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UNDERSTANDING ATTITUDES TOWARD THE LGBTQI+ PEOPLE IN KAZAKHSTAN: A CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH

ЛГБТКИ+ АДАМДАРҒА ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ КӨЗҚАРАСТЫ ТҮСІНУ: КОНСТРУКТИВИСТІК НЕГІЗДЕЛГЕН ТЕОРИЯЛЫҚ ТӘСІЛ

ПОНИМАНИЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ К ЛГБТКИ+ ЛЮДЯМ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ: ПОДХОД НА ОСНОВЕ КОНСТРУКТИВИСТСКОЙ ОБОСНОВАННОЙ ТЕОРИИ

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF MA PROGRAMS AT NAZARBAYEV UNIVERSITY:

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Abstract

This thesis explores how individuals in Kazakhstan articulate, justify, and negotiate their attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach, it investigates not only what people think but how these views are constructed and why they take particular forms. Data were collected through an open-ended national survey (n=829) and follow-up interviews (n=6). The research does not seek generalizability but instead offers an exploratory and abductive mapping of interpretive frameworks and meaning-making practices within Kazakhstan's sociocultural setting.

Three core frameworks emerged from the data: "LGBT as a Threat," which positioned LGBTQI+ existence as endangering cultural or moral order; "Visibility Concerns," where discomfort/threat perception was centered on public presence and perceived "propaganda"; and "Empathy-Driven Acceptance," where support was often expressed through personal familiarity, ethical non-interference, or humanistic views about individual autonomy — even in the absence of ideological agreement. Although not initially central to the research design, gender and language differences surfaced as interpretive threads worth attending to. Kazakh-language responses more frequently invoked religious and traditional justifications and reflected stricter perceived network norms, suggesting higher conformity pressures. Russian-language responses demonstrated more discursive flexibility and more tentative formulations.

While the study does not claim theoretical saturation, it offers an initial theoretical integration of recurring interpretive patterns, providing direction for future research on sexual and non-cisgender prejudice in Kazakhstan. It demonstrates how public attitudes are shaped not only by personal belief but by interpretive framings that reflect broader normative and cultural environments.

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"Disappointed but not surprised" became something of a motto during my seven-year stay at Nazarbayev University — a wry expression that my friends and I often used to make sense of repeated institutional letdowns. Thankfully, this sentiment never applied to my home Department of Political Science and International Relations, which remained a space of integrity, intellectual rigor, and genuine student support. I am deeply grateful to the department for fostering an environment where critical thinking and care for students were consistently prioritized. I would especially like to thank my advisors, Dr. Dinara Pisareva and Dr. Hélène Thibault. Their ability to create an intellectually stimulating and encouraging learning space, coupled with their sincere investment in students' growth, has been truly inspiring. Their support, extending well beyond class sessions and office hours, guided me through the program and made this thesis possible.

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CHAPTER I — INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

Kazakhstan decriminalized consensual sex between males in 1998, legalized gender reassignment surgeries in 2009, and its Constitutional Council rejected anti-LGBT "propaganda" law in 2015 (Diapozon 2009; Human Rights Watch 2015). Despite these positive de jure trends, the country's de facto social and political climate remains notably resistant to sexual and gender diversity — the country scored 44 in Legal Index versus 28 in Equality Index regarding the safety and acceptance of the LGBTQI+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, and other) community, where 100 indicates total equality (EqualDex 2024).

Sexual and non-cisgender prejudice, defined as negative attitudes toward non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people, contributes to this disparity (Herek 2004). Kazakhstani LGBTQI+ individuals continue to face discrimination and the lack of legal protection, which might also prevent them from reporting crimes committed on the basis of their sexual and gender identities (UN. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights 2019).

Sexual and non-cisgender prejudice is also reflected and echoed in politics: 2025 marked an unprecedented mention of the LGBTQI+ community by the head of state (KazTAG 2025). No Kazakhstani president has addressed topics of sexual orientation and gender identity in over three decades until President Tokayev's following statement in his address to the nation:

> *"Globalism is losing its relevance, state nationalism, the desire to divide spheres of influence, and the regionalization of world politics are coming to the fore. For decades, so-called democratic moral values, including LGBT, have been imposed on many countries, and under this guise, international non-governmental foundations and organizations have grossly interfered in*

their internal affairs. In fact, everything turned out to be simple - billions of dollars in budgets were stolen”

(KazTAG 2025, par. 2).

Tokayev’s speech was not an isolated incident but part of a broader trend. Deputies of the Mazhilis, the lower chamber of parliament, and the Ministry of Information and Communication have actively attempted to restrict mentions and visibility of the LGBTQI+ community post-2015 (Azattyq 2023; KazTAG 2025; Shashkina 2024a; Shashkina 2024b). These efforts coincided with — and were likely influenced by — Russia’s intensifying use of anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric in its state propaganda since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Cushman 2020). In recent years, calls for an anti-LGBT “propaganda” law have grown more frequent, culminating in partial endorsement by the Ministry of Information and Communication in 2024 (Skendirova 2024). More than fifty thousand people signed a petition calling for the criminalization of LGBT propaganda, and while the ongoing process has not yet produced de jure consequences, the petition remains to be reviewed in further detail in 2025.

At the same time, the hearing on the anti-LGBT "propaganda" law shed light on something that has not been documented: the visible and vocal presence of pro-LGBTQI+ citizens. Discussions about LGBTQI+ issues in Kazakhstan have long been characterized by one-sided outbursts rather than constructive dialogue, with the exception of relatively infrequent instances of LGBTQI+ activism. Yet, pro-LGBTQI+ attendees were not limited to these activists but also included ordinary citizens — students, professionals, parents, and allies, who chose to express their support publicly. It contributed to a rare moment of open debate — one as unprecedented as President Tokayev’s mention of LGBTQI+ in political discourse.

LGBTQI+ issues have never been as politically relevant to Kazakhstan as they are today. The growing politicization of LGBTQI+ identities have real consequences for real people, especially for sexual and gender minorities. At the same time, such politicization might be unfolding within an informational bubble where the loudest voices may dominate public discourse, limiting a more comprehensive understanding of social dynamics. A lack of such understanding risks reinforcing sexual and non-cisgender prejudice, misrepresenting the complexity of views within society.

Given this context, this thesis is a timely academic intervention that sheds light on the ways people construct meaning around LGBTQI+ identities and justify their positions. By examining not only what people think but also *why* they think that way, this thesis offers valuable insights into the shaping of attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals. In doing so, it provides an empirical foundation for understanding the complexities of these attitudes in Kazakhstan, where discussions about LGBTQI+ rights are only getting more politicized and contested.

1.2 Research Problem and Rationale

Current academic literature on sexual and gender minorities in Kazakhstan mostly touches on issues of the LGBTQI+ community or the extent of sexual and non-cisgender prejudice. While negative attitudes are well documented, especially through sociological surveys and international monitoring reports, existing research tends to focus on levels of rejection or tolerance rather than the meaning-making processes behind those attitudes. For example, the World Values Survey Association (2018, 11) found that 74.2% of male and 72.8% of female respondents in Kazakhstan identified LGBTQI+ individuals as undesirable neighbors, suggesting widespread societal bias. However, these figures offer limited insight into how individuals interpret, justify, or explain their positions. Literature that interrogates how people rationalize or frame their attitudes — especially

through their own narratives and references to social norms, religion, culture, or perceived morality — remains scarce.

This lack of attention is particularly visible in discussions of linguistic diversity. Kazakhstan is a bilingual society, with most citizens fluent in both Kazakh and Russian to varying degrees. However, differences in first language often correspond to divergent patterns of socialization, media consumption, and historical memory. These variations may influence how individuals interpret social norms and frame issues related to gender and sexuality. Despite the significance of these distinctions, few studies have examined how attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals may differ between Kazakh- and Russian-speaking populations, particularly at the level of meaning-making.

To address this gap, I apply constructivist grounded theory, an abductive research method in the social sciences, to investigate how people in Kazakhstan construct and justify their attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities. Rather than imposing predefined categories of acceptance or rejection, this approach allows participants to articulate their own positions and explain how these views are shaped. It pays close attention to the language respondents use, the references they invoke, and how they situate themselves within perceived normative environments. The methodology involves iterative data collection and analysis, aiming to build empirically grounded theory based on the meanings that individuals assign to their attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals.

1.3 Research Questions

Primary:

- What are the prevailing attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals in Kazakhstan?

Secondary:

- How do these attitudes differ between Russian and Kazakh-speaking populations?
- What factors influence the formation of these attitudes?

1.4 Thesis Structure Overview

This thesis is structured into five chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction outlines the research problem, objectives, and significance of the study, and situates the project within the political and social context of LGBTQI+ issues in Kazakhstan.

Chapter 2: Literature Review reviews existing literature on attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals, the role of political discourse in shaping public perception, and theoretical frameworks relevant to prejudice, normative expectations, and meaning-making.

Chapter 3: Methodology describes the research design, including data collection methods and analytical procedures, and explains how both survey and interview materials were used to explore patterns in public attitudes.

Chapter 4: Findings presents the empirical findings, identifying major patterns in how respondents express and justify their views toward LGBTQI+ individuals, with attention to both individual-level responses and perceived network norms.

Chapter 5: Discussion offers an interpretive analysis of how public attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals are constructed, connecting the empirical categories identified in the previous chapter to broader theoretical frameworks.

Conclusion synthesizes the study's key contributions, reflects on their significance in the context of Kazakhstan's political and social landscape, and proposes avenues for future research.

CHAPTER II — LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditional literature reviews entail that researchers browse existing academic works to develop a timely research question, theory, and hypotheses, and that methodology be picked in later stages of the study (Daigneault, Jacob, and Ouimet 2014; Knopf 2006; Powner 2006; Powner 2014). While this scheme is practical and proven by time, its dominance is mainly reasoned by the hegemony of deductive research in social sciences, and not all inductive or abductive research can satisfy the same inquiry (Coccia 2018; Dunne 2011; Ramalho et al. 2015; Soiferman 2010). Certain research methods from the latter category cannot be selected post-literature review. I am applying a constructivist grounded theory to study attitudes toward the LGBTQI+ people in Kazakhstan, and my methodology is meant to avoid reviewing the literature as the first instance not to develop potentially limiting priors (Glaser and Strauss 2017; Ramalho et al. 2015).

It is thus important to note that, while this chapter precedes the other chapters, relevant literature was analyzed, and the chapter was produced during the analysis of findings post-data collection.

This chapter selectively draws on prior research to situate the present study within ongoing conversations on attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals, while remaining grounded in Kazakhstan's empirical realities. Relevant literature has identified multiple factors that influence these attitudes, including political ideology, age, religiosity, gender role beliefs, education, and socioeconomic status (Crawford et al. 2015; Flores et al. 2016; Gulevich, Krivoshchekov, and Sorokina 2023; Kowalski and Scheitle 2020; Lewis et al. 2017; Trošt and Marinšek 2022; Wang et al. 2020). This literature review synthesizes current research on LGBTQI+ attitudes, with particular attention to conceptual frameworks, individual factors, and intergroup dynamics that shape these attitudes.

2.1 Conceptual Frameworks of Sexual and Non-cisgender Prejudice

This section focuses exclusively on the conceptualization of negative attitudes, rather than positive ones. The decision to center prejudice stems from both methodological and empirical considerations. As constructivist grounded theory is designed to allow categories to emerge from the data, this chapter reflects the patterns most prominent in the responses. During data collection and analysis, negative expressions and justifications of prejudice appeared with significantly higher frequency than explicitly affirmative attitudes. While some participants did articulate empathy or acceptance, such responses were rare and generally less developed. As a result, this chapter turns to the broader literature on prejudice, particularly sexual and non-cisgender prejudice, not to define categories in advance, but to offer a conceptual foundation for interpreting recurring themes that surfaced in the data.

The conceptualization of negative attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals has evolved over time and occurred separately for negative attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities.

In regards to prejudice against sexual minorities, Weinberg first introduced "homophobia" in a published work on July 19, 1971, in an article for *Gay*, a newsweekly edited by Nichols. In his essay, Words for the New Culture, he defined "homophobia" as "the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals — and, in the case of homosexuals themselves, self-loathing" (Herek 2004, 8). Currently, the term "homophobia" is defined as "discrimination against, aversion to, or fear of homosexuality or gay people" in standard English dictionaries (Merriam-Webster 2025a).

In regards to prejudice against gender minorities, Hill and Willoughby (2005) coined the term "transphobia" in 2005. "Trans" in "transphobia" served as an umbrella term for non-cisgender individuals, allowing to grasp prejudice towards all gender minorities (Singer 2014; Currah, Juang, and Minter 2006; McCrea 2014; Tebbe Moradi and Ege 2014). Hill and Willoughby (2005, 533)

defined the term as “emotional disgust toward individuals who do not conform to society’s gender expectations”; standard English dictionaries define it as “discrimination against, aversion to, or fear of transgender people” (Merriam-Webster 2025b).

The coining of the terms "homophobia" and "transphobia" marked significant milestones in modern history. They enabled rethinking of the issues of rejection and hostility: the object of intolerance remained the same, whereas the subject shifted from their perceived clinical abnormality to cisgender heterosexuals exhibiting prejudice. The problem of "homophobia" became intolerant heterosexuals, not homosexual people, while the problem of "transphobia" became cisgender people, not transgender individuals. Former U.S. congressman William Dannemeyer expressed concern that "homophobia" diverts the discourse from the notion “that homosexuals are disturbed people by saying that it is those who disapprove of them who are mentally unbalanced, that they are in the grips of a "phobia’” (Dannemeyer 1989, 129). It demonstrates that such conceptualizations of "homophobia" and, by extension, "transphobia" significantly contributed to public discussions and the subsequent alleviation of LGBTQI+ rights protection.

Just as the term "homophobia" “crystallized the experiences of rejection, hostility, and invisibility that homosexual men and women in mid-20th-century North America had endured throughout their lives” (Herek 2004, 8), the coining of "transphobia" played a similarly important role in naming and legitimizing marginalization faced by gender minorities (Hill and Willoughby 2005; Willoughby et al. 2010). It helped to differentiate anti-trans sentiments from sexism and "homophobia", providing researchers and activists with a conceptual framework that recognizes and addresses prejudice specifically directed at non-cisgender individuals.

However, despite their merits, "homophobia" and "transphobia" also have notable drawbacks. A couple have been mentioned by Herek (2004): 1) misclassification as a phobia; 2) pathologization of opponents:

First, -phobia, meaning fear, is not an accurate depiction of anti-LGBTQI+ sentiments due to misclassification as a phobia. While Weinberg did not mean to suggest that "homophobia" constituted a diagnostic category, he did justify his choice of term by arguing homophobic people do display symptoms of fear when exposed to homosexual people, akin to how individuals with a snake phobia react to snakes. Despite his assertion being true in certain instances, there is little empirical evidence to support it as a widespread phenomenon. Instead, studies indicate that negative attitudes toward LGBTQI+ people are more strongly associated with feelings of disgust, anger, and moral disapproval — none of which meet the clinical criteria of a phobia (Bernat et al. 2001; Ernulf and Innala 1987; Haddock, Zanna, and Esses 1993; Herek 1994; Nagoshi et al. 2008; Tee and Hegarty 2006; Van de Ven, Bornholt, and Bailey 1996; Winter, Webster, and Cheung 2009).

Second, the pathological capacity of "homophobia" and "transphobia" is not empirically supported. Some activists and commentators have proposed classifying them as mental disorders (Brownworth 2001; Elliott 1988; Johnson 1993; Lerner 1993), as have some researchers (Guindon, Green, and Hanna 2003; Jones and Sullivan 2002; Kantor 1998; Nagoshi et al. 2008; Tee and Hegarty 2006; Winter, Webster, and Cheung 2009). However, with the exception of individuals with preexisting mental health conditions, such framings have been largely discredited due to lack of empirical support. If anything, labeling "homophobia" and "transphobia" as pathologies risks reinforcing the mistaking of psychopathology with moral wrongdoing, much like homosexuality and transgenderism have been pathologized. A more thorough understanding of prejudice against LGBTQI+ individuals requires analyzing empirical evidence in the context of cultural, social, and political interactions — an approach this thesis aims to take (Herek 1992; Pharr 1988).

Instead Herek (2004) proposed that "sexual prejudice" is the most appropriate term for negative attitudes toward individuals based on their non-heterosexual group membership. This terminological shift moved the conceptualization from a clinically based framework (homophobia) to one rooted in social psychology, intergroup relations, and social stigma, connecting it to the broader research on prejudice (Poteat and Birkett 2016). It is not, however, limited to sexual prejudice against non-heterosexual individuals.

Since sexual prejudice encompasses negative attitudes rooted in sexual orientation, conceptually it is not limited to heterosexual people's negative attitudes toward sexual minority groups (Herek 2000). Members of one minority group, such as gay people, may exhibit negative attitudes toward another minority group, like the trans community. Similarly, members of sexual minorities can also express negative sentiments toward heterosexual individuals. Yet, current realities demonstrate that prejudice is most prominent against sexual minority groups, even if perpetrated by members of other minority groups. As such, sexual prejudice will only denote negative attitudes against sexual minorities within the scope of this thesis.

In a parallel move, Aguirre-Sánchez-Beato (2020) has argued that "trans prejudice" is the most accurate term for describing negative attitudes based on individuals' non-cisgender group membership. Like "sexual prejudice', the term "trans prejudice" enables a conceptual shift away from frameworks that pathologize bias (as with "transphobia"), and toward one that locates such attitudes within the broader social dynamics of prejudice. This framing allows for capturing not only interpersonal hostility but also the institutional and cultural mechanisms that uphold cisnormativity.

Nevertheless, this thesis recognizes that not all individuals who fall outside cisnormative gender categories in Kazakhstan identify with the terms "trans" or "transgender", nor do these terms

necessarily carry the same meanings in the local context as they do in Western academic or activist discourses. From a discursive and constructivist perspective, the meaning of gender categories is contextually produced in specific cultural, linguistic, and institutional frameworks (Foucault 1978; Butler 1990; Valentine 2007). While "trans" in the United States may denote a broad, politicized umbrella term encompassing various forms of gender nonconformity, its usage in Kazakhstan tends to be more narrowly associated with biomedical or legal transitions, particularly in relation to sex-reassignment surgeries (Zhenisbekova 2021). This is reflected in empirical studies on trans people in Kazakhstan, where the terms "trans" or “transgender” are often used without conceptual clarity and appear primarily in relation to medicalized narratives of transition (Kirey-Sitnikova 2024a, 2024b). As a result, these framings risk reinforcing a binary understanding of gender that many gender-diverse individuals in Kazakhstan actively reject or find inadequate for describing their experiences.

‘Non-cisgender prejudice" would thus allow for conceptualization of negative attitudes toward gender minorities, accounting both for prejudice, not pathology, and for identities that may fall outside Western and biomedical frameworks, without assuming the universal applicability of globally dominant gender categories (Kulick 1998; West 2014).

2.2 Individual Factors Influencing LGBTQI+ Attitudes

The study of individual factors shaping attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals has consistently pointed to the influence of gender, ideological orientation, religious beliefs, and personal identity salience. Although public opinion towards sexual minorities has evolved across many societies, substantial disparities remain at the level of individual predispositions. This subsection focuses on three major clusters of factors: gender differences, Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), and identity and traditional

value orientations, as significant predictors of variations in attitudes toward LGBTQI+ communities.

Gender Differences

While the World Values Survey Association (2018, 11) (WVS) does not report substantial gender differences in attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals in Kazakhstan — 74.2% of male respondents identified LGBTQI+ individuals as undesirable neighbors, compared to 72.8% of women — gender remains a consistent predictor of such attitudes in the broader scholarly literature, and is therefore relevant to this study. Earlier research from the United States has shown that men are more likely than women to express negative views toward LGBTQI+ individuals, even when education, religiosity, and income are taken into account (Cotten-Huston and Waite 1999; Nagoshi et al. 2008). These patterns are not confined to Western contexts; they remained observable across world regions even after accounting for both regional and individual-level variation. Cole and Geist (2023), drawing on three decades of WVS data (1990–2019), found that in most regions, including Muslim-majority countries, Eastern Europe, East Asia, and Latin America, women consistently reported lower disapproval toward homosexuality than men. The only exception was the Western Catholic zone, where the difference was less pronounced.

It is also important to note that sexual and gender minorities are not perceived as a monolithic group, and attitudes often vary depending on the specific identity in question. For instance, Kite, Whitley, and Wagner (2022) found that male respondents expressed stronger animosity toward gay men compared to lesbians. Whether this pattern stems from stricter enforcement of masculinity norms or the sexualization of same-sex female attraction, such variation has been well documented (Annati and Ramsey 2022; Buckley 2023; Hill and Fischer 2008; Kim 2021).

Several theoretical explanations have been proposed for these observed gender differences. One influential explanation involves the internalization of traditional masculine ideologies. Theodore and Basow (2000) argue that traditional masculinity, with its emphasis on dominance, toughness, and compulsory heterosexuality, creates an environment in which deviations from heteronormative masculinity are perceived as existential threats. Men who adhere strongly to these ideals may consequently respond with heightened sexual prejudice, particularly toward other men who are seen as violating prescribed gender norms. Mac An Ghaill et al. (2001) further elaborates that masculinity is often constructed relationally, through the negation of femininity and homosexuality, thus positioning gay men as particularly destabilizing figures.

The phenomenon of performative masculinity further explains these dynamics. As Pascoe (2007) demonstrates in her ethnographic study of adolescent boys, masculinity is actively produced and validated through peer interactions, often through the policing of sexual normativity. Phoenix, Frosh, and Pattman (2003) similarly found that young men engage in ritualized displays of heterosexuality and sexual prejudice to secure social standing among male peers. In this sense, expressions of homophobia can function less as stable individual traits and more as public performances shaped by immediate social environments and expectations. Scholars have shown that attitudes are often expressed in alignment with perceived peer norms, where deviation may incur reputational costs (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004; Rimal and Real 2003). This has particular relevance in societies where conformity to heteronormative standards is socially reinforced.

Conversely, women's comparatively more positive or neutral attitudes toward LGBTQI+ communities have been attributed to their greater empathy (Liang and Alimo 2005). In the Kazakhstani context, this pattern might be reinforced by prevailing socialization into relational and caregiving roles. Cultural narratives continue to emphasize a woman’s responsibilities as a mother, wife, and household manager (Arystanbek 2023; Werner 2009). These expectations are actively

reproduced through state discourse and educational policy, which promote idealized portrayals of women as nurturers and moral anchors of the family (Zhussipbek and Nagayeva 2023; Kataeva et al. 2025; Kuzhabekova, Durrani, and Kataeva 2025). Additionally, women's historical positioning as a marginalized group in patriarchal societies may foster greater solidarity with other marginalized identities.

Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Social Dominance Orientation (SO)

Beyond gender, ideological predispositions such as Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) significantly predict negative attitudes toward LGBTQI+ populations. RWA, as conceptualized by Altemeyer (1988), involves a cluster of traits centered around submission to authority, adherence to social conventions, and aggression toward those who deviate from normative standards. Numerous studies have demonstrated a strong association between RWA and homonegative attitudes (Whitley 1999). Individuals high in RWA perceive LGBTQI+ identities as direct violations of established social norms and thus respond with heightened prejudice.

Similarly, SDO, defined as a preference for hierarchical social structures and inequality among groups (Pratto et al. 1994), has been linked to sexual and non-cisgender prejudice. Individuals high in SDO are motivated to maintain social dominance of ingroups over outgroups, viewing challenges to traditional hierarchies, such as LGBTQI+ rights movements, as destabilizing. Whitley (1999) found that while both RWA and SDO independently predict negative attitudes toward LGBTQI+ people, their mechanisms differ: RWA is rooted in perceived threats to social cohesion, whereas SDO is motivated by a desire to maintain group-based hierarchies.

Importantly, Duckitt and Sibley (2007) propose a dual-process motivational model, arguing that RWA and SDO arise from different worldviews: RWA from a perception of the world as

dangerous, and SDO from a perception of the world as competitive. This distinction offers a useful lens for understanding the heterogeneous motivations behind sexual prejudice. Where RWA-based prejudice views LGBTQI+ visibility as a moral threat, SDO-based prejudice frames LGBTQI+ rights as challenges to the rightful dominance of traditional social groups.

Identity Factors

Personal identity salience also plays a crucial role in shaping attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals. Poteat, Mereish and Birkett (2015) find that when heterosexual identity becomes a central component of one's self-concept, individuals are more likely to exhibit prejudice toward LGBTQI+ populations. This phenomenon aligns closely with the propositions of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 2004), which emphasizes that individuals seek to enhance their self-esteem through favorable comparisons between their ingroups and outgroups. When heterosexual identity is foregrounded, differentiating from LGBTQI+ individuals becomes a means of reaffirming one's ingroup status, thereby exacerbating prejudice (Jetten, Spears, and Manstead 1997).

Religious and Traditional Values

Religious affiliation and traditional value orientations too can explain sexual and non-cisgender prejudice. Numerous studies have established strong correlations between religiosity and homonegative attitudes (Rosik et al. 2007; Finlay and Walther 2003). Many religious traditions endorse cisgender and heteronormative frameworks for family and sexuality, positioning LGBTQI+ identities as threats to sacred social structures. Religious narratives often emphasize the sanctity of traditional marriage, reproductive heterosexuality, and gender roles, hindering LGBTQI+ advocacy (Adamczyk and Pitt 2009; Kirey-Sitnikova 2024a).

Moreover, the intersection of religious traditionalism with national identity narratives, particularly in post-colonial and post-Soviet societies, further intensifies homonegative attitudes. Levitanus (2020, 2022) suggests that traditional values tied to collective identity projects, like such in Kazakhstan, often frame LGBTQI+ rights as foreign impositions that threaten national and cultural integrity. While they had still adopted their Soviet-time approach to ignoring "queerness" in the form of social deviance, in rare instances of visibility, framing LGBTQI+ as foreign elements can be seen by local societies as an attempt to connect to their pre-Soviet collective identities. Integrated with religious identity, the dichotomy in these states have evolved into "Western" and "Muslim" stances on LGBTQI+, which in combination with Islamic revival can potentially predict a high level of sexual prejudice, viewing LGBTQI+ identities as foreign impositions (Levitanus 2020, 2022; Malik 2019). In such contexts, rejecting LGBTQI+ identities becomes not only a defense of religious morality but also an act of cultural preservation.

Thus, individual attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals are shaped by a complex interplay of gender socialization, ideological predispositions, identity salience, and value orientations. Understanding these intersecting factors is crucial for developing more nuanced models of prejudice and for designing effective interventions aimed at fostering acceptance and reducing discrimination.

2.3 Intergroup and Social Factors

Understanding prejudice toward LGBTQI+ individuals requires not only attention to individual dispositions but also a close examination of social relational dynamics. Intergroup and social factors, particularly the quality of interpersonal relationships and peer group norms, play a central role in shaping attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities. Intergroup contact theory and

research on peer socialization offer important frameworks for analyzing how prejudice is both diminished and reinforced within everyday social contexts.

Intergroup Contact Theory

Intergroup contact theory, first articulated by Allport (1954), posits that prejudice can be significantly reduced through meaningful contact between members of different social groups, provided that certain optimal conditions, such as equal status, cooperative interaction, and institutional support, are met. Although originally formulated in the context of racial prejudice, this theory has been extensively applied to attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals.

Research consistently demonstrates that direct interpersonal contact with sexual minorities is associated with lower levels of sexual prejudice (Herek 2002; Smith, Axelton, and Saucier 2009). Herek and Capitanio (1994) found that heterosexual individuals who had personal friendships with gay men or lesbians reported significantly more positive attitudes toward LGBTQI+ people. Vonofakou, Hewstone, and Voci (2007) further confirmed these findings, emphasizing that it is the quality of contact, characterized by intimacy, frequency, and perceived equality, that predicts prejudice reduction rather than mere exposure alone.

A critical mechanism underlying the effectiveness of intergroup contact is the reduction of intergroup anxiety. Mereish and Poteat (2015) argue that much of sexual prejudice is rooted in discomfort and fear when encountering outgroup members. Positive contact experiences disrupt negative expectations, reduce perceived threat, and foster empathy, thereby lowering prejudice. This process of anxiety reduction has been repeatedly validated across various contexts and populations, demonstrating its robustness as a mediator (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006).

Importantly, Tropp et al. (2022) stress that not all forms of contact are equally effective. Superficial or incidental encounters may do little to alter deep-seated prejudices and, in some cases,

may even reinforce existing biases if negative experiences occur. Meaningful, cooperative, and emotionally engaging contact is essential for facilitating genuine attitude change. Thus, interventions aimed at reducing sexual prejudice through intergroup contact must be carefully designed to promote sustained, positive interpersonal interactions rather than one-off exposures.

The relevance of intergroup contact theory in contemporary discussions of LGBTQI+ acceptance underscores that personal relationships and direct interpersonal experiences are among the most powerful tools for challenging prejudice. In societies where systemic barriers limit opportunities for positive contact, attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals are likely to remain more negative. Kazakhstan falls under this category due to prevailing sexual and non-cisgender prejudice and patriarchal society (Paine et al. 2021; Levitanus 2020, 2022).

Peer Socialization and Group Norms

While intergroup contact focuses on relationships across group lines, peer socialization theory highlights how within-group dynamics shape individual attitudes and behaviors. Social network theories emphasize that individuals are embedded in relational networks characterized by homophily — the tendency for people to associate with others who are similar to themselves in important respects (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). This dynamic extends to attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals, with evidence indicating that peer groups significantly influence the development and reinforcement of sexual and non-cisgender prejudice.

Research among adolescents offers particularly clear insights into these processes. Birkett and Espelage (2015) found that members of the same peer groups report remarkably similar levels of sexual prejudice and are likely to engage in comparable discriminatory behaviors toward LGBTQI+ peers. They argue that it is not merely individual dispositions that drive these behaviors, but also the broader normative climates within peer groups (Birkett and Espelage 2015).

Poteat (2007) emphasizes the role of hierarchy-enhancing norms within peer groups. Adolescents who belonged to groups that prioritized dominance, social hierarchy, and traditional gender norms exhibited higher levels of sexual prejudice, even when controlling for individual traits like Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) — a personality characteristic that estimates a person's support for social hierarchy and the level of willingness for their in-group to be superior to out-groups. This finding suggests that group-level ideologies exert an independent effect on individual attitudes, reinforcing or exacerbating prejudices beyond personal predispositions.

The relationship between group norms and individual attitudes is particularly evident in environments characterized by overt heteronormativity. Herek (2004) provides a useful conceptual distinction between sexual stigma — the shared societal knowledge that homosexuality is denigrated — and heterosexism, the cultural ideology that enforces heterosexuality as normative. In contexts where heterosexism is pervasive, peer groups act as critical sites for the transmission and reinforcement of these ideologies. Thus, even individuals with moderate personal prejudice levels may adopt stronger public expressions of sexual prejudice to align with perceived group expectations.

Group norms not only shape overt behaviors but also influence the emotional climates within peer groups. Peer environments characterized by acceptance and inclusivity can significantly buffer LGBTQI+ individuals from the negative effects of broader societal stigma. Conversely, in peer groups where heteronormative norms dominate, individuals often face intensified pressures to conform to homonegative attitudes, especially during adolescence — a critical period for identity formation and social belonging (Poteat and Russell 2013).

Moreover, research by Wright et al. (1997) introduced the concept of extended contact, whereby merely knowing that an ingroup member has a positive relationship with an outgroup

member can reduce prejudice. In peer groups where LGBTQI+ friendships are visible and normalized, even indirect exposure to positive intergroup relationships may diminish sexual prejudice among those who have no direct LGBTQI+ contact themselves.

These insights suggest that strategies aiming to foster positive attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals must engage not only at the level of individual education but also target the peer and social environments in which attitudes are formed and maintained. Promoting inclusive group norms and challenging hierarchy-enhancing ideologies at the peer level offers a powerful avenue for creating more accepting social climates.

Taken together, intergroup contact theory and research on peer socialization underscore that attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals are not solely products of internal dispositions but are dynamically shaped within social relationships and group contexts. Meaningful personal contact with sexual minorities consistently reduces prejudice by alleviating intergroup anxiety, while peer group norms either reinforce or challenge existing biases. Acknowledging the relational and social embeddedness of prejudice provides a more comprehensive understanding of the forces that sustain or dismantle sexual and non-cisgender prejudice in larger societies, revealing potential pathways for intervention and change.

While these frameworks offer valuable insight into how prejudice operates, it is important to note that much of this literature is based on studies conducted in Western liberal democracies. As such, many underlying assumptions may not fully translate to post-Soviet or Central Asian contexts. Kazakhstan's historical, linguistic, and political environment presents different constraints and discursive patterns, requiring analytical caution when applying imported models.

2.4 LGBTQI+ Attitudes in Post-Soviet and Central Asian Contexts

The study of public attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals in Kazakhstan must be situated within a broader global and historical context. LGBTQI+ rights are not merely domestic cultural debates; they are deeply intertwined with questions of national identity, post-colonial memory, and shifting geopolitical alignments. Recognizing the multi-scalar dimensions of these dynamics is essential for a meaningful analysis of contemporary sexual and non-cisgender prejudice in Kazakhstan.

Binary gender identity and its associated expressions, including sexual orientation, rarely reflect the full spectrum of human experience. Gender roles and expectations are deeply contextual, shaped by factors such as biological sex, age, social position, and other intersecting identities. As Peshkova and Thibault (2022) demonstrate through their analysis of gendered power dynamics in Central Asia, femininities and masculinities operate along a continuum rather than within rigid dualities. In this light, the gender binary appears less as an empirical truth and more as an ideological construct — one that was, if not originally introduced, then certainly entrenched by the region's past colonial rule.

A revealing example comes from an 1891 account by V. U. Kushilevskij, who described a local Central Asian practice he termed *bulgare* — a label he dismissed as a "perversion" akin to Western notions of lesbianism (Peshkova & Thibault 2022, 170). In his account, *bulgare* described females who penetrated their partners, whereas *bachaler* denoted females' receptive role in a sexual intercourse (Peshkova & Thibault 2022, 170). Despite the writing dating back to the colonial period, the author acknowledged that such practices predated Russian intervention, implicitly referring to the existence of an elaborate and historically rooted spectrum of gender and sexual expression that challenged the binary norms imposed by imperial ideology.

Kazakhstan's historical relationship with sexual and gender diversity has been profoundly shaped by its colonial past during the Russian Empire and the USSR. Under both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, same-sex relations were criminalized, stigmatized, and rendered largely invisible (Healey 2001). Early Tsarist regulations pathologized non-heteronormative behavior, framing it as both a moral and biological deviance. The Soviet period entrenched these attitudes further, despite temporary liberalization during the early 1920s. From Stalin's criminalization of homosexuality in 1934 onward, LGBTQI+ identities were cast as threats to socialist morality, often conflated with criminality and political subversion (Essig 1999; Healey 2001).

These legacies did not merely disappear with independence. Deeply embedded in institutional structures and social norms, they continue to inform contemporary attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals. Across the post-Soviet space, including Kazakhstan, heteronormativity remains the social norm, and deviations from it often evoke moral panic (Kambekova 2024; Wilkinson 2020). The historical invisibilization and criminalization of non-heteronormative identities thus created enduring foundations for sexual and non-cisgender prejudice, later reinforced and rearticulated through new geopolitical narratives.

While historical legacies explain the deep-seated societal prejudices, the contemporary geopolitical context further intensifies these dynamics. Following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia increasingly politicized LGBTQI+ rights as part of its broader strategy to consolidate domestic support and assert international distinction from the liberal West. Scholars have highlighted how sexual and non-cisgender prejudice has become an integral part of Russia’s sovereign democracy narrative, positioning LGBTQI+ rights as emblems of Western moral corruption (Edenborg 2017; Sperling 2014).

Putin's administration seeks to present itself as the bastion of "traditional values" under siege from external cultural imperialism through the construction of LGBTQI+ identities as foreign impositions (Wilkinson, 2014). This ideological project is reinforced by the neo-Eurasianist discourse, which elevates Russia's role as the defender of a multipolar world order and the center of "Eurasian zone" which includes Central Asia and Eastern Europe (Dugin 2015; Shekhovtsov 2017). Neo-Eurasianism, increasingly influential under Putin's leadership (Kurt 2023; Khan and Saeed 2021), offers a political vision premised on cultural conservatism, often bordering on ethnonationalism and imperial nostalgia (Balatska 2022; Shenfield 2001).

For Kazakhstan, Russia's growing reliance on sexual and non-cisgender prejudice as a tool of political legitimacy is geopolitically consequential. Despite Kazakhstan's independence, the country remains intertwined with Russia through economic, political, and security ties (Kudaibergenova 2016; Ó Beacháin and Kevlihan 2011). As Russia intensifies its projection of "traditional values" across the region, Kazakhstan is indirectly drawn into ideological frameworks that de-legitimize LGBTQI+ rights. However, while the Russian influence can de facto be traceable in social interactions, Kazakhstan performed relatively LGBTQI+friendly in its de jure commitments.

Kazakhstan decriminalized consensual sex between males in 1998, legalized gender reassignment surgeries in 2009, and its Constitutional Council rejected anti-LGBT "propaganda" law in 2015 (Diapozon 2009; Human Rights Watch 2015). Since gaining independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has consistently pursued a multi-vector foreign policy, seeking to balance relations with Russia, China, and the democratic West. Maintaining this balance has been central to Kazakhstan's identity as a sovereign and pragmatic actor in international affairs (Cooley 2012). Engagement with Western and international institutions, including the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States, all of whom openly supported gender equality and non-discrimination of LGBTQI+

individuals, brought not only economic and security benefits but also normative pressures concerning human rights, including non-discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Until recently, Kazakhstan showed considerable caution in its domestic rhetoric surrounding LGBTQI+ issues. Although societal prejudice persisted, political leaders avoided overt public statements that would tarnish Kazakhstan’s international reputation. Scholars such as Junisbai (2010) have argued that this strategic moderation was instrumental in securing Kazakhstan’s image as a modernizing and internationally engaged state. However, the changing global environment has reduced the costs of abandoning this cautious position.

Scholars have documented how Trump’s first administration marked a significant period of democratic backsliding both domestically and internationally (Bermeo 2016; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). The U.S. retreat from consistent advocacy of human rights, including LGBTQI+ protections, emboldened authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes worldwide (Bugarič 2019). Rather than facing strong normative rebukes from the traditional champions of human rights, states now operate in a more fragmented and ambivalent international system.

Kazakhstan's government, sensitive to shifting international alignments, has increasingly found space to appeal to domestic conservatism without immediate fear of diplomatic isolation. The consequences of this shift are visible in Kazakhstan’s internal discourse. Until recently, no Kazakhstani president had publicly addressed LGBTQI+ issues. However, in 2025, President Tokayev explicitly denounced LGBTQI+ rights as part of a broader critique of globalization and Western influence, marking an unprecedented departure from previous rhetorical caution (KazTAG 2025; Shashkina 2024a, 2024b). This unprecedented statement positions LGBTQI+ rights not as matters of equality and dignity but as instruments of geopolitical manipulation. The rhetoric mirrors

broader regional trends toward the securitization of human rights discourse, portraying sexual diversity as a national security threat rather than a civil rights concern (Edenborg 2017).

Thus, Kazakhstan's current positioning must be understood as the outcome of intersecting historical legacies, contemporary geopolitical pressures, and global democratic backsliding. The weakening of liberal internationalism, the strategic invocation of "traditional values" by Russia, and Kazakhstan's own calculations of political expediency have together created an environment where expressions of sexual and non-cisgender prejudice are increasingly normalized at the highest political levels.

2.5 Theoretical Gaps and Research Contribution

The preceding review of scholarship has mapped the evolution of conceptual frameworks, individual-level determinants, intergroup dynamics, and broader geopolitical influences shaping societal attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals. The review has demonstrated that significant scholarly efforts have been invested in understanding sexual and non-cisgender prejudice, particularly in Western contexts and, more recently, in certain post-Soviet and Central Asian settings. Nevertheless, despite these contributions, notable gaps remain in both the geographic coverage and the theoretical framing of existing research. This study seeks to address these gaps by offering a localized, contextually grounded exploration of attitudes toward LGBTQI+ people in Kazakhstan, informed by a constructivist grounded theory approach.

This literature review linked negative attitudes toward LGBTQI+ people to broader research on prejudice. Considerable attention has been paid to the roles of gender, political ideology, religious beliefs, and identity salience in shaping LGBTQI+ attitudes at the level of individual factors (Crawford et al. 2015; Lewis et al. 2017; Wang et al. 2020; Trošt and Marinšek 2022). However, much of this literature is either based on Western samples or operates with assumptions

that may not transfer seamlessly to post-Soviet societies. For instance, while research has demonstrated that adherence to traditional masculinity predicts sexual prejudice (Pascoe 2007; Theodore and Basow 2000), the meanings and expressions of masculinity vary significantly across cultural contexts. In Kazakhstan, masculinity is historically intertwined with nomadic traditions, Soviet militarism, and Islamic revivalism, each carrying distinct expectations regarding gender and sexuality. Thus, while Western models of gender socialization offer useful insights, they require careful contextual adaptation.

Similarly, intergroup contact theory and peer socialization research provide powerful tools for understanding how prejudice is transmitted and challenged within social networks (Allport 1954; Herek 2002; Birkett and Espelage 2015). Yet, these theories are predominantly derived from societies where open visibility of LGBTQI+ individuals is comparatively higher. In Kazakhstan, where LGBTQI+ visibility remains limited and often highly stigmatized, the applicability of contact-based models must be critically examined. Moreover, social structures characterized by strong collectivist norms, high respect for hierarchy, and pervasive informality create peer dynamics that differ substantially from those typically modeled in Western literature (Levitanus 2020; Paine et al. 2021).

In methodological terms, while much of the prior research on LGBTQI+ attitudes has employed deductive, hypothesis-testing approaches, often using pre-existing survey instruments and predetermined analytical frameworks, there are limited body of empirical research delving into theory production on attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities (Kospakov, Kylyshbayeva, and Uyzbayeva 2022; Levitanus 2020; Olijar and Li 2024). While valuable for testing specific theories, such approaches risk imposing conceptual categories that may not resonate with participants' lived realities. This can be particularly problematic in contexts like Kazakhstan, where local understandings of gender and sexuality do not always align with Western categorizations. A

constructivist grounded theory approach, by contrast, prioritizes participants' own meanings, allowing for the emergence of categories grounded in empirical realities rather than theoretical assumptions (Charmaz 2014; Glaser and Strauss 2017).

This study thus positions itself at the intersection of several scholarly conversations. It seeks to contribute to the literature in three key ways. First, it offers an empirically grounded analysis of attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals in Kazakhstan, a context that remains significantly underexplored in global LGBTQI+ research. Second, it critically engages with existing conceptual frameworks of prejudice, adapting them to reflect the specificities of the Kazakhstani sociocultural environment. Finally, by employing a constructivist grounded theory methodology, it generates theoretical insights that are inductively derived from participants' own understandings, thus avoiding the imposition of externally developed categories.

CHAPTER III — METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodological Approach: Constructivist Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was first introduced and originally conceptualized by sociologists Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser as a methodology to develop novel theories based both on empirical and a systemic collection of data (Glaser 1999; Glaser and Strauss 2017; Harry, Sturges, and Klingner 2005; Strauss and Corbin 1998). The authors did not aim to develop a methodology that verifies a "grand" theory, but one that "bridge(s) the gap between the theoretically "uninformed" empirical research and empirically "uninformed" theory" (Goulding 1998, 51).

While Glaser and Strauss diverted their stance on grounded theory in later stages of their careers, which will be discussed in the next section, the following depicts the original stance of the authors in the 1960s.

Grounded theory, as the name suggests, aims to develop a theory grounded in the data collected throughout the research. Analyzing specific cases, collected from various qualitative sources such as, but not limited to, field interviews, observation, and documentation, can allow us to produce general conclusions that can be used in developing a theory (Urquhart 2022). It uses different coding techniques to depict patterns necessary for generalizations. Grounded theory is, hence, an inductive research method that reasons from the ground up and, in most cases, analyzes empirical qualitative data to build a theory (Birks and Mills 2015; Glaser and Strauss 2017; Urquhart 2022). It is important to note that, while new, it successfully managed to become an alternative to the "theoretically "uninformed" empirical research and empirically "uninformed" theory" mentioned above (Goulding 1998, 51).

Grounded theory was revolutionary for its time as it led to two major implications. First, researchers could generate new theories instead of forcing data into a limited number of existing theories (Glaser and Strauss 2017; Urquhart 2022). Glaser and Strauss (2017) proposed starting a study without preconceived theoretical ideas — the opposite of traditional deductive research design — to produce or, perhaps, let a substantive theory appear. It is meant to help prevent prior biases from influencing theory-building, while maintaining an empirical basis. In other words, a researcher conducts a comprehensive literature review only in the later stages of a study.

Second, the methodology implied that both qualitative and quantitative data are important in the social sciences (Glaser and Strauss 2017; Urquhart 2022). Quantitative research was still dominating in the 1960s, questioning the empirical relevance of qualitative data. The authors argued that qualitative data collection can too be systematic and empirical (Glaser and Strauss 2017; Urquhart 2022). While grounded theory was proposed to be a general methodology applicable in both qualitative and quantitative research, it has grown in significance and has primarily been used in qualitative research (Glaser 1999; Glaser and Strauss 2017; Miller and Fredericks 1999).

Rationale for Grounded Theory

Grounded theory, as intended, is not used in this study to generate a "grand" theory. Rather, its appeal lies in the opportunity it offers to shift away from Western-oriented theoretical frameworks that are often taken as default in academic research. Most scholarship on sexual and non-cisgender prejudice has been developed in Western liberal democracies, where the social and political treatment of LGBTQI+ identities differs significantly from the realities found in Kazakhstan. While empirical data can in fact align with existing literature, assuming such frameworks without modification risks fitting local realities into externally produced models, producing conclusions that reflect the theory more than the data. This is especially problematic in

contexts where the meaning of visibility, identity, and minority recognition cannot be assumed to mirror Euro-American contexts.

Grounded theory, and constructivist grounded theory in particular, enables the researcher to approach the field without preselecting concepts. Instead, it allows categories and interpretations to emerge through an iterative engagement with empirical data. For this reason, the method is also an epistemological choice. It resists pre-established analytical hierarchies and offers a more open-ended engagement with how meaning is constructed by research participants. In doing so, it helps minimize theoretical dependence on Western-centric expectations and instead focuses on how people in Kazakhstan themselves define and make sense of LGBTQI+ identities.

On Literature Review

Glaser and Strauss experienced a major dispute in the 90s that affected the core understanding of grounded theory (Urquhart 2022). During that period, Strauss and Corbin (1998) released a book titled "*Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*" to provide a wider audience with a "how-to" manual. It shed light on the mechanisms, principles, and practical advice on grounded theory. It was not until this book that Glaser and Strauss realized how their views, as co-founders, differed fundamentally. Glaser (1992) attempted to revoke his colleague's publication and, when he failed to do so, released a book titled "*Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis: Emergence vs. Forcing*", to respond in opposition, which essentially became a starting point for two strands of grounded theory — Glaserian and Straussian. Understanding this dispute is, thus, essential to comprehend what grounded theory constitutes today.

While, in their original work, Glaser and Strauss (2017, 37) explicitly argued against a literature review before developing a theory — "an effective strategy is, at first, literally to ignore

the literature of theory and fact on the area under study" — for the reasons explained above, Strauss deviated from their original stance and welcomed what they called "conditional" literature review or sampling of prior literature (Flick 2018; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Urquhart 2022).

Strauss acknowledged that it is not entirely possible to enter a study with no prior biases and suggested that theoretical interaction with prior works be done strategically at early stages (Strauss and Corbin 1998). They still believed that excessive dependence on literature review before theory production would hinder the emergence of truly novel theories, yet they suggested that researchers carefully engage with the literature as the study progresses, focusing mainly on relevant theoretical sampling (Flick 2018; Heath and Cowley 2004; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Urquhart 2022). Strauss relied on moderate and iterative theoretical integration between current literature and empirical data and believed that, if done properly, it would not hinder but enrich the analysis. Comparing the sampling with findings of empirical data could, thus, be beneficial to the researcher.

However, Glaser (1992) did not find their argument sufficiently convincing and even argued that Strauss's work opposed the core concept of grounded theory. In practice, a researcher might indeed not have a total absence of priors in advance of a study. Yet, it should not annul the option for one to enter a study with as open a mind as possible (Flick 2018; Glaser 1992). Glaser argued that epistemology, or theories of knowledge, should not concern a grounded theorist, as exactly prior theories of knowledge are a limiting factor in producing novel theories:

> *"Epistemology. A theory of – or a theoretical perspective. That's all bullshit for grounded theory. You can read it in "Theoretical Coding". GT is just a stupid little method. That's all it is. The epistemology is irrelevant. It's how you use it"*
>
> (Tarozzi and Glaser 2007, 27).

For Glaser (1992), grounded theory is all about induction: everything is in the collected data. One simply needs to collect what is already there. While Glaser provides a convincing argument against Strauss's position on the relevant theoretical sampling and, by extension, literature review, his statement too faced criticism. Keller argues that Glaser fell victim to "naive empiricism" (Clarke and Keller 2014; Flick 2018). Real-world studies are not a "pure inductive form of discovery"; not everything that is there can be collected (Flick 2018, par. 13). As such, the next generation of grounded theorists proposed an alternative between Strauss and Glaser.

Methodology of Choice — Constructivist Grounded Theory

Constructivist grounded theory was developed by sociologist Kathy Charmaz as an alternative, or perhaps, an extension to Glaserian and Straussian grounded theories. It is a qualitative research method in social sciences that highlights the significance of understanding social phenomena through the lens of participants' subjective experiences and interpretations (Charmaz 2006; Charmaz and Belgrave 2012; Thornberg and Charmaz 2014).

Charmaz's (2006) standpoint on the start of literature review is aligned with Glaser (1992). They support Glaser's (1992) position — that the review be conducted in later stages of a study — and suggest that delaying the review can help "avoid importing preconceived ideas and imposing them on your work. Delaying the review encourages you to articulate your ideas" (Charmaz 2006, 165). Since Charmaz and Glaser's arguments seem more aligned with the core intention and advantage of grounded theory, this thesis project turned to a literature review after comprehensive data collection and during the development of a theory.

Nevertheless, Charmaz (2006) also agreed with Strauss's standpoint on the flexibility of literature review. Strauss and Corbin (1998) moved toward a more pragmatic and flexible approach to literature use in grounded theory. They argued that literature may be consulted before, during,

and after data collection to enhance theory development. While Charmaz (2006) agreed with Glaser (1992) that early literature review should be delayed to avoid importing preconceived ideas, they also acknowledged, similar to Strauss and Corbin (1998), that literature can be used iteratively and reflexively at later stages to support theoretical development. Their reasoning is grounded in the constructivist position, where the research process is seen as co-constructed and the role of prior knowledge is neither ignored nor treated as inherently problematic.

Charmaz's methodology differs from the more traditional, positivist grounded theory developed by Strauss and Glaser with its more interpretive approach and acknowledgment of the researcher's positionality (Charmaz 2006; Flick 2018). Recent advancements in the interpretive ontological community have demonstrated that accounting for the socially constructed nature of human societies and the researcher's positionality in the study does not necessarily lower its empirical basis but instead increases reflexivity and awareness of potential biases that grounded theory, essentially, tries to minimize (Charmaz 2006; Lin 1998; Walsham 2006; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012). As such, this thesis project shares constructivist grounded theory's ontological perspective.

Additionally, Charmaz's (2006) grounded theory accommodates a new, third principle of reasoning — abduction. It is a form of reasoning that begins with an observation and then seeks the simplest and most likely explanation through interpretation and theorization and is often referred to as "inference to the best explanation" (Reichertz 2007, 2). Unlike induction or deduction, research using abduction does not claim to derive general principles or specific conclusions applicable to all settings but rather finds the most plausible explanation for the observed phenomena (Bruscaglioni 2016; Charmaz 2006; Reichertz 2019). Abduction was introduced in the recent literature as "a way of capturing the dialectical shuttling between the domain of observations and the domains of ideas"

in regards to grounded theory (Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont 2003, 149). As such, this reasoning can allow theory-building to be an iterative and reflexive process in constructivist grounded theory.

Iterative theory-building suggests that all stages of research are circular, and the researcher can come back to data collection with new questions as they discover new ideas from the analysis of previous rounds — all until no data adds insight to the conclusion (Charmaz 2006; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012). Reflexivity is accounting for the researcher's positionality (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012). In one's interactions, they are not invisible actors but human beings with a subjective perspective who are exposed to other human beings whose behavior can too be dependent on various factors. When theory-building is both iterative and reflexive, the researcher continuously refines and elaborates their insights, based on the best explanation, contrary to the traditional grounded theory grounded in "objective" patterns that this paper rejects (Bruscaglioni 2016; Charmaz 2006; Flick 2018; Reichertz 2019; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012).

Lastly, Charmaz (2006) proposes updated methodology and coding techniques, depicting abductive reasoning, that will be discussed in 3.3 Data Analysis. One of the key methodological shifts she introduced is the central role of memo-writing, which she conceptualized differently from Glaser and Strauss. While Glaser and Strauss acknowledged memoing as part of grounded theory, their use of memos was largely instrumental — a way to keep track of coding steps and category development (Glaser and Strauss 2017). Charmaz, in contrast, treats memo-writing as an analytical and reflexive act in its own right. For them, memos are not simply procedural records but sites of theorization, where the researcher engages actively with data, categories, and their own positionality (Charmaz 2006; Charmaz and Belgrave 2012).

3.2 Research Design

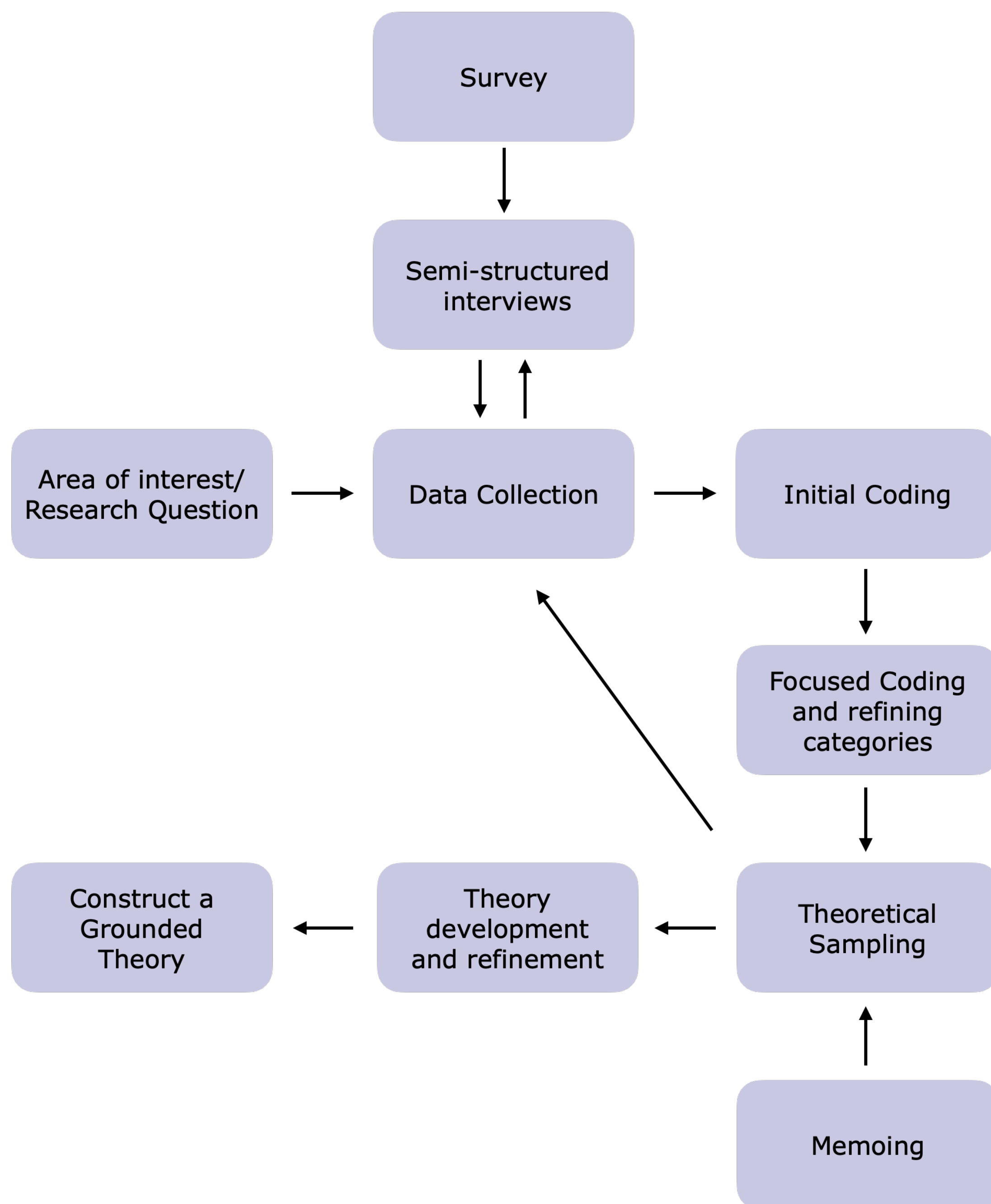

Figure 1 — Research Design

Considering the aforementioned, the research design follows the logic of constructivist grounded theory and proceeds in iterative stages. Figure 1 outlines the sequential but flexible structure of the research process from initial data collection to theory building. Data collection and analysis are not strictly separated, and the flow of research may shift direction based on emerging

categories. The initial survey is conducted without the influence of prior analytical categories, in line with the core principles of grounded theory. It consists of a survey with two open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' own framing of the topic. The sampling for the survey is random and includes respondents from all regions of Kazakhstan. While the study does not claim generalizability, regional diversity allows the data to be relatively representative of broader discursive environments within the country.

Survey responses were analyzed using initial and focused coding, and prominent patterns and interpretive avenues informed the next round of data collection — semi-structured interviews. Interview participants were drawn from those survey respondents who voluntarily provided contact information. While the second stage of data collection was originally designed to be iterative, allowing the researcher to return to participants with follow-up questions or conduct additional interviews if new categories emerged, this plan could not be fully realized due to limited participation. In contrast to the one-time survey, the interview process was intended to be shaped by prior data and the researcher's analytical engagement with it.

Throughout all stages, memo-writing was used to document relevant information, such as the researcher's analytical thinking, shifts in interpretation, or emerging theoretical insights. Memos served as a critical tool in guiding the development of categories and interview prompts. As such, they functioned as an integral part of the research design, ensuring both consistency and reflexivity in the analysis.

3.3 Data Collection

Charmaz (2006) argues that a researcher can conduct textual analysis of written data that they had no or limited part in shaping. This includes two main types of texts: those that are *elicited* by the researcher, such as interview responses or survey comments, and those that are *extant*,

meaning they were produced for reasons unrelated to the research itself. Both are considered meaningful and analytically valid, as they are shaped by the intentions, assumptions, and conditions under which they were produced.

Charmaz notes that such texts often “record, explore, explain, justify, or foretell actions,” and do so within “social, economic, historical, cultural, and situational contexts” (Charmaz 2006, 35). Because all texts emerge from particular social and cultural situations, they can be situated within broader discursive patterns. A practical example of this might be when a participant in an interview recounts a past experience not in direct response to a question but as part of a broader reflection. Even when unprompted, such reflections remain part of elicited text, as they are shaped by the interview setting and the participant’s awareness of the research context.

This study worked exclusively with elicited text. The primary sources included an anonymous online survey and a set of semi-structured interviews. These were designed to prompt open reflection on the research topic, without guiding participants toward any specific conclusion. Combining the survey and interview methods allowed for both breadth and some degree of depth. The survey provided a wide range of responses across different regions and demographics, capturing recurring patterns and common justifications. The open-ended format gave participants space to articulate their positions in their own words, often revealing spontaneous associations or socially embedded reasoning. Interviews, although limited in number, offered an opportunity to explore these justifications in more detail and to ask follow-up questions that could clarify or complicate earlier interpretations. In this way, the two methods complemented one another: the survey allowed for the identification of patterns, while the interviews helped contextualize and probe the meanings behind them.

3.3.1 Survey

Textual Analysis — Elicited Text

In constructivist grounded theory, text is considered *elicited* when produced by research participants for the purpose of a study (Charmaz 2006). This includes, among other sources, responses to open-ended survey questions. In this project, elicited text refers to narrative responses gathered from an anonymous online survey administered to a randomly selected group of individuals across Kazakhstan. A private research firm, NAC Analytica, affiliated with Nazarbayev University and experienced in large-scale public opinion studies, was contracted to carry out random sampling and survey implementation. The survey was hosted and administered using the Qualtrics platform. Eligibility criteria were minimal: participants had to be Kazakhstani nationals and at least 18 years old. No further demographic or behavioral targeting was applied.

Participants responded to the following open-ended questions:

1. “Can you please describe your attitudes toward the members of the LGBTQI+ community? Please feel free to include any details or personal stories."

2. “Can you please describe the attitudes of your close network (family, friends) toward the members of the LGBTQI+ community? Please feel free to include any details or personal stories."

The use of open-ended, anonymous survey questions aimed to reduce social desirability bias — a well-documented phenomenon where individuals adjust their responses to conform to perceived social norms or expectations (Krumpal 2013; Fisher 1993). This bias can get most present when respondents are asked to report views that may be seen as morally or politically sensitive, such as those related to sexual and gender minorities (Tourangeau and Yan 2007). By eliminating face-to-face interaction and withholding any identifying personal information, the online format

reduces the interpersonal pressure that can result in misreporting or silence (Joinson 1999). While open-ended responses are not always detailed, they can yield more honest and spontaneous expressions of attitude than interviews or close-ended formats. These responses serve to identify dominant framings that are later explored more systematically.

Final Sample Characteristics

A total of 829 valid responses were collected. The dataset includes basic demographic information related to age, education, gender, region, and a language of choice in completing the survey. While not designed for statistical generalization, the sample demonstrates internal variation across key social markers, supporting the objective of identifying recurring discursive patterns in attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals.

Gender:

- Female: 459
- Male: 357
- No answer / unspecified: 13

The sample includes 459 women, 357 men, and 13 respondents who did not specify their gender. No respondents identified outside binary categories. Although slightly skewed toward female participation, the distribution does not suggest domination by any single group and remains adequate for comparative reading across gender lines (see Appendix A).

Age:

Respondents range from 18 to 55 years and older (see Appendix B). The age structure is as follows:

- 18–24: 134 respondents

- 25–34: 177 respondents
- 35–44: 190 respondents
- 45–54: 133 respondents
- 55 and older: 195 respondents

This distribution allows for the analysis of generational perspectives across all major adult cohorts. While the 35–44 and 55+ groups are slightly overrepresented, no single cohort dominates the sample.

Education:

- Completed higher education: 391
- Completed college: 155
- Completed school: 120
- Incomplete college: 65
- Incomplete higher education: 44
- Incomplete school: 46
- No formal education: 8

The majority of respondents have completed higher education. However, the presence of participants across all levels of educational attainment supports meaningful comparisons along educational lines (see Appendix C).

Region:

Respondents came from across the country, including three cities of Republican significance and all major geographic regions. The breakdown is as follows:

- Almaty: 90
- Astana: 62
- Eastern Kazakhstan: 63
- Central Kazakhstan: 60
- Northern Kazakhstan: 136
- Shymkent: 54
- Southern Kazakhstan: 231
- Western Kazakhstan: 131
- Outside Kazakhstan: 2

For analysis purposes, the following regional categories are used:

- Western Kazakhstan: Atyrau, Mangystau, Aktobe
- Central Kazakhstan: Ulytau, Karagandy
- Southern Kazakhstan: Kyzylorda, Turkistan, Jambyl, Almaty Oblast, Jetisu
- Eastern Kazakhstan: Abai, East Kazakhstan
- Northern Kazakhstan: Akmola, Pavlodar, North Kazakhstan, Kostanay

- Separate categories: Almaty, Astana, Shymkent — as cities of Republican significance (see Figure 2)

Figure 2 — Map with regional categories

Figure 3 presents the ratio of respondents per region relative to the total sample alongside the share of each region's population in the national demographic structure (Bureau of National Statistics 2024). The sample broadly reflects the regional distribution of Kazakhstan's population, with minor deviations. While Southern Kazakhstan is slightly underrepresented (−4.04%) and Northern Kazakhstan overrepresented (+2.22%), the majority of regional proportions align with national demographic estimates from 2024 (<1.08%). This regional match is a result of the stratified random sampling approach employed by NAC Analytica, which was based on regional quotas.

Region	Survey Participants (%)	Regional Population Size (%)	Difference (%)
Almaty	10.86	11.33	-0.47
Astana	7.48	7.6	-0.12
Shymkent	6.51	6.21	0.3
Central Kazakhstan	7.24	6.67	0.57
Eastern Kazakhstan	7.6	6.52	1.08
Northern Kazakhstan	16.41	14.19	2.22
Southern Kazakhstan	27.86	31.9	-4.04
Western Kazakhstan	15.8	15.58	0.22
Outside	0.24	—	—

Figure 3 — Breakdown of population and sample size across regions

Language:

Of the 829 responses, 334 were submitted in Kazakh and 495 in Russian (see Appendix D). Language of completion was not externally assigned and reflects respondents' own linguistic preference.

Given the randomized regional sampling frame and the absence of targeted quotas, except for the regional division, these demographic characteristics were not predetermined but emerged from a probabilistic selection process. While the sample cannot be treated as statistically generalizable to the national population, which this thesis does not attempt, its internal diversity is

sufficient to explore a wide range of interpretive framings and discursive tendencies relevant to the topic.

Voluntary Interview Participation:

In addition to open-ended questions, the survey included an optional entry field for participants to leave contact information should they be willing to participate in follow-up interviews. This optional entry field allowed for voluntary selection into the next stage of the study. Interview candidates were drawn exclusively from this pool. Selection was based on the interpretive relevance of their responses, particularly those that reflected either complex framing, narrative inconsistency, or alignment with emergent coding categories.

Interview questions were developed after the initial phase of survey analysis in order to follow the principles of constructivist grounded theory. Rather than designing interviews in advance, the aim was to allow themes and tensions to emerge from the data first. Initial and focused coding of the survey responses, followed by a targeted review of relevant literature, informed the development of interview prompts. This approach ensured that the interviews built directly on participants' own framing of the topic, without introducing theoretical assumptions prematurely (Charmaz 2006).

3.3.2 Interviews

In-depth Semi-structured Interviews

At the end of the survey, respondents were invited to provide their contact information if they were open to a follow-up interview. Of the 871 individuals who completed the survey, 329 left either a phone number or email address. This form of voluntary self-selection did not serve as a

form of stratified targeting; the only eligibility criteria throughout were that participants be Kazakhstani nationals and at least 18 years old.

Before scheduling interviews, all individuals who had provided contact details were contacted to confirm their willingness to participate and to verify that they met the age requirement. Only those who confirmed both their interest and legal eligibility were sent a follow-up informational letter outlining the purpose of the project, the voluntary nature of participation, and the structure of the interview process. During this outreach, five individuals were found to be underage; their survey responses were excluded from the final sample.

Although the original plan was to conduct theoretical sampling for the interview phase, this was not possible due to recruitment challenges. Many phone numbers turned out to be invalid, and a large portion of those contacted either did not respond or explicitly declined to discuss LGBTQI+ issues. As a result, the final interview sample was one of convenience, composed of those few individuals who were both reachable and willing to speak.

The interview guide was developed following the focused coding stage and was directly informed by the patterns identified in the survey data. Given this sequence, a separate ethics application for the interview stage was submitted after the completion of the survey and its preliminary analysis. The first ethics approval covered the online survey, while the second was submitted to authorize the interview phase. Both applications were reviewed and approved by the Institutional Research Ethics Committee of the School of Sciences and Humanities at Nazarbayev University before any data collection took place.

The interview guide was first drafted in English and then translated into Russian and Kazakh. Both versions were reviewed by native speakers to ensure linguistic clarity and cultural resonance. The guide included instructions on memo-taking and transcription to support thorough

contextual and multilingual analysis, along with a set of open-ended interview questions. These questions were formulated to prompt clarification and elaboration and were grouped thematically to allow for flexible yet comparable conversations across interviews. Topics included threat perception, values discourse, visibility, sources of knowledge, and emotional tone (see Appendix E).

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were chosen to examine emerging categories. Although 329 participants left contact information, only six eventually completed interviews. Many did not respond to follow-up messages or declined. As a result, selection was not guided by interpretive richness or comparative saturation, but by availability and consent. This significantly limited the potential for interviews to iteratively inform the coding process or expand on preliminary categories.

In-depth interviews are commonly used to explore complex behavior, such as people's attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals, and to understand participants' perspectives on the topic (Brounéus 2011; Lucas 2014; Trangbæk and Cecchini 2023). Unlike structured interviews, which aim to gather factual information, in-depth interviews are more suited for interpretive research (Trangbæk and Cecchini 2023). In this study, the collected data reflected context-sensitive responses and were transcribed and coded to either extend or adjust existing categories. Analysis and coding remained interpretive and accounted for the researcher's positionality.

Interviews were semi-structured to balance thematic focus with flexibility. This format allowed the researcher to follow narrative threads introduced by participants while maintaining comparability across interviews. In constructivist grounded theory, where meaning is co-constructed through interaction, semi-structured interviews are useful for probing unspoken assumptions, elaborating partial statements, and responding to culturally specific references

(Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; Charmaz 2006). This approach made it possible to explore developing categories without imposing rigid structure.

Constructivist grounded theory allows iterative interviewing, such that a participant could be re-contacted if new questions emerged or clarification became necessary, but this was not possible in practice due to recruitment constraints and limited availability. Theoretical saturation was not reached, as the limited number of interviews prevented further category refinement or triangulation. Nevertheless, the interviews contributed valuable interpretive depth to themes that had already surfaced in the survey responses.

3.4 Data Analysis

Both initial and focused coding were conducted separately for Kazakh and Russian responses. Categories were developed independently within each language group, without attempts at early cross-language alignment. This approach is consistent with prior work in multilingual qualitative research, which emphasizes the risk of conceptual distortion when coding is forced into a shared language framework too early in the analysis (van Nes et al. 2010; Squires 2009).

Language is not merely a medium of expression but a site of meaning-making. Coding responses in the original language allowed for greater sensitivity to implicit references, idiomatic phrasing, and discursive nuance that might otherwise be flattened in translation (Temple and Young 2004). Separate coding ensured that conceptual categories remained grounded in the semantic and sociolinguistic patterns specific to each group. Only after the completion of focused coding were the datasets compared and merged, preserving the integrity of each linguistic trajectory prior to synthesis.

Analytical Approach

Charmaz's (2006) approach to analyzing data within the framework of constructivist grounded theory, as detailed in her 2006 book, "Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis", emphasizes an iterative and flexible process. Key steps and principles of data analysis, according to Charmaz (2006), are as follows:

3.4.1 Initial Coding

Initial coding began with open-ended survey responses and was carried out separately in the Kazakh and Russian language groups. This phase followed Charmaz's (2006) recommendations to code closely to the data and allowed early meanings to surface without premature theoretical framing. A manual word-by-word coding strategy was used where feasible, allowing for nuanced attention to idiomatic expressions and emotionally charged terms, given the nature of many survey responses — brief and fragmented entries.

Due to the high number of responses — 829 in total across both languages — coding was conducted on Atlas.ti, a platform for engaging with qualitative datasets. It allows retrieval across multilingual text blocks and manages annotation and code categories. The initial codes depicted distinct affective framings, rhetorical devices, or implicit assumptions and often emerged from participants' own phrasing. Memos were written throughout this process to document interpretive decisions and emergent patterns.

The main challenges of this stage included the variability in response length and clarity, as well as the risk of flattening entries' meaning with codes in English. To address this, coding was performed by native speakers, and a comparative session was conducted to compare codes in Russian and Kazakh.

3.4.2 Focused Coding and Category Development

In the second stage, focused coding was applied to the most frequent and analytically significant initial codes. This involved comparing codes with data and codes with other codes, identifying convergences and patterns across cases. Focused codes were used to condense the data into higher-level categories.

At this stage, the Russian and Kazakh datasets were compared to identify shared or divergent thematic structures, despite not being part of the original research design. It emerged during the coding process, when it became clear that responses written in different languages varied in quality and quantity of the generated codes. Since Kazakhstan is a bilingual country, it became important to acknowledge this distinction in the analysis.

Co-occurrence analysis in Atlas.ti helped trace how codes clustered together in participant narratives. Within each language group, minor but similar codes were first merged into broader conceptual bundles. These bundles were then reviewed and synthesized into final categories. The purpose of this process was to enhance analytical clarity while maintaining sensitivity to internal variations. After finalizing categories in each language, cross-language comparison was conducted to explore thematic convergence and divergence.

Codes were grouped into provisional categories such as threat narratives, conditional acceptance, or human rights framings. These categories were iteratively refined by constant comparison and supported by analytic memos. The Kazakh-speaking codes yielded 19 final categories (See Appendix F), while the Russian-speaking ones resulted in 23 (See Appendix G). Then, a cross-linguistic comparison was conducted to identify conceptual overlap and divergence. This comparison helped define merged categories, which were later used to build the final codebook.

Code Category	Kazakh (n=334)	Russian (n=495)	Merged (n=829)
Apathy/Discomfort	—	1.6% (8)	1.0% (8)
Concern with children	1.8% (6)	2.4% (12)	2.2% (18)
Concern with LGBT propaganda	5.7% (19)	8.3% (41)	7.2% (60)
Don't Ask, Don't Tell	—	4.2% (21)	2.5% (21)
Extremely negative	5.4% (18)	5.8% (29)	5.6% (47)
Feeling sorry for LGBT	—	1.0% (5)	0.6% (5)
Humanistic beliefs	2.7% (9)	1.2% (6)	1.8% (15)
Indifferent	2.1% (7)	11.9% (59)	8.0% (66)
Isolating LGBT	7.2%* (24)	—	—
LGBT as disorder	1.5% (5)	4.6% (23)	3.4% (28)
LGBT as movement/organization	4.2% (14)	2.8% (14)	3.4% (28)
LGBT as threat	12.9% (43)	7.5% (37)	9.7% (103)
Moral/religious/traditional values	14.7% (49)	6.5% (32)	9.8% (81)
Negative	70.7% (236)	37.5% (186)	50.9% (422)
Neutral	7.2% (24)	20.2% (100)	15.0% (124)
Neutral but no propaganda	0.3% (1)	7.9% (39)	4.8% (40)
No knowledge of LGBT	18.0% (60)	2.2% (11)	11.7%* (97)
Not understanding LGBT	—	2.4% (12)	1.4% (12)
No personal connections	—	5.3%* (26)	—

Personal connections or self-identification	3.0% (10)	1.4% (7)	2.1% (17)
Positive	6.0% (20)	6.5% (32)	6.3% (52)
Right to choose sexuality	5.7% (19)	7.7% (38)	6.9% (57)
Unclear	6.0% (20)	10.1% (50)	8.4% (70)

Figure 4 — Code category distribution

During the work with merged codes, the following decisions were made:

1) "No personal connections" was merged with "No knowledge about LGBT".

2). "Isolating LGBT" code was merged with "LGBT as a threat".

3)."Feeling sorry for LGBT" and "Apathy/Discomfort" were deleted because they represented very few individuals.

An abbreviated version of the final codebook is provided below:

General Attitudes:

- Extremely negative
- Negative
- Neutral
- Neutral but no propaganda
- Positive
- Indifferent
- Unclear

"LGBT as a threat":

- Moral/religious/traditional values
- LGBT as threat
- Queerness as a disorder
- Being Queer is Unnatural
- Concern with children
- Not understanding LGBT
- Isolating LGBT

“Visibility Concerns”:

- Concern with LGBT propaganda
- Don't Ask, Don't Tell
- Neutral but no propaganda

“Hidden Agenda”:

- LGBT as movement/organization
- Concern with LGBT Propaganda

“Empathy-driven Acceptance”:

- Right to choose sexuality
- Personal connections or self-identification
- Humanistic beliefs

“Propaganda concerns”:

- Propaganda as Western Influence

- Propaganda as Connection with TV/Movies
- Propaganda as Marches/Meetings

“Indifference and Apathy”:

- Apathy/Discomfort
- No Personal Connections
- No Knowledge of LGBT
- Feeling Sorry for LGBT
- No conversations about LGBT

Other Categories:

- Group differences

Memo-writing continued throughout, capturing contextual detail, contradictions, and potential conceptual relevance. Where category boundaries were ambiguous, memos were especially useful for documenting interpretive tensions and unresolved conceptual threads.

3.4.3 Gender and Statistical Associations

While the primary analytic approach in this study is qualitative, rooted in constructivist grounded theory, basic statistical testing was employed to descriptively examine gender variation in personal and network attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals. These procedures were used not to establish causality but to support interpretive reflection through the identification of meaningful distributional patterns.

A chi-square test of independence was selected to assess the association between gender (male/female) and personal and network attitude categories in survey responses. This test is well-

suited for examining relationships between categorical variables and provided a useful descriptive tool for evaluating potential group-level divergence. To reduce the risk of low expected counts in contingency table cells, attitude codes were collapsed into three broader categories: "Negative" and "Extremely negative" responses were grouped together due to their shared oppositional stance (only "Negative" for network attitude); "Neutral" and "Unclear" responses were combined to reflect non-affirmative but also non-hostile positions; and "Indifferent" responses were grouped with "Positive" for statistical purposes only, due to the small frequency of positive responses. These categories remain analytically distinct in the interpretive coding framework.

The chi-square test was first conducted on the full dataset and then repeated for linguistic subsamples within general attitudes. In subsamples where expected cell frequencies fell below the recommended threshold, a Fisher's Exact Test was employed as a conservative alternative. The Fisher's Exact Test calculates exact probabilities and is more appropriate than the chi-square test for small samples or unevenly distributed data. Together, these statistical procedures allowed for a cautious exploration of gender-linked variation while remaining consistent with the broader logic of constructivist inquiry.

It is important to note that I treat cell counts and χ^2 statistics as accountable traces of participants' meaning-making rather than as independent measures of an objective social reality. In keeping with constructivist grounded theory, the tables function only as sensitizing devices that highlight patterns warranting further interpretive analysis.

3.4.4 Theoretical Integration

The goal at this stage is not to impose an external framework but to identify meaningful links between categories that could inform theoretical sampling and support conceptual integration. A code co-occurrence network map was generated in Atlas.ti to explore the empirical relationships

between established codes. Co-occurrence refers to instances where two codes are applied to overlapping segments of the same response or closely related content. For example, references to a right to a sexuality co-occurred more often with neutral attitudes than positive ones, suggesting that some respondents may use liberal principles to justify passive acceptance rather than active support.

Co-occurrence analysis helps identify patterns of association among attitudes, rationales, and narrative justifications. Co-occurrence strength was annotated and categorized as follows: associations exceeding 40% were coded as strong, those between 20–40% as moderate, and those under 20% as weak (See Appendix H). Importantly, co-occurrence was treated as one-directional, from secondary explanatory codes toward main attitudinal positions, enabling assessment of which rationales were invoked to support or contextualize particular stance categories.

At this stage, the analysis also turned to relevant literature, such as work on non-cisgender prejudice, moral panic, and heteronormative values, not to validate findings but to help situate emergent categories within broader scholarly conversations. The conceptual framework developed in this stage was thus grounded in the data but sensitized by relevant theoretical insights.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) of the School of Sciences and Humanities at Nazarbayev University reviewed and approved this research in June 2024. Ethical approval was obtained both for an online survey and in-depth, semi-structured interviews prior to data collection. All stages of data collection and subsequent procedures adhered to the conditions outlined in the protocol provided by the committee.

Participants' rights, dignity, and safety were respected throughout the research process. Ethical safeguards, such as informed consent, were applied at all stages. The online survey required respondents' acquaintance with the consent form to participate in the survey: they were asked to

confirm that they were at least 18 years old and agreed to take part in the study by clicking a confirmation button. While the button ensured respondents' willingness to participate, completion and submission of the survey were treated as the ultimate indication of informed consent.

The survey respondents who expressed their willingness to be interviewed were contacted separately to confirm their participation. Upon their confirmation, they were sent an informational letter explaining the study's goals, the nature of participation, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any point without any negative sanctions. They were briefly reviewed on these key points and asked to confirm they had read the informational letter and understood its contents before starting the interview. Verbal consent was then recorded at the beginning of the session. This approach minimized participants' digital footprint, especially relevant given the politically sensitive nature of the topic.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained: no personally identifiable information was collected in the survey nor transcribed post-interview. Any identifying details were removed or altered in transcripts; interview participants were assigned an individual code to protect their identities. During data collection, audio files were protected with passwords, accessible only to those directly involved in data processing and analysis, and were deleted after transcription was completed.

I maintained an ongoing reflexive stance throughout the project, particularly in acknowledging how personal positionality might shape data interpretation. As a scholar based in Kazakhstan with a public record of advocacy on issues of equality and anti-harassment, I was attentive to potential bias and took steps to remain analytically open. This included regular memo-writing and informal peer consultations to reflect on assumptions, reactions, and interpretive choices.

No significant risks were anticipated or observed during the research project. The project ensured that respondents were not placed in situations of discomfort or harm through voluntary design, emphasis on anonymity, and absence of targeted recruitment. Ethical practice was guided by the principles of autonomy, respect, and the obligation to do no harm.

3.6 Limitations and Methodological Reflections

LGBTQI+ is a term that brings together individuals with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. In practice, however, people often hold different kinds of opinions depending on whether they are thinking about, for example, gay men, lesbians, or trans people. While this study sought to explore these distinctions, particularly between sexual and gender minorities, through interviews, the overall design of this thesis may not have been the most effective in fully capturing these variations.

The survey design, which formed the core of the data, poses the main limitation. Respondents were asked to reflect on their attitudes toward LGBTQI+ people as a whole, without specifics on subgroups. This broad framing was deliberate — it avoided imposing predefined categories and allowed participants to respond freely. However, while it enabled exploratory analysis, it also involved a tradeoff: the broad framing limited the ability to depict potential differences in attitudes toward subgroups of LGBTQI+.

The interviews were designed to address this gap by encouraging participants to reflect on their attitudes toward distinct LGBTQI+ subgroups. Some interviewees responded in ways that highlighted these differences, offering more nuanced interpretations. Others, however, either did not recognize such distinctions or chose not to elaborate. The absence of clear distinctions in some responses is itself an empirical finding, reflecting how interviewees engaged with LGBTQI+ identities and what meanings they gave to these identities. At the same time, it is also possible that

it may simply reflect a lack of engagement with the topic or difficulty articulating more specific views. Regardless of the quality of the dataset, interview findings cannot be considered representative of the broader survey sample.

The limited number of interviews presents another challenge. Although 329 survey respondents left contact information, only six completed interviews. Many provided invalid contact details, did not respond to follow-up outreach, or declined to speak about LGBTQI+ issues. As a result, the final interview sample was based on availability rather than theoretical sampling. This made it impossible to revisit participants for follow-up or to incorporate new cases based on emergent categories. Consequently, theoretical saturation was not reached, and interviews could not play the iterative role expected in a grounded theory study.

There were also challenges related to bilingual data. Although coding was conducted separately for Russian and Kazakh responses, language choice does not directly map onto identity. According to Kazakhstan’s census, many participants likely speak both languages, and their choice may reflect situational or practical preferences rather than stable affiliation (Bureau of National Statistics 2023, 380). As such, while meaningful patterns were identified across language groups, they should not be interpreted as representing mutually exclusive populations.

Finally, although the sample demonstrates internal variation by age, gender, education, and region, it is not representative of Kazakhstan’s population. It was designed for qualitative insight rather than generalizability. All findings should therefore be interpreted with sensitivity to the study’s scope and design constraints.

CHAPTER IV — FINDINGS

4.1 Overview of Personal Attitudes Toward LGBTQI+ Individuals

Category	Russian-speaking (n=495)	Kazakh-speaking (n=334)	Merged (n=829)
General Attitudes			
Negative	38% (186)	71% (236)	51% (422)
Neutral	20% (100)	7% (24)	15% (124)
Indifferent	12% (59)	2% (7)	8% (66)
Unclear	10% (50)	6% (20)	8% (70)
Neutral but no propaganda	8% (39)	0.3% (1)	5% (40)
Positive	7% (32)	6% (20)	6% (52)
Extremely negative	6% (29)	5% (18)	6% (47)
LGBT is a Threat			
Moral/religious/ traditional values	7% (32)	15% (49)	10% (81)
LGBT as threat	8% (37)	20% (66)	13% (103)
LGBT as disorder	5% (23)	2% (5)	3% (28)
Concern with children	2% (12)	2% (6)	2% (18)
Not understanding LGBT	2% (12)	-	1% (12)
Propaganda Concerns			
Connections with movies/TV/internet	1%(3)	0%(1)	0%(4)
Marches/meetings	2%(9)	0%(1)	1%(10)
Western influence	1%(3)	-	0%(3)

Hidden Agenda			
LGBT as movement/ organization	3% (14)	4% (14)	3% (28)
Visibility Concerns			
Concern with LGBT propaganda	8% (41)	6% (19)	7% (60)
Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT)	4% (21)	-	3% (21)
Empathy-driven acceptance			
Right to choose sexuality	8% (38)	6% (19)	7% (57)
Personal connections or self-identification	1% (7)	3% (10)	2% (17)
Humanistic beliefs	1% (6)	3% (9)	2% (15)
Other			
Apathy/Discomfort	2% (8)	-	1% (8)
Feeling sorry for LGBT	1% (5)	-	1% (5)
No knowledge of LGBT	7% (37)	18% (60)	12% (97)

Figure 5 — Survey results

According to the survey findings (See Figure 5), a slight majority, about 51% of respondents, expressed negative views toward LGBTQI+ individuals. An additional 6% were classified as "Extremely negative," displaying more hardline opposition such as open disgust, use of slurs, or extreme emotions. Positive attitudes were relatively rare, with only around 6% of respondents classified as supportive. The remaining sample was distributed across categories such as "Neutral" (15%), "Indifferent" (8%), "Unclear" (8%), and conditionally neutral with opposition to "propaganda" (5%).

Looking more closely, many of those who held negative attitudes grounded their views in traditional, moral, or religious reasoning. Roughly 10% of all responses explicitly referenced these values when justifying their disapproval. Others leaned on the perception that LGBTQI+ identities represented a broader social or cultural threat, accounting for around 13% of responses. A smaller group, about 3%, pathologized LGBTQI+ identities, describing them as psychological or medical disorders.

By contrast, explicit support for LGBTQI+ rights was limited. About 7% of participants endorsed the idea that individuals have the right to choose their sexuality freely, and an additional 2% drew upon broader humanistic values. A small number, again roughly 2%, cited personal relationships with LGBTQI+ individuals as shaping their more accepting views. Although these figures represent a minority, they point to the presence of positive and inclusive attitudes within Kazakhstan's largely conservative environment.

Importantly, conditional statements, such as tolerating LGBTQI+ individuals provided they remained private about their identities, was mostly observable among participants who selected Russian language to complete their surveys: 8% of responses in Russian out of the Russian sample versus only 0.3% in Kazakh. The conditional notion that LGBTQI+ existence was acceptable "as long as it is not imposed" recurred frequently in Russian-speaking participants across both surveys and interviews. Responses in Kazakh on average tended to display more absolute attitudes, be it negative or positive.

Concerns about visibility were noticeably pronounced. Approximately 7% of respondents objected to what they perceived as LGBTQI+ "propaganda," particularly in the form of public events, media representation, or activism. Meanwhile, about 3% indicated that while they were not

personally hostile, they preferred a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" approach, suggesting that tolerance depended largely on invisibility.

Some interviews reinforced this dynamic. Participants often expressed a willingness to "tolerate" LGBTQI+ people in private settings, while drawing a clear line against public advocacy (See Appendix I). Concerns about children were a frequent rationale: although only about 2% of survey respondents mentioned it explicitly, many interviewees spoke of fears that visibility could influence or confuse younger generations.

Visibility also intersected with geopolitical narratives. Around 3% of respondents connected LGBTQI+ rights and visibility directly to Western influence, suggesting that promoting acceptance was part of a broader cultural imperialism. This framing rendered LGBTQI+ advocacy not just socially problematic, but politically dangerous, aligning it with perceived threats to national sovereignty.

Interestingly, expressions of pity, while less frequent, also appeared. About 1% of respondents described LGBTQI+ individuals as objects of sympathy rather than hostility. However, these narratives often reinforced underlying hierarchies, casting LGBTQI+ people as lost, misguided, or victims of some manipulation rather than as fully autonomous individuals.

References to "propaganda", though pervasive in discourse, were often vague upon closer scrutiny. Although a combined 1% pointed directly to movies, television, or the internet, most mentions of "propaganda" lacked specific examples. Instead, the term seemed to function more broadly as a marker of discomfort with any public affirmation of LGBTQI+ existence.

Language patterns differ dramatically. While both ends demonstrated similar results — 6% (Russian) versus 5% (Kazakh) in extremely negative attitudes and 7% (Russian) versus 6% (Kazakh) in positive attitudes, Russian-speaking respondents displayed more diverse attitudes, with

38% classified as "Negative" and 20% as "Neutral". Among Kazakh-speaking respondents, negativity was almost twice as high at 71%, with only 7% adopting a neutral stance. While a detailed exploration of these linguistic dynamics will follow in Chapter 4.5, it appears that Russian-speakers are potentially exposed to a wider range of discourses.

In sum, public attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals in Kazakhstan reveal a landscape defined less by stark binaries than by overlapping and sometimes conflicting narratives. Open rejection, conditional tolerance, and cautious acceptance coexist, often within the same individual. Beyond the numbers, what stood out across interviews was the degree of internal conflict. Many respondents seemed to wrestle with competing influences: traditional expectations on one side, emerging discourses of rights and dignity on the other. It was not uncommon for a single narrative to include both condemnations of public visibility and acknowledgments that LGBTQI+ individuals "deserved respect" as human beings.

4.1.1 Gender Differences in General Attitudes

While this study does not treat gender or any other factors as causal or standalone variables, descriptive analysis revealed notable differences in how male and female respondents articulated their attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals. General patterns revealed a predominance of negative and neutral responses, yet a closer look at gendered differences indicated several noteworthy divergences in how attitudes are distributed across male and female respondents. Women in the sample were more likely to report neutral or indifferent stances compared to men, while men more frequently expressed explicitly negative views. The distribution of other attitudes was almost identical, with no more than 1% difference, comprising “Extremely negative," "Neutral but no propaganda," "Positive," and "Unclear" responses.

Gender Differences in Personal Attitudes			
Code Category	Female (n=459)	Male (n=357)	N/A (n=13)
Extremely negative	5% (25)	6% (21)	8% (1)
Negative	47% (214)	58% (208)	—
Neutral	18% (81)	11% (40)	23% (3)
Neutral but no propaganda	5% (25)	4% (15)	—
Positive	5% (24)	5% (19)	54% (7)
Indifferent	10% (47)	5% (17)	15% (2)
Unclear	8% (38)	9% (32)	—

Figure 6 — Gender differences in personal attitudes

According to Figure 6, among female respondents (n = 459), 47% (214) were coded as expressing negative views toward LGBTQI+ individuals, while 18% (81) were categorized as "Neutral". Additionally, 10% (47) of women expressed indifference, and 5% (25) were coded under “Neutral but no propaganda”, referring to responses that emphasized personal neutrality as long as LGBTQI+ identities remained private or invisible. Positive responses were present in 5% (24) of the female sample, and extremely negative views were comparatively rare (5%, or 25 respondents). A small share (8%, or 38) of responses were categorized as “Unclear".

Male respondents (n = 357) were too more concentrated in the "Negative" categories. Over half (58%, or 208) were coded as expressing negative views, and an additional 6% (21) were categorized as "Extremely negative". Neutrality was notably less common among men (11%, or 40), and indifferent responses were also lower (5%, or 17). Similar to women, 5% (19) of male

respondents expressed positive attitudes, while 4% (15) expressed neutral-but-no-propaganda views. 9% (32) of male responses were categorized as "Unclear".

Among the 13 respondents who did not specify gender, the majority expressed either positive (54%, or 7) or neutral (23%, or 3) stances, with two coded as "Indifferent" and one as "Extremely negative”. These cases were excluded from the statistical analysis due to the small sample size and the categorical nature of the tests, which require a minimum count per group to produce reliable results.

To determine whether these patterns were statistically meaningful, a chi-square test of independence was conducted using collapsed categories. In order to reduce the risk of low expected counts in contingency table cells, attitude codes were collapsed into three broader categories: “Negative” and “Extremely negative” responses were grouped together due to their shared oppositional stance; “Neutral” and “Unclear” responses were combined to reflect non-affirmative but also non-hostile positions; and “Indifferent” responses were grouped with “Positive” for statistical purposes only, due to the small frequency of positive responses. These categories remain analytically distinct in the interpretive coding framework.

Gender Differences in Personal Attitudes

Attitude Category	Female (n=459)	Male (n=357)
Negative/Extremely negative	239	229
Neutral/Unclear	144	87
Positive/Indifferent	71	36

Figure 7 — Gender differences across collapsed categories (personal)

Chi-Square Output: Chi-square statistic (χ^2) — 13.02; Degrees of freedom (df) — 2; p-value — 0.0015.

The test revealed a statistically significant association between gender and expressed attitudes ($\chi^2(2) = 13.02$, $p = 0.0015$), suggesting that gender influenced how responses were distributed across attitude types. The same analysis was conducted on the Kazakh- and Russian-language subsamples.

Gender Differences in Personal Attitudes (KAZ)

Code Category	Female (n=130)	Male (n=199)	N/A (n=5)
Extremely negative	5% (6)	6% (12)	—
Negative	75% (97)	70% (139)	—
Neutral	8% (11)	6% (12)	20% (1)
Neutral but no propaganda	1% (1)	—	—
Positive	3% (4)	5% (10)	80% (4)
Indifferent	3% (4)	2% (3)	—
Unclear	3% (4)	3% (6)	—

Figure 8 — Gender differences in personal attitudes (KAZ)

Gender Differences in Personal Attitudes (KAZ)

Attitude Category	Female (n=130)	Male (n=199)
Negative/Extremely negative	103	151
Neutral/Unclear	16	18
Positive/Indifferent	8	13

Figure 9 — Gender differences across collapsed categories (personal KAZ)

Chi-Square Test Output: Chi-square statistic (χ^2) — 0.61; Degrees of freedom (df) — 2; p-value — 0.74.

Gender Differences in Personal Attitudes (KAZ)		
Attitude Category	Female (n=329)	Male (n=158)
Negative	103	151
Non-negative	24	31

Figure 10 — Gender differences across collapsed categories (personal KAZ)

Fisher's Exact Test Output: Odds Ratio — 0.88; p-value — 0.763.

In the Kazakh-speaking group, the gender pattern was reversed: 75% of women expressed negative attitudes, compared to 70% of men. However, this difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2(2) = 0.61$, $p = 0.74$). A Fisher's Exact Test was also conducted due to small expected cell counts and similarly found no significant association (odds ratio = 0.88, $p = 0.763$).

Gender Differences in Personal Attitudes (RUS)			
Code Category	Female (n=329)	Male (n=158)	N/A (n=8)
Extremely negative	6% (19)	6% (9)	13% (1)
Negative	36% (117)	44% (69)	—
Neutral	21% (70)	18% (28)	25% (2)
Neutral but no propaganda	7% (24)	9% (15)	—
Positive	6% (20)	6% (9)	38% (3)
Indifferent	13% (43)	9% (14)	25% (2)
Unclear	10% (34)	10% (16)	—

Figure 11 — Gender differences in general attitudes (personal RUS)

Gender Differences in General Attitudes (RUS)		
Attitude Category	Female (n=329)	Male (n=158)
Negative/Extremely negative	129	77
Neutral/Unclear	142	59
Positive/Indifferent	58	22

Figure 12 — Gender differences across collapsed categories (personal RUS)

Chi-Square Test Output: Chi-square statistic (χ^2) — 4.06; Degrees of freedom (df) — 2; p-value — 0.132.

Gender Differences in General Attitudes (RUS)		
Attitude Category	Female (n=329)	Male (n=158)
Negative	129	77
Non-negative	200	81

Figure 13 — Gender differences across collapsed categories (personal RUS)

Fisher's Exact Test Output: Odds Ratio — 0.68; p-value — 0.0504.

Among Russian-speaking respondents, the gender gap was more aligned with the overall dataset, though less pronounced. The chi-square test again did not indicate a significant relationship ($\chi^2(2) = 4.06$, $p = 0.132$), but the Fisher's Exact Test yielded a marginal result (odds ratio = 0.68, $p = 0.0504$), suggesting a potential pattern in which women were somewhat less likely than men to express negative views. However, the association remains weak and should be interpreted with caution.

Because the survey relied on self-selection rather than probability sampling, p-values are interpreted as descriptive indicators of pattern strength within the study cohort, not as population estimates.

4.2 Overview of Network Attitudes Toward LGBTQI+ Individuals

In addition to capturing personal attitudes, the survey asked respondents to describe how their close social circles, such as family and friends, view LGBTQI+ individuals. These perceptions offer insight into the broader normative environments in which individual attitudes are embedded. While responses do not necessarily reflect empirical observations of network behavior, they nonetheless reveal how participants interpret and position themselves within their social surroundings.

Gender Differences in Network Attitudes

Code Category	Female (n=459)	Male (n=357)	N/A (n=13)	Total (n=829)
Negative	45% (208)	52% (184)	23% (3)	48% (395)
Neutral	10% (45)	6% (20)	23% (3)	8% (68)
Positive	2% (7)	2% (8)	15% (2)	2% (17)
Indifferent	4% (20)	2% (6)	8% (1)	3% (27)
Unclear	24% (110)	19% (67)	23% (3)	22% (180)
Homogenous attitudes	10% (45)	16% (56)	—	12% (101)
No conversations about LGBT	7% (30)	5% (19)	8% (1)	6% (50)
Concern with LGBT propaganda	5% (24)	2% (8)	—	4% (32)
Group differences	6% (29)	3% (10)	8% (1)	5% (40)

LGBT as a threat	2% (8)	3% (10)	—	2% (18)
Moral/religious/ traditional values	2% (9)	1% (3)	—	1% (12)
No knowledge about LGBT	2% (11)	3% (9)	—	2% (20)

Figure 14 — Gender differences in network attitudes

According to the survey data (See Figure 14), nearly half of all respondents (48%) described their close social circles as holding negative views toward LGBTQI+ individuals. Only 2% of respondents characterized their networks as broadly supportive, and another 3% described them as indifferent. An additional 8% reported neutrality within their social circles. Descriptions of network attitudes were often marked by vagueness or uncertainty. A significant share of responses (22%) were categorized as "Unclear," referring to entries where participants gave contradictory, ambiguous, or evasive answers. This lack of clarity may itself be indicative of the sensitive nature of the topic in many social contexts, where individuals either cannot or prefer not to speak concretely about the views of those around them.

Importantly, around 12% of respondents explicitly described their social circles as ideologically homogenous — that is, everyone in their immediate network shared the same general stance toward LGBTQI+ individuals. While a few of these environments were described as accepting, the majority reflected consistently non-affirming views. Co-occurrence analysis showed a strong overlap between homogeneous network attitudes and negative perspectives, both in how respondents described their own views and those of their social circles.

A small proportion of participants across all groups identified moral, religious, or traditional values as drivers of their network's attitudes (1%–2%). Similarly, 2%–3% framed their networks as perceiving LGBTQI+ individuals as a threat, and 4% reported concern with "LGBT propaganda"

within their circles, often referring vaguely to media influence or visibility. Notably, 6% of respondents said that LGBTQI+ topics were never discussed within their networks at all.

Gendered differences emerged again, though they were less stark than in personal attitudes. Male respondents were somewhat more likely than female respondents to describe their networks as holding negative views (52% vs. 45%) and more likely to characterize them as homogenous (16% vs. 10%). Women, by contrast, were slightly more likely to describe their networks as neutral (10% vs. 6%) or indifferent (4% vs. 2%).

A chi-square test of independence was applied to simplified response categories that are mutually exclusive per respondent, which excludes the homogenous attitudes, to assess the statistical relevance of these patterns. To address the issue of low expected cell counts in the contingency tables, N/A gender identity was excluded from the test, and original attitude codes were consolidated into three broader groups: “Negative”; “Neutral/Unclear”; and “Indifferent/Positive.” The latter, while dissimilar in conceptual terms, was paired together solely for statistical calculation due to the limited number of explicitly positive responses. These groupings do not alter their distinction within the interpretive coding process and were assembled only to increase statistical accuracy.

Gender Differences in Network Attitudes

Code Category	Female (n=329)	Male (n=158)	Total (n=829)
Negative	208	184	392
Neutral/Unclear	155	87	242
Positive/Indifferent	27	14	41

Figure 15 — Gender differences across collapsed categories (network)

Chi-Square Test Output: Chi-square statistic (χ^2) — 8.57; Degrees of freedom (df) — 2; p-value — 0.0138.

Gender Differences in Network Attitudes		
Code Category	Female Residual	Male Residual
Negative	-1.23	1.44
Neutral/Unclear	1.28	-1.50
Positive/Indifferent	0.68	-0.80

Figure 16 — Standardized Residuals (gender, network)

A chi-square test of independence confirmed that gender differences are statistically significant in regards to network attitudes within the given sample, $\chi^2(2, N = 816) = 8.57$, $p = 0.0138$. Standardized residuals further indicated that male respondents were overrepresented in the "Negative" category, while female respondents were more likely to be situated in ambiguous or non-hostile network contexts. These findings support the broader conclusion that men and women are embedded in differently perceived social environments, with male respondents more frequently feeling surrounded by ideologically homogenous and rejectionist networks.

4.3 Core Category: LGBT as a Threat

The survey and interview data show that many respondents framed LGBTQI+ individuals not only in terms of morality or visibility but as a broader threat to social and cultural values. This perception of threat appeared consistently across different segments of the sample and took several forms, often centered on traditional norms, family structures, and national identity.

Among the merged survey sample (N=829), about 13% of respondents directly referred to LGBTQI+ individuals as a threat. These responses did not focus primarily on behavior or visibility

but on the perceived impact that LGBTQI+ existence could have on the cohesion and future of Kazakhstani society. Participants in this category often expressed concern that the normalization of LGBTQI+ identities would lead to a weakening of family values, confusion among youth, and the disruption of long-standing cultural traditions.

Another 10% of participants explained their negative views by appealing to religious, moral, or traditional frameworks. While these responses sometimes overlapped with general concerns about societal change, many framed LGBTQI+ identities as incompatible with what was perceived to be the moral foundation of Kazakhstani life. References to protecting children and ensuring the preservation of national values were common.

The perception of LGBTQI+ individuals as a threat was frequently tied to fears about the erosion of the traditional family. Many respondents described non-traditional sexual and gender identities as undermining the ideal of heterosexual marriage and procreation. In some cases, these concerns were explicitly linked to worries about national survival, with participants suggesting that declines in birth rates or the weakening of family authority structures would pose long-term risks for Kazakhstan's future.

Concerns about cultural preservation also played an important role in threat narratives. Although explicit mentions of Western influence were relatively rare in the survey data (about 3%), references to outside forces attempting to weaken Kazakhstan's values surfaced repeatedly in interviews. Some respondents suggested that LGBTQI+ identities were being promoted as part of a broader strategy to erode traditional societies, positioning the acceptance of LGBTQI+ rights as a loss of cultural sovereignty.

In addition to appeals to tradition and sovereignty, a small number of respondents (3%) characterized LGBTQI+ identities as forms of disorder or confusion. These responses framed non-

cisgender and non-heterosexual experiences as abnormalities, using derogatory medicalized terms or references to psychological instability. Interestingly, only this category had both a (strong) relationship with negative attitudes and a (moderate) relationship with extremely negative attitudes. Extremely negative attitudes exhibit highly emotional responses in the form of disdain, anger, or fear. It links these responses to a broader category of threat perception as the emotional tone of text plays a significant role in interpretive research.

On the other hand, despite the prominence of visibility concerns along with perception as a threat, the co-occurrence analysis showed very little direct overlap between visibility issues, such as concern with "propaganda" or support for a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" approach, and threat narratives. Only one case was recorded where concerns about "propaganda" directly co-occurred with framing LGBTQI+ individuals as a societal threat. This pattern suggests that the construction of LGBTQI+ identities as a danger is largely independent from discomfort over public expressions or activism. Emotional tone of data serves as a potential explanation.

Emotions surrounding threat narratives differed from other areas of concern, which allowed for different frameworks. While visibility issues often provoked irritation or discomfort, perceptions of threat were more likely to elicit fear, anger, or warnings of severe consequences. Some participants displaying the latter described LGBTQI+ normalization as leading to "moral collapse," "the destruction of families," or even "the end of national identity." These expressions often included urgent language, suggesting that tolerance of LGBTQI+ individuals would inevitably result in cultural degradation. Although these expressions were not the majority, they illustrate the intensity with which some individuals perceive LGBTQI+ existence as an active danger rather than a passive difference.

Threat narratives were not uniformly present among all negative responses. Some participants expressed discomfort or opposition to LGBTQI+ rights without framing LGBTQI+ existence as a societal danger. These responses tended to focus more on religious teachings or personal values rather than broader cultural collapse. However, where threat framings did occur, they often served as the primary explanation for rejecting LGBTQI+ rights or inclusion.

It is also notable that some participants did not clearly distinguish between different sources of threat. For example, concerns about LGBTQI+ individuals undermining family structures were sometimes combined with broader warnings about cultural Westernization or political manipulation, even when such connections were not explicit. This blurring of lines between social, cultural, and political anxieties can indicate how perceptions of LGBTQI+ individuals are embedded within larger frameworks of vulnerability and defense.

While strong among some segments of the population, threat narratives were not without contestation. In a minority of interviews, particularly among younger respondents, participants rejected the idea that LGBTQI+ identities threatened tradition or national values. Some emphasized that societal strength came from diversity and the protection of human dignity rather than rigid adherence to traditional norms. Though these counter-narratives were less common, their presence indicates that perceptions of threat are not monolithic and may shift under different influences.

In sum, the perception of LGBTQI+ individuals as a societal threat constitutes one of the most deeply embedded and emotionally charged forms of negativity identified in the data. These narratives frame LGBTQI+ identities not only as morally problematic but as existential dangers to family structures, cultural traditions, and national identity. They are distinct from, and largely independent of, concerns about public visibility or activism. Understanding this threat framing is

crucial for grasping the full complexity of sexual and non-cisgender prejudice in Kazakhstan and for identifying the specific barriers to broader societal acceptance.

4.4 Core Category: Visibility Concerns

The theme of visibility emerged as a critical axis around which many respondents organized their attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals. While not always expressed in explicitly hostile terms, concerns about visibility structured the boundaries of acceptance and rejection in significant ways. The data show that visibility-related discomfort often manifested through concerns about "propaganda" and support for "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) approaches to LGBTQI+ existence — conditional acceptance based on privacy.

Prevalence and Manifestations

Visibility concerns were widespread across the dataset. In the survey, 7% of respondents expressed specific concern with LGBTQI+ "propaganda," while 3% endorsed "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" sentiments. Although these percentages are smaller than those linked to general negativity or threat perceptions, they represent an important segment of the population whose discomfort centers not on LGBTQI+ individuals themselves, but on the public acknowledgment of their existence.

Unlike respondents who viewed LGBTQI+ identities as inherent threats to national values, those concerned with visibility often framed their views around behavioral expectations. LGBTQI+ individuals were tolerated or even sympathized with, so long as their identities remain private. Sexual and non-cisgender prejudice is not manifested in LGBTQI+ individuals' personal existence, but from perceived "promotion," "imposition," or "public display" of LGBTQI+ life. Within "Visibility concerns", two interconnected sub-themes emerged:

Propaganda Concerns

Survey respondents referencing "propaganda" typically viewed media portrayals, public events, and activism as problematic. To further elaborate on the topic, interview questions touched on conceptualization of "LGBT propaganda" and arrived at following conclusions:

- Fighting for LGBTQI+ human rights
- Supporting LGBTQI+ recognition
- Gatherings, social media presence
- Excessive public displays, like parades or media coverage
- Protests

Some of the language used suggested that representation of LGBTQI+ individuals was not neutral but was framed as a deliberate campaign to influence or recruit others:

> *“Well, it's not blocked somehow, this Western "propaganda" at the government level, I think. That this ideology is being sent to children en masse.”*
>
> (female, 45-54 years old, interview in Russian)

In alignment with the strong language, "propaganda" concerns have high co-occurrence with negative attitudes. It suggests that visibility framed as "propaganda" was seen not merely as inappropriate, but as potentially dangerous, necessitating active rejection. For example, an interviewee even argued that an uprising was a possible outcome of LGBTQI+ visibility:

“It (LGBTQI+ visibility) causes resonance; there will be public resonance. How can I put it? … Leading to uprisings.”

(female, 55+ years old, interview in Kazakh)

"Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT)

Another common manifestation was support for a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" approach. Here, respondents articulated a tolerance for LGBTQI+ individuals provided that their identities remained invisible. Public discussion, activism, or self-expression was framed as unnecessary and provocative.

Relevant statements from interviews included:

"I am also against these gay parades, why flaunt it and so on. It's your personal business, well, deal with it, why advertise it, flaunt it and walk down the street?”

“Why should it (sexual or gender identity) be public?”

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Russian)

"Well, how can I say, I don't welcome this "propaganda", but everyone has the right to choose for himself, what life to live, whom to love and so on.”

"LGBT people should be accepted if they do not publicly demonstrate their orientation.”

(female, 25-34 years old, interview in Russian)

DADT exhibited moderate co-occurrence with most of the major categories: "Negative", "Neutral", and "Neutral but no propaganda". These categories reveal a spectrum of attitudes in which LGBTQI+ individuals were tolerated under the condition that their identities remained private and not publicly affirmed. Public affirmation of identity through activism, visibility in media, or open self-expression was treated as a violation of this fragile social contract.

Importantly, DADT was the only code to show any significant co-occurrence with the "Neutral but no propaganda" category. Initially, there was considerable deliberation regarding whether "Neutral but no propaganda" should be coded separately from negative attitudes, as conditional neutrality cannot arguably constitute genuine neutrality. The exposure of a phenomenon is deemed destructive only when the phenomenon itself is perceived negatively. From this perspective, "Neutral but no propaganda" would be more accurately placed along the negative continuum of attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals.

However, retaining the distinction, as it was constructed by participants, proved instrumental for identifying patterns of conditional acceptance. As discussed in greater detail in Section 4.5, the presence of DADT and "Neutral but no propaganda" codes highlights how acceptance of LGBTQI+ individuals is often contingent upon the maintenance of invisibility, particularly among Russian-speaking respondents.

4.5 Secondary Categories

Besides the core categories of “LGBT as a threat” and “Visibility concerns”, there are secondary categories that share further insight into attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals in Kazakhstan. These include "Empathy-Driven Acceptance" and “Hidden Agenda”.

Empathy-driven acceptance			
Category	**Russian-speaking (n=495)**	**Kazakh-speaking (n=334)**	**Merged (n=829)**
Right to choose sexuality	8% (38)	6% (19)	7% (57)
Personal connections or self-identification	1% (7)	3% (10)	2% (17)
Humanistic beliefs	1% (6)	3% (9)	2% (15)

Figure 17 — "Empathy-Driven Acceptance"

“Empathy-driven Acceptance” incorporates responses framed around "Humanistic beliefs" (2%), "Personal connections or self-identification" (2%), and the fundamental right to one's sexuality and gender identity (7%) (See Figure 17). Participants in this category emphasized individual autonomy, dignity, and the universality of human rights. Typical responses included affirmations of the inherent worth of individuals regardless of sexual (or gender) identity. Respondents often referenced personal relationships with LGBTQI+ individuals as significant in shaping their positive or accepting attitudes. For example, survey responses highlighted statements like, "Everyone has the right to live their life and choose whom they love," reflecting a strong emphasis on individual freedoms and empathy.

The co-occurrence analysis demonstrated moderate associations between "Empathy-Driven Acceptance" and positive attitudes, as well as neutral attitudes, indicating that personal connection and humanistic beliefs contribute significantly to shaping more inclusive perceptions (See Figure 17). In particular, “Right to choose sexuality” displayed strong co-occurrence with neutral attitudes and moderate co-occurrence with positive attitudes. “Humanistic beliefs” demonstrated moderate relations with both attitudes, while “Personal connections or self-identification” exhibited a strong relationship exclusively with positive attitudes.

Hidden Agenda			
Category	**Russian-speaking (n=495)**	**Kazakh-speaking (n=334)**	**Merged (n=829)**
LGBT as movement/ organization	3% (14)	4% (14)	3% (28)

Figure 18 — "Hidden Agenda"

The Hidden Agenda category involves narratives that frame LGBTQI+ communities as a structured political or social movement with deliberate, organized intentions. Respondents who adhered to this view often expressed suspicion regarding the perceived coordinated efforts to promote LGBTQI+ rights, suggesting underlying motives such as social destabilization or foreign interference. Phrases, such as "it's an organized movement" or "part of a larger agenda," appeared frequently in responses, often linking LGBTQI+ visibility to broader geopolitical or ideological threats. The co-occurrence analysis showed that this perception had strong associations with negative attitudes, particularly emphasizing distrust and skepticism (See Figure 18).

While the narrative is not overwhelming in the survey (3%) (See Figure 18), three interviewees mentioned it in their responses:

"Well, it's not blocked somehow, this Western "propaganda" at the government level, I think. That this ideology is being sent to children en masse."

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Russian)

"But to create such an organization, to do this kind of propaganda, they are getting great support from the West, especially America. That's why they (government) couldn't shut it down. Our country's strength wasn't enough."

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Kazakh)

"They (LGBTQI+) probably have organizations…"

(female, 55+ years old, interview in Kazakh)

These interviewees expressed negative attitudes against LGBTQI+ individuals, believed they operate in organizations to achieve some hidden agenda, and were concerned mostly about "propaganda's" influence on children, moral degradation, and failure to fulfill "God's intent" in creating men and women (See Appendix I). Two people linked LGBTQI+ representation to Western democracies. Interestingly, while one believes that the Kazakhstani government is complicit in this "propaganda," the other argues that the government is actually against LGBTQI+ but does not possess sufficient strength to exercise its sovereignty. The third person went further and claimed such organizations can lead to an uprising in Kazakhstan.

4.6 Language Group Differences

According to the latest census, 80,1% of the total population of Kazakhstan speaks Kazakh versus the 83,7% who speaks Russian (Bureau of National Statistics 2023, 380). This demonstrates that, while research participants did select either of the languages to complete the survey and interviews, they are likely to speak both. This thesis does not claim to denote exclusively Kazakh or Russian-speakers when addressing them as such. The choice of the language can be contingent on many factors such as their social circle, official work language, or a native language, despite potentially commanding both languages. Hence, it is important to note that the division between people who completed the survey and interviews in Kazakh and Russian is not clear-cut to necessarily treat them as distant groups and to produce accurate conclusions about them. However, findings display drastic differences in data in two languages sufficient to depict ongoing dynamics around LGBTQI+ identities.

When examining the interviews conducted for this study, it quickly becomes evident that language background did more than simply mediate how participants expressed their views; it appeared to shape the very frameworks through which they understood LGBTQI+ issues. Although all participants demonstrated some level of distance from affirmative acceptance, the ways they justified their positions and the emotional textures of their responses varied considerably, and these variations seemed closely tied to linguistic affiliation.

Across the merged dataset (N=829), general attitudes were distributed as follows: 51% were categorized as "Negative", 15% as "Neutral", 8% as "Indifferent", 8% as "Unclear", 5% as “Neutral" but with visibility concerns, 6% as "Positive", and 6% as "Extremely negative". However, this overall distribution masks substantial linguistic variation.

Positive and extremely negative responses were relatively rare but similar in both language groups (6%-7% & 5%-6%). Yet among Kazakh-speaking respondents (n=334), negativity was considerably higher: 71% were categorized as "Negative", compared to 38% among Russian-speakers (n=495). Kazakh-speaking participants also exhibited lower rates of neutrality (7% compared to 20%) and indifference (2% compared to 12%). Neutral stance conditioned to a lack of "propaganda" appeared almost exclusively among Russian-speakers.

The Kazakh-speaking sample also showed significantly higher reliance on traditional, moral, and religious justifications. About 15% of Kazakh-speaking respondents explicitly framed LGBTQI+ identities as violating cultural, moral, or religious values, compared to 7% among Russian-speakers. Threat narratives were similarly more common among Kazakh-speakers (20%) than among Russian-speakers (8%). These figures suggest that while sexual and non-cisgender prejudice exists across both linguistic groups, it is more dominant and more explicitly tied to traditional frameworks in Kazakh-language responses.

Although both groups produced the full spectrum of attitudes from positive to extremely negative, the linguistic context appeared to shape not only the frequency of attitudes but also the specific framings and rationales through which those attitudes were expressed. This section outlines these differences by drawing on the survey data and mapping code co-occurrences separately for each linguistic group.

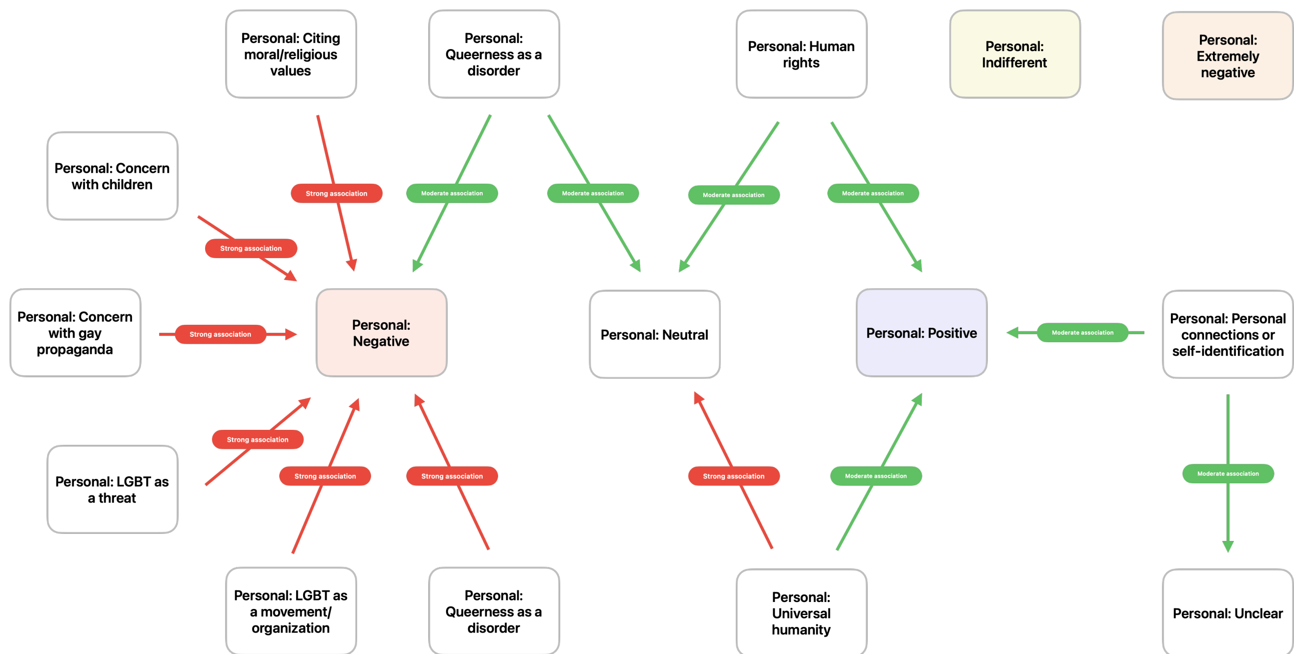

Figure 19 — Personal attitudes co-occurrence map for responses in Kazakh

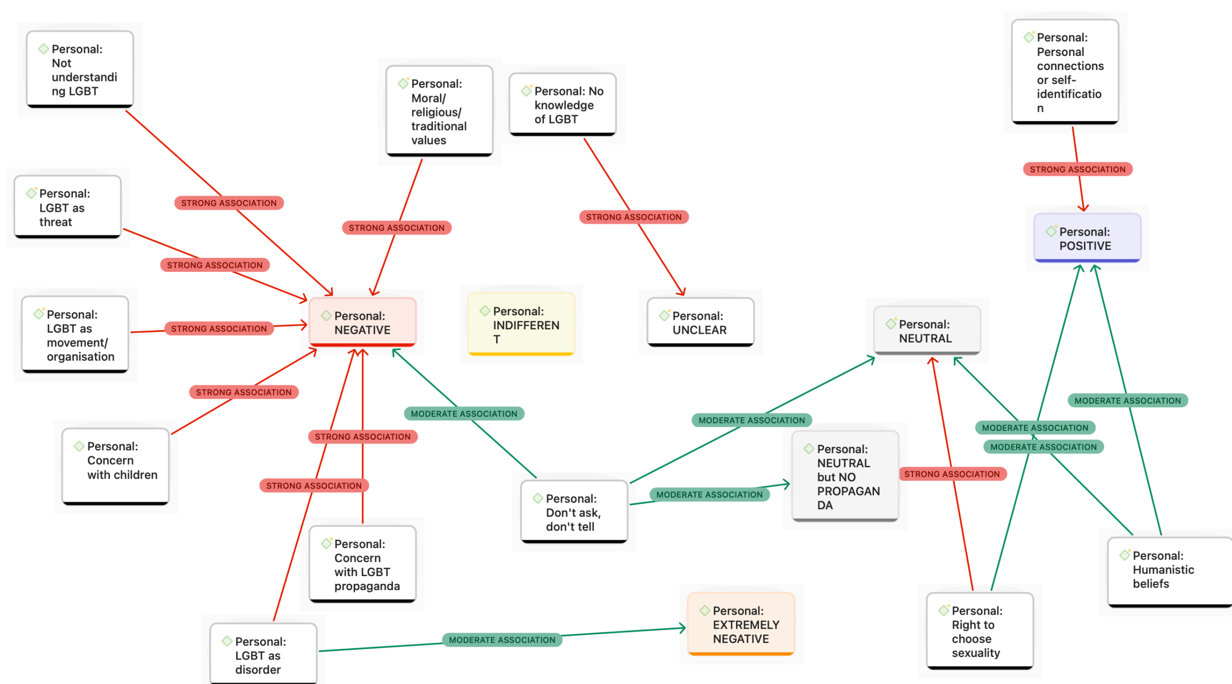

Figure 20 — Personal attitudes co-occurrence map for responses in Russian

Unclear Attitudes

While much of the survey and interview data revealed structured patterns of negativity, conditional acceptance, or rare positivity toward LGBTQI+ individuals, a smaller but important category of responses exhibited ambiguity. The "Unclear" category, representing participants who did not articulate a consistent or easily classified attitude, showed distinct co-occurrence patterns depending on linguistic group. These patterns suggest that uncertainty or ambivalence is structured by different mechanisms among Russian-speaking and Kazakh-speaking respondents, revealing deeper differences in knowledge and connection.

Among Russian-speaking respondents, the co-occurrence network highlights a significant link between the "No knowledge of LGBT" code, which indicates a lack of exposure to information on LGBTQI+ or LGBTQI+ individuals, and the "Unclear" attitude category. This relationship was strong, suggesting that being less informed about LGBTQI+ individuals directly contributed to uncertainty about how to evaluate them. Their responses lacked the emotional clarity to attribute an outright category. Typical expressions included comments such as "I haven't really encountered LGBT people personally, so I can't say much," or "I don't fully understand what LGBT means." This suggests that, for these Russian-speaking participants, the lack of direct experience or specific knowledge was central to why they felt unsure or ambivalent.

In contrast, the co-occurrence network for Kazakh-speaking respondents presents a totally different dynamic. Here, a lack of knowledge does not display any significant relationship with unclear attitudes, conversely it is the “Personal connection or self-identification” with LGBTQI+ individuals, which is the total opposite of “No knowledge of LGBT”, that demonstrated a moderate co-occurrence with the “Unclear” category. Unlike their Russian-speaking counterparts, their

uncertainty did not stem from unfamiliarity. Rather, respondents in the Kazakh-speaking group appeared to experience ambiguity precisely because they personally knew LGBTQI+ people. Their comments often reflected mixed feelings without resolving into clearly positive or negative stances. It is important to note, that primarily “Personal connection or self-identification” was linked with positive attitudes: it still had strong co-occurrence with positive attitudes among Russian-speakers and moderate co-occurrence among Kazakh-speakers.

These distinct differences highlight an interesting divergence between the two linguistic groups. Although both Russian- and Kazakh-speaking respondents demonstrated unclear attitudes toward LGBTQI+ topics, the underlying contexts of this uncertainty differed significantly. Russian-speaking ambiguity was largely informational, reflecting an absence of direct exposure, whereas Kazakh-speaking ambiguity was relational, reflecting a complicated interplay between personal experience and prevailing cultural norms. This distinction provides a valuable layer of insight into how attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals form and remain uncertain across different linguistic communities within Kazakhstan.

Conditional Acceptance

The difference between responses in Kazakh and Russian in relation to concerns over visibility expressed itself in conditional acceptance. "Visibility concerns" in subsection 4.3 covered “Concerns with LGBT propaganda" and DADT. While the overall proportions of participants concerned with LGBTQI+ "propaganda" were comparable in sizes, with a 2% difference, in Russian and Kazakh, patterns of conditional acceptance differed significantly between linguistic groups.

In the Russian-speaking sample, conditional acceptance was expressed most clearly through the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) code and the "Neutral but no propaganda" category. Survey

data showed that 8% of Russian-speaking respondents endorsed "Neutral but no propaganda," compared to only 0.3% among Kazakh-speaking respondents. Similarly, expressions of DADT were present exclusively in Russian responses. These categories reveal a spectrum of attitudes in which LGBTQI+ individuals were tolerated under the condition that their identities remained private and not publicly affirmed. Public affirmation of identity through activism, visibility in media, or open self-expression was treated as a violation of this fragile social contract.

While concerns about "propaganda" appeared in both linguistic groups — cited by 8% of Russian-speaking respondents and 6% of Kazakh-speaking respondents — the associated emotional framing differed. In the Kazakh-speaking group, "propaganda" concerns were more tightly linked to perceptions of LGBTQI+ individuals as a broader societal threat. Unlike the Russian-language sample, concerns with "propaganda" exhibited moderate co-occurrence with the "LGBT as a threat" code besides the strong co-occurrence with negative attitudes. This indicates that "propaganda" concerns, while provoking negativity, were more often framed as existential threats within the Kazakh-language sample compared to Russian-language one.

These differences extended into interviews. Two Russian-speaking interview participants discussed LGBTQI+ acceptance as contingent on invisibility or discretion, while one expressed irritation with overrepresentation despite accepting these identities unconditionally. Kazakh-speaking participants tended to express more polarized positions: either firm rejection or almost full (if cautious) acceptance. Two interviewees expressed total rejection of LGBTQI+, rejecting "propaganda" too; one interviewee accepted visibility of both sexual and gender minorities short of what he deemed "inadequate" activism:

"The main thing is, if they're holding hands, let them hold hands — just don't do provocative or vulgar things. That's just not right. Even if a man

and woman are kissing in a park, that's not okay either. The main thing is to be adequate, not provocative."

"Most people are just afraid of what kids might think. That's when it becomes the parents' job. They have to explain it properly. Like, "they're like that, they chose that path, they chose their gender."

"There are peaceful protests that help teenagers who haven't figured it out yet, like what community they belong to. That kind of help is good. Maybe someone is heterosexual but doesn't realize it yet (or) doesn't know if they're gay or not. There are people who help with that. But then there are those who yell about their rights — that they must be respected, valued, and so on."

(male, 25-34 years old, interview in Kazakh)

While his acceptance of LGBTQI+ activism (such as helping confused teenagers understand their identities) and what he described as "yelling about rights" is conditional but different from that of DADT, his view on displays of public affection or gender expression is non-discriminatory in regards to sexual and gender minorities.

Threat Perception

Differences in the perception of LGBTQI+ as threats also align closely with linguistic distinctions. General threat narratives resonated significantly more with Kazakh-speakers (20%) than with Russian-speakers (8%). The concept of threat among Kazakh-speaking respondents was frequently framed in terms of traditional, religious, or moral values. 15% of the language group respondents explicitly recognized the existence of LGBTQI+ identities as violating cultural, moral,

or religious values, compared to 7% among Russian-speakers. This code category displayed high co-occurrence with negative attitudes (over 40% co-occurrence), underscoring the cultural and ideological nature of negative attitudes within this group. These figures suggest that while sexual and non-cisgender prejudice exists across both linguistic groups, it is more dominant and more explicitly tied to traditional frameworks in Kazakh-language responses.

Respondents often articulated fears related to the dilution or disruption of national values and moral frameworks, indicating deep-seated cultural and nationalistic anxieties. For example, one Kazakh-speaking interviewee remarked:

"Of course, they are propagating it! What else are they going to do? ... There are a lot of weak people now. They could invite such weak people, those who are "searching for who they are", women, and say, "Oh, we will make you amazing"."

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Kazakh)

The narrative explicitly positions LGBTQI+ visibility as a catalyst for social transformation and moral decay, linking identity politics directly with threats to cultural authenticity.

Among Russian-speaking respondents, while LGBTQI+ as a threat also exhibited strong associations with negative attitudes, the framing differed slightly. Threat perceptions were less explicitly tied to traditional cultural values or national identity, and more frequently linked to generalized anxieties about the influence of perceived Western ideological trends. For instance, a typical Russian-speaking response highlighted irritation with perceived media overload rather than existential fears:

"It's everywhere on Netflix now; it's annoying, but not the end of the world."

(female, 25-34 years old, interview in Russian)

This subtle distinction suggests that Russian-speaking respondents' threat perceptions center more on cultural irritation and skepticism toward globalization-driven media trends, contrasting with Kazakh-speakers' deeper concerns over cultural erosion and national identity.

Network Attitudes

Language Differences in Network Attitudes			
Category	**Russian-speaking (n=495)**	**Kazakh-speaking (n=334)**	**Merged (n=829)**
General Attitudes			
Negative	44% (220)	52% (175)	48% (395)
Neutral	13% (62)	2% (6)	8% (68)
Positive	1% (6)	3% (11)	2% (17)
Indifferent	5% (26)	—	3% (26)
Unclear	30% (149)	9% (31)	22% (180)
Language Differences in Network Attitudes			
Homogenous attitudes	8% (41)	18% (60)	

Figure 21 — Language Differences in Network Attitudes

Kazakh-speaking respondents were more likely to express negative attitudes (52%) than their Russian-speaking counterparts (44%), while the Russian-speaking sample exhibited a substantially higher share of neutral (13% versus 2%) and unclear (30% versus 9%) responses (See Figure 21). The proportion of positive responses remained low in both groups but was slightly higher in Kazakh (3%) than in Russian (1%). Indifference appeared exclusively in Russian-language responses (5%). Homogeneous attitudes were over twice as common in Kazakh (18%)

than in Russian (8%). These differences were statistically significant: a chi-square test (collapsed into three broader categories — Negative, Neutral/Unclear, and Positive/Indifferent) confirmed a strong association between language group and general attitude category ($\chi^2 = 60.96$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.0001$).

Language Differences in Network Attitudes

Code Category	Russian-speaking	Kazakh-speaking
Negative	-2.85	4.11
Neutral/Unclear	3.37	-4.86
Positive/Indifferent	0.55	-0.80

Figure 22 — Standardized Residuals (language, network)

Standardized residuals further support the interpretation: Kazakh-speaking respondents were significantly more likely to fall in the "Negative" category when describing their network, while Russian-speaking respondents were overrepresented in the "Neutral/Unclear" group. The Positive/Indifferent category did not meaningfully differ by language. This distribution reinforces the earlier finding that Kazakh-language responses more consistently reflect moral rejection, while Russian-language responses are more likely to contain ambiguity or mixed sentiment. These patterns suggest that language mediates not only the intensity but also the form of LGBTQI+-related attitudes in Kazakhstan.

CHAPTER V — DISCUSSION

The previous chapters have thoroughly outlined how respondents conceptualized their attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals in Kazakhstan. Building from a detailed analysis of survey responses and interview narratives, Chapter 4 presented categories emerging directly from participants' perceptions, including "LGBT as a Threat," "Visibility Concerns," secondary categories, and linguistic nuances. However, identifying these categories alone does not fully display the broader societal dynamics at play. This chapter therefore connects the empirical findings to theoretical discussions explored in Chapter 3, focusing on prejudice, identity politics, and cultural narratives. The aim here is to move beyond merely identifying respondent attitudes, instead unpacking how these attitudes are embedded within deeper cultural, social, and political frameworks in contemporary Kazakhstan.

While I cannot claim to have reached full theoretical saturation, the patterns identified in this study provide a strong foundation for further inquiry. The uncovered dynamics, particularly the intersection of core categories with broader research on prejudice, point to important areas for future research.

5.1 Understanding "LGBT as a Threat"

A core finding from the previous chapter is the consistent framing of LGBTQI+ identities as a threat. This theme appeared repeatedly, particularly concerning the idea that accepting LGBTQI+ identities would somehow undermine Kazakhstani society's core institutions and traditional values. The "LGBT as a threat" category consisted of several codes: approximately 13% of respondents explicitly identified LGBTQI+ individuals or movements as societal threats, 10% expressed sexual or non-cisgender prejudice rooted in moral, religious, or traditional values, 3% framed LGBTQI+

identities as a disorder, 2% raised concerns about the influence on children, and 1% stated that they "don't understand LGBT."

Consistent with survey findings, interviewees who demonstrated sexual and non-cisgender prejudice interpreted LGBTQI+ identities through the dominant codes — "LGBT as a threat" (13%) and “Moral/religious/traditional values” (10%) — often blending moral, religious, and traditional arguments to assert that LGBTQI+ individuals posed broader societal threats. Importantly, the prevalence of threat narratives observed in both survey and interview data confirms scholarly observations from the literature, particularly the frameworks of Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO).

- Right-Wing Authoritarianism explains why people feel the need to protect social cohesion and are especially prone to perceive out-groups as threats when those out-groups are linked to broader narratives of disorder or foreign subversion. This can be connected more directly to the emotional and defensive tone participants use when discussing LGBTQI+ as an "imported" threat.
- Social Dominance Orientation is directly relevant when respondents treat LGBTQI+ advocacy not just as deviance but as part of a foreign-backed movement that challenges Kazakhstan’s cultural hierarchy. The use of narratives about “a man is a man; a woman is a woman” and “LGBTQI+ cannot procreate” aligns with SDO’s notion that dominant groups justify the suppression of subordinated identities as necessary to maintaining societal order.

Right-Wing Authoritarianism

In Chapter 3, I discussed that RWA incorporates the psychological tendency to uphold social cohesion by rigidly defending traditional norms against perceived deviations (Altemeyer 1996). This explanation directly mirrors the attitudes articulated by respondents who consistently emphasized the importance of traditional family structures as central to Kazakhstan’s national

identity. Rather than viewing LGBTQI+ identities as private matters, respondents described them as actively harmful to these traditional institutions, suggesting that any divergence from heterosexual and cisgender norms could weaken family cohesion and, by extension, societal stability. Such perceptions are supported by prior research indicating how authoritarian tendencies are activated particularly by public visibility of marginalized groups (Whitley and Ægisdóttir 2000). While three out of six interviewees mentioned the threat narrative, quotes from a particular interview in Kazakh seems most exemplary:

"People say things about it on the internet… That it (LGBTQI+) needs to be supported too… To treat them as humans and such."

"I mean, they have those flags and all. I don't really know for sure. People say things about it on the internet, but I haven't personally seen it…"

"It (LGBTQI+ visibility) causes resonance; there will be public resonance. How can I put it? ... Leading to uprisings."

(female, 55+ years old, interview in Kazakh)

The participant recognizes calls for support and humane treatment of LGBTQI+ as "LGBT propaganda," acknowledges that she has not encountered the so-called "propaganda," yet believes that LGBTQI+ visibility can lead to uprisings without sound justifications. Although she had not personally encountered any public LGBTQI+ visibility, her narrative reflected a strong belief in its disruptive potential. What stands out is how these anxieties exist independently of empirical evidence, rooted instead in circulating discourses and anticipatory fears. This reaction illustrates a core mechanism of RWA: the perception of deviance itself, even in abstract or hypothetical terms, is seen as threatening enough to demand preemptive resistance.

Social Dominance Orientation

Accepting LGBTQI+ is perceived as rejecting the current social hierarchy. Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) manifests in the perception of gender essentialism — expectations around the binary of masculinity and femininity. Several respondents expressed strong views about the proper behavior, appearance, and social function of men and women, linking gender identity directly to fixed societal roles. For instance, all Kazakh-speaking interviewees shared at least some forms of patriarchal expectations of men and women:

"A man is a man, a girl is a girl, a woman is a woman… they must fulfill their roles."

(female, 55+ years old, interview in Kazakh)

"In the end, if they get married, they are supposed to reproduce, to flourish, to have children. But for example, how will same-sex people have children?"

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Kazakh)

"You (a man) are, after all, the future head of a family, a support system. Not just for yourself... you should be someone who can support not just your wife and family, but your children, your younger siblings."

(male, 25-34 years old, interview in Kazakh)

These statements align with the ideology of gender complementarity discussed in existing research on gender in Kazakhstan, where men are framed as providers and protectors, and women as nurturing figures who sustain family life (Peshkova and Thibault 2022). Such framings treat

gender not as a personal identity but as a structural role embedded in social expectations. These expectations of masculinity and femininity as inherently unequal and functionally complementary sustains broader hierarchical systems, particularly that of patriarchy that dominates Kazakhstani society, and aligns with SDO's emphasis on the legitimacy of unequal group relations.

In this context, LGBTQI+ acceptance, which by definition challenges binary gender roles and the presumed naturalness of the heterosexual family, is perceived as a fundamental disruption of this social order. Since it calls for the recognition of identities and relationships outside the established gender hierarchy, it threatens to expose the contingency of roles that have long been accepted as normative or even sacred. Gender essentialism and heteronormativity are not just personal beliefs but are embedded in state discourse, religious messaging, and cultural socialization. Within this dominant ideological framework, LGBTQI+ rights are interpreted not merely as a demand for equality but as a direct challenge to an entire system of duties, roles, and authority.

LGBTQI+ as a Geopolitical Tool

The effectiveness and persistence of these two frameworks — RWA and SDO — in shaping respondents' perceptions of LGBTQI+ as threats are reinforced by current geopolitical realities. Many respondents did not frame LGBTQI+ issues merely as domestic social concerns but explicitly linked them to perceived foreign interference, predominantly Western in origin. Participants described LGBTQI+ advocacy as part of a deliberate ideological campaign aiming to destabilize Kazakhstan culturally and politically, often explicitly referencing Western actors:

"Well, it's not blocked somehow, this Western "propaganda" at the government level, I think. That this ideology is being sent to children en masse."

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Russian)

"Right. So why was that organization created in the first place, for example? Probably to weaken the nation, to corrupt it. I think it was to cause discord within … But to create such an organization, to do this kind of propaganda, they are getting great support from the West, especially America. That's why they (government) couldn't shut it down. Our country's strength wasn't enough."

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Kazakh)

This narrative fits in a secondary category Hidden Agenda. While only 3% of survey respondents mentioned it explicitly, three out of six interviewees touched on LGBTQI+ in terms of organizational structures that might possess some hidden agendas. Current geopolitical reality upholds this narrative on a transnational level, closely paralleling the discursive strategies deployed by the Russian government, particularly since the adoption of its 2013 "gay propaganda" law and its intensified efforts post-2022 to define itself in opposition to Western liberalism. In Russia's official discourse, particularly by President Putin, LGBTQI+ identities have been consistently framed as a symbol of Western moral decline and cultural imperialism — a contrast used to bolster Russia's own image as a guardian of "traditional values" (Edenborg 2017; Sperling 2014). This ideological framing has been actively exported through Russian-language media and normative mimicry across post-Soviet states, including Kazakhstan, where Russian television and social media remain influential (Grigas 2016).

In this context, Kazakhstan's public discourse on LGBTQI+ issues does not operate in isolation but in a regional Russian-speaking online space. Scholars have noted how Russia's soft power strategy in Central Asia deliberately invokes shared cultural conservatism and post-colonial nostalgia to maintain its regional influence (Hudson 2022; Keating and Kaczmarska 2019;

Yessirkep et al. 2025). This soft power is not limited to formal diplomacy but also includes moral messaging and identity politics, including anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric. When respondents describe LGBTQI+ organizations as dangerous or externally funded, they are often drawing on discursive patterns already shaped by these transnational agendas. They did not require personal exposure to LGBTQI+ individuals to form their stance; instead, exposure to politicized narratives sufficed to activate strong defensive responses in favor of tradition and moral stability.

For example, an interview participant made comparisons between attitudes toward LGBTQI+ identities before and after such political narratives were endorsed on a transnational level. When asked about the causes of aggression toward LGBTQI+ individuals, she first attempted to suggest that socioeconomic deprivation could be a contributing factor. However, she subsequently corrected herself, arguing instead that Kazakhstani people were not as aggressive in the 90s as they are today. While her explanation requires further examination, her recollection of the 90s helps document that defensiveness against LGBTQI+ was less pronounced in her life then than presently:

"I would say hard times. But earlier, in the 90s, when we lived without electricity, without a salary, without anything, we survived, there was no such aggression (toward LGBTQI+). Now I don't know what. Either some kind of upbringing has taken place, or overindulgence, or, on the contrary, the lack of upbringing."

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Russian)

Additionally, Kazakhstan has begun to replicate aspects of Russia's legal and rhetorical approach to LGBTQI+ politics, otherwise defined as normative mimicry. Although no direct law banning so-called "gay propaganda" has yet been passed in Kazakhstan, legislative proposals and

political statements have increasingly mirrored Russian formulations (Azattyq 2023; KazTAG 2025; Shashkina 2024a, 2024b). In 2023 and 2024, public petitions and parliamentary debates began to echo the same moral panic language used in Russia, including references to "protecting children" and resisting "foreign influence." Officials have used near-identical justifications to defend efforts to restrict LGBTQI+ visibility, citing national values and cultural sovereignty. This pattern reflects what scholars describe as "normative mimicry" — a form of policy borrowing in which states emulate the rhetorical and legal strategies of regional powers to signal ideological alignment and consolidate domestic legitimacy (Edenborg 2018; Bosia and Weiss 2013). In Kazakhstan's case, mimicking Russian anti-LGBTQI+ policies allows the state to reinforce its own conservative position and increase internal legitimacy.

This dynamic became even more pronounced following the presidency of Donald Trump in the US. While Kazakhstan has long been influenced by Russian anti-LGBTQI+ discourse, one participant in this study explicitly referenced Trump's rhetoric, particularly his critique of USAID's support for LGBTQI+ initiatives, as proof that the U.S. president confirmed the country's international enforcement of non-traditional values. The participant noted:

> *"Now, after Trump spoke out against it and said "this mustn't go on" it broke down, right? Didn't they get disbanded? They disbanded an entire organization (USAID) in America. Many other countries, nations... their organizations are also getting disbanded, right? … I was so happy when Trump shut it down."*
>
> (female, 45-54 years old, interview in Kazakh)

This comment reflected a broader discursive convergence: as Trump publicly suggested that U.S. foreign aid had been misused to impose moral agendas abroad, such statements were

interpreted within Kazakhstan, in particular by the president Tokayev, as validation of existing Russian-style narratives about Western cultural imperialism. The notion that LGBTQI+ advocacy was externally funded, morally corrosive, and politically destabilizing — central to Russian "propaganda" — found renewed legitimacy when echoed by a U.S. president. In this sense, Trump's rhetoric did not merely align with Russian discourse — it helped make that discourse appear more globally acceptable, providing local actors in Kazakhstan with added justification for adopting similar anti-LGBTQI+ stances.

From the perspective of RWA and SDO, anti-LGBTQI+ narrative serves to preserve social cohesion and existing hierarchies by justifying exclusion of LGBTQI+ through appeals to national security and cultural sovereignty. By recasting LGBTQI+ visibility as part of a hidden, foreign-backed project, respondents position themselves as defenders of national stability — an identity that can override personal empathy or prior exposure. While only 3% of survey respondents used this framing, three out of six interview participants characterized LGBTQI+ organizations as well-resourced movements backed by foreign NGOs or Western governments, rather than as local expressions of identity or civil rights. In this view, rejecting LGBTQI+ rights becomes not merely a moral stance but a patriotic imperative.

One interviewee exemplified this discourse: despite having a trans-identifying friend during university, she later aligned herself with anti-LGBTQI+ activists and adopted the belief that LGBTQI+ individuals threaten national and cultural stability. Her trajectory shows how RWA and SDO can override personal connection when larger ideological concerns, particularly those involving national sovereignty or cultural preservation, become the dominant lens through which LGBTQI+ existence is interpreted.

"Yes, she dressed like a boy, believed she was a boy. She didn't acknowledge herself as a girl."

"But I supported that girl, for example. When I supported her, I supported her as a person."

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Kazakh)

She also mentioned her earlier exposure to gender non-conforming individuals, beginning in childhood:

"We ourselves, when we were little living in a village, you know, uuh, there were boys who were like girls, and girls who acted like boys! … But still! Back then, without all this current internet stuff, we would just accept them — boy as boy, girl as girl. Even if their behavior was, uuh, wrong, for example."

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Kazakh)

Today, however, she expresses complete alignment with anti-LGBTQI+ activists and considers LGBTQI+ as an active threat. She cited one prominent anti-LGBTQI+ public figure as someone she follows online and whose views she now fully supports:

"I don't enter or watch their own (LGBTQI+) websites. I only listen to the news that's against them… Yeah, I can't look up her Instagram, but I'm subscribed to her (anti-LGBTQI+ activist). That woman really, really cares, is genuinely worried about the people and is fighting against them (LGBTQI+). She's talking about how their actions, their behavior are

wrong, for example… I fully agree with her. One hundred percent, with both hands raised."

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Kazakh)

This shift from tolerance to ideological opposition illustrates the powerful sway of public narratives. According to findings, particularly the framework of "Empathy-Driven Acceptance", personal exposure to LGBTQI+ individuals had a strong co-occurrence with more accepting attitudes. The participant's past friendship with a trans-man suggests the presence of humanistic beliefs, which in many cases co-occurred with neutral or positive views. This pattern would typically predict more lenient attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities. However, in this case, she now expresses total opposition to the concept of LGBTQI+ altogether. While she did not initially perceive gender non-conforming individuals as threatening, her stance changed once their presence acquired broader ideological meaning. When LGBTQI+ became framed through the discourse of threat, her earlier personal experience lost its interpretive authority. The figure of LGBTQI+ shifted from that of a human to a symbol within a larger political struggle. Her judgments were no longer rooted in relational empathy but reoriented by collective anxieties.

In this case, the "Empathy-Driven Acceptance" framework was ultimately outweighed by the "LGBT as a threat" narrative. Her opposition was shaped not by direct harm but by concerns over national sovereignty, cultural erosion, and perceived foreign interference, particularly those narratives promoted by vocal anti-LGBTQI+ activists. These ideological concerns may reflect a deeper inclination to preserve perceived social cohesion and hierarchies. From the perspective of RWA and SDO, the participant's alignment with anti-LGBTQI+ activism may be interpreted as an effort to defend the dominant sociocultural order against perceived destabilization. By rejecting LGBTQI+ rights and visibility, despite previous personal connections, she upholds a worldview in

which deviations from traditional gender and sexual norms are framed not only as morally suspect, but as politically subversive. This shift underscores how, under the influence of dominant threat discourses, even past empathy can be reinterpreted as irrelevant or naive in the face of a supposed national danger.

5.2 Understanding “Visibility Concerns”

"Visibility concerns" emerged as another central category shaping respondents' attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals. The survey responses revealed notable concerns related to LGBTQI+ visibility: approximately 7% mentioned "LGBT propaganda" concerns and another 3% endorsed a “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” (DADT) stance. Collectively, these responses suggest that visibility, rather than mere existence, determines acceptance or rejection.

Propaganda Concerns

The first major subtheme within "Visibility concerns" centered around "LGBT Propaganda’. Respondents oftentimes defined "propaganda" as LGBTQI+ acceptance and activities that are meant to represent the community and ensure its rights, including media portrayals, public events, activism, and public display of affection. For example, conceptualization of "LGBT propaganda" in interviews included:

- Fighting for LGBTQI+ human rights
- Supporting LGBTQI+ recognition
- Gatherings, social media presence
- Public displays, like parades or media coverage
- Protests

Participants who raised "propaganda" fears did not necessarily dispute individual rights to privacy but interpreted public LGBTQI+ expression as a deliberate ideological campaign aimed at reshaping societal values. Visibility, in this framing, was not neutral — it was politically loaded, potentially harmful, and needing restriction.

Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT)

A second visibility-related subtheme was observed only among Russian-language responses and manifested through "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" attitudes. Respondents endorsing this view often emphasized individual choice but objected to public displays of LGBTQI+ identity. DADT expressions revealed less catastrophic fears and more interpersonal discomfort. Examples from interviews illustrate this perspective:

”LGBT people should be accepted if they do not publicly demonstrate their orientation.”

"I am also against these gay parades, why flaunt it and so on. It's your personal business, well, deal with it, why advertise it?”

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Kazakh)

These statements suggest conditional tolerance: LGBTQI+ individuals may exist, but their identities should remain invisible. The underlying concern is not societal collapse, but the disruption of personal comfort zones and the violation of unspoken social norms regarding privacy and decorum.

Social Identity Theory

Visibility concerns can optimally be interpreted through the prism of Social Identity Theory, according to which individuals derive a sense of identity and self-esteem through group memberships (Tajfel and Turner 2001). Social Identity Theory emphasizes that individuals seek to enhance their self-esteem through favorable comparisons between their ingroups and outgroups. Such group identities become noticeable when they are challenged by visible, norm-defying outgroups (Brewer 1999; Tajfel and Turner 2001). When heterosexual and cisgender identities are foregrounded, differentiating from LGBTQI+ individuals becomes a means of reaffirming one's ingroup status, thereby exacerbating prejudice (Jetten, Spears, and Manstead 1997). In this process, the drive for distinction often overrides recognition of internal differences within the outgroup, leading to homogenized and simplified perceptions of LGBTQI+ individuals.

Findings from this study support these theoretical expectations. LGBTQI+ individuals were often merged into a singular outgroup category, demonstrating a lack of nuances within the outgroups yet prominent differences between ingroups and outgroups. Despite scholarly literature emphasizing that public attitudes toward sexual minorities (e.g., gay men and lesbians) often differ from those toward gender minorities (e.g., transgender individuals), such distinctions were absent in respondents' narratives (Norton and Herek 2013; Lewis et al. 2017). When asked about their views on specific identities, be it within or between sexual and gender minorities, none of the interviewees differentiated between them. LGBTQI+ individuals were discussed as a single, undifferentiated group. This lack of differentiation does not necessarily imply that respondents held identical feelings toward all identities. Rather, it indicates that LGBTQI+ individuals are symbolically merged into a singular outgroup category.

As Brewer's (1999) theory of ingroup-outgroup categorization suggests, when group boundaries become salient, cognitive distinctions within the outgroup are minimized, reinforcing simplified, homogenized images of difference. Specifically, the visibility of LGBTQI+ identities

heightens perceptions of outgroup homogeneity and magnifies ingroup defensiveness, highlighting group boundaries and intensifying prejudice. In this context, the nuances between sexual and gender minorities were erased, allowing respondents to sustain a unified perception of LGBTQI+ existence as culturally alien and socially disruptive.

Such symbolic homogenization is particularly consequential for visibility concerns. It amplifies defensive reactions not against specific practices or rights claims but against the visibility of an undifferentiated LGBTQI+ presence itself. Following Stephan and Stephan's (1985) theory of intergroup anxiety, when group categorization processes simplify complex social realities, they fuel discomfort, fear, and prejudice even in the absence of direct personal experience. Thus, the absence of distinction between sexual and gender minorities among respondents further illustrates how LGBTQI+ visibility triggers generalized anxieties centered on group identity protection rather than specific behavioral objections.

The act of becoming visible transforms LGBTQI+ individuals from abstract concepts into tangible social actors. Any visible outgroup, especially one that challenges core group values, can be perceived as a failure to abide by the social norms of the ingroup or a threat to the ingroup's cohesion. In the Kazakhstani context, visibility of LGBTQI+ individuals disrupts the taken-for-granted dominance of traditional, religious, and national identities, which can be interpreted by some as threats or violations of norms. In particular, "propaganda" fears mobilize stronger protective responses because of intergroup threats tied to symbolic dominance, whereas DADT reflects intergroup anxiety over interactional norms and comfort boundaries. Yet both reactions ultimately serve a deeper psychological function predicted by Social Identity Theory: the maintenance of positive group distinctiveness.

Respondents expressing "propaganda" concerns perceived LGBTQI+ visibility as an intergroup threat to the ingroup’s social norms: once sexual and gender minorities assert public presence, they are no longer private deviations but perceived agents of cultural disruption (Brewer 1999; Tajfel and Turner 2001). According to Social Identity Theory, group identities become noticeable particularly when they are challenged by visible, norm-defying outgroups (Brewer 1999; Tajfel and Turner 2001). The fear that LGBTQI+ rights activism could "change our children" or "weaken traditional values" reflects not a fear of material loss but a fear of losing normative superiority — the symbolic foundation of ingroup cohesion. The perceived conflict prompts defensive reactions aimed at reasserting traditional group boundaries.

Respondents expressing "propaganda" concerns often linked public LGBTQI+ expression to broader societal instability:

"Before, such things were hidden, and life was better. Now they are trying to change our children.”

(female, 55+ years old, interview in Kazakh)

By contrast, DADT attitudes align more closely with lower-level intergroup discomfort. When individuals are exposed to visible indicators of outgroup membership that violate prevailing social norms, such as public displays of LGBTQI+ identity, they experience unease without necessarily perceiving existential threat. The desire to keep LGBTQI+ identities private ("why flaunt it?") signals a preference for maintaining interactional predictability rather than a full-blown defense against group displacement. This pattern reflects Social Identity Theory’s prediction that the noticeability of difference alone, even without overt competition, can destabilize perceived social harmony (Brewer 1999; Tajfel and Turner 2001).

"What, how to say, there is too much content on Netflix where it (LGBTQI+) appears. For example, I don't like that in any movie, in any series there is always a gay, lesbian, transgender, and so on. And sometimes it seems to be too much."

(female, 25-34 years old, interview in Russian)

While both concerns arise from heightened group boundary salience, "propaganda" fears mobilize stronger protective responses because of intergroup threats tied to symbolic dominance, whereas DADT reflects intergroup anxiety over interactional norms and comfort boundaries. Yet both reactions ultimately serve a deeper psychological function predicted by Social Identity Theory: the maintenance of positive group distinctiveness.

According to Social Identity Theory, positive group distinctiveness is its core mechanism when individuals strive to uphold a favorable image of their ingroup by comparing it advantageously against relevant outgroups (Tajfel and Turner 2001). When the public presence of an outgroup, such as visible LGBTQI+ communities, challenges the perceived superiority or stability of the ingroup's social norms, defensive strategies are activated to reaffirm its primacy. In this sense, both "propaganda" concerns and DADT attitudes can be understood not simply as reactions to visibility, but as mechanisms through which individuals attempt to preserve the status and cohesion of their traditional ingroup identity. This dynamic was observable in several narratives, but particularly evident in one respondent. When discussing broader societal values, she added:

"It (Kazakhstani government) should block (LGBT) "propaganda" a little. Or not block it, but at least raise the "propaganda" of traditional values… Just normal family values. Promote them in school, or somehow in films…

There are entire ministries, internal, that deal with culture and ideology.

Why aren't they working in this regard?"

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Russian)

The interviewee is content with LGBTQI+'s continued existence as long as the depiction of her in-group values — traditional values — overpowered it. According to Social Identity Theory, the primary goal is not necessarily the removal of the outgroup, but the maintenance of favorable comparisons that secure the ingroup's cultural and moral primacy (Tajfel and Turner 1979). In this case, LGBTQI+ visibility was not perceived as an immediate existential threat requiring full elimination. Rather, the visibility could potentially be tolerated under the condition that it remained subordinate to, and overshadowed by, the depiction of traditional values. Thus, the respondent's emphasis on promoting traditional values suggests that her primary concern was not existential erasure, but the preservation of positive ingroup distinctiveness — a motivation more consistent with Social Identity Theory than with other threat-elimination frameworks.

5.3 Understanding "Empathy-Driven Acceptance"

A secondary yet crucial category that emerged from the data was "Empathy-Driven Acceptance". Unlike threat narratives or visibility concerns, this category reflected respondents' efforts to humanize LGBTQI+ individuals by appealing to values of individual autonomy, personal connection, and basic human dignity. Although this acceptance remained conditional in many cases, it still represents a potential axis for broader societal change.

Empathy-driven acceptance			
Right to choose sexuality	8% (38)	6% (19)	7% (57)

Personal connections or self-identification	1% (7)	3% (10)	2% (17)
Humanistic beliefs	1% (6)	3% (9)	2% (15)

Figure 17 — "Empathy-Driven Acceptance"

Right to Choose Sexuality

The most prevalent code within this category was the affirmation of the right to choose one's sexuality, appearing in approximately 7% of responses. Respondents emphasizing this view framed sexuality as a personal matter, independent of public or governmental interference.

Interviewees and survey responses who fell into this category made statements such as:

"I think all people should have equal rights."

(male, 25-34 years old, interview in Kazakh)

"It is their life and their right. Everyone chooses for themselves."

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Russian)

Such expressions resonate with broader traditions of liberal individualism, which prioritize personal autonomy and freedom over collective moral regulation (Kymlicka 1995). Within this framework, LGBTQI+ existence was not necessarily embraced as a positive good, but was instead defended under the principle that individuals must be free to make personal life choices without external judgment or restriction. This framing shifts the question away from the moral acceptability of LGBTQI+ identities toward a broader defense of personal liberty.

It is important to stress, however, that this affirmation of choice did not always translate into active support for LGBTQI+ rights or lives. According to findings (Chapter 4.4), while the "Right

to Choose Sexuality" code had moderate co-occurrence with positive attitudes, it exhibited stronger co-occurrence with neutral attitudes. This suggests that many respondents who emphasized personal freedom might have still experienced some degree of discomfort or prejudice toward LGBTQI+ individuals. Liberal individualism provided a discursive framework to justify tolerance without requiring emotional acceptance. In other words, they could maintain personal disapproval or distance while still upholding the principle that LGBTQI+ individuals should not face public discrimination.

This pattern reflects broader trends observed in empirical studies of sexual and non-cisgender prejudice. Research by Herek (2002) and Adamczyk and Pitt (2009) has demonstrated that endorsement of individual rights is often associated with lower levels of overt sexual and non-cisgender prejudice, particularly among younger, more educated, and urban populations. However, this endorsement does not always indicate deep personal acceptance. Rather, it functions as a normative shield against active hostility, mitigating negative expressions without necessarily transforming underlying biases. Respondents in this study appeared to reproduce a similar logic: while some showed genuine acceptance, many used the language of choice and rights to mark a boundary between private tolerance and public affirmation.

At the same time, the presence of appeals to individual autonomy is noteworthy within the broader Kazakhstani context. Kazakhstan is a post-colonial country, where traditional collectivist values, religious frameworks, and national identity narratives continue to play a significant role (Assyltayeva et al. 2025; Essig 1999; Healey 2001; Mussabekov 2024; Schatz 2000). Even a relatively modest articulation of liberal individualism can serve as an important complement to prevailing moral frameworks that tend to conceptualize LGBTQI+ existence within collective terms. In a society where traditional gender roles and family structures are deeply embedded in social life, references to personal choice, even when cautiously expressed, create discursive

openings for defending LGBTQI+ existence without directly challenging broader cultural foundations.

Moreover, the "Right to Choose Sexuality" suggests a shift in the moral locus from society to the individual. Rather than society having the right to judge and regulate non-heteronormative lives, individuals are cast as autonomous agents whose choices must be respected, even if not celebrated. In this respect, the "Right to Choose Sexuality" code captures a transitional form of tolerance, one that softens the most overt forms of sexual prejudice while falling short of full affirmation. In sum, while this form of empathy-driven acceptance remains limited in depth, it nonetheless reflects meaningful ideological openings. It reveals that even among populations where traditional moral values remain strong, liberal discourses about personal freedom can serve as a moderating influence on sexual prejudice.

"I would say that I agree that everyone chooses, well, I'll put it this way — who to love, what kind of relationship to build."

"If they are adults, it is their choice."

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Russian)

"I don't have the right to judge people in terms of religion. In terms of religion, of course it's wrong — a man with a man, a woman with a woman. That's why I stick to my opinion."

(male, 25-34 years old, interview in Kazakh)

Survey findings and above-mentioned quotes from three interviews suggest that appeals to individual autonomy, while insufficient for deep acceptance on their own, may provide a pragmatic

starting point for fostering broader tolerance in societies where cultural resistance to LGBTQI+ rights remains significant.

Humanistic Beliefs

A smaller but still meaningful subset of respondents appealed to basic humanistic principles when articulating their acceptance of LGBTQI+ individuals. Approximately 2% of survey participants referenced general ideas of human dignity, respect, or equality. Although fewer in number compared to other empathy-driven codes, these responses provide insight into an important, though less frequently invoked, foundation for tolerance.

Several respondents stressed that sexual or gender identity should not alter the basic respect owed to individuals. For example, survey responses included statements such as:

"We are all human beings."

"Everyone deserves equal respect."

"Their choice, their life. They should be treated like everyone else."

Although the expressions were often brief and generalized, they resonated with ideas found in broader human rights discourse. As scholars such as Ignatieff (2001) have argued, framing rights through appeals to shared humanity can foster solidarity across otherwise divisive identity boundaries. Research on LGBTQI+ rights campaigns similarly finds that emphasizing universality — the notion that human dignity applies equally to all — can be effective in increasing acceptance (Pettinicchio 2012; NeJaime 2012).

However, the humanistic appeals observed in the dataset were typically non-specific and cautious. Respondents rarely mentioned active support for LGBTQI+ visibility, activism, or

political claims. Rather, their statements suggested a passive recognition of equality, limited primarily to interpersonal respect rather than public affirmation. In this sense, while the presence of humanistic arguments indicates potential openings for broader acceptance, the practical implications remain limited. Abstract respect did not necessarily translate into support for LGBTQI+ rights in the public sphere.

Nonetheless, the invocation of shared humanity, even in cautious or generalized terms, offers an important alternative pathway for challenging prejudice. In environments where traditionalist and religious narratives dominate public discourse, even minimal humanistic appeals can create discursive space for more inclusive attitudes. As such, while humanistic acceptance remains a minority position in the data, it signals the latent potential for broader shifts in moral reasoning about LGBTQI+ rights in Kazakhstan.

Personal Connections and Self-Identification

Another important dimension of empathy-driven acceptance was the role of personal connections or self-identification with LGBTQI+ individuals. Approximately 2% of survey respondents, along with three interview participants, explicitly referenced personal relationships in forming their stance toward LGBTQI+ identities. Although the proportion of respondents citing personal ties is considerably lower compared to other major categories, it is noteworthy given that positive attitudes overall constituted only 6% of survey responses. Among the three empathy-driven codes, Personal Connections and Self-Identification demonstrated the strongest co-occurrence with positive attitudes. In contrast, "Right to Choose Sexuality" and "Humanistic beliefs" showed more moderate co-occurrence patterns. Additionally, these codes aligned with both positive and neutral attitudes, whereas Personal Connections and Self-Identification was the only code to correlate

exclusively with positive attitudes, further highlighting the central role of interpersonal familiarity in fostering acceptance.

Both the empirical findings and broader literature suggest that interpersonal relationships are among the most powerful mechanisms for reducing prejudice, yet their effectiveness depends heavily on the context and quality of contact. Intergroup Contact Theory, originally articulated by Allport (1954), offers a framework for understanding when and how contact with marginalized groups can shift attitudes. Rather than assuming that any exposure will necessarily diminish bias, the theory emphasizes that particular conditions, such as equality between parties, emotional closeness, and cooperative interaction, must be present for contact to meaningfully challenge stereotypes and foster empathy. Subsequent scholarship expanded on these conditions, arguing that high-quality, meaningful contact, not incidental or distant acquaintance, is crucial for reducing negative attitudes (Herek and Capitanio 1996; Vonofakou, Hewstone, and Voci 2007).

While none of the interview participants had close friendships or family relations with LGBTQI+ individuals, three participants had engaged with LGBTQI+ identities in at least some capacity. Their attitudes currently reside in a spectrum of acceptance toward sexual and gender minorities: from total rejection to acceptance. Investigating the quality of their connections through the lens of Intergroup Contact Theory can help explore the efficacy of personal connections in producing more lenient attitudes toward the LGBTQI+ community.

One interview participant mentioned a direct personal connection with an LGBTQI+ individual during her university years:

> *"For example, when I was a student, when we were studying at [University Name], there was a girl in another group named [Kazakh name]… Yes, she*

dressed like a boy, believed she was a boy… But I supported that girl, for example. When I supported her, I supported her as a person."

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Kazakh)

Initially, this exposure appeared to foster a degree of acceptance. However, as discussed in Chapter 5.1.1, the participant's stance shifted over time toward full rejection of LGBTQI+ identities, reflecting the influence of the "LGBT as a threat" framework. This case illustrates that while personal connections can facilitate empathy, their impact is fragile when subsequent ideological narratives, particularly those framing LGBTQI+ existence as a societal threat, offer alternative lenses through which to reinterpret past experiences. As Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) emphasize, sustained emotional closeness and perceived equality are necessary for durable attitude shifts; in this instance, both conditions gradually eroded.

Unlike the trajectory observed in this case, two other participants described more recent or ongoing indirect personal connections that revealed different patterns of familiarity and emotional engagement:

"I saw a blogger, a female blogger, who helps with that. She's a cheerful person, doesn't divide people like, "if you're straight, you're bad." There are moments when people don't show respect. But she's a good person, helps people understand themselves if they feel different, how to accept themselves and live with it. I respect that. Like, good job, you're helping people. People need help."

(male, 25-34 years old, interview in Kazakh)

"So, in my circle, my daughter, for example, she, I know that she has (LGBTQI+) acquaintances, and for her, this is a person's private matter/ business. I feel the same way."

(female, 45-54 years old, interview in Russian)

The first participant offered a vivid and positive portrayal of the LGBTQI+ blogger, highlighting admiration, respect, and human solidarity, despite his preconception about some LGBTQI+ figures who he deems not respectful of heterosexual and cisgender people. The second participant, by contrast, maintained a more reserved stance, framing the LGBTQI+ acquaintance as a private matter and suggesting conditional acceptance, as long as the identity remained within personal boundaries and outside of public discussion — DADT. This distinction between the two participants is important when understood through the lens of Intergroup Contact Theory.

In the case of the first participant, the contact, even if mediated through social media, was framed positively and associated with admiration and respect. The participant's description revealed evidence of emotional engagement and perceived moral equality, suggesting that at least some conditions for optimal prejudice reduction may have been met. While the participant expressed conflicting ideas about LGBTQI+ individuals, navigating between his aspiration to align with Islamic values and his recognition of sexual and gender minorities' human rights, his online interaction with an admired figure contributed to constructing more accepting attitudes.

By contrast, the second participant's narrative (mother) reflected a more limited form of exposure. The daughter's acquaintance with an LGBTQI+ individual was acknowledged, but no emotional closeness or positive admiration was expressed. Additionally, since the LGBTQI+ individuals were acquaintances of her daughter, the mother did not share their social status, positioning herself instead as a parent observing from a distance. In this case, although there was

some exposure, the optimal conditions for deep prejudice reduction outlined by researchers like Pettigrew and Tropp (2006), particularly emotional engagement, appear not to have been present. The result was conditional acceptance aligned with "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" category, but not active support.

The divergence between the three participants further illustrates the complexity and fragility of empathy-driven acceptance. While familiarity with LGBTQI+ individuals can create conditions for reduced prejudice, it is not a universal remedy. As Intergroup Contact Theory suggests, the quality, emotional depth, and continuity of interpersonal contact critically shape its effectiveness. Where admiration and emotional engagement were present, as in the case of the blogger, more sustained and positive attitudes emerged. Where contact remained distant, framed solely as a private matter, as in the case of the daughter's acquaintance, its contribution to attitude formation was limited and allowed for conditional acceptance. And where ideological narratives framing LGBTQI+ existence as a societal threat became salient, as in the case of the former university acquaintance, prior empathy was overridden altogether.

These findings do not reflect close personal connections that would fully satisfy the optimal conditions outlined by Intergroup Contact Theory for effective prejudice reduction. In none of the cases was there a deeply rooted, sustained relationship characterized by emotional intimacy, equal status, and continuous cooperative interaction — conditions emphasized by Allport (1954) and expanded by later scholars (Herek and Capitanio 1996; Vonofakou, Hewstone, and Voci 2007). Nonetheless, the cases analyzed still engage with key aspects of Intergroup Contact Theory and offer empirical support for its broader principles. They illustrate that while partial or indirect contact, such as admiration of a public figure or acknowledgment of a family member's acquaintance, can foster more tolerant or empathetic attitudes, the depth and quality of the contact significantly shape its ultimate impact.

The insight here is the potential of internet-mediated connections. In a context like Kazakhstan, where offline personal exposure to openly LGBTQI+ individuals is often limited due to prevailing sexual and non-cisgender prejudice, online representation emerges as a comparatively accessible channel. As shown in the case of the blogger admired by an interviewee, digital parasocial contact can produce affective engagement and tentative attitude shifts, even in the absence of face-to-face interaction (Kudaibergenova 2020; Olijar and Li 2024). Yet the same digital infrastructure that enables exposure also risks reinforcing prejudice. For instance, when addressing prejudice towards LGBTQI+ individuals, an interviewee mentioned the following:

"Maybe they had a bad experience, maybe they watched too much TikTok."

(male, 25-34 years old, interview in Kazakh)

Other interviewees, especially those expressing negative attitudes, explicitly cited social media such as Instagram and TikTok as primary sources of LGBTQI+ content — except in their cases, these platforms appeared to confirm existing biases or reinforce threat narratives.

This ambivalence reflects the dual nature of the digital sphere: while it provides avenues for intergroup contact, it is also subject to the logic of algorithmic reinforcement. As users engage with content that reflects their existing views, platform algorithms prioritize similar content, creating informational bubbles that limit exposure to alternative perspectives. These structures are designed to maximize engagement and thereby profit, not deliberation. As Cinelli et al. (2021) argue, such informational bubbles can deepen ideological polarization, making empathy-driven acceptance more difficult to sustain. Dall'Agnola (2024) offers a parallel observation in the context of Kazakhstan, where the internet plays a complex role in shaping gender-related attitudes, including those related to sexuality. She emphasizes that social media algorithms foster conditions in which dominant narratives can be reinforced. In this sense, the internet is both an opportunity and a

liability: it allows mediated contact where physical contact may be impossible, but it also entrenches attitudes through selective exposure.

5.4 Mapping Gender in General Attitudes

While this study does not treat gender or any other factors as causal or standalone variables, descriptive analysis revealed notable differences in how male and female respondents articulated their attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals. These differences, while not absolute, help situate individual responses within broader patterns of gendered socialization and institutional norms. Within the full sample, women were less likely to express overtly negative attitudes and more likely to adopt neutral or indifferent positions. Although the majority of responses across both gender groups leaned toward non-affirmative views, the distribution patterns were meaningfully different. Among female respondents (n = 459), 47% expressed negative attitudes. An additional 18% articulated neutral views, while 10% expressed indifference. Male respondents (n = 357), by contrast, were more likely to express negative attitudes (58%) and less likely to report neutral (11%) or indifferent (5%) positions. The proportions of respondents expressing explicitly positive or extremely negative views were roughly comparable across genders (5–6%).

To examine whether gender was associated with differences in general attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals, a chi-square test of independence was conducted using collapsed categories. The test revealed a statistically significant association between gender and expressed attitudes ($\chi^2(2) = 13.02$, $p = .0015$), indicating that male and female respondents in this dataset differed in how they were distributed across the three collapsed categories: “Negative/Extremely negative,” “Neutral/Unclear,” and “Positive/Indifferent.” To assess whether the observed gendered pattern held across different linguistic groups, a chi-square test of independence and an additional Fisher’s Exact Test were conducted for the Kazakh- and Russian-language subsamples. This aimed to explore whether

language group affiliation might mediate the relationship between gender and attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals.

However, the results did not indicate significant variation. Although the gender pattern appeared reversed in the Kazakh-language group — 75% of women expressed negative attitudes compared to 70% of men — statistical tests found no meaningful association between gender and general attitudes. In the Russian-language group, the results were somewhat more suggestive: while the chi-square test did not indicate significance, the Fisher's Exact Test produced a marginal result ($p = 0.0504$). This may suggest a weak pattern in which female respondents were less likely than male respondents to express negative views. These findings, however, remain inconclusive.

The contrast between the general sample and the linguistic subsamples raises important considerations. Although the language-specific analyses did not yield statistically significant differences, short of the possibility that gendered variation may be more pronounced among the Russian-speaking respondents, warranting further attention, they do not undermine the clearer pattern observed in the full dataset. The general sample is larger and more heterogeneous, making it more likely to reflect meaningful internal variation. In contrast, the Kazakh- and Russian-speaking subsamples, particularly the Kazakh-language group, where high levels of negativity are observed across genders, are smaller and more internally homogeneous, reducing the likelihood that gender patterns will be statistically visible. This disparity suggests that while gender may not function as a consistent axis of differentiation across the language subsamples, it remains analytically relevant within the broader dataset.

For the full sample, the chi-square test shows a statistically significant skew toward more negative personal attitudes among men ($\chi^2 = 13.0$, df = 2, $p \approx 0.001$). This pattern redirected

memoing toward two related issues: how male peer groups socialize members into common attitudes and how respondents perceive the informal policing of acceptable masculinity.

Gendered Socialization

Kazakhstani society remains deeply patriarchal, shaped by both historical Soviet legacies and reemerging traditional norms. Even as Kazakh women attain high levels of education and participation in the labor market, societal expectations continue to position men firmly in dominant roles. Scholars have described this phenomenon as Kazakhstan’s "gender paradox," in which formal equality coexists with deeply rooted patriarchal values that reinforce male superiority and define women’s status primarily through marriage and motherhood (Durrani et al. 2022). Recent survey data underscore these biases, revealing widespread perceptions of male superiority in leadership roles, acceptance of domestic violence under certain conditions, and gendered employment preferences (UNDP 2020). Such findings highlight how gender differentiation is inculcated early, producing sharp divisions in attitudes and social behaviors.

In practical terms, Kazakh women are commonly socialized into relational, caregiving roles. Cultural narratives traditionally emphasize a woman's duties as a mother, wife, and household manager (Arystanbek 2023). Historically, nomadic Kazakh women oversaw domestic affairs and caregiving even as men managed external responsibilities such as herding and community leadership (Werner 2009). Contemporary state policy and media continue to reinforce these expectations. Official discourses predominantly celebrate women's reproductive and domestic roles, promoting idealized portrayals of women primarily as mothers and spouses (Zhussipbek and Nagayeva 2023). Educational curricula similarly propagate rigid gender norms: school textbooks explicitly promoted distinct and restrictive gender roles, embedding heteronormativity deeply into moral education (Kataeva et al. 2025; Kuzhabekova, Durrani, and Kataeva 2025). This environment

primes women toward empathy, relational focus, and conflict avoidance. Consequently, even Kazakh women who morally or religiously disapprove of LGBTQI+ individuals might still prefer relational discretion rather than overt hostility.

Kazakh men's socialization, by contrast, strongly emphasizes ideals of dominance, control, and heteronormative enforcement (Arystanbek 2023). From early childhood, boys are taught to envision themselves as primary breadwinners, family protectors, and community leaders. Family surveys consistently show Kazakh men see themselves as economically dominant and indispensable providers, reflecting broader social expectations of masculine authority (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2017). Media representations reinforce these norms, often highlighting male characters in positions of political and military authority, while women appear primarily as supportive or passive figures (Kazhenova 2022). Religious and peer-group influences further entrench these gendered roles, with conservative teachings linking masculinity directly to the enforcement of traditional moral codes and norms, particularly regarding perceived deviations like LGBTQI+ identities (Zhussipbek and Nagayeva 2023). Thus, overt expressions of anti-LGBTQI+ attitudes among Kazakh men frequently serve as public assertions of this protective, norm-guarding masculinity.

These distinct gender roles are systematically institutionalized. Kazakh media and educational materials explicitly reinforce traditional gender hierarchies, glorifying subservient femininity and authoritative masculinity (Bekzhanova and Durrani 2025; Kataeva et al. 2025; Kazhenova 2022). State family policy further entrenches these divisions through extensive maternity leave benefits juxtaposed against minimal paternal leave, effectively reaffirming separate gendered spheres of influence and responsibility (Tengrinews.kz 2023). Together with religious institutions and local customs, this institutional environment consistently directs women toward empathetic relational roles and men toward assertive, normative dominance.

These deeply embedded gendered roles help clarify the observed gender disparities in attitudes toward LGBTQI+ communities. Public attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals in Kazakhstan remain overwhelmingly negative, with significant proportions of the population expressing moral disapproval or hostility (World Values Survey Association 2018, 11). Yet, within this generally conservative landscape, men are distinctly more likely to articulate overt hostility due to the rigid, assertive gender scripts into which they are socialized. Women, meanwhile, even when privately disapproving, typically articulate their positions through relational or empathetic lenses. This aligns with broader findings from patriarchal contexts where women's socialization often moderates their public hostility, while men's socialization into hegemonic masculinity intensifies their overt rejection of non-normative identities (Pascoe 2007; Phoenix, Frosh, and Pattman 2003). Thus, the divergent forms of gender socialization in Kazakhstan profoundly shape individual and collective responses to LGBTQI+ identities, channeling men toward overt hostility and women toward more moderated, relational expressions of disagreement. These gendered roles, as institutionalized in Kazakhstan's social structures, set the stage for distinct normative pressures, shaping differential conformity among men and women, as explored next.

Normative Pressures and Conformity

Social psychological theories consistently underscore that perceived social norms can strongly influence individual attitudes and behaviors. Research demonstrates that people often align their expressed beliefs and attitudes with what they perceive as dominant in their social circles, primarily due to a desire for social acceptance and fear of sanctions (Bond and Smith 1996; Cialdini and Goldstein 2004). Crucially, these perceived norms are maintained through implicit or explicit sanctions that reinforce conformity. According to Rimal and Real (2003), individuals internalize expectations about likely consequences of deviation from norms, which significantly affects their willingness to express views that diverge from perceived group consensus. Thus, the anticipation of

social sanctions, whether actual or imagined, can compel individuals toward conformity, particularly in environments where normative expectations are clearly defined.

In the present study, descriptive statistical analysis explored gender differences in perceived network attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals. Given the constructivist grounded theory approach of this thesis, the aim of this analysis was exploratory rather than deductive; it was designed to assess only whether gender differences observed within this specific sample were statistically meaningful. Male respondents were notably more inclined than female respondents to describe their social networks as negative. Specifically, 52% of men characterized their networks as having negative attitudes, compared to 45% of women. Conversely, women more frequently characterized their networks as “Neutral” (10% women vs. 6% men), "Indifferent" (4% women vs. 2% men), or as expressing "Unclear" positions (24% women vs. 19% men). Positive attitudes (2%) were recorded in the same proportion across two genders. While these findings should not be interpreted as indicative of the broader population beyond this dataset, a chi-square test of independence across collapsed categories confirmed these differences as statistically significant for the given sample ($\chi^2(2) = 8.57$, $p = 0.0138$).

Moreover, the perception of uniform negativity in a network increases the perceived cost of deviation, making open expressions of support for LGBTQI+ individuals socially risky. 16% of male respondents perceived their immediate social environment as homogenous in attitudes, compared to only 10% of female respondents. According to the co-occurrence analysis of network categories, homogenous attitudes had a strong co-occurrence with negative attitudes. Consequently, individuals embedded in environments perceived as uniformly negative are more likely to express similarly negative attitudes publicly, irrespective of their private convictions. These interpretations align with literature suggesting that perceived unanimity within peer groups heightens pressures

toward conformity, especially on issues that incorporate moral or cultural implications (Pascoe 2007; Phoenix, Frosh, and Pattman 2003).

Interview data might offer some insights into how normative conformity might operate in practice. While interviews cannot yield broadly generalizable findings, they nonetheless revealed a pattern aligned with perceptions of conformity. Interviewees (n=2) who explicitly expressed strongly negative attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals described their social circles as similarly and homogeneously negative. Conversely, most of those who shared non-negative views (n=3) also recognized greater diversity of views within their networks or perceived a prevailing neutrality. This partial alignment between individual attitudes and perceived network attitudes aligns with broader theories of normative influence and conformity (Bond and Smith 1996; Rimal and Real 2003).

However, there is one respondent, whose responses proved especially illustrative of conformism. A male participant (25-34 years old, survey and interview in Kazakh), who initially identified as holding a negative view in the survey and described his social environment as mostly negative, later offered a strikingly neutral account during the interview. This discrepancy between the anonymous survey response and the in-depth interview can be read as a demonstration of how conformity pressures may operate internally, leading individuals to align with perceived norms even when no audience is present. Hence, these interviews may offer insight into how perceptions of peer consensus, even if inaccurate, can reinforce dominant attitudes and discourage deviation.

At the same time, this research does not definitively establish a causal direction between individual and network attitudes. It remains possible that individuals with pre-existing negative attitudes intentionally seek out or interpret their social networks as negative, reflecting a process of homophily — individuals associating preferentially with others who share their beliefs (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). However, disentangling individual predispositions is incredibly

complex if not impossible: individuals are not passively influenced by their networks, nor do they independently form their beliefs without reference to their social environments. Rather, as Cialdini and Goldstein (2004) emphasize, attitudes and behaviors are continuously negotiated within perceived normative contexts. Thus, the critical factor is not necessarily the causality between individual and network attitudes or objective homogeneity of attitudes within networks, but the perception of homogeneously negative network that can impose constraints on individual expression through anticipated sanctions.

Taken together, these findings suggest that expressions of support or hostility toward LGBTQI+ individuals are often shaped less by isolated personal beliefs than by how individuals experience their social environments. In a context like Kazakhstan, where traditional gender norms remain firmly embedded in institutional, familial, and religious structures, the cost of voicing dissent from perceived group consensus can feel significant. This is especially true for those embedded in networks perceived as uniformly negative. While this chapter has emphasized gendered pathways through which these pressures operate, highlighting how masculinity is often enacted through overt norm-enforcement and femininity through relational discretion, the underlying mechanism remains social. People do not form or express views in a vacuum; they navigate expectations, anticipate consequences, and often temper their speech accordingly. The interpretive analysis presented here does not claim that network attitudes cause individual opinions, but rather, that perceived social norms, especially when internalized through gendered scripts, can act as powerful filters through which people understand what is speakable, and what is not.

5.5 Language Group Differences

The role of language context emerged as an important factor contributing to how respondents made sense of LGBTQI+ issues. While the choice between Kazakh and Russian for

completing the survey or interview does not in itself imply fixed or mutually exclusive cultural identities, the differences that emerged across language groups pointed to broader patterns that needed investigation.

While the merged dataset revealed a predominance of negative and neutral positions across the broader sample, disaggregating responses by language group revealed distinct patterns in how LGBTQI+ identities were framed and how these framings were justified. These differences remain largely unaddressed in existing literature, which has tended to focus on general attitudes toward LGBTQI+ individuals in Kazakhstan. For instance, Kospakov, Kylyshbayeva, and Uyzbayeva (2022) conducted a study analyzing factors associated with certain attitudes toward LGBT+ among Kazakhstanis, highlighting the continued social unacceptability of LGBT+ identities despite some positive attitudes. Olijar and Li (2024) examined the impact of social media on young Kazakhstani users' attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community, finding that frequent use of social media positively influences these attitudes. However, few studies have attended to internal heterogeneity within the population, particularly concerning language as an analytic category.

This study addresses that gap by attending to language as a potentially meaningful axis of difference, which may signal broader cultural and informational alignments that shape how sexual and gender diversity is understood. These dynamics are unpacked in relation to three interpretive frameworks: how threat is constructed, how ambiguity is experienced, and how perceived network consensus shapes expressive boundaries.

“LGBT as a Threat”

The framework of “LGBT as a Threat” exhibited disproportionate representation across language groups. Within the framework, “Moral, religious, and traditional values” was cited in 15% of Kazakh-language responses compared to 7% in Russian; explicit mentions of “LGBT as a

Threat" produced similar results, with 20% in Kazakh-language responses and 8% in Russian. Similarly, within the framework of "Visibility concerns", concerns with "propaganda" were more often framed as existential threats in Kazakh-language responses compared to the Russian-language responses, due to moderate co-occurrence with the "LGBT as a threat" code. These findings suggest a significantly heightened threat perception among Kazakh-speaking respondents.

The framework of "LGBT as a Threat" was investigated, using theories of Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), in Chapter 5.1. While both remain applicable across language groups, their manifestations can be formed and, thus, explained by different extents of various factors.

Both RWA and SDO are concerned with in-group/out-group relations, where out-groups' entities pose perceived threats to an in-group' social cohesion and hierarchy. Yet, there are various social groups to which Kazakhstani people might feel most belonging to. While this section does not exhaust all potential influences, it turns to the role of Islamic discourse as one particularly salient factor in Kazakh-language responses.

Religious language, particularly Islamic references, was a recurring element in Kazakh-language responses, where LGBTQI+ individuals were often discussed in moral, traditional, or religious terms (15%). This trend may be partly explained by the sociolinguistic and cultural context in which Islam is more salient among Kazakh speakers, as it has been particularly pronounced among ethnic Kazakhs — a group more strongly represented in the Kazakh-speaking portion of the sample (Malik 2019) — with most mosques in Kazakhstan operating primarily in this language (Bekqulova 2022; Muftyat.kz 2025). As a result, Kazakh-speaking individuals are more likely to encounter Islamic messaging that reinforces heteronormative values and traditional family models.

These patterns are situated within the broader context of Kazakhstan's post-independence Islamic revival (Achilov 2015; Malik 2019; Sadvokassov and Zhumashev 2023; Sarsembayev et al. 2021). Achilov (2015) argues that Kazakhstani government's inclusionist policies welcomed Islamic financial and educational institutions, short of Islamic political institutions, which significantly contributed to Islamic revival installing representation in Kazakh civil society. While it is difficult to establish estimates of religiosity within the population as well as the extent of such religiosity, institutional processes are quantitatively visible: the number of mosques increased from 68 in 1991 to 2516 in 2016 (Yerekesheva 2020, 72-73).

Although a direct causal link between the Islamic revival and increased hostility toward LGBTQI+ individuals cannot be empirically established within this study, several indicators point to a broader normative shift. One interviewee (female, 45–54 years old, interview in Russian) remarked that the "aggression" toward LGBTQI+ people she observes today was not present in the 1990s. While this reflection cannot be generalized, it resonates with patterns observed in Kazakh-language responses, where morality and tradition were more frequently framed through religious discourse. This does not necessarily imply that Kazakh speakers are more religious overall, but it suggests that religious frameworks were more readily mobilized, indicating that such references may feel more culturally relevant and socially resonant within this linguistic group. For example, all three Kazakh-speaking interviewees explicitly referenced their Muslim identity during the interviews — a pattern not observed among the Russian-speaking participants.

Taken together, these patterns help clarify why threat perception may be more pronounced among Kazakh-speaking respondents. In the context of RWA, religion functions as a key normative anchor: individuals who perceive LGBTQI+ visibility as disrupting traditional moral structures may react with heightened rejection to defend perceived social order. In Kazakh-speaking environments where Islamic discourse is more present, this moral structure appears more frequently tied to

religious language, reinforcing in-group expectations around proper behavior and family life. From the standpoint of SDO, this same discourse can also work to uphold social hierarchies, particularly gender hierarchies that assign culturally sanctioned roles to men and women. Traditional masculinity and femininity, often linked to Kazakh national or religious identity, are reinforced through public discourse and institutional norms, making non-conforming gender expressions appear as threats to the broader social structure. When LGBTQI+ individuals are framed as undermining cultural cohesion or national identity, their rejection serves not only to defend symbolic boundaries but also to reassert hierarchical gender roles.

The combination of stronger moral references and group-based identity cues among Kazakh speakers suggests that while RWA and SDO are applicable across the entire sample, their expression may be shaped by the more prominent public visibility of Muslim identity in Kazakh-speaking environments. This does not imply that other religious traditions are more accepting of LGBTQI+ individuals, nor that Russian-speaking respondents are less religious or cannot be Muslim. Rather, the distinction may reflect the greater integration of Islamic references into the cultural and linguistic public sphere among Kazakh speakers, especially in the context of Kazakhstan's ongoing Islamic revival. This helps explain how similar ideological orientations toward order and hierarchy can generate varying levels of perceived threat, depending on which cultural or normative frameworks are most socially available and regularly reinforced.

Unclear Attitudes

A distinct pattern of unclear answers emerged within both language groups, but the sources of ambiguity varied considerably.

Among Russian-speaking respondents, unclear attitudes co-occurred primarily with the "No knowledge of LGBT" code. Many participants explicitly cited a lack of familiarity or information

as the basis for their ambivalence. Phrases such as "*I haven't really encountered LGBT people personally, so I can't say much*" or "*I don't fully understand what LGBT means*" were common. This aligns with Intergroup Contact Theory, which suggests that lack of exposure to minority groups is associated with higher ambivalence or prejudice (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). In this context, the absence of knowledge appears to produce a kind of informational ambiguity.

In contrast, Kazakh-speaking respondents who expressed unclear attitudes often reported personal acquaintance with LGBTQI+ individuals. Instead of lack of exposure, their uncertainty seemed to arise from a tension between personal familiarity and broader cultural expectations. This dynamic resonates with research on cognitive dissonance and moral ambivalence in societies undergoing cultural change (Anderton, Pender, and Asner-Self 2011; Rabin 1994; Tillman 2021). When personal relationships conflict with dominant religious, traditional, or nationalist narratives, uncertainty may reflect internal tension rather than lack of knowledge.

As discussed earlier in threat perception differences, Kazakh-language responses were more likely to invoke religious, moral, and traditional values when articulating views on LGBTQI+ individuals. These frameworks, while not necessarily indicating greater religiosity, were more frequently mobilized, suggesting that such references hold greater salience within Kazakh-speaking contexts. This helps explain why unclear attitudes in this group often reflected inner conflict rather than indifference.

This interpretive tension becomes clearer when situated within the ongoing Islamic revival in Kazakhstan. Public expressions of Muslim identity have become more visible in recent decades, particularly among ethnic Kazakhs and in Kazakh-language media, education, and religious institutions. In this environment, Islam and LGBTQI+ rights are often constructed as mutually exclusive positions, with the latter portrayed as a Western imposition incompatible with national or

moral authenticity (Levitanus 2020, 2022). For Kazakh-speaking respondents, then, personal familiarity with LGBTQI+ individuals may sit uneasily alongside moral expectations that frame such identities as deviant or foreign. Unclear responses in this group often seemed to reflect friction between relational empathy and the perceived boundaries of cultural legitimacy.

Notably, the unresolved tensions observed in Kazakh-language responses do not undermine Intergroup Contact Theory discussed in Chapter 5.3. Personal connections moderately co-occur with positive attitudes, the same as unclear attitudes, in Kazakh and strongly co-occur in Russian. Where unclear attitudes appear alongside personal familiarity, the Kazakh-language pattern may reflect an intermediate position, where exposure has softened categorical rejection but has not fully translated into expressed acceptance. Although most empirical research on cognitive dissonance has been conducted in non-Central Asian settings, its core mechanisms, particularly the internal negotiation of conflicting values, remain applicable to the patterns observed in Kazakh-language responses, suggesting dissonance as a plausible mechanism (Anderton, Pender, and Asner-Self 2011; Rabin 1994; Tillman 2021).

The two types of unclear responses thus represent different mechanisms: one grounded in limited exposure, and the other in moral dissonance. In Russian-language responses, ambiguity often resembled a kind of cognitive blank — a space unfilled by personal experience or concrete knowledge. In Kazakh-language responses, ambiguity more often signaled an unresolved tension — a point of friction between empathy and normative commitments. Both forms of ambiguity are analytically relevant, but they stem from different experiential and cultural contexts.

Network Attitudes Across Language Groups

In addition to expressing their own attitudes, respondents were asked to characterize the general views of people in their immediate social circles. Extending the earlier discussion of conformity (5.4), this section turns to perceptions of the normative climate across language groups.

Kazakh-speaking respondents more often described their networks as negative (52%) than Russian-speaking respondents (44%). In contrast, neutrality and ambiguity were more commonly reported among Russian-speaking participants — 13% and 30% respectively, compared to 2% and 9% among Kazakh speakers. Positive assessments were rare across both groups (1% in Russian and 3% in Kazakh), while "Indifferent" appeared in 5% of Russian-language responses but not at all in Kazakh-language ones.

A chi-square test with collapsed categories confirmed that the association between language and perceived network attitudes was statistically significant ($\chi^2(2) = 60.96$, $p < 0.0001$). Kazakh-speaking respondents were notably overrepresented in the "Negative" category, while Russian-speaking respondents more often described their environments as neutral or unclear.

Additional difference was observed in perceived homogeneity. Uniformity of attitudes in social network appeared especially salient among Kazakh speakers: 18% described their networks as ideologically uniform, more than double the rate among Russian-speaking participants (8%). While "Homogeneity" does not equate to negativity, co-occurrence analysis showed that respondents who perceived homogenous networks were most likely to describe them as negative. These differences may reflect broader symbolic climates.

As established in the previous subchapter on gender (5.4), people tend to adjust their public expressions in line with what they perceive to be socially acceptable (Bond and Smith 1996; Cialdini and Goldstein 2004). In more ideologically homogenous environments, the perceived risk of social sanction can increase even in the absence of overt pressure. Rimal and Real (2003) suggest

that people internalize consequences for deviating from perceived group norms — an effect amplified in networks perceived as uniform or closed. This mechanism was already discussed in Chapter 5.4 with respect to gender, where men, more often embedded in rejectionist networks, tended to mirror what they understood as group consensus. A similar dynamic seems to emerge here along linguistic lines: those embedded in Kazakh-speaking networks appear more likely to sense and mirror a window of acceptable views.

Interview data reinforce this interpretation. As discussed earlier, respondents who held negative views frequently described their networks as uniformly negative, while those with more moderate or accepting views typically reported greater diversity or ambiguity within their social environments. In one particularly illustrative case, a Kazakh-speaking respondent initially self-identified as holding a negative view in the anonymous survey, yet described his attitude as neutral during a follow-up interview. His social circle was characterized as largely negative, suggesting that internalized conformity pressures may have shaped his initial survey response even without an external audience. Such cases highlight how perceptions of consensus — accurate or not — can constrain expression at the level of both belief and self-report.

While this section does not attempt to establish a direct causal relationship between language and network attitudes, it views language-linked environments as socially meaningful. It remains equally plausible that people with already-formed views, especially negative ones, gravitate toward like-minded environments, or interpret their surroundings through those pre-existing beliefs (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). Yet individual attitudes never emerge in isolation. People are not simply shaped by their environment, nor are they immune to it; rather, as Cialdini and Goldstein (2004) argue, their views and behaviors take shape in relation to what they believe will be socially sanctioned or accepted. What ultimately matters here is not whether a network is truly uniform, but whether it is perceived to be. In such contexts, the felt sense of consensus can act

as a constraint, narrowing the space for dissent not through explicit censorship but through everyday negotiations of what is speakable.

In sum, these findings should not be taken as evidence of a fixed link between language and attitude. Rather, they point to the role of language in shaping the normative context within which attitudes are developed and expressed. In this study, Kazakh-speaking respondents tended to perceive their linguistic environments as more cohesive and restrictive when it came to sexual and gender diversity. Within such settings, individuals may be more inclined toward conformity, especially when prevailing norms are anchored in religious or traditional frameworks. This supports the broader argument that normative pressures are not uniformly distributed but are experienced through specific cultural and linguistic channels that shape what is felt to be acceptable, speakable, or safe to express.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore public attitudes and theoretical frameworks through which LGBTQI+ individuals are viewed in contemporary Kazakhstan. Drawing on a constructivist grounded theory approach, the study aimed to generate theoretical insight grounded in empirical data and reach theoretical saturation. While saturation was not achieved due to the limitations of iterative data collection, this thesis produced exploratory frameworks that lay groundwork for further research on how social meanings are constructed and navigated in relation to LGBTQI+ discourse.

Three core overarching frameworks emerged during the analysis: “LGBT as a Threat,” “Visibility Concerns,” and “Empathy-Driven Acceptance.” These narratives were not evenly distributed across the dataset but appeared with consistent internal structures and justification patterns.

The “LGBT as a Threat” framework constructed LGBTQI+ individuals not merely as different, but as active threats to moral, cultural, or national order. Respondents invoking this frame often relied on religious, traditionalist, or protectionist reasoning — sometimes equating LGBTQI+ with moral decay, social fragmentation, or the erosion of national values. These anxieties were often articulated through or adjacent to geopolitical narratives, where LGBTQI+ was framed as a foreign intrusion associated with Western liberalism and thus incompatible with national or cultural sovereignty. This framing positioned rejection not only as a moral stance, but as a form of cultural defense against perceived external interference.

Additionally, among Kazakh-language responses in particular, this framework appeared to draw on established discourses linking cis- and heteronormativity with religious propriety and social cohesion, creating a perceived moral imperative to reject LGBTQI+ identities as incompatible with the imagined normative core of Kazakhstani society.

The “Visibility Concerns” framework did not equate LGBTQI+ existence with harm per se, but constructed public expressions of LGBTQI+ identity, such as activism, education, public displays of affection, or media representation, as inappropriate or excessive. Respondents expressing this view often acknowledged LGBTQI+ people in private but objected to their presence in public discourse, describing it as “propaganda” or unnecessary visibility. In case of “propaganda” concerns, the sense of threat did not stem from LGBTQI+ existence itself, but from its public visibility. By contrast, more ambivalent formulations, such as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, reflected unease with interactional norms and comfort boundaries rather than outright rejection. DADT occurred exclusively among Russian-language responses. In both cases, visibility itself became the perceived problem. By shifting focus away from prejudice and onto LGBTQI+ expression, this framework implicitly justified exclusion, suggesting that friction arises not from rejection, but from individuals’ refusal to remain out of sight.

The "Empathy-Driven Acceptance" framework presented a contrasting logic. Rather than resting on ideological agreement, acceptance here was rooted in ethical non-interference, humanistic ideas about personal autonomy, or relational proximity. Respondents often framed support not in terms of advocacy, but as a refusal to judge, drawing on narratives of lived experience, moral tolerance, or respect for individual choice. Together, these patterns point to potential pathways through which sexual and non-cisgender prejudice can be reduced, particularly when interpersonal empathy or moral restraint override dominant exclusionary discourses. Rather than representing full endorsement of LGBTQI+ rights, this framework suggests the presence of ethical gray zones where acceptance is possible, if still contingent.

While gender and language differences were not the initial focus of this study, they emerged as significant interpretive variables, with statistically significant patterns observed within the dataset. Kazakh-speaking respondents more frequently invoked moral and religious rationales and described more rigid perceived network norms, suggesting stronger conformity pressures. Russian-speaking responses, in contrast, reflected greater ambiguity, linguistic tentativeness, and descriptive variation. Gendered patterns followed a similar logic: male respondents were more likely to describe their networks as homogeneously negative and to express rejectionist views, while female respondents more often used neutral or relational language. These contrasts do not suggest fixed or essential cultural or gender divides, but point to how linguistic and gendered environments shape socialization processes that influence what individuals internalize as speakable, legitimate, or socially risky to express.

These findings open several avenues for future research. First, the exploratory frameworks presented here may serve as starting points for more targeted studies — whether through larger-scale surveys, in-depth interviews, or ethnographic observation — to examine how these discourses are reproduced, resisted, or reinterpreted across different contexts. Second, while this study only

briefly addressed language-based variation, differences in threat perception and patterns of normative conformity identified in Kazakh-speaking environments deserve more sustained, longitudinal, and comparative attention. Kazakhstan is not a monolithic society, and future research should investigate how distinct linguistic communities navigate shifting cultural narratives around national identity, religion, and gender roles. Third, future work might further explore how global discourses, particularly those tied to Western liberalism, Russian soft power, and transnational conservatism, intersect with local meaning-making practices around LGBTQI+ issues.

Finally, the "Empathy-Driven Acceptance" framework highlights potential entry points for pragmatic interventions in Kazakhstan's context of sexual and non-cisgender prejudice. These gray zones may offer culturally legible spaces for shifting attitudes in settings where explicit ideological support is limited. For both NGOs and state stakeholders, such spaces present policy opportunities — for example, promoting human rights and non-discrimination through values-based education, supporting dialogue-centered community initiatives, or integrating inclusive practices into school and media programming — that do not rely on full ideological alignment but can nonetheless foster greater tolerance.

As a final note, this thesis does not offer closure but proposes a generative analytical lens through which future studies can explore the contested and evolving landscape of gender and sexual politics in Kazakhstan.

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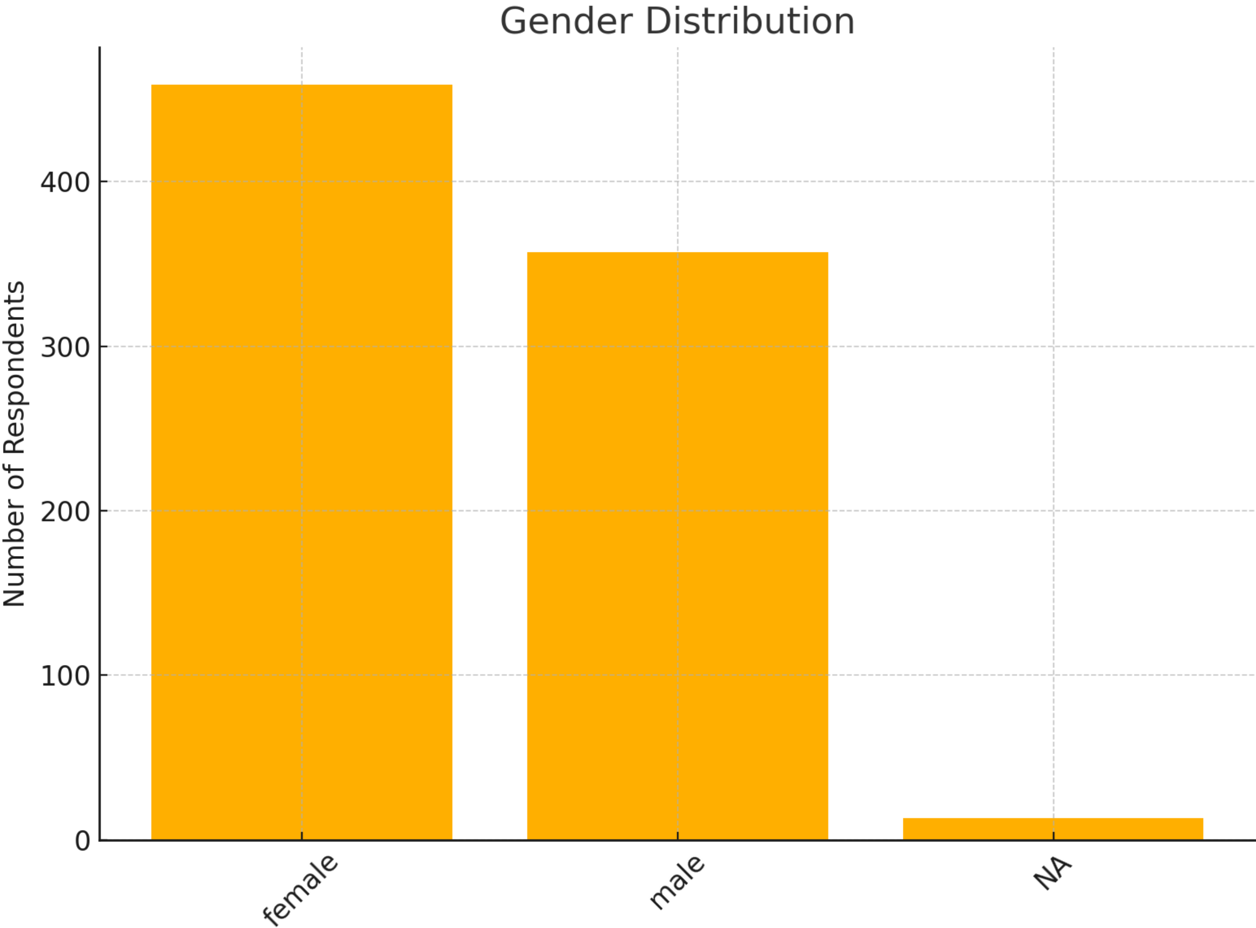
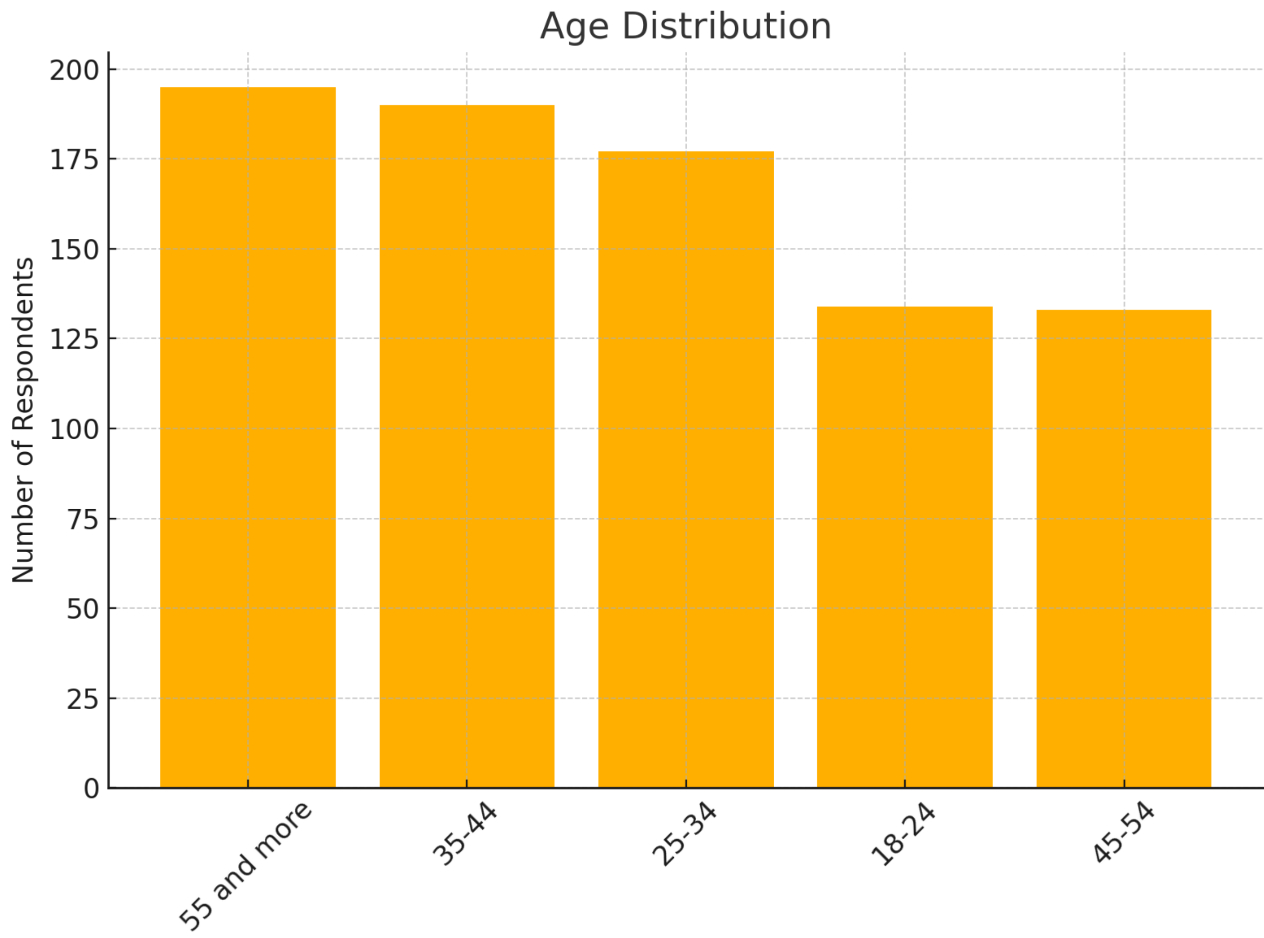
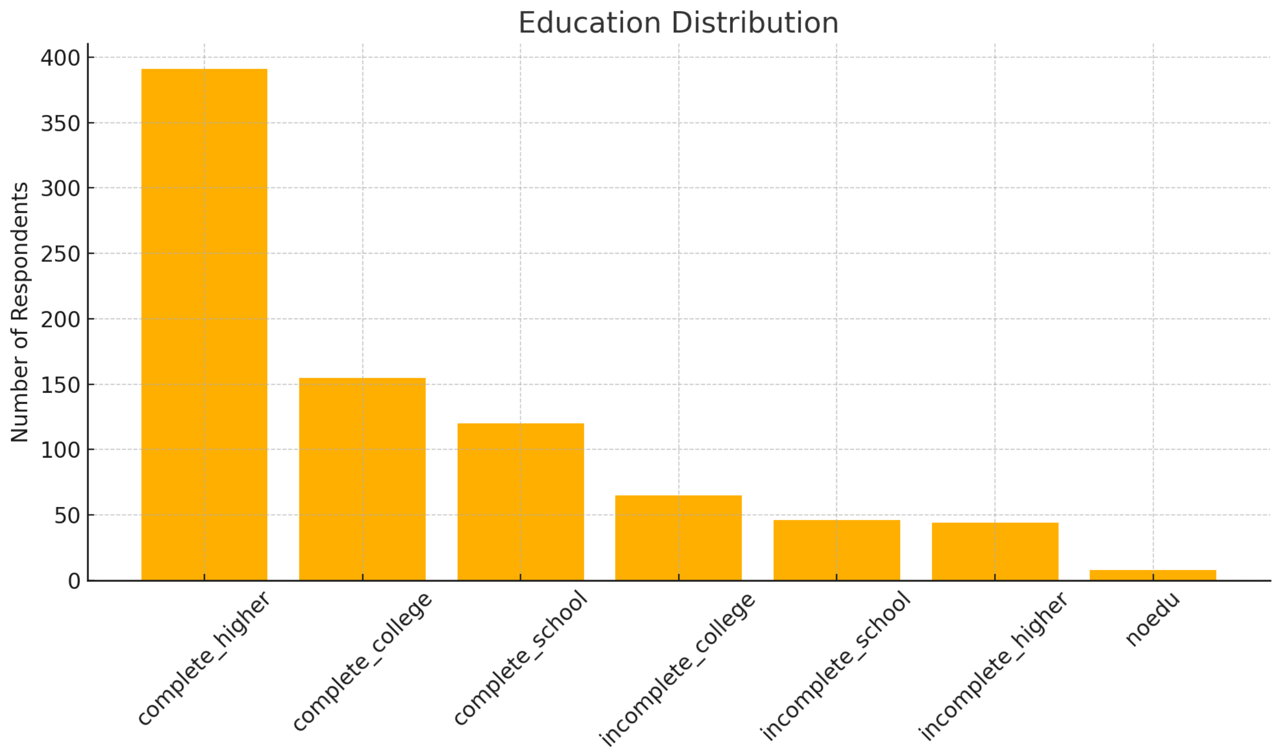
Appendix A: Gender Distribution



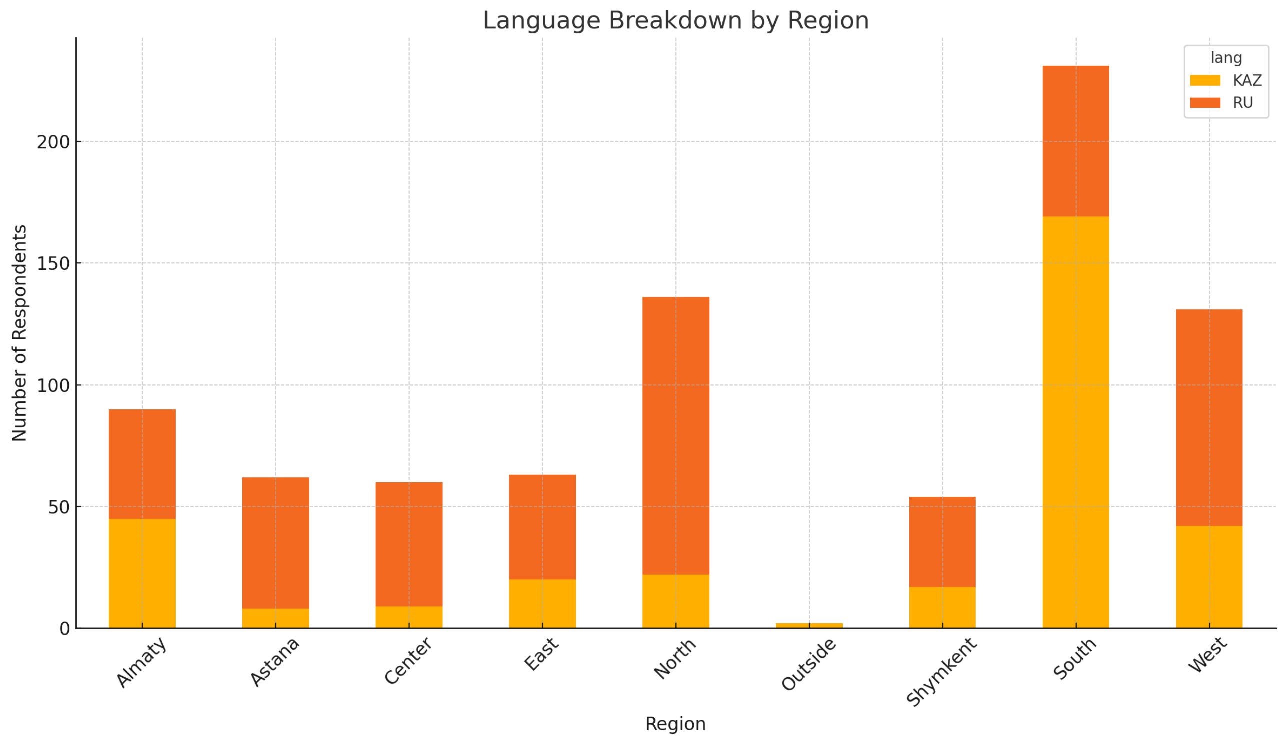
Appendix B: Age Distribution



Appendix C: Education Level Breakdown by Region



Appendix D: Language Breakdown by Region



Appendix E: Interview Questions List – English Version

- How would you describe your overall attitude toward LGBT people?
  - Do you feel the same way about all LGBT people —lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and trans individuals?
- When did you first hear about the concept of LGBT? In what context?
- Did any specific source of information influence the development of your views on this topic?
- In your opinion, how do most people in your social circle feel about LGBT individuals?
- Some people view LGBT issues as a threat to traditional values. What do you think about this perspective?
  - You mentioned traditional (moral, religious) values. Could you explain what specific values you are referring to?
  - Do you believe it is possible to preserve these values while also accepting LGBT people?
- Others believe that LGBT people should be accepted only if they do not display their orientation publicly. What is your opinion on this?
- Some people consider LGBT rights to be, essentially, human rights. What do you think about this?
- What does the term "LGBT propaganda" mean to you, and could you give examples of what you consider LGBT propaganda?
- How did you first learn about LGBT propaganda?
- Who, in your opinion, is responsible for what you consider LGBT propaganda?
- What forms of public behavior by LGBT individuals do you consider acceptable?
- Have you personally known anyone who identifies as LGBT?
  - How did knowing an LGBT person affect your views, if at all?
  - Was there a difference between what you thought about LGBT people before and after getting to know someone who is LGBT?
- How would you react if a close friend or family member came out as LGBT?
- How would you define what it means to be a man in contemporary Kazakhstan?
  - How do people in your social circle talk about men who do not conform to traditional male roles?
- How would you define what it means to be a woman in contemporary Kazakhstan?
  - How do people in your social circle talk about women who do not conform to traditional female roles?
- How would you describe the government's position on LGBT issues in Kazakhstan?
- Is it easier for you to talk about LGBT issues in Kazakh, Russian, or another language—and why?
- Which media sources do you trust for information on LGBT topics?
  - Have you noticed differences in how LGBT issues are discussed in Kazakh-language and Russian-language media?

Appendix F: Codebook for responses in Kazakh

Category	Definition	Subcategory	Definition	Application	Quote example
General Attitudes	Labels that capture the general stance respondents take towards LGBTQI+ issues.	**Indifferent**	Respondents show apathy or detachment from LGBTQI+ topics, often stating they “do not care” or “it doesn’t affect them.”	**Personal/ Network**	Бәрібір, бар болса бола берсін
		Extremely Negative	Respondents express overt hostility or aggression, including expressions of contempt, insults, or a desire for exclusion.	**Personal**	Оларды ату керек, түрмеге жабу керек
		Negative	Respondents express negative views but without the intensity of hostility seen in extremely negative attitudes.	**Personal & Network**	Маған ұнамайды қарсымын олардың құқығын қорғаған дұрыс емес деп ойлаймын
		Neutral but no Propaganda	Respondents state they are indifferent or neutral as long as LGBTQI+ identities are not publicly visible or promoted.	**Personal**	ЛГБТ қоғамдастығының көшеге шығып, өз ойларын жарнамалап, ашық - шашық жүргендеріне түбегейлі қарсымын. Бұл оларды қамап, адами құқықтарын шектеу деген сөз емес…Сондай болып жаратылған болса, айғайламай-ақ жүре берсін...Жас балаларға оларды жарнамалап, үгіт жүргізу заңмен жазалануы керек.
		Neutral	Respondents express impartiality on LGBTQI+ issues.	**Personal & Network**	Орташа көзқарасым

		Positive	Respondents express acceptance, support, or advocacy for equal rights and positive views about LGBTQI+ individuals.	**Personal & Network**	Колдаймын. Ар Адам Ози шешеды кимди жаксы коруды
		Unclear	Respondents provide ambiguous, inconsistent, or contradictory views that make their stance difficult to interpret.	**Personal & Network**	Менің достарымның бірі лгбт
Fear/ Threat-Based Framing	Negative attitudes driven by fear, perceived threats, or moral/ religious justifications.	**LGBT as a “threat”**	LGBTQI+ individuals are seen as a threat to traditional family structures or cultural values.	**Personal & Network**	Лгбт қазақтардың жауы
		Concern with children	LGBTQI+ rights are perceived as a risk to children's safety or moral development.	**Personal & Network**	Лгбт жаман ұйым когамга зияны тиеді кіші балдар соларга еліктеп кетуі мумкін
		Concern with gay propaganda	LGBTQI+ visibility is perceived as an attempt to influence or indoctrinate others.	**Personal & Network**	Дариптеуге, насихаттауга карсымын
		Citing moral/ religious values	Opposition to LGBTQI+ rights based on religious beliefs or moral standards.	**Personal & Network**	Лгбтға қарсымын Алла қарсы затқа менде қарсымын
		Queerness as a disorder	LGBTQI+ identities are viewed as pathological or unnatural.	**Personal**	Түк пайдасы жоқ тек есі жетілмеген псих.травма алған адамдар қоғамы деп ойлаймын…
		Isolating LGBT	LGBTQI+ identities are not seen as fit to live in the Kazakhstani society.	**Personal**	Менин ойым олар баска жакка барып турса

Hidden Agenda	Opposition driven by viewing LGBTQI+ rights as a political movement or an imposed agenda.	**LGBT as Movement/ Organization**	LGBTQI+ rights are seen as a political agenda rather than a social reality.	**Personal**	бұл қоғамға кері әсер тигізетін ұйым деп есептеймін
		Concern with gay propaganda	LGBTQI+ visibility is perceived as an attempt to influence or indoctrinate others.	**Personal & Network**	Лгбт оте лас уйым жастардын санасын бузады колдамаймын
Empathy-Driven Acceptance	Positive or accepting attitudes driven by personal connections, humanistic beliefs, or familiarity.	**Personal Connections or Self-Identification**	Respondents reveal their connection to LGBTQI+ individuals or their own sexual or gender identities.	**Personal**	Менің достарымның бірі лгбт
		Universal humanity	Respondents express acceptance based on belief in universal humanity.	**Personal**	Бейтарап, олар да адамдар гой, жамандык коргем жок олардан
		Human rights	Acceptance based on the belief that individuals have the right to choose their own sexual orientation.	**Personal**	Мемлекетіміз демократиялық болғанға әрине бұл қауымдастықтың өмір сүруіне құқығы бар. Алайда менің жеке ойым, мен қарсымын. Біздің дәстүр мен дінге, қалыпты көзқарасымызға қарсы дүние

Appendix G: Codebook for responses in Russian

Category	Definition	Subcategory	Definition	Application	Quote example
General Attitudes	Labels that capture the general stance respondents take towards LGBTQI+ issues.	**Indifferent**	Respondents show apathy or detachment from LGBTQI+ topics, often stating they “do not care” or “it doesn’t affect them.”	**Personal & Network**	Равнодушен к ним. Моим близким это безразлично.
		Extremely Negative	Respondents express overt hostility or aggression, including expressions of contempt, insults, or a desire for exclusion.	**Personal**	Отрицательное. Это ненормально. Это болезнь. Больных нужно лечить.
		Negative	Respondents express negative views but without the intensity of hostility seen in extremely negative attitudes.	**Personal & Network**	Против. Против шествий и пропагандирова ние. Из моей семьи никто не поддерживает это движение.
		Neutral but no Propaganda	Respondents state they are indifferent or neutral as long as LGBTQI+ identities are not publicly visible or promoted.	**Personal**	Нейтральное. Но пропаганду не поддерживаю.
		Neutral	Respondents express impartiality on LGBTQI+ issues.	**Personal & Network**	Нейтральное, практически нет близких людей из ЛГБТ. Но не считаю, что нужно их подвергать гонениям. В моем окружении нет представителей сообщества. В целом отношение толерантное.

		Positive	Respondents express acceptance, support, or advocacy for equal rights and positive views about LGBTQI+ individuals.	**Personal & Network**	Отношусь положительно, люди как люди. Относятся хорошо уважают их выбор.
		Unclear	Respondents provide ambiguous, inconsistent, or contradictory views that make their stance difficult to interpret.	**Personal & Network**	Они не должны выделяться. Я не могу описать отношение других людей к ЛГБТ сообществам. Это не моё дело.
LGBT is a Threat	Negative attitudes driven by fear, perceived threats, or moral/religious justifications.	**LGBT as Threat**	LGBTQI+ individuals are seen as a threat to traditional family structures or cultural values.	**Personal & Network**	Отношусь отрицательно так как это не соответствует правилам казахского менталитета развращает молодёжь. Отрицательное, многие опасаются за будущее поколение.
		Concern with Children	LGBTQI+ rights are perceived as a risk to children's safety or moral development.	**Personal**	Нейтральное. Не поддерживаю пропаганду среди детей.
		Moral/ Religious/ Traditional Values	Opposition to LGBTQI+ rights based on religious beliefs or moral standards.	**Personal & Network**	Я не приветствую, это развращает молодежь. Отрицательно,они против традиционных устоев,это же противоестественно, я против.
		LGBT as a Disorder	LGBTQI+ identities are viewed as pathological or unnatural.	**Personal**	Нейтрально отношусь. Но считаю что это больные люди.

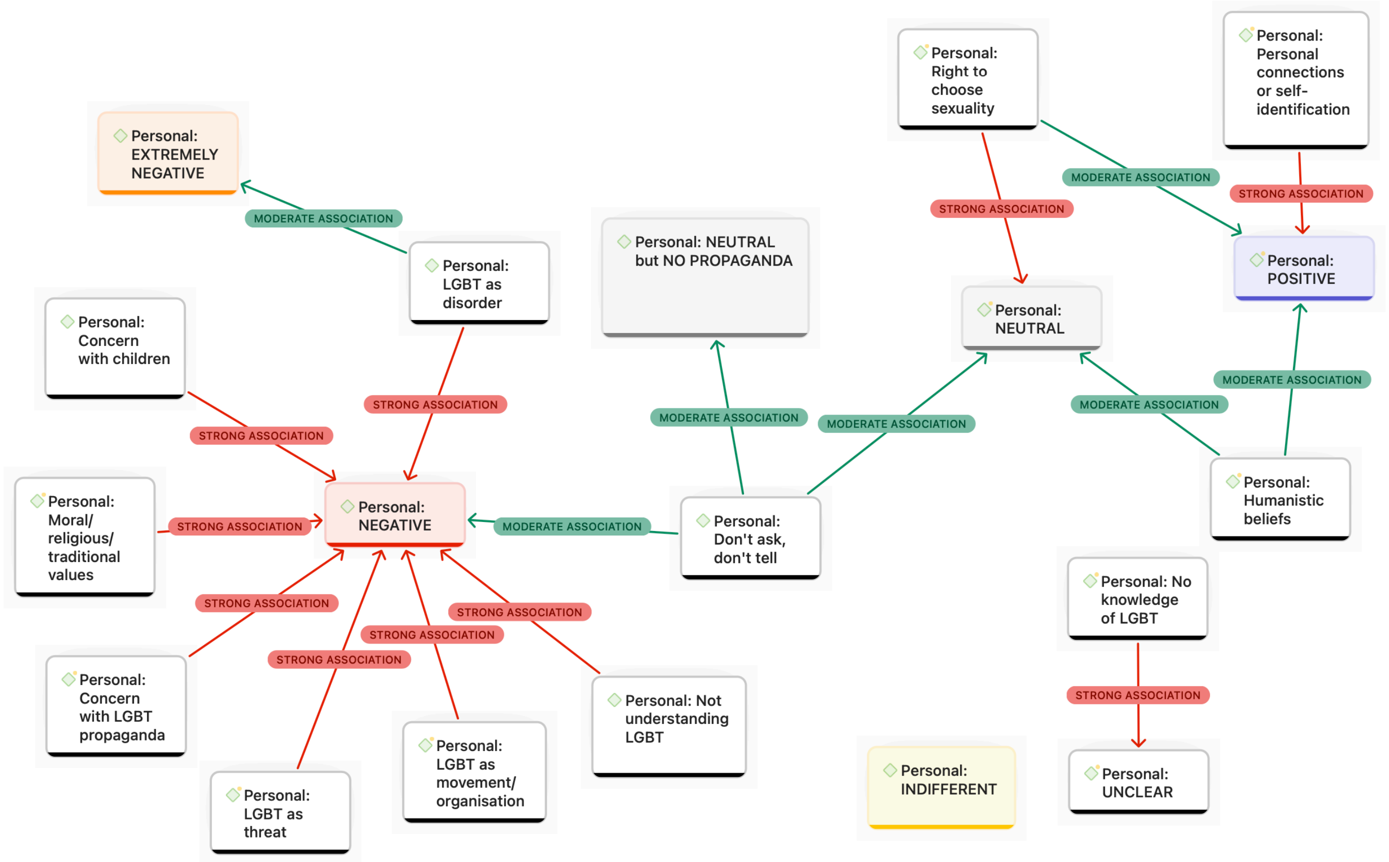
		Being Queer is Unnatural	LGBTQI+ identities are seen as violating natural or cultural norms.	**Personal**	Отрицательное отношение, все что не естественно, не должно возникать.
		Not Understandi ng LGBT	Respondents express a lack of understanding or difficulty relating to LGBTQI+ individuals.	**Personal**	Не поддерживаю и не понимаю.
Propaganda Concerns	Attitudes driven by concerns about LGBTQI+ visibility, resulting in negative, neutral, unclear, or indifferent positions.	**Propaganda as Western Influence**	LGBTQI+ rights are framed as an imported Western ideology that contradicts local traditions.	**Personal & Network**	Больной мозг у людей и гонка за западом.
		Propaganda as Connection with TV/ Movies	LGBTQI+ representation in movies, TV, and pop culture is perceived as a form of propaganda.	**Personal & Network**	Мои близкие против таких сообществ, против показа их по телевидению, против их выступления.
		Propaganda as Marches/ Meetings	LGBTQI+ activism, pride parades, or public demonstrations are framed as propaganda.	**Personal & Network**	Против. Против шествий и пропагандирова ние.
Hidden Agenda	Opposition driven by viewing LGBTQI+ rights as a political movement or an imposed agenda.	**LGBT as Movement/ Organization**	LGBTQI+ rights are seen as a political agenda rather than a social reality.	**Personal**	К ЛГБТ? Нейтрально. Не интересуюсь, но знаю о "повесточке', которое сильно актуально в современных реалиях игр, киноиндустрии, и разных сериалах. Такое я не поддерживаю. Откровенный бред, пропаганда, идиотизм, изменииния оригинала ради гендор, полит коректности.

		Concern with LGBT Propaganda	LGBTQI+ visibility is perceived as an attempt to influence or indoctrinate others.	**Personal & Network**	Категорически против. Против пропаганды и общественных собраний. Очень негативно, особенно если это видят младшее поколение.
Visibility Regulation	Attitudes driven by the belief that sexual preferences, particularly LGBTQI+ identities, should remain private and not be publicly visible or discussed. This includes both negative and neutral positions.	**Don't Ask Don't Tell**	Attitudes that accept LGBTQI+ individuals only if their identities remain private. This includes negative views (e.g., "LGBTQ+ individuals should be silent") and neutral views (e.g., "I don't care as long as it's not public").	**Personal**	Негативно, пусть сидят тихо.
		Concern with LGBT Propaganda	LGBTQI+ visibility is perceived as an attempt to influence or indoctrinate others.	**Personal & Network**	Негативно. Защитить детей от пропаганды. Им без разницы, главное чтобы не было пропаганды и агитации.
		Neutral but no Propaganda	Respondents state they are indifferent or neutral as long as LGBTQI+ identities are not publicly visible or promoted.	**Personal**	Нейтральное. Но пропаганду не поддерживаю.
Em pathy-Driven Acceptance	Positive or accepting attitudes driven by personal connections, humanistic beliefs, or familiarity.	**Personal Connections or Self-Identificatio n**	Respondents express positive attitudes based on relationships with LGBTQI+ individuals.	**Personal**	У меня есть сестра и поэтому я нормально отношусь к ним.
		Humanistic Beliefs	Respondents express acceptance based on belief in universal humanity and equal rights.	**Personal**	Вполне такие же как и мы.

		Right to Choose Sexuality	Acceptance based on the belief that individuals have the right to choose their own sexual orientation.	**Personal**	Отношусь хорошо, личная жизнь это право любого человека.
Indifference and Apathy	Attitudes characterized by indifference, discomfort, or a lack of clear stance.	**Apathy/ Discomfort**	Respondents express discomfort discussing LGBTQI+ topics or show indifference.	**Personal**	Не против, главное чтобы меня не затрагивали.
		No Personal Connections	Respondents express a lack of connection to LGBTQI+ individuals.	**Personal**	Отношусь нейтрально, не имею знакомых такого сообщества, но не хочу, чтобы мои дети принадлежали к ним.
		No Knowledge of LGBT	Respondents express a lack of knowledge or awareness about LGBTQI+ issues.	**Personal**	Я такого не знаю.
		Feeling Sorry for LGBT	Respondents express pity without a clear stance on LGBTQI+ rights.	**Personal**	Безразличие и местами сожаление.
		No conversations about LGBT	Respondents indicate that LGBTQI+ issues are not discussed within their network, contributing to uncertainty or passive attitudes.	**Network**	Не знаю, не интересно, не спрашивала.

Group Differences	Differences in network attitudes based on gender, religion, and age, with men, Muslims, and older generations tending to be more negative, while women are more neutral.	**Network**	Старшее поколение относится отрицательно. Подростки относятся лояльно. Родители, старшие родственники - очень отрицательно. Включается традиции, консерваторские взгляды, религия и т.д. тому подобное. Друзья если мусульманины то плохо, а большинство моего окружения относятся нейтрально. Без негатива.

Appendix H: Personal Code Co-occurrence Network Map



Appendix I: Interview Summaries

Question	KUF01	KUF06	KUF08	RF04	RF05	RF11
Overall attitude toward LGBT	Neutral; opposes activism.	Strongly against.	Strongly against, emotional.	Neutral, but dislikes overrepresentation in media	Indifferent privately, against public displays.	Neutral but uncomfortable.
Same attitude toward all LGBT groups	Same attitude toward all.	All are wrong.	All are wrong. More emotional about non-cisgender people	Generalized neutrality for sexual minorities, does not understand non-cisgender identities but supports their freedom to self-identification	Generalized indifference.	Not specified clearly.
First exposure to the concept of LGBT	School, negative mentions from adults.	Internet, 2–3 years ago.	Internet, no real-life encounters.	Cannot recall exactly, long ago.	During perestroika (late 1980s).	Cannot recall.
Source of influence	Social media and discussions.	Personal belief; no external influence.	Instagram and anti-LGBT influencers.	Self-formed views; minor exposure via media.	Soviet tabloids ("AIDS Info").	Mentions rallies/ protests.
Views in social circle	Mixed (some against, some neutral, few supportive).	Everyone around is against.	Everyone is against.	40% negative, 20% ignores the topic, 40% indifferent. Men mostly negative	Daughter neutral; men conservative.	Majority neutral.
LGBT as threat to traditional values?	No	Yes, against God's creation.	Yes, strongly tied to religion and national values. As a mother most concerned about children	No	Yes, mentions moral degradation.	Agrees, but cannot articulate clearly.
What traditional values?	N/A	Created male/ female by God; natural roles.	Created male/ female by God; natural roles.	Kazakh traditions integrated within contemporary realities	Traditional family values	Struggled to answer.
Can values be preserved while accepting LGBT?	N/A	No, incompatible.	No, they contradict society's foundations.	Yes	N/A	N/A
Acceptance only if private?	Unconditional acceptance short of some types of activism	Rejects both private and public expressions.	Rejects both private and public expressions.	Unconditional acceptance	Agrees: private acceptable, public not (same as religion)	N/A
LGBT rights as human rights?	Agrees only to equal rights (not more).	No, believes LGBT have psychological issues.	No, society must prioritize traditional values.	Technically agrees but tired of visibility.	Agrees but emphasizes not "flaunting."	N/A
What is LGBT propaganda?	Fighting for human rights	Supporting LGBTQI+ rights	Gatherings, social media presence.	No conceptualization	Excessive public displays (parades, media).	Associates it vaguely with protests, calls it provocation
First learning about LGBT propaganda	Internet.	Internet	Instagram.	From anti LGBT "propaganda" influencers	Not specified.	Protests.
Who is responsible for propaganda?	Individual people (not against all)	Probably organizations	LGBT organizations, the West	No one	Media and activists.	Protesters.
Acceptable public behavior	Yes	None	None	Yes	Private life, discreet behavior.	N/A
Personal acquaintance with LGBT	Follows a pro-LGBTQI+ online influencer	No.	No.	No direct acquaintances.	No. Only heard of daughter's acquaintances.	N/A
Change after knowing someone LGBT?	N/A.	N/A.	Trans-man: No	N/A.	N/A	N/A.

Reaction to family/ friend coming out	Will be shocked but will accept eventually	Strong disapproval.	Strong disapproval.	Will respect their choice	Will respect their choice	N/A
Definition of manhood in Kazakhstan	Traditional provider role, personal responsibility	Must stay masculine as created.	Must stay masculine as created.	Honesty (regardless of a gender)	Traditional roles emphasized, responsible for supporting a family	N/A
Views on non-traditional men	Ok but they should still be providers and be responsible	Completely wrong.	Against; deviation from natural role.	N/A	If they are happy, they are happy	N/A
Definition of womanhood in Kazakhstan	Traditional caregiver role if married or a mother. Otherwise free to do anything	Must stay feminine as created.	Motherhood and nurturing emphasized.	Honesty (regardless of a gender)	In a family, equal role with a man	N/A
Views on non-traditional women	Ok	Completely wrong.	Strong disapproval.	N/A	Let them be	N/A
Government position on LGBT	N/A	Negative	Negative but it should protect traditional values more	Not informed (uncomfortable discussing it)	Government is indifferent but should either prevent LGBT "propaganda" or work on "propaganda" of traditional values	N/A
Preferred language for talking about LGBT	Okay in both but Russian is easier due to work environment.	Kazakh	Kazakh	Russian	Russian.	N/A
Trusted media sources on LGBT	None; distrusts biased sources.	No clear trusted source.	Anti-LGBT activists on Instagram.	No specific source	No specific source mentioned, distrusts media outlets	N/A
Difference between Kazakh and Russian media	None	None	N/A	N/A	Russian media seen as more liberal.	N/A