

Title Page

**QUEER SHAME: LIVED
EXPERIENCES OF LGBTIQ+
COMMUNITIES IN CONTEMPORARY
MONGOLIA**

Dissertation

By

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Abstract

The transition from the socialist regime (1924–1989) to the democratic movement of the 1990s enabled Mongolian lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and other sexual and gender minorities (LGBTIQ+) to establish organized community spaces and advocate for their human rights. Although Mongolia has enacted seemingly progressive laws on certain aspects of sexuality, enforcement remains inconsistent. The inclusion of hate crime and hate speech protections for LGBTIQ+ individuals in the 2017 Criminal Code aligns with the constitutional vision of “a humane, civil, and democratic society.” However, many Mongolian queer individuals continue to experience shame, violence, hatred, and discrimination in private and public spheres.

This dissertation explores the lived experiences of Mongolian queer individuals through the lens of shame, employing qualitative research methods, critical discourse analysis, and an exploratory survey. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 20 queer participants using a mix of purposive and snowball sampling, a critical discourse analysis of 100 media texts published between 2010 and 2023, and a small-scale survey of 52 queer individuals and allies. Findings reveal that shame functions as an integral identity construct and a persistent affective state, shaping life experiences across personal, social, and national contexts. Sources of shaming include media narratives, state mechanisms, peers, and family members, often compelling individuals to hide, resist, migrate, or live in the literal and social form of “exile.”

The study argues that when embraced and critically addressed through activism, knowledge production, and queer solidarity, shame can be transformed into self-acceptance and self-esteem. Central to this process is the role of power, which reinforces systems of privilege and oppression while simultaneously shaping the emotional and political terrain of queer life in Mongolia. Ultimately, shame can persist as a lifelong scar, emerge as a resolved episode through resilience, or become a site of transformation and resistance, allowing queer individuals to reclaim subjectivity on their own terms. This dissertation contributes original insights into the intersections of shame, sexuality, and national identity in the lived experiences of Mongolian queer communities.

Keywords: Shame, Shamed Citizens, Queer Mongolians, Lived Experiences, LGBTIQ+

List of Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
APA	American Psychological Association
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DP	Democratic Party of Mongolia
GLAAD	Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, and Plus
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia
MNB	Mongolian National Broadcaster
MOH	Ministry of Health of Mongolia
MOJHA	Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs of Mongolia
MLSP	Ministry of Labor and Social Protection
MPP	Mongolian People's Party
MSM	Men who have Sex with Men
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NHRCM	National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia
OHCHR	The United Nations Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights
PLHIV	People Living with HIV
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Finally, this work is a tribute to my late father, who always aspired to pursue a PhD but dedicated his life to supporting his family as a dutiful son, father, husband, brother, grandfather, and teacher. I thank my mother, siblings, and partner for their tireless support, love, and care for my academic aspirations. This has truly been a family endeavor.

¹ The spelling “Centre” in *LGBT Centre* follows the organization’s official British-English naming and registration, whereas “Center” in *Youth for Health Center* reflects its official American-English usage.

Chapter 1: Introduction

“Best to expose well than to hide poorly” – A Mongolian saying

1.1. Statement of Research Problem

Homosexuality in Mongolia has historically been considered taboo and largely invisible (Billé, 2010, p. 192). Although same-sex practices existed among clergy before 1924 and among individuals during the socialist era (1924-1989), they remained both socially taboo and criminalized. Man-on-man sexual activity was officially condemned as perverse and mentally debilitating (Terbish, 2013, p. 262), and homosexuality was only decriminalized following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Nyamdorj, 2012; Terbish, 2013). Despite a small population of roughly 3.5 million, public narratives about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ+)² people remain predominantly negative.

Historical and cultural legacies further complicate understandings of rights and identity. A Mongolian proverb, “Suffer with your own rule, rather than frolic under someone else’s rule” (Хүний эрхээр жаргахаар өөрийн эрхээр зов), originally referencing colonial oppression, reflects the enduring tension between autonomy and externally imposed norms. Ironically, the phrase “someone else’s rule” can be literally interpreted as “human rights,” underscoring a historical skepticism toward concepts of individual freedom and externally defined rights.

Contemporary testimonies from Mongolian queer individuals illustrate the profound impact of social and familial shaming. Anaraa Nyamdorj, a queer trans*³ man and co-founder of the Mongolian LGBT Centre, described the psychological burden of public condemnation:

“Because when you are yourself, when you don’t hide and aren’t ashamed, and aren’t scared, people’s attitude is: ‘You gotta be scared, you must hide, and you must be

² LGBTIQ+ “refers to same-sex behavior, identities or relationships, and non-binary gender identities” (OHCHR, 2011). Alternatives to this terminology include SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics) and sexual and gender minorities, which are sometimes used interchangeably.

³ “Transgender” people have a gender identity, or gender expression, that differs from their assigned sex. Transgender people are sometimes called transsexual if they desire medical assistance to transition from one sex to another. Transgender is also an umbrella term: in addition to including people whose gender identity is the opposite of their assigned sex (trans men and trans women), it may include people who are not exclusively masculine or feminine (people who are genderqueer, e.g., bigender, pangender, genderfluid, or agender) (APA, 2024; GLAAD, 2024).

ashamed of yourself.’ And that’s really difficult, that’s very hard. I can’t breathe” (LGBT Centre documentary, 2010).

Anaraa’s experience of shame is particularly intense, as public efforts to shame and silence him are linked directly to his sexuality. Similarly, other queer Mongolians recount familial rejection so severe that it provoked suicidal ideation (LGBT Centre, 2012). These experiences reveal that shame is not merely an internalized emotion but a socially imposed mechanism, reinforced through patriarchal norms, heteronormativity, and rigid expectations of masculinity, femininity, and respectable citizenship.

When asked about his experience of shame a decade later— during Pride in Mongolia in August 2022, eight months before his death in April 2023⁴—Anaraa stated:

“I am still the one who is not hiding, for whom it is no longer possible even to hide, neither am I ashamed of myself or my life. Shaming was imposed from external parties, and that is still the case.”

Anaraa is not alone in his experience of being shamed for who he is. Queer people in Mongolia—particularly queer youth—often face emotional and physical abuse at school and within their families. Many queer individuals report experiencing peer bullying in educational settings and homelessness resulting from domestic violence (Ganbaatar et al., 2021, p. 14). Although shame may appear to be a personal emotion rooted in internalized guilt or embarrassment, it is also imposed by external forces through systemic means and mechanisms. Thus, shame functions both as an individual feeling and as a socially constructed emotion, produced through patriarchal, societal, and moral norms that marginalize LGBTIQ+ individuals and position them as subordinate under heteronormativity.

Despite legal protections established under the 1992 Constitution and the 2015 Criminal Code, including hate crime provisions, enforcement is weak, and dominant societal narratives continue to frame queerness as “un-Mongolian,” morally deviant, and socially threatening (United States Department of State, 2017; Takano et al., 2020). Public discourses often conflate queerness with Western influence, reinforcing exclusion and marginalization. Limited understanding of gender and sexuality, particularly in educational institutions, further perpetuates prejudice,

⁴ The communication occurred via Meta Messenger. Anaraa Nyamdorj (1976–2023) died in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, following an unsuccessful attempt to obtain refugee status in the Netherlands and subsequent deportation to Mongolia.

bullying, and domestic violence, sometimes resulting in homelessness or refugee migration (Ganbaatar et al., 2021; GIZ, 2022).

The queer community in Mongolia is diverse, shaped by intersecting factors such as ethnicity, class, gender identity,⁵ and socio-economic status. An intersectional approach is therefore essential to understand the multiple and overlapping forms of oppression and shame experienced by sexual and gender minorities. Shame manifests individually and collectively, symbolically and discursively, constraining identity expression and social belonging while simultaneously motivating strategies of resistance and community formation.

This research investigates the socio-cultural dynamics of shame among queer Mongolians, examining how social, familial, and institutional pressures shape lived experiences, limit authentic self-expression, and influence the formation of queer communities. Understanding these dynamics is critical for developing culturally sensitive policies, promoting social inclusion, and supporting sexual and gender minorities in Mongolia.

1.2. Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Shame plays a central role in the lived experiences of queer Mongolians. It is often imposed by external sources such as family, peers, media, and the state, casting queer individuals as dishonorable or illegitimate within their communities. Family rejection—including verbal abuse and emotional violence—frequently results in severe psychological distress and social marginalization, as documented in testimonies of queer Mongolians who have experienced intense familial and societal shaming.

Shame is both a powerful political emotion and a negative affect closely tied to identity and social hierarchies. Graff and Korolczuk (2022) defined shame as “the reaction to not being recognized,” emphasizing its role in reinforcing social stratification. Linguistically, the word shame derives from an Indo-European root meaning “to cover” (Hollander, 2003), suggesting an

⁵ “Gender identity” refers to each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical, or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech, and mannerisms (ICJ, 2007. Yogyakarta Principles, Introduction).

intimate relationship between the self and others—one involving concealment or hiding (Ahmed, 2005).

At the individual level, shame can prompt self-reflection or the development of a new self, whereas shaming is an externally imposed act through which individuals or institutions communicate that someone “ought to be ashamed” (Probyn et al., 2019). In the context of sexuality, shame is foundational to the creation of modern gay identity, with unacknowledged shame generating anger and resentment and acknowledged shame possessing transformative potential (Munt, 2018). Like other moral emotions—such as anger, guilt, and contempt—shame is deeply connected to social and moral norms (Elster, 2007).

Although psychology and psychoanalysis have traditionally addressed shame at the individual level, sociology offers critical insights into its broader social dimensions. Scheff (2000) argued that although shame may be declining in modern societies, awareness of it is increasing, warranting sociological analyses of how it operates within racial, gender, ethnic, and class relations. Liu (2017) further challenged the binary opposition between pride and shame, proposing a queer psychology of shame that reclaims it as a politically charged and productive affect.

A comprehensive understanding of shame can be framed through a three-part conceptualization:

1. Political/national shame—a meta-perspective focusing on individual responsibility in responding to shaming, often linked to societal contexts;
2. Social/group shame—informed by symbolic interactionism and psychoanalytic approaches, examining how shame functions in social relationships and group dynamics; and
3. Personal/individual shame—addressing shame as a personal emotional phenomenon, drawing on object relations theory and narrative identity (Frost et al., 2021).

Drawing on Tomkins’s (1995) work, Sedgwick (as cited in Gould, 2009) argued that shame arises not from parental prohibitions but from a breakdown in communication caused by nonrecognition from others, resulting in feelings of nakedness, alienation, and diminished dignity. This social nonrecognition is common among marginalized groups, including queer individuals, who often experience misrecognition or rejection from family, friends, and society (Gould, 2009). Taylor (1994) emphasized that such misrecognition can cause real harm, effectively imprisoning individuals within distorted identities.

Dominant societal groups often employ “rhetorical silence” to marginalize and render invisible the lived experiences of queer populations, particularly those existing outside heteronormativity (Glenn, 2004). This silence extends to specific subgroups, such as LGBTIQ+ elders, who often face exclusion within both queer and gerontological discourses, leaving them without adequate social support or cultural representation (Brown, 2009). Studies have found that LGBT[IQ+] older adults engage in riskier health behaviors, including alcohol consumption and unsafe sexual practices, compared with their non-LGBT[IQ+] counterparts (Choi & Meyer, 2016, p. 1). Additionally, some researchers view older adults as potential burdens on the economy, social welfare systems, and family life (Frost et al., 2021, p. 33).

Beyond identity and age, the concepts of perversion and deviance remain relevant in sociopolitical and economic analyses. Questions about whether such labels genuinely threaten society and how harm should be measured remain open for future research. Economic studies have revealed the substantial costs of stigma and exclusion faced by LGBTIQ+ populations. For example, a 2014 Indian case study estimated that homophobia costs the country approximately \$31 billion annually, underscoring the need to integrate empirical economic data with social, cultural, and ethical analyses of SOGIESC issues.

In sum, this framework conceptualizes shame as a complex political and emotional phenomenon deeply intertwined with identity, social hierarchies, and moral norms. Scholars such as Graff and Korolczuk (2022) define shame as a response to nonrecognition, while Ahmed (2005) highlights its linguistic roots in concealment. Shame functions at multiple levels:

1. Political/national—focusing on collective responsibility and societal contexts;
2. Social/group—exploring its role in relationships and group dynamics; and
3. Personal/individual—examining its emotional and psychological dimensions (Frost et al., 2021).

Queer scholarship reframes shame as potentially transformative, challenging its assumed opposition to pride (Liu, 2017; Munt, 2018). Misrecognition, rhetorical silence, and exclusion—particularly affecting marginalized groups such as LGBTIQ+ individuals and elders—produce alienation and reinforce distorted identities (Gould, 2009; Glenn, 2004; Brown, 2009; Frost et al., 2021). Beyond identity, the framework incorporates sociopolitical and economic perspectives, highlighting the tangible costs of stigma, such as the estimated \$31 billion annual economic loss

in India due to homophobia (Badgett, 2014). Integrating psychological, sociological, and economic dimensions, this framework underscores shame's dual potential to reinforce oppression or catalyze transformation.

The term *queer*, as used in reference to queer Mongolians in this thesis, serves as an umbrella term encompassing all SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics) identities that are not heteronormative. It is also employed strategically to engage with queer theory and the notion of queerness as a challenge to binarism and patriarchal normative structures. In this thesis, I consciously—but with some reluctance—use the term *sexual minority/minorities*, fully aware of its minoritizing implications. Similarly, variations of *LGBTIQ+* are recognized as having Western connotations, which often do not resonate meaningfully in national or local (especially non-Western) contexts.

By contrast, *sexual and gender minorities* refers to “people whose biological sex, sexuality, gender identity and/or gender expression depart from majority norms” and encompasses “considerable diversity as well as a multiplicity of identities and behaviors” (O'Malley et al., 2018, p. 10). *Trans* (with an asterisk) is understood in the same sense as Halberstam (2017), who described it as a designation that “holds open the meaning of the term ‘trans’ and refuses to deliver certainty through the act of naming” (p. 3). Throughout this thesis, *LGBTIQ+* is sometimes used interchangeably with *sexual and gender minorities*, whereas *queer* is employed in a more subversive sense to question and transgress heteronormativity.

Valentine (2007) argued that “the notion of ‘transgender’ is a central cultural site where people work out the meanings of gender and sexuality, rather than it being an index of marginality or simply an identity category” (p. 14). Through a complex social and political process he called *imagining transgender*, Valentine examined the concept beyond non-normative gender and sexual identities. He contended that “the institutionalized contexts of identifying ‘transgender’ would not be able to explain the lived experiences of this particular community” (pp. 14–15). While I do not explore this process in detail here, what is crucial for my argument is the notion of the “imagined community.” Drawing on Valentine's insights, I highlight the queer community in Mongolia as an achievement, aligning with Anderson's (1991/1983) definition of community as “not a natural fact but an achievement, a process that does not happen without the exercise of agency and power” (p.

[insert page number]). As a cultural site, the imagined community in Mongolia is not conventional; rather, it emerges as a community of marginalized individuals.

1.3. Research Aim and Objectives

Based on the above-mentioned theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and the initial ideas and arguments presented, this study seeks to address the question: How has shame discursively constructed the lived experiences of the queer community in contemporary Mongolia? This study adopts a transcendental phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of queer Mongolians, adding nuanced “dimensions to the study of human experiences through qualitative research (Sheehan, 2014).

Through both explicit and implicit “shaming” discourses, which often group LGBTIQ+ individuals alongside other socially marginalized “deviants” such as sex workers and drug users, the queer community is explicitly marginalized and, at times, criminalized. This categorization reinforces historically dominant narratives of pathologization and deviance. This ostensibly simple question leads to deeper inquiries about what it means to be a Mongolian queer citizen today, considering intersecting identities related to nationality, gender, race, class, sexual identity, cultural capital, socio-economic background, legal status, health, personality, modernity, and age.

The primary research objectives are:

- To explore how the queer community and the general public in Mongolia perceive shame and sexuality.
- To analyze media representations concerning shame and queer identities in Mongolia.
- To investigate the lived experiences of Mongolian queer individuals in relation to shame, shaming, and sexuality.

Within this framework, I aim to formulate a context-specific definition of shame as understood by contemporary Mongolian queers and those impacted by it, drawing on social dimension perspectives enriched by queer and affective dimensions. I examine similarities and differences in how sub-groups within the queer community define shame and experience its

effects. Given that shaming discourses imply moral judgment, a key question is: What aspects of queer identity and behavior ‘bother’ authorities and state institutions? This research engages with scholarly debates to address these broader questions and uncover insights through shame.

This investigation represents a pioneering study within Mongolian queer studies, as no prior research has explicitly explored shame in this context. The term “contemporary” in the study’s title refers to queer individuals living in today’s post-Soviet Mongolian society; the analysis of queer lives during the socialist era is beyond the scope of this thesis.

This research also explores the socio-cultural dynamics shaping shame and its role in the lives of queer Mongolians. Many endure rejection not only from society but also from their families due to prevailing social and cultural norms. Themes such as shame and fear, love and longing, acceptance and rejection, nationalism and modernity, and sexuality and social norms are central to the lived realities of these marginalized individuals.

Comparative insights from other contexts, such as Vietnam, where homosexuality was labeled a “social evil” by state media in 2002 and equated with crimes like gambling, prostitution, and drug trafficking, provide useful parallels (Newton, 2014). These campaigns resulted in arrests of homosexual couples and highlighted the ways shame is institutionalized in some societies.

Given that sociology and psychology both study human beings as social individuals, their separation is largely artificial (Goudsblom, 2016). Similarly, just as history and sociology are intertwined, it is important to approach shame from both sociological and psychological perspectives. While definitions of “social evils” vary, it is widely recognized as a socially and culturally constructed concept (Javaid, 2015). Newton (2014) argues that “social evils” is a loose category in Vietnam encompassing homosexuality, and that the state has regulated non-normative gender and sexuality indirectly through campaigns against social evils since the 1950s (Newton, 2014, p. 259).

1.4. Research Questions

There are three key research questions which could include sub-questions as follows:

- 1) How do contemporary Mongolian queers define the concept of shame?

- What is the definition of shame by contemporary Mongolian queers?
 - What are its cultural and social implications?
 - What are the layers or dimensions of shame (resolved, unresolved, embraced, unacknowledged shame, etc.)
- 2) How does shame or shaming affect lived experiences of contemporary Mongolian queers?
- What does it mean to be shamed in a Mongolian way?
 - How does shame manifest in lived experiences of Mongolian queers?
 - How do acts of shame or shaming affect Mongolian queers in short- or long-term?
 - Who are the stakeholders involved in shame and what are their agenda or strategies of shaming sexual minorities in Mongolia?
- 3) What other concepts could be revealed about sexuality in Mongolia through exploring the notion of shame?
- Which new paths or topics of research can shame lead you to?
 - Are there other concepts lurking beneath or waiting to be discovered and explored to better understand lived experiences of contemporary Mongolian queers?
 - What are the potentials or transformative powers of shame that contemporary Mongolian queers can benefit from?

1.5. Hypothesis and Limitations

I hypothesize that acknowledged shame can serve as a catalyst for empowerment and transformation within queer communities across generations. This study contributes original insight by critically examining the experiences of Mongolia's queer population through the conceptual lens of shame. Building on Glenn's (2004) notion of "rhetorical silence" and Gould's (2010) exploration of affect and "ambivalence about self and society," I argue that state, media, and public shaming—manifested through dominant discourses—renders queer individuals invisible and cognitively subordinate. Moreover, domination, marginalization, and misrecognition or nonrecognition are also experienced affectively through the profound workings of shame. Confronting and embracing shame, rather than avoiding it, enables older and more self-aware

queer individuals to cultivate agency, fostering both personal liberation and broader social recognition.

This thesis analyzes narratives of lived experiences in a manner that is both personal and balanced, drawing on relevant literature. Although scholarship on memory—and the mechanisms of memory construction and selection in storytelling at both individual and social levels—is highly relevant, the scope of this thesis does not explicitly engage with these aspects, as the interviewees and survey participants are primarily young, contemporary queer individuals. Nevertheless, the politics of memory remains a crucial concept in identity construction and negotiation for marginalized groups, including queer communities. Similarly, the concept of stigmatization is examined insofar as it contributes to the social construction of shame.

Regarding field research in Mongolia, the initial plan included conducting desk research on socialist-era queer lived experiences through archival sources such as the Special Archives of the National Intelligence Agency, the National Archives of Mongolia, and the National Library of Mongolia. However, due to time constraints and bureaucratic challenges, this component of the research could not be completed. Nevertheless, interviews were conducted, and the research topic was presented to community members, allies, and scholars to gather detailed feedback and commentary.

1.6. Research Methodology

This study employs the concept of *lived experiences* intentionally to emphasize the complex entanglement between the discursive (i.e., how queer lives are talked about) and the phenomenal (i.e., how queer lives are actually lived) dimensions of identity and experience (Earl, 2014). Following Joan W. Scott's (1991) problematization of experience, this research recognizes multiple meanings of "experience" including its role as "the most authentic kind of truth," "the prior existence of individuals," and "the process by which subjectivity is constructed" (p. 782). The most relevant framing for this study is Scott's (1991) articulation of experience as "the lived realities of social life" (p. 784), which centers the agency, authenticity, and embodied realities of Mongolian LGBTIQ+ individuals.

The overarching research method of the dissertation is critical discourse analysis (CDA), particularly Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach (Fairclough, 2010), while being informed by Foucauldian notions of power and dominant discourses (Foucault, 1978). In analyzing institutionalized narratives and shaming discourses surrounding queerness in Mongolia, the study pays particular attention to how language, policy, and media function to regulate queer identities (Wambui, 2013).

This research also is grounded in feminist methodological frameworks, employing qualitative approaches such as semi-structured online interviews and a small-scale survey. These methods are selected for their capacity to center participants' voices, enable context-sensitive inquiry, and foster non-hierarchical, ethically reflexive researcher-participant relationships, aligning with feminist commitments to co-constructed and emancipatory knowledge production.

Feminist-informed qualitative approaches are crucial for this study as they provide a platform for marginalized voices, challenge traditional hierarchies in knowledge production, and emphasize participatory, non-exploitative research relationships (Oakley, 1981; Wambui, 2013). An ongoing scholarly debate concerns the extent to which qualitative research methodologies can be inherently feminist. Within this study, feminist-informed qualitative approaches are indispensable, as they foreground the lived experiences of marginalized groups, interrogate established hierarchies of knowledge production, and cultivate participatory, ethically grounded, and non-exploitative researcher-participant relationships (Oakley, 1981; Wambui, 2013).

These approaches are informed by a feminist commitment to social justice and the pursuit of broader societal change. As Oakley (1981) and other feminist scholars argue, ethical research design must avoid hierarchical, authoritarian, or manipulative dynamics between researcher and participant. Accordingly, my role as a researcher was not to extract data but to facilitate a respectful, dialogic space in which participants could share their experiences on their own terms.

This research also draws on intersectionality both as a theoretical lens and methodological tool. Intersectionality enables the analysis of social inequalities, power relations, and identity construction across multiple levels, including gender, sexuality, class, nationality, ability, and age. Although the primary focus is on Mongolian queer individuals, references are also made to

Vietnamese queer communities in a comparative context to reflect broader patterns of marginalization and cultural specificity.

The queer community in Mongolia is not a single, homogenous entity; it is diverse and multifaceted shaped by national and ethnic background, socioeconomic status, age, sex, gender and sexual identity, race, class, religion, education, upbringing, and other intersecting factors. In this context, an intersectional analysis—one that highlights the multiple and overlapping sources of oppression affecting marginalized groups—is essential for understanding the experience of shame among queer individuals. Similarly, multiple dimensions and forms of shame shape the lived realities of LGBTIQ+ individuals in Mongolia. Shame is deeply felt, internalized, acknowledged, ignored, resisted, and rejected—both named and unnamed—individually and collectively, discursively and symbolically.

As Lutz (2015) notes, the relationship between researcher and participant is always situated, with both parties bringing intersecting identity positions into the interaction. Thus, intersectionality must be explored on both the narrative and analytical levels. Interviewees often highlight specific identity categories—such as gender, class, or nationality—that are under attack and thus become salient in their self-narratives (Lutz, 2015).

This multilayered analysis shifts the focus away from essentialist understandings of identity and toward how individuals negotiate multiple, shifting identities in everyday life. Moreover, it acknowledges that individuals may experience both oppression and privilege, depending on the context (Lutz, 2015, p. 42). As Hillsburg (2013) reminds us, effective intersectional research must avoid policing identity boundaries and prioritizing the emotional safety and vulnerability of participants.

Data collection involved three main methods:

1. Semi-structured interviews
2. Critical discourse analysis of media content
3. A small-scale survey focused on perceptions of shame

Interviews were conducted using a mix of purposive and snowball sampling methods with their advantage of accessing hard-to-reach populations, starting with key contacts in the Mongolian LGBTIQ+ communities. These included Enkhmaa Enkhbold (Executive Director of the LGBT Centre of Mongolia) and Nyampurev Galsanjamts (also known as Nyamka, Project Manager at the Youth for Health Center). As a former co-founder and executive director of the LGBT Centre, I was able to access a wide network of queer individuals and community leaders, including those living abroad as asylum seekers, students, or educational and economic migrants.

Interview questions (see Appendix I) included both general and targeted prompts—beginning with warm-up topics such as coming-out stories and community involvement, and moving toward more complex questions about shame, activism, rights, and inter-generational differences. Interviewees frequently raised the concept of shame—both verbally and affectively—demonstrating its deep relevance to their lived experiences.

Surveys were distributed and interviews conducted between November 2021 and August 2022, primarily via online platforms due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and the broader global context, including the Russo-Ukrainian war. Interviews were transcribed, translated, and analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis, with attention to recurring themes and power-laden language.

In May 2023, I conducted in-person fieldwork in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, following the easing of COVID-related border restrictions. During this time, I introduced my doctoral research at community events, shared findings from my published article “*Shamed Citizens: ‘Exilic’ Lived Experiences of Contemporary Mongolian Queers*,” and administered the small-scale survey. These events were co-organized with the LGBT Centre, Youth for Health Center, All for Education! National Education Coalition, and the governmental human rights agency.

The target population for interviews consisted of queer Mongolian individuals with transnational experiences—those who had lived abroad or left the country due to sexual and gender identity-related persecution. The sample also included a few non-queer, heterosexual allies who offered critical insights into the broader context of queer life in Mongolia.

Participants were recruited through trusted community leaders using respondent-driven snowball sampling (Neuman, 2014). Interviews averaged 90 minutes in duration, with notes and

transcriptions prepared immediately following each session. All participants were fully informed of the research purpose, ethical considerations, and confidentiality protocols. Pseudonyms were used to protect their identities.

Due to time constraints, limited interview numbers, and difficulties accessing certain populations (e.g., intersex, lesbian, bisexual, rural, and elderly individuals), the study has several limitations. These gaps highlight the urgent need for further research into Mongolian queer diasporas and queer migration more broadly.

1.7. Ethical Considerations

This research involved several important ethical considerations to ensure the protection, dignity, and autonomy of all participants.

To safeguard privacy, all interviewees who requested anonymity were anonymized or assigned pseudonyms. For the sake of consistency, pseudonymization was applied to all interviewees regardless of request. Personally identifiable and sensitive information has been removed or altered to maintain confidentiality. The information sheet and consent form provided to participants are included in Appendix II.

The study followed the *Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0* (franzke et al., 2020), which served as the ethical framework for online interviews conducted via Facebook/Meta. The informed consent was obtained prior to or during each interview, in line with these guidelines.

In the case of a publicly available YouTube podcast featuring a queer refugee living in Europe, written informed consent was obtained via email from the content creators to allow citation of material from the podcast.

This study also involved survey participants aged 16 and 17. Although the survey did not include questions that were explicitly sensitive or potentially harmful to minors, particular care was taken to consider the age-specific needs and vulnerabilities of these younger participants. As the researcher, I took special care to ensure the process was conducted respectfully, ethically, and with appropriate sensitivity.

The chapter analyzing media representations of shaming discourses contains examples of derogatory and offensive language. While it is essential to cite such language accurately to convey the intensity and harm of these discourses, especially in relation to queer identity and public discourse, particularly vulgar or demeaning terms have been partially censored using asterisks (e.g., “f****”) to reduce potential harm to readers, while preserving the analytical intent.

Finally, I acknowledge that this thesis incorporates excerpts from my previously published work. Chapter 3, *Background on Contemporary Mongolian Queer Communities*, is adapted from my entry in *The Global Encyclopedia of LGBTQ History* (GALE), titled “*Mongolia: The State of LGBTQI Rights in This Landlocked East Asian Country Historically and in the Twenty-First Century.*” Additionally, Chapter 6, *Shamed Citizens in Exile*, is based on my peer-reviewed article, “*Shamed Citizens: Exilic Lived Experiences of Queer Mongolians Abroad,*” published in *Intersections: East European Journal of Society and Politics*. These acknowledgments are made to ensure transparency, uphold academic integrity, and clarify the use of previously disseminated material.

1.8. Significance of the Research

Given the political, legal, social, and cultural circumstances surrounding queer Mongolians—as well as emerging questions about their sexual and national identities—it is essential to investigate their lived experiences as they are *actually* lived, rather than how these experiences are discursively constructed or portrayed by the state, media, or public. Attending to lived experience makes queer agency visible. Documenting the history of queer Mongolians not only addresses a significant gap in the country’s overall historiography but also empowers future generations to ground their existence in a more inclusive and accurate historical narrative.

Dominant discourses frequently frame queer lived experiences within heteronormative “boxes” or pigeonholes, often misrepresenting or erasing them. State and public narratives tend to be biased, contributing to the silencing and marginalization of queer voices. These tensions are further complicated by the impacts of modernization and globalization, which introduce additional layers to the negotiation of identity.

This research also brings a novel comparative aspect by introducing parallel analyses of “social evils” from other Asian contexts. The concept of “social evils” is considered holistically encompassing social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions. This prompts important questions: Is the perceived threat to society from these so-called “evils” consistent across national contexts? If harm occurs, how can it be measured, and to what extent does it vary?

Although not central to the thesis, such questions highlight important directions for future research on the LGBTIQ+ community, particularly concerning the economic costs of discrimination and exclusion from employment, healthcare, family life, and broader social participation. For example, a 2014 study on India estimated that homophobia costs the country approximately \$31 billion annually due to stigma and exclusion (Badgett, 2014). This underscores the potential of economic arguments—alongside social, cultural, and ethical ones—in advocating for LGBTIQ+ rights.

This study further seeks to explore how, under specific conditions, shame may be transformed into an empowering and affirming experience for queer individuals. By investigating shame as a culturally and nationally embedded affect with transformative potential, this research offers a unique contribution to queer studies—particularly in the underrepresented context of Mongolia.

Moreover, this research will generate much-needed historical, sociological, and cultural insights into the ways queer sexuality and shame have been understood, ignored, or distorted in public and state narratives. Findings will inform the work of LGBTIQ+ NGOs and advocates by providing an evidence-based foundation for policy development and community empowerment. This study also serves as a steppingstone for Mongolian academia to explore affective concepts such as shame both creatively and empirically.

As a researcher, I believe this inquiry will not only empower LGBTIQ+ individuals in Mongolia but also foster mutual learning through dialogue and collaboration with community members. Understanding the lived experiences of past and present queer communities is crucial for informing future strategies and actions within the broader queer rights movement. Without this knowledge, it is difficult to determine how best to advocate equality, dignity, and social justice.

Finally, at the national level, this research addresses a broader issue of scholarly neglect and internalized shame in academic and knowledge-production spaces. For instance, a prominent sociological reference on 20th-century Mongolian social stratification fails to mention LGBTQ+ individuals altogether. Instead, it frames globalization as a threat to national security (Gundsambuu, 2002, p. 639) and uses the term *shuumar*—referring to male-to-male sexual relations in monastic settings—only in the context of criminal statistics (p. 512).

Other key reports, such as those by the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia and the ruling party's human rights institute, address LGBTIQ+ issues solely through a legal or rights-based lens, without seriously engaging with affective experiences such as shame in an academic context. This thesis seeks to bridge these gaps, initiating a critical conversation that integrates personal narratives, cultural dynamics, and social structures into the evolving field of queer studies in Mongolia.

1.9. Outline of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into eight chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the study by presenting the research problem, objectives, research questions, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, methodology, hypotheses, ethical considerations, and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2, Literature Review, examines shame as a relational, political, and affective phenomenon central to understanding queer subjectivities. Rather than being solely an individual emotion, shame operates across families, communities, and nations as a marker of otherness, a mechanism of social control, and a potential catalyst for collective action and social transformation. Queer theory, drawing on Foucault (1978), Butler (1993, 2004), and Deleuze (1990), highlights how identities are simultaneously constrained by and resistant to normative structures, with sexuality, affect, and relationality producing possibilities that challenge hegemonic norms. Lived experiences of shame reveal the coexistence of self-doubt, internalized stigma, pride, and resilience, illustrating how marginalized individuals navigate structural oppression while cultivating affective solidarity (Dresler-Hawke, 2010; Liu, 2017).

Structural analyses of oppression, including Young's (1990) framework of exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence, situate shame within broader social hierarchies. When considered alongside research on collective shame (Dresler-Hawke, 2010; Liu, 2017), it becomes clear that affective experiences are intertwined with questions of social identity, historical accountability, and reparative engagement. Furthermore, the intersections of shame, sexuality, and citizenship underscore the socio-political stakes of belonging, as queer identities challenge normative notions of inclusion while mobilizing collective affect to both enforce and contest hierarchies. Overall, shame emerges as a site of vulnerability and agency, reflecting both the constraints imposed by systemic oppression and the transformative potential of collective affect, solidarity, and imaginative engagements with community and justice.

Chapter 3, *Background on Contemporary Mongolian Queer Communities*, explores the evolution of LGBTIQ+ rights in Mongolia within the context of democratization and globalization since 1989. Under socialism, discussions of sexuality were taboo, and legal frameworks often fluctuated between tolerance and criminalization, reflecting strong Soviet influence. Post-1990 reforms, including the decriminalization of homosexuality in 2002, the 2009 civil registration law for transgender individuals, and anti-discrimination provisions in the 2015 Criminal Code, represent progress toward human rights compliance. However, these measures are weakly enforced, and societal stigma rooted in patriarchal norms, nationalist discourse, and limited public understanding of gender and sexuality continues to marginalize queer communities, fostering experiences of shame and exclusion.

Cultural and political forces shape how queerness is perceived—often as a Western import threatening Mongolian identity and masculine ideals symbolized by historical figures like Genghis Khan. Ultra-nationalist groups, negative media portrayals, and family rejection reinforce discrimination, leading some queer Mongolians to seek refuge abroad. Despite this, activism and cultural expression through Pride events, literature, and art have begun challenging dominant narratives and reclaiming historical depictions of sexual diversity. The chapter highlights the complex interplay of law, culture, nationalism, and affect, emphasizing the need for intersectional approaches to understand and advance queer rights in Mongolia.

Chapters 4, *An Exploratory Study of Shame in Queer Mongolian Communities*, examines the experiences of shame and shaming among Mongolia's queer community, highlighting its pervasive psychological, emotional, and social impacts. Survey respondents described shaming as harmful, undermining dignity, self-confidence, and mental health, often constituting a form of social and emotional abuse. Participants linked shame to entrenched societal stereotypes, limited understanding of sexual and gender diversity, and structural inequalities, emphasizing its roots in cultural norms, education, and public awareness. Shaming was identified as both deliberate and systemic, functioning to marginalize sexual minorities, enforce patriarchal norms, and reinforce social hierarchies. Respondents reported diverse emotional and behavioral responses, ranging from depression, guilt, and withdrawal to proactive self-defense and community engagement, reflecting the intense psychological burden of shame alongside acts of resilience.

Despite these challenges, participants expressed a strong desire for social transformation and spaces free from shaming, emphasizing education, narrative sharing, and communal support as key strategies for healing and empowerment. Activism, queer movements, and accountability measures, including legal frameworks and public advocacy, were highlighted as mechanisms to address systemic injustice and reduce the harmful effects of shame. Cultural and generational shifts, facilitated by democratization, globalization, and critical engagement with Western narratives of sexuality, were identified as contributing to greater awareness and acceptance of sexual and gender diversity. Collectively, these findings illustrate the persistence of structural stigma, the agency and resilience of queer individuals, and the potential for transformative social change through both personal and collective interventions.

Chapter 5, *Media Representation of Shame and Mongolian Queers*, examines how Mongolian LGBTIQ+ communities are represented in both domestic and international media, analyzing 100 media pieces published between 2010 and 2023. Mongolian-language outlets constitute the majority, often employing sensationalist or scandal-driven framing that portrays queer identities as threats to social norms, family structures, and national security. English-language coverage, by contrast, emphasizes human rights, recognition, and social change, highlighting key events such as attacks against transgender individuals, the establishment of the LGBT Centre, Pride events, and legal reforms. The chapter highlights how media representations are influenced by ownership structures, political and economic interests, and cultural norms,

revealing the interplay between text, discursive practice, and broader social practice. Through critical discourse analysis (CDA), it shows that Mongolian media often reproduce heteronormative, patriarchal ideologies and perpetuate stigma, while English-language media tend to adopt a more progressive, rights-based perspective.

The chapter also explores the mechanisms of shaming and marginalization experienced by queer individuals in Mongolia. Derogatory language, sensational headlines, and xenophobic framing function as discursive practices that reinforce societal stigma and constrain visibility. Queer individuals and activists respond through counter-discourses, digital platforms, and public visibility, using strategies such as anonymous storytelling, podcasts, and queer performance to resist normative pressures. The analysis highlights the tension between systemic discrimination, ineffective legal enforcement, and efforts to promote social inclusion. Media thus emerges as a critical arena where power relations, ideologies, and resistance are negotiated, shaping public understanding of queer identities while influencing advocacy, policy, and societal attitudes toward LGBTIQ+ communities in Mongolia.

Chapter 6, *Shamed Citizens in Exile*, empathizes exilic experiences of Mongolian queers. Whether they migrate for education, economic opportunities, or as refugees and asylum seekers due to SOGIESC-related persecution, Mongolian queers navigate varying degrees of shame and exile. The reasons Mongolian queers migrate are multifaceted: sexual, gender, and racial discrimination; SOGIESC-based violence and hate crimes; poverty; family rejection; and even death threats. These challenges are rooted in entrenched patriarchal and stereotypical social norms regarding sexual and gender minorities, reinforced by the unwillingness or inability of law enforcement and state authorities to intervene effectively. Such systemic neglect and societal hostility render queer individuals feeling disqualified, secondary, and “failed” citizens. Nationalism in Mongolia functions not only as a gendered and sexist practice but also as a deeply heteronormative one (Billé, 2010: 191).

Chapter 7, *Discussion*, investigates the complex role of shame within queer Mongolian LGBTIQ+ and migrant communities, framing it as a socially mediated and politically potent affect rather than merely an individual emotion. Drawing on sociological and queer theoretical perspectives (Scheff, Liu, Ahmed, Probyn), shame is examined as both a mechanism of exclusion

and a catalyst for identity negotiation, resilience, and community formation. The chapter emphasizes the intersectional dimensions of shame, shaped by gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class, while highlighting how queer theory challenges conventional binaries, allowing shame to be understood as productive and transformative. Participants' narratives reveal how embracing shame can foster self-reflexivity, collective empowerment, and the construction of non-normative subjectivities that resist heteronormative and patriarchal norms.

The chapter also explores the historical, cultural, and affective dimensions of shame, including its roots in religious and moral frameworks (Butler, Munt) and its oscillation with positive affective experiences (Tomkins, Sedgwick). Nathanson's Compass of Shame provides a framework for understanding behavioral responses such as withdrawal, avoidance, and self- or outward-directed aggression. These dynamics are compounded by social misrecognition and familial rejection, illustrating how shame operates structurally and relationally. Finally, the chapter situates shame within broader socio-political and cultural contexts, including the regulation of queer identities through "social evils" and capitalist notions of success, highlighting how shame and failure can also serve as tools for resistance, identity reconstruction, and the creation of supportive, queer communities.

Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation by answering research questions, while addressing thematic areas that emerged throughout the research: lived experiences as a journey to authenticity, queer solidarity to overcome shame, and queer shame as a lifetime experience.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

“We live in an atmosphere of shame. We are ashamed of everything that is real about us, ashamed of ourselves, of our relatives, of our incomes, of our accents, of our opinions, of our experience, just as we are ashamed of our naked skins.” – George Bernard Shaw in *Man and Superman*

2.1. Shame and Sexuality: A Theoretical Overview

Shame is a relatively emergent concept within sociological inquiry, with its definition remaining somewhat ambiguous and contested (Scheff, 2000). Whereas psychoanalytic and psychological disciplines typically frame shame in individualized contexts, sociology emphasizes its social dimensions. Scheff (2000) argues that although experiences of shame may be diminishing in modern societies, societal awareness and reflexivity regarding shame are simultaneously increasing. He advocates for a sociology of emotions that critically examines how racial, gender, ethnic, and class dynamics shape experiences of shame. Extending this line of thought, Liu (2017) challenges the conventional binary opposition between pride and shame, proposing a queer psychology that disrupts this dichotomy. By reclaiming shame as a politically charged and generative affect, Liu positions it as a vital site for queer theorizing and resistance, reintegrating shame into public and scholarly discourse as a productive force.

Shame is fundamentally implicated in the construction of contemporary gay identity. Munt (2018) emphasizes its pervasive role in shaping self-perception and social positioning, while Butler (2004) contends that shame and homosexuality are deeply intertwined in Western contexts, rooted in the moral and cultural legacies of Christian traditions. Consequently, any structural analysis of gay life must critically account for the influence of shame. On other hand, non-Western scholars like Direk (202) analyze shame as both a social and political mechanism, showing how it regulates behavior, enforces norms, and disciplines marginalized groups.

From a psychological perspective, shame has been described as “the affect of indignity, of defeat, of transgression, and of alienation... [it] is felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul” (Sedgwick & Adam, 1995, p. 133). Tomkins (1995) similarly characterizes shame as an inner torment that renders the self vulnerable—feeling naked, defeated, alienated, and deprived of

dignity or worth. Donald L. Nathanson highlights shame as a critical regulator of human social behavior, maintaining social cohesion and conformity. Silvan Tomkins (1987) further conceptualizes shame as arising when positive affects, such as interest or joy, are interrupted or inhibited. Unlike other negative affects, shame is introspective, experienced internally, and distinct in its phenomenology.

Tomkins (1995) differentiates shyness, shame, and guilt primarily by the level of conscious awareness accompanying each experience. This differentiation stems from what he terms the “shame-humiliation system,” a unique constellation of neurological and psychological components. Sedgwick and Adam (1995) identify the “innate activator of shame” as the incomplete reduction of interest or joy (p. 134). Once shame is activated, the original positive affect may either be restored, inhibiting shame, or further suppressed, intensifying it (Sedgwick & Adam, 1995, p. 135). This dynamic interplay underscores the complexity of shame as an affective response, with duration and intensity varying across individuals and contexts.

Nathanson (1994), co-founder of the Silvan S. Tomkins Institute, elaborates a multi-phasic framework known as the Compass of Shame, in which shame culminates in a final, responsive stage following four preceding phases: the triggering source, physiological responses, cognitive appraisal, and decision-making. He defines shame as an interpersonal and interactional affect that emerges when positive affect is obstructed and attention becomes fixated on this impediment. Personal and societal expectations further shape the qualities and experience of shame. Within the cognitive phase, many queer individuals internalize the belief that “there is something wrong with their sexuality” (Nathanson, 1994, p. 126), illustrating how shame is both intrapsychic and socially constructed, particularly in heteronormative and patriarchal contexts.

The intensity of shame often motivates avoidance of its implications, a phenomenon Nathanson (1994) identifies through four characteristic responses: withdrawal, avoidance, attack self, and attack other. Withdrawal involves concealing the authentic self and retreating into isolation or depression. Avoidance manifests in evasion of shame, sometimes through maladaptive coping such as substance use. “Attack self” encompasses self-blame and masochistic tendencies, while “attack other” projects shame outward through aggression or blame. These patterns reveal how shame shapes both individual behavior and social interactions.

Building on Tomkins, Sedgwick (as cited in Gould, 2009) posits that early experiences of shame arise not from parental prohibition alone but from disruptions in relational acknowledgment. Shame “floods” the individual when a desired circuit of communication is interrupted, producing feelings of being “naked, defeated, alienated, and lacking in dignity or worth” (Tomkins, 1995, p. 133). Marginalized groups, particularly lesbian and gay individuals, frequently experience nonrecognition in critical relational spheres—parents, siblings, friends, colleagues—affecting identity formation (Gould, 2009, p. 223). Taylor (1994) emphasizes that misrecognition can inflict harm and act as a form of oppression, highlighting shame as both a personal and social phenomenon.

Beyond individual affect, shame intersects with broader sociopolitical mechanisms. Historically, the term “social evils” refers to morally problematic issues impacting society, including prostitution, disease, gambling, and racism (Watts et al., 2008). These classifications reflect prevailing social norms and often serve to marginalize non-normative groups, including queer individuals (Kozary, 2019). Newton (2012, 2014) illustrates how terms like “social evils” or “hooliganism” in Vietnam, China, and the former Soviet Union operated as state-sanctioned mechanisms to control behaviors deemed deviant, often under ideological or moralistic pretenses. Queer bodies and practices, thus, became sites of state anxiety, framed as incompatible with national ideals and obscuring the state’s role in producing conditions for perceived deviance (Foucault, 1978).

Silencing further compounds this marginalization. Glenn (2004) identifies “the rhetorical move of silence” as a mechanism to suppress subaltern voices, rendering queer experiences invisible within dominant public discourses. Brown (2009) expands on this by highlighting the systematic erasure of older LGBTQ+ individuals, whose intersectional identities—age, sexuality, and gender—leave them excluded from cultural narratives and social supports (p. 65–67). Homi Bhabha’s (1994) notion of a “third space” captures this liminality, illustrating how recognition is fragmented and belonging contingent. The silencing of queer elders thus reflects broader patterns of epistemic injustice embedded in both mainstream and queer-specific institutions.

2.2. Queerness and Queer Theory

While sociology, social science, and social psychology approach the notion of “social evils” from distinct analytical lenses, there remains considerable debate regarding what constitutes “evil.” As Javaid (2015) asserts, “evil” is a socially and culturally constructed category, contingent upon specific historical, political, and moral contexts. Behaviors or identities deemed “evil” in one cultural milieu may be normalized or valorized in another. This discursive fluidity underscores the importance of deconstructing the power relations embedded in such labels, particularly as they pertain to queer subjectivities.

Moral discourses, in this framework, serve as disciplinary mechanisms. Reich (1970) argues that morality functions to produce compliant, docile subjects who conform to an authoritarian social order, often at the expense of personal well-being, as individuals experience distress, repression, and humiliation. He further posits that “the family is the authoritarian state in miniature,” a primary site where children are socialized into normative roles and expectations as preparation for broader social conformity (p. 30). For queer individuals, especially in socio-cultural contexts where non-heteronormative identities are pathologized or criminalized, familial and societal disciplining operate as forms of moral policing.

Growing up queer under the persistent threat of being labeled “social scum” or deviant, individuals face a dual regime of control: one within the private sphere of the family and another across national, institutional, and cultural domains. These regimes do not merely correct behavior but work ideologically to render queer lives abject and morally suspect. Queer existence, in this sense, becomes framed as a “social evil,” a discursive and symbolic category that justifies surveillance, exclusion, and punishment. From a queer theoretical perspective, the invocation of “social evil” functions as a heteronormative tool of oppression, regulating desire and gender expression through moral condemnation and public shaming.

In this thesis, I draw upon queer theory and insights from identity politics to interrogate the roles Mongolian queers occupy as national citizens. While identity categories are often necessary for political recognition and advocacy, queer theory critiques the essentialism and rigidity embedded in these classifications (Warner, 1999). The term queer—once a pejorative—has been reappropriated to resist normative frameworks of gender and sexuality, offering a theoretical lens that deconstructs binary logics and challenges heteronormative and cis-normative assumptions

(Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1993). Rather than treating identity as fixed or universally intelligible, queer theory emphasizes its performative, fluid, and socially constructed nature.

In this context, I use “queer” as an inclusive term to encompass individuals in Mongolia who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, or otherwise express non-normative gender and sexual identities. This usage is both politically strategic and theoretically informed. Queer theorists argue that categories must remain open to contestation, particularly in post-socialist, postcolonial, or non-Western contexts, where globalized notions of identity intersect with localized cultural, legal, and socio-political dynamics (Altman, 2001; Puar, 2007). Thus, in this study, “queer” functions not only as an identity marker but also as a critical stance against dominant systems of categorization and exclusion.

Douglas Crimp’s (2003) notion of queer responsibility articulates an intergenerational ethic that emphasizes critical reflection on the politics of sex, the historical legacy of queer culture, and the affective dimensions of grief and shame. Emerging from his experience during the AIDS crisis in 1980s United States, Crimp contends that the queer community must confront the cultural and emotional aftermath of the epidemic—not through moralistic binaries of “good” versus “bad” gay sex, but by reclaiming the emotional and sexual freedom characteristic of the pre-AIDS era. Here, the politics of sex encompasses public health, media representation, community cohesion, and the enduring impact of structural and affective stigmatization.

Crimp (2003) frames queer responsibility as a historical and political project that fosters intergenerational reconnection. This reconnection is not merely about shared identity; it involves cultivating a culture of queer solidarity through mutual recognition, emotional openness, and resistance to moral policing. Applied to the Mongolian context, this framework suggests that older queer individuals bear responsibility to support younger queer generations—not through prescriptive identity politics but by nurturing spaces where non-normative identities and desires are affirmed as part of a shared human experience. Such an approach resists pathologizing discourses that frame queerness as deviant or morally suspect, affirming affect, memory, and collective resilience as central to queer life and politics.

State-led shaming discourses are not confined to individual national contexts but often follow broader regional patterns in Southeast and East Asia. For instance, the “social evils” campaign in Mongolia parallels similar efforts in 1980s China, where state campaigns targeted so-called “evils,” “pollution,” and “poison.” These campaigns were instruments of social control, mobilizing mass organizations, bureaucracies, and the public in the moral purification of society (Rydstrom, 2006). Comparable strategies were evident in Malaysia, where morality and cultural “pollution” were central to nationalistic and religious governance. In each context, the language of “poison” and “evil” functioned as affective governance, delineating acceptable citizenship by casting queer, deviant, or marginalized identities as societal threats.

Asian queer studies further illuminate these dynamics. Megan Sinnott (2010) highlights the nuanced, often fraught use of “queer” in non-Western contexts. She emphasizes that same-sex sexualities and transgender identities should not be seen merely as outcomes of Western influence or as purely “authentic” local forms but as complex articulations shaped by culturally specific gender regimes, nationalistic ideologies, capitalist labor markets, consumer practices, urbanization, and transnational flows (Sinnott, 2010, p. 17). Sinnott also critiques the uncritical application of “queer” outside its Western sociohistorical context, noting that the term may carry oppositional or socially alienating connotations (Sinnott, 2010, p. 20). This underscores the need for careful cultural translation and adaptation of queer theoretical frameworks to avoid overwriting local gendered and sexual lives.

Newton (2014) explores similar tensions in Vietnam, analyzing the translation of Western concepts such as sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) into local contexts. She notes that these frameworks can obscure or distort pre-existing understandings of gender and sexuality (Newton, 2014, p. 264). Newton critiques homogenized identity politics, arguing that labels like “LGBT” can obscure gendered subordination and reinforce patriarchal norms, highlighting the need for culturally grounded queer theorizing (Newton, 2014, p. 264). Her research also examines historical gender systems, such as masculine/feminine pairings, complicating linear narratives of LGBTQ+ identity development in Southeast Asia (Newton, 2014, p. 263).

In Taiwan, legal reforms illustrate selective adoption of queer theory to address sociocultural discrepancies. Taiwanese queer legal politics did not primarily aim to liberate

sexuality in a Western sense but sought to destabilize normative legal definitions by queering the institution of family (Lee, 2016, p. 986). Proposed legislation—including Marriage Equality, Civil Partnership, and Multiple Persons Household Bills—expanded legal recognition beyond homonormative partnerships, encompassing non-nuclear and non-sexual configurations. This approach aligns with queer theoretical critiques of assimilationist models of marriage, emphasizing alternative conceptions of intimacy, kinship, and care. The Constitutional Court’s 2017 decision recognizing same-sex unions thus benefited a broader spectrum of queer relationships.

Finally, issues of visibility and erasure remain critical. Glenn (2004) highlights “the rhetorical move of silence” as a mechanism through which dominant groups render marginalized experiences invisible. Building on this, Brown (2009) examines the compounded invisibility of LGBTIQ+ elders, whose intersecting identities of age and sexuality exclude them from cultural representation and social supports (Brown, 2009, pp. 65, 67). Older queer individuals occupy a liminal space marked by temporal and social ambiguity, marginalized across age, sexual orientation, gender, nationality, health status, and ability. This intersectional invisibility challenges queer theory and social gerontology to adopt more inclusive and nuanced frameworks.

2.3. Lived Experiences

Researching the lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ individuals, past and present, and the attendant notions of shame, is not simply a historical exercise. This study does not aim merely to document past lives as a neutral historian might; rather, it adopts a critical stance towards historical inquiry, drawing on the influence of Michel Foucault as interpreted by Joan Wallach Scott. Scott emphasizes that “questions you have in the present are not innocent or objective questions. There are questions that are related to the time you live in, to the political justifications, or challenges to the politics of the time you live in” (Scott, 1991). From this perspective, history is not linear; rather, it is punctuated by ruptures where meanings of key concepts such as “women,” “men,” “reason,” and “passion” shift across time, reflecting both societal and political forces (Scott, 1991). Such shifts reveal how phenomena perceived as “natural” or “normal”—for instance, labeling certain identities or behaviors as “evil”—function as socially constructed realities with coercive power, or Durkheimian social facts (Durkheim, 1982).

Within this framework, lived experiences are understood as historically and culturally situated, shaped by power relations and social constructions. Scott (1991) problematizes experience itself, demonstrating that it is always interpretive and contested, rather than transparent or self-evident. Her work, building on Foucault, underscores that categories of identity and sexuality are historically contingent and fluid, rather than fixed or universal. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how queer Mongolian identities are negotiated amid complex intersections of social, political, and national discourses, as well as an acknowledgment of the silences or absences in historical records that often obscure marginalized voices.

The concept of “lived experience” foregrounds the interplay between discursive and phenomenal dimensions of life (Earl, 2014). Drawing on Scott (1991), experience can be understood variously as “the most authentic kind of truth,” “the prior existence of individuals,” or “the process by which subjectivity is constructed” (p. 782). E.P. Thompson, as cited by Scott, emphasizes that experiences are felt as much as they are cognitively apprehended: “People do not only experience their own experience as ideas, within thought and its procedures, they also experience their own experience as feeling” (Thompson, 1978, p. 171). These feelings are mediated through cultural norms, kinship obligations, artistic expression, and religious beliefs, highlighting the centrality of affect in lived experience.

Affect, in this context, represents embodied, inarticulate, and often non-conscious dimensions of experience that shape both perception and action (Gould, 2010, p. 26). Such a perspective enables the study of queer lives to capture both the expressed and ineffable aspects of identity, emotion, and social interaction. It underscores the psychological dimension of experience and provides insight into how agency operates within constraints imposed by societal norms (Scott, 1991, p. 784).

Experience is dynamic, continuously shaped by cultural, historical, and political contexts. It resonates beyond immediate events, with feelings associated with past experiences potentially reactivated in different contexts. This research, therefore, moves beyond documenting historical subjects to critically engaging with how their experiences persist and resonate in the present. Following Scott’s Foucauldian-informed approach, questions posed in research are themselves

situated within contemporary political and temporal frameworks, emphasizing that experience is always relational and contextually mediated (Scott, 1991).

David Valentine's (2007) conceptualization of transgender identities further illuminates the study of lived experience. Rather than treating "transgender" as a fixed category, Valentine situates it as a cultural site where gender and sexuality are actively negotiated. This aligns with Benedict Anderson's (1991 [1983]) notion of "imagined communities," highlighting that queer communities, including in Mongolia, are constructed through ongoing social negotiation, collective agency, and shared practices, rather than pre-existing as static entities.

Personal narratives further reveal the affective dimensions of lived experience. Peter Gajdics's memoir *The Inheritance of Shame* (2017) recounts his traumatic experience of conversion therapy, reflecting the intersection of sexuality, intergenerational trauma, and societal stigma. Such accounts illustrate how shame operates as a socially mediated and deeply embodied phenomenon, shaped by broader historical and cultural contexts.

Shame, as experienced by queer individuals, is neither uniform nor static. It is continuously negotiated and resisted, varying according to historical, national, and cultural conditions (Direk, 2020, p. 47; Takács, 2016). A nuanced understanding of queer lived experience therefore requires attentiveness to these contexts, recognizing the complex interplay of identity, affect, social norms, and political regimes.

In sum, this research treats the lived experiences of Mongolian queers as dynamic, affectively mediated, and historically situated phenomena. It foregrounds the critical interplay of identity, culture, and power, highlighting how notions of shame and social marginalization are constructed, experienced, and resisted across time and space.

2.4. Shame, Affect, and Queer Solidarity

This research engages with shame as an affective experience that holds both constraining and empowering potentials for queer communities. Drawing on affect theory and shame scholarship, I particularly draw from Ann Cvetkovich's (2007) critique of the repressive

hypothesis, wherein she argues that “Michel Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis applies as much to affect as sexuality, warranting a skeptical approach to claims for interiority or emotional expression as the truth of the self” (p. 462). Just as sexuality has been historically confined within narrow discourses—such as heteronormative marriage—shame too has often been interpreted solely in negative terms, overlooking its transformative and affirmative capacities.

Building on this, I conceptualize affect as a “way of life,” inspired by Foucault’s notion of “friendship as a way of life” (Foucault, 1981), illustrating how queer solidarity among Mongolian queers can be understood at an affective level. Foucault (1997) suggests that gay men historically established ways of life capable of generating “a culture and an ethics” that broaden and diversify societal norms around friendship and love relationships (p. 138). Similarly, affect functions as a form of cultural capital that unifies and sustains the queer community beyond identity categories.

This research also addresses the nuanced relevance of queer theory and identity politics in understanding Mongolian queers as national citizens. While identity categories remain important, queer theory critiques fixed or uniform definitions, emphasizing fluidity and contestation. Affect theory complements this by organizing affects—often used interchangeably with emotions or feelings—into categories that capture their physiological, social, interpersonal, and internalized dimensions. Together, these frameworks allow for a multifaceted exploration of shame and affect as both personal and collective phenomena.

By focusing on the “lived experiences” of Mongolian queer individuals, this study emphasizes the complex interplay between discursive constructions and phenomenal realities (Earl, 2014). Drawing on Joan Wallach Scott (1991), experience is “always already an interpretation and something that needs to be interpreted” (p. 797). It is inherently political, culturally mediated, and historically situated. E.P. Thompson (1978) further argues that experience encompasses the affective domains of family, religion, and symbolic dimensions of expression (Scott, 1991, p. 784), highlighting that emotions and feelings are shaped by social norms and cultural obligations. Affect, as Gould (2010) elaborates, is often bodily, inarticulate, and less-than-fully conscious, shaping subjectivities and actions. This framework enables the analysis of the psychological, emotional, and social dimensions of queer experience.

Shame, specifically, operates as a relational affect with multifaceted social functions. It can enforce moral norms and prevent violence while simultaneously offering the potential for social transformation. Munt (2018) argues that resolved shame can prompt individuals to seek new attachments, forming “communities of shame” that provide safety and ontological security, whereas unacknowledged shame can fracture social bonds and engender disidentification. Nathanson’s (1992) clinical work emphasizes “attacking the self” as a productive strategy for dealing with shame, though it predominantly addresses male homosexual adults, highlighting the need for culturally and socially contextualized analyses beyond psychotherapeutic settings.

In Mongolian queer contexts, shame often emerges from familial rejection, societal stigma, and state-sanctioned erasure. These experiences, however, can also catalyze the formation of alternative kinship networks—chosen families—that provide care, mutual support, and emotional sustenance (Berlant, 1998; Weston, 1991). Through these affective bonds, shame becomes generative, fostering relationality, solidarity, and community. Such formations actively challenge patriarchal and heteronormative family structures (Yuval-Davis, 1997), proposing relationalities grounded in consent, care, and coexistence.

Affect theory, particularly as articulated by Lutz (2017) and Gould (2010), enables the examination of these processes by foregrounding embodied, pre-subjective experiences and the political and moral dimensions of affect. Scholars such as Sedgwick (2003), Tomkins (1995), and Ahmed (2004) emphasize that shame should not be understood solely as immobilizing; it can produce new relational forms, intensities, and solidarities. Shared shame strengthens mutuality and community, allowing marginalized queer groups to navigate exclusion and build affective counter-publics that resist normative pressures and cultivate collective resilience.

Through this lens, Mongolian queer solidarity emerges as an affectively mediated, relational, and historically situated process. Shame is both a source of constraint and a catalyst for collective agency, shaping intimate ties, chosen families, and affective communities. These insights illuminate how affect, identity, and experience intertwine to sustain queer life, belonging, and political engagement in contexts marked by social marginalization.

2.5. Shame, Oppression, and Collectivity

To contextualize the extensive scholarship on shame, I engage with *Gay Shame*, the seminal 2009 anthology edited by David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub. This volume explores the multifaceted and often contradictory role of shame within queer communities, challenging the dominant celebratory narrative of gay pride. Key queer theorists such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Douglas Crimp, and Michael Warner reflect on shame's capacity to forge collectivities without erasing difference. Dividing people into categorical differences based on "selected facts and features" (Minow, 1987, p. 34) helps explain the persistence of myths and stereotypes used to shame sexual and gender minorities. One example is the ongoing debate over the biological versus innate nature of LGBTIQ+ identities, a debate often framed through dominant heteronormative arguments in both simplistic and complex forms. As Deborah Gould summarizes, "A collectivity of the shamed need not be premised on sameness or identity; indeed, due to its peculiarly contagious and peculiarly individuating capacity, shame can generate connection through a shared experience while leaving difference and singularity intact" (Gould, 2009: 223).

Gay Shame critically interrogates the corporatist, capitalist, and homonormative tendencies of mainstream pride movements while maintaining a hopeful exploration of shame's generative potential. In the context of Mongolia, where LGBTIQ pride remains nascent following the country's first Pride event in 2013, the anthology raises questions about the possibilities of shame that pride cannot address: Can reclaiming gay shame open new avenues for queer community-building? What can shame enable that pride cannot? Halperin and Traub (2009: 3) emphasize that pride has never fully transcended shame; it is inseparable from the historical and political experiences of being queer.

Sedgwick positions shame as integral to identity formation, neither wholly positive nor negative, but an "organizing principle of identity" and a site for communal connection and transformative political engagement (Hanson, 2009: 138). Michael Warner critiques assimilationist queer politics, linking them to gay shame, while Gould highlights how shame arising from nonrecognition fuels anxiety within mainstream movements (Gould, 2009: 221). Sedgwick and Stanley (2018) advocate for harnessing shame's transformative potential to

challenge normative frameworks and generate affective commons where shared shame fosters community and resistance.

Crucially, shame sustains difference within collectivity. Sedgwick, Crimp, and Warner argue that shame can form bonds without “squashing difference,” preserving singularity alongside connection. Warner’s notion of “identity ambivalence” captures this tension, explaining oscillations between assimilationist and radical queer politics (Gould, 2009: 224). The politics of difference, exemplified in Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, emphasizes hybridity and intersectionality as central to understanding marginalized identities (Hammad, 2010: 303–304). *Gay Shame* thus provides a framework for understanding shame not simply as a negative affect but as a generative force shaping queer subjectivities, histories, and communities.

Iris Marion Young offers a systematic and nuanced understanding of oppression, highlighting experiences of diverse groups—including racial minorities, sexual minorities, the disabled, the elderly, and working-class people. Moving beyond binaries of oppressors versus oppressed, Young (1990) conceptualizes oppression as a structural phenomenon embedded in institutions and social practices. She identifies five “faces” of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (Young, 1990: 48).

Young demonstrates that oppression persists structurally even after formal elimination of overt oppressors, drawing on Foucault’s concept of diffuse and productive power embedded in institutions like education, healthcare, and administration. She emphasizes that social groups are “multiple, fluid, and context-dependent” (Young, 1990), complicating both academic and activist understandings of collective identity.

Her analysis extends beyond class exploitation, incorporating racialized labor, women’s unpaid domestic work, and symbolic violence through cultural imperialism. Importantly, oppression is relational: different groups face overlapping, context-specific injustices, requiring intersectional approaches. This structural understanding aligns with Gould’s observation that suppressed groups’ emotional experiences are deeply intertwined with systemic power, highlighting the connection between affect, identity, and oppression (Gould, 2010: 30).

This framework is especially relevant for sexual minorities in post-Soviet contexts, where social norms, censorship, and historical legacies shape both visibility and intensity of oppression (Takacs, 2015). Understanding structural oppression provides the foundation for analyzing how shame operates at both individual and collective levels within marginalized communities.

Collective shame extends the affective and social dimensions of individual shame to the communal level, illuminating how groups negotiate and transform shame in relation to shared histories, cultural narratives, and identity positions. Dresler-Hawke and Liu (2017) examine collective shame among third-generation Germans confronting the legacy of Nazi atrocities. Their study demonstrates that collective shame functions as identity positioning, shaped by audience effects—how groups perceive themselves and are perceived by others. Collective shame correlates negatively with certain dimensions of national identity but positively with the desire for reparative action, suggesting that shame can motivate engagement rather than avoidance.

Unlike collective guilt, which presupposes direct moral responsibility, collective shame can be experienced by descendants or members not personally culpable for historical wrongs. In this sense, shame operates as an affective force shaping identity, responsibility, and political engagement. Self-categorization theory links these processes to social identity formation, connecting interpersonal emotions like shame to group boundaries, recognition, and political action.

Collective shame also functions as a mechanism of social control. O'Hara (2020) shows how public shaming reinforces class hierarchies, marginalizing economically vulnerable groups while shielding the wealthy. Scheff (2000) describes shame as a “hidden injury of class,” while Goudsblom (2016) emphasizes that social class shapes distinct experiences of shame. These dynamics underscore the intersectional and structural dimensions of collective shame, highlighting its role in both oppression and resistance.

Taken together, the scholarship on gay shame, oppression, and collective shame provides a robust framework for analyzing the affective, structural, and political dimensions of marginalization. It emphasizes that shame is not merely a private emotion but a social and collective experience with transformative potential—particularly relevant for emerging queer

communities, such as those in Mongolia, where pride remains contested and shame continues to shape social and political life.

2.6. Citizenship, National Belonging, and Queer Affect

Michel Foucault (1988) asserts that sexuality is integral to individual identity, linking desire to truth and marking sexuality as a key dimension through which individuals and groups construct and negotiate their identities. Judith Butler (2004) further problematizes identity categories, arguing that they function both as instruments of regulatory power and as rallying points for political resistance. Identities, then, simultaneously constrain and enable social and political agency.

Shame emerges as a foundational affect in this process, shaping both individual and collective identities. Gould (2010) highlights the ambivalence experienced by members of oppressed groups, who may internalize self-doubt and shame while also feeling anger toward oppressors and pride in their community. Munt (2018) describes shame as inescapably intertwined with gay identity, emphasizing multiple forms of shame—unacknowledged, internalized, temporary—and underscores its relational dimension, noting its potential to prevent harm, enforce moral values, and inspire social transformation. She advocates for communities to acknowledge and “own” their shame to harness its creative and reparative potential.

Foucault (1997) extends this discussion through the concept of queer relationality. He emphasizes how homosexual friendship and modes of life extend beyond sexual acts, challenging normative institutions and opening new affective possibilities. By situating these “virtualities” historically, Foucault highlights how queer relationality can generate social and cultural transformation, resonating with Deleuze’s notion of the virtual as a realm of potentiality. One of the political goals of queer social movements is to advocate for freedom of sexual choice, rather than merely freedom of sexual acts, which includes the freedom to express that choice (Foucault & O’Higgins, 1982, p. 12). Freedom of expression and speech is closely interconnected with freedom of sexuality (Terbish, 2013, p. 267).

These affective dimensions of identity intersect with notions of citizenship and national belonging. Benedict Anderson's (1983) "imagined communities" underscores that national identity relies on affective bonds, while Nagel (2003) and Mosse (1985) demonstrate how morality, sexuality, and gender are central to national inclusion and exclusion. National moral economies regulate who belongs and who is stigmatized, using sexuality as a key boundary marker. Deviance, in this framework, reinforces social cohesion by reaffirming norms (Durkheim, as cited in Nagel, 2003). Contemporary illiberal movements, particularly in Central Europe, exploit collective shame to marginalize LGBTQ+ communities under the guise of defending traditional values (Kalmar, 2022). Sexual and gender minorities still face police negligence, state intimidation, and restriction of NGOs in post-Soviet countries such as Hungary (Hungarian LGBT Alliance et al., 2018), Russia (Novitskaya, 2021), and Poland (Kalmar, 2022, p. 178).

At the intersection of economic and cultural transformations, Rofel (2007) theorizes "cultural citizenship," showing how neoliberal reforms and global cultural flows shape desires, identities, and belonging. In China, the emergence of a "desiring China" illustrates how sexual and gendered subjectivities become entwined with socio-economic aspirations and anxieties, highlighting that citizenship and belonging are not only legal or political but deeply cultural and affective (p. 158).

Together, these perspectives reveal citizenship and national belonging as relational, affective, and contested processes. Sexuality and shame are central to these processes, structuring who is recognized as a legitimate citizen and who is excluded. Queer communities navigate this terrain by negotiating both structural inequalities and affective experiences, transforming shame into forms of solidarity, resistance, and cultural imagination.

2.9. Conclusion

Across the multiple dimensions explored—shame and sexuality, queerness and queer theory, lived experience, affective solidarity, oppression, and citizenship—the complex interplay of identity, emotion, and social structure emerges as central to understanding queer subjectivities. Shame is not simply an individual affective state but a relational and political phenomenon, shaping how marginalized groups negotiate their place within families, communities, and nations.

It operates simultaneously as a marker of otherness, a mechanism of social control, and a potential catalyst for collective action and social transformation.

Queer theory, drawing on Foucault, Butler, and Deleuze, illuminates how identities are both constrained by and resistant to regulatory norms. Sexuality, affect, and relationality intersect to produce “virtualities” of queer life—possibilities that challenge normative structures and open spaces for new forms of culture, friendship, and sociality. Lived experiences of shame reveal the nuanced realities of those navigating structural oppression, highlighting the coexistence of self-doubt, internalized stigma, pride, and collective resilience.

Young’s analysis of oppression provides a structural lens, showing how exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence operate across social institutions, producing and reinforcing hierarchies of privilege. When considered alongside Dresler-Hawke and Liu’s work on collective shame, it becomes clear that these affective experiences are intertwined with broader questions of social identity, historical accountability, and reparative engagement. Shame, in this context, emerges as a site of both vulnerability and agency, enabling communities to confront systemic injustice while cultivating solidarity.

Finally, the intersections of shame, sexuality, and national belonging reveal the socio-political stakes of affective life. Citizenship is not only a legal status but also an affectively mediated, culturally constructed position within the moral economies of nations. Queer identities challenge the boundaries of normative citizenship, exposing the contingencies of belonging and the ways in which collective emotions such as shame are mobilized to enforce social hierarchies. Yet these same affective experiences offer opportunities for reimagining social relations, producing solidarities that contest exclusion and affirm alternative modes of belonging.

Taken together, these perspectives underscore that shame is neither inherently debilitating nor merely personal; it is a socially and politically charged affect, intimately connected to identity, community, and justice. Understanding shame as both structural and relational offers a richer, intersectional lens through which to examine queer lives, highlighting not only the challenges imposed by systemic oppression but also the transformative potentials embedded in collective affect, solidarity, and imaginative engagements with belonging.

Chapter 3: Background on Contemporary Mongolian Queer Communities

3.1. Introduction

Since Mongolia's democratic movement in 1989, the country has increasingly engaged with global discourses on democracy, human rights, gender equality, and sexuality. This shift reflects Mongolia's broader processes of globalization and democratization. Under the preceding socialist regime (1924–1989), discussions of erotic intimacy and homosexuality were largely taboo, making retrospective analysis of gender and sexual minority issues challenging (UNDP & USAID, 2014, p.16).

Scholars argue that homosexual practices and behaviors were somewhat tolerated in pre-socialist Mongolia but became ideologized, pathologized, and criminalized under the direct influence of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) during the socialist era (Nyamdorj, 2012; Terbish, 2013). Specifically, homosexuality was forbidden only for the clergy during the theocratic, pre-socialist period—from the late seventeenth century to 1924—even though monks engaged in homosexual relationships, as documented by foreign researchers and visitors at the time (Terbish, 2013, p. 246). Under the subsequent socialist regime, however, sexuality—especially same-sex relations and those who engaged in them—became ideologically charged (Nyamdorj, 2012; Terbish, 2013).

The concept of “homosexual deviance” was “an ideological import to Mongolia from the USSR where homosexuality was a crime” (Nyamdorj, 2012, p. 50), and it was considered immoral and perverse; homosexuality and homosexual acts were viewed as violations of Soviet or socialist morality. This perspective led not only to the criminalization of homosexuality but also to medicalization and pathologization during the socialist period (Nyamdorj, 2012, p. 51). Homosexual acts, as non-reproductive sexual activities, were deemed anti-ideological and, therefore, anti-regime, and they were further construed as a threat to public health and security. Even in post-socialist Mongolia, LGBTIQ+ individuals continue to be portrayed as “AIDS carriers,” as suffering from a “mental disease,” and as flagrantly displaying their unnatural, perverted sexuality—often depicted as a “Western import” (Terbish, 2013, p. 263).

While Mongolia officially positions itself as a tolerant nation toward LGBTIQ+ individuals—evidenced by recent amendments to the Criminal Code (revised in 2015 and enacted in 2017), Law on Infringements (revised in 2015 and enacted in 2016), and other legislation incorporating SOGIESC-related protections—the implementation of these laws remains weak or largely ineffective. Consequently, the number of queer Mongolians seeking refuge abroad continues to rise. Central to this phenomenon are the sexual and gendered forms of shame that originate from deeply entrenched patriarchal and heteronormative social norms pervasive within both familial and broader societal contexts.

Queer identities, as partly shaped by their lack of recognition or misrecognition within prevailing social hierarchies (Gould, 2009), are further marginalized through the intensification of oppression by the affective experience of shame. This dynamic fundamentally diminishes the humanity of Mongolian queer individuals, relegating them to positions of exclusion and dehumanization (Taylor, 1994). As Odets (2019) poignantly observes, “shame is probably the most fundamental, pervasive, and destructive consequence of stigmatization” (p. 88), underscoring its centrality in the lived realities of marginalized sexual and gender minorities.

Human rights and gender equality have been major “Western projects” with which Mongolia has engaged in the post-socialist era, while simultaneously negotiating the implications of what is often described as modernity and civilization. For instance, “women’s NGOs for democracy, human rights, gender equality, and social justice began to emerge and became established in the first decade of post socialism,” usually with foreign aid and funding (Tumursukh, 2018, p. 102). One aspect of this modernity is the concept of human rights as a marker of progress, which may be perceived ironically in light of the current Trump administration in the United States. For example, human rights were central to U.S. international policy and were frequently used as a criterion for the allocation of foreign aid. As Ignatieff (2005) argued, “Across the political spectrum since 1945, American presidents have articulated a strongly messianic vision of the American role in promoting rights abroad” (p. 13). Until recently, the U.S. Embassy in Mongolia has been a key supporter of the human rights of marginalized communities in Mongolia.

Human rights, as Asad (1993) argues, have been “integral to the universalizing moral project of the American nation-state—project of humanizing the world—and an important part of the way many Americans see themselves in contrast to their ‘evil’ opponents” (p. 147). Similarly,

Schwenkel (2009) observes, “The construction of the uncivilized and barbaric communist ‘Other’ reinforces the binaries that perpetuate the humanitarian and economic achievements of ‘modern’ capitalist civilizations while condemning the presumed moral failures and deficiencies of non-capitalist ones” (p. 182).

Academically, this dynamic interplay between global influences and local realities provides fertile ground for research. It invites critical inquiry into how international norms related to gender and sexuality are adapted, resisted, or transformed within the Mongolian context. It also highlights the importance of intersectional approaches that consider ethnicity, nationalism, history, and religion alongside sexuality and gender.

In Mongolia, most government officials and the general population do not fully grasp the concept of gender and sexuality, often confusing it with sex due to limited knowledge and the absence of relevant courses in educational institutions (GIZ, 2022). Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), experts and activists working from feminist, LGBTIQ+, queer, and intersectional perspectives have stepped in to address gaps in understanding gender and related areas such as queer theory, theory of change, and intersectionality. In this context, the state, prevailing social norms, and even family members frequently fail to support queer Mongolians in expressing their identities. Consequently, some gay, lesbian, trans* and queer individuals have sought asylum abroad and are now living as refugees in other countries.

3.2. Historical and Political Context

Mongolia’s path toward building “a humane, civil, and democratic society,” as stated in the 1992 Constitution, has been fraught with challenges. Rapid social changes in the 1990s and greater openness to global influences enriched the LGBTIQ+ rights movement but also exposed it to opposition. Key milestones include the registration of the LGBT Centre, the 2009 amendment to the civil registration law permitting transgender individuals to change their name and gender marker, the rise of ultra-nationalist opposition, the first Pride Week in 2013, and the 2015 criminal law reform. We formed the LGBT Centre of Mongolia in 2007 and succeeded in registering it with the authorities in 2009 after overcoming several obstacles. The Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs and the General Authority for State Registration initially rejected the Centre’s registration.

They alleged that “the name ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Centre’ has a meaning that conflicts with Mongolian customs and traditions and has the potential to set the wrong example for youth and adolescents” (Human Rights Watch, 2009). In 2009, the ruling party was the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party (MPRP), which has a historical communist background.

Mongolia decriminalized consensual homosexual acts between adults in 2002, thereby legally affirming the legitimacy of homosexuality (Aumakhan et al., 2014, p.9). Historically, the country’s criminal codes have shown fluctuating stances: the 1926 criminal code did not prohibit homosexual acts; however, following the Soviet Union’s criminalization of homosexuality in 1933, Mongolia adopted similar prohibitions in 1934, only to decriminalize it again in 1961. Scholars suggest that Article 113 of the 1986 criminal code implicitly re-criminalized homosexuality by using vague language, such as “satisfying one’s sexual desire perversely or immorally” (Mongolian Criminal Code, 2003), which could be interpreted to target LGBTIQ+ individuals. This legislative oscillation, combined with the taboo nature of sexuality during the socialist era, underscores the strong Soviet influence on Mongolia’s political, ideological, legislative, and social spheres.

Soviet influence is crucial to understanding Mongolia’s modern history. The 1921 revolution established Mongolia’s independence from China, which was achieved with Soviet Red Army support, and until 1946, Mongolia’s sovereignty was recognized only by the Soviet Union (Tsedendamba, 1998). After protracted diplomatic efforts, Mongolia joined the United Nations in 1961. Many Mongols argue that without Russia’s support, Mongolia would have lost its independence to China (Billé, 2010, pp. 187-188). Yet, some Mongolian LGBTIQ+ activists hold ambivalent views about Soviet influence concerning SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics) issues. Others refer to historical evidence of homoerotic behavior in ancient China and contemporary queer cultural developments, such as PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) China and queer art and film initiatives.

The influence and control of the USSR between 1921 and 1989—until the collapse of the Soviet Union—functioned as a form of colonization. While Mongolia was never a formal constituent republic of the USSR, it functioned as a satellite state under Soviet influence (Murphy,

1966) from 1924 until the early 1990s. During this period, Soviet colonial ideologies and propaganda shaped public consciousness; Soviet Russian laws and norms were adopted without critical evaluation; and, most significantly, history—including Mongolia’s queer history—was systematically suppressed or erased. In this context, a decolonial analysis of the lived experiences of Mongolian queer individuals is essential for uncovering the silenced histories of sexuality. Post-socialist reflections on queer life in Mongolia are thus inherently decolonial, grounded in retrospective narratives that preserve and interpret these marginalized experiences.

Applying Young’s framework (1990) to the Mongolian LGBTIQ+ context illuminates how structural oppression intersects with local cultural, historical, and political dynamics. While homosexuality was criminalized, decriminalized, and recriminalized frequently in Mongolia as mentioned above, social norms, legal gaps, and widespread stigma continue to produce exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence in ways that are often subtle but pervasive. For instance, LGBTIQ+ individuals frequently face barriers to employment, healthcare, and social services, reflecting exploitation and marginalization akin to Young’s conceptualization of systemic inequality.

Powerlessness is also evident in the limited political visibility and advocacy opportunities for sexual and gender minorities. The nascent LGBTIQ+ movement in Mongolia has historically lacked institutional support, resulting in a diminished capacity to influence policy, secure legal protections, or publicly shape narratives around queer life. These structural constraints highlight how oppression can persist even without formal laws criminalizing sexuality, echoing Young’s emphasis on diffuse, institutionalized power.

As of 2024, Mongolia has been assessed as having lost its democratic status due to poor performance in media freedom, declining electoral fairness, and the repression of civil society. This indicates that freedoms of expression, speech, and association have deteriorated under the current ruling party, the Mongolian People’s Party, thereby shrinking civil society spaces and further silencing marginalized communities, such as LGBTIQ+ individuals.⁶

⁶ Please see: V-Dem. 2025. Democracy Report 2025: <https://www.v-dem.net/publications/democracy-reports/>.

3.3. Religion, Culture, and Sexuality

Dr. Gundsambuu (2002) defines twentieth-century Mongolia as a society in which a wide range of seemingly paradoxical descriptors are both applicable and coherent. These include religious yet secular; colonial yet federal; independent yet autonomous; traditional yet modern; geographically central in Inner Asia yet functionally resembling a city-state; simultaneously a satellite and a buffer; unified yet internally divided; a single polity encompassing both nomadic and sedentary modes of civilization; culturally Eastern yet influenced by Western models; pastoral in its economic base yet industrialized in development; and characterized by both revolutionary and reformist impulses (p. 3). I believe this characterization is still relevant in today's Mongolia.

Mongolia's spiritual landscape, shaped by Buddhism and Shamanism for centuries, tacitly accepts homosexuality (UNDP & USAID, 2014). Publicly recognized religious leaders have not made explicit statements against homosexuality, although some implicitly caution against uncritical adoption of Western gender and human rights concepts. For example, the "Science and Buddhism" dialogue held in 2015 at the Mongolian University of Science and Technology featured the Hamba Lama (Chief Abbot) of the Gandantegchinlen Monastery, who expressed concern about young people internalizing Western gender ideas without full awareness ((Mongolian University of Science and Technology, 2015)). The Manchu Qing Empire, which colonized Mongolia from the late seventeenth century, collapsed in 1911, giving rise to the initial independence of Mongolia under the rule of the theocratic king the Eighth Javzandamba Hutugtu (1869-1924), who was bisexual (Terbish, 2013, p. 245).

Relations between queer organizations and state authorities were strained prior to the introduction of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR)—a peer-review mechanism established in 2008 that evaluates the human rights records of all UN member states. In the realm of LGBTIQ+ rights, Mongolia has faced increasing pressure from the international community to acknowledge, protect, and uphold the rights of sexual and gender minorities, as required under various UN conventions and treaties. This process is reflected in the lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ Mongolians and shaped by contestations within the broader human rights discourse. The human rights concern of LGBTIQ+ individuals in Mongolia was first raised at the international level during the UPR's first cycle in 2010 (OHCHR, 2025). On November 2, 2010, Mr. Tsogtbaatar

Damdin, then State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) of Mongolia, stated that “legal modification will stop the ill treatment against LGBT people,” pledging to amend non-conforming laws. He further acknowledged that “when it comes to sexual orientation, there are cultural stereotypes and we will have to work hard to increase public awareness” (OutRight Action International, 2010). This marked a turning point for queer Mongolians, representing the government’s initial steps toward acceptance in response to both international and domestic pressure.

Following the recommendations made by United Nations human rights bodies, the Government of Mongolia was obligated to implement them and subsequently passed Resolution No. 158 on 18 May 2011, detailing an implementation plan for the UPR recommendations. The National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia’s (NHRCM) annual report, which included a detailed chapter on LGBTIQ+ rights, intensified this process and caused concerns among some members of Parliament, prompting a proposal for a closed session to discuss the chapter. Mr. Byambadorj Jamsran, then Chief Commissioner of the NHRCM, supported holding a closed session for two main reasons: first, the sensitivity of allowing members of Parliament to openly challenge one another, engage in discussions on these issues, and make informed decisions; and second, the risk of potential misinformation if these discussions were made public. Concerns were raised about whether members of Parliament could engage in such sensitive deliberations without external observation by civil society and media representatives. Additionally, the session involved delicate and confidential information—both internal and external—that required protection.

Since 2016, Mongolia has been governed by the Mongolian People’s Party, which espouses on-paper center-left, social democratic principles but often adopts policies across the traditional left–right spectrum. This context demonstrates that cultural and moral values, as well as religion, play important roles in shaping the status of LGBTIQ+ legislation in the country (Gibert & Palacios, 2023, p. 9). Moreover, this process forms part of a broader project in which, following the collapse of socialism, Mongolians have looked to their “deep past”—the pre-socialist era dating back to Genghis Khan—to reclaim moral authority and inform contemporary identity, often in contrast to the recent socialist period (Humphrey, 1992).

Contemporary Mongolian society often conflates homosexuality with sexual behaviors observed in male-only environments such as prisons, the military, and monasteries, where same-sex acts may occur to satisfy sexual needs (Terbish, 2013). The verb *bandidah* (“to have sex with men”) exemplifies this association. These terms and literary examples illustrate that Mongolian culture has historically recognized same-sex behaviors, though the modern terms “lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual,” and “transgender” are transliterations from English. Notably, the Mongolian language includes native terms for “intersex” such as *manin* and *khiosgon* and “lesbian” (“*badga*”) indicating indigenous recognition of diverse sex characteristics and sexual orientation.

Shame experienced by contemporary queer Mongolians often arises from the conflict between self-identification and dominant public perceptions of sexual and gender identity. For LGBTIQ+ individuals in Mongolia, acts of shaming frequently originate from those expected to offer love and support—namely, their own families. Moreover, shame challenges the ability to conform to rigid norms of masculinity or femininity, respectable citizenship, and even perceived legitimacy as a human being. This is illustrated in the testimony of a gay man who was targeted in a nightclub by heterosexual men:

“... he said he wanted them to kick the asses of the gays since gays are a shame to the prestige of manhood...” (Lai et al., 2013).

This and many other testimonies reveal the profound challenges queer Mongolians face in resisting and surviving state, media, and institutional pressures, as well as stigmatization based on SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics).

3.4. Legal and Policy Developments

The newly revised *Criminal Code of Mongolia*, which entered into force on July 1, 2017, prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (Article 14.1.1) and imposes aggravated penalties for homicides motivated by hate toward a victim’s sexual orientation or gender identity (Article 10.1.2.14). In addition, Article 10.1 raises the maximum sentence for such hate-motivated killings from 15 to 20 years (*Mongolian Criminal Code*, 2015).

The stark discrepancy between legislative reform and its practical implementation reveals significant shortcomings in Mongolia’s legal and institutional frameworks for protecting

LGBTIQ+ individuals. Despite the introduction of SOGIESC-inclusive provisions within the Criminal Code and other relevant laws, the pervasive culture of discrimination and systemic inertia within law enforcement and judicial institutions critically undermine these legal advancements. The reluctance or inability of authorities to effectively investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate hate crimes against queer individuals not only perpetuates a climate of impunity but also reinforces the broader social stigma and marginalization faced by the community.

Moreover, community-based organizations, such as the LGBT Centre, play a crucial role in advocacy, victim support, and awareness raising. Their continued engagement should be supported through sustained funding and partnership with governmental and international human rights bodies. Ultimately, bridging the gap between Mongolia's legislative framework and the lived experiences of queer individuals necessitates a holistic approach that combines legal reform, institutional transformation, and societal change to foster an environment where LGBTIQ+ people can live free from fear, discrimination, and violence.

While the Constitution of Mongolia (1992) protects human rights in general terms, and the Criminal Code—adopted in 2015 and enacted in 2017—criminalizes hate crimes and hate speech against LGBTIQ+ individuals, these legal protections are frequently not effectively enforced (United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2018, pp. 18–19).

The 2015 Criminal Code revision explicitly prohibits discrimination based on SOGIESC. However, enforcement was delayed from the planned date of September 2016 to July 2017 following the election of the conservative Mongolian People's Party, illustrating how political fluctuations affect LGBTIQ+ rights progress. Similarly, while the 2009 civil registration law allows transgender and intersex individuals to change their preferred sex and name on official documents, bureaucratic hurdles and discriminatory attitudes by government agencies and officials make the process emotionally taxing and prolonged.

The 1992 democratic Constitution guarantees fundamental human rights and freedoms but does not explicitly prohibit discrimination based on SOGIESC. While freedoms of expression and press enable public discourse on LGBTIQ+ rights, Mongolia lacks comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation to protect sexual and gender minorities. The 12th Annual Human Rights

Status Report by the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia (NHRCM) highlights ongoing rights violations against LGBTIQ+ individuals. It attributes these violations primarily to lack of information, negative public attitudes, and insufficient institutional protections, which undermine LGBTIQ+ people's rights to safe environments, education, employment, health, and cultural participation (NHRCM, 2013, p.65). A 2014 poverty study of the LGBTIQ+ community revealed that unemployment among survey participants was 10.4%, higher than the national average of 7.8%, with approximately 22% living below the poverty line (Aumakhan et al., 2014). The study advocates for a legal framework that ensures equal access to education and employment and calls for efforts to shift public perceptions.

The 1997 Law on Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) grants freedoms of association and peaceful assembly. In 1999, a group of men founded Tavilan (meaning Destiny or Fate), the first queer organization serving gay men. Throughout the 2000s, other gay and lesbian organizing initiatives followed, though many struggled with funding and project limitations, leading to closures. Recognizing the need for an inclusive civil society adopting rights-based and intersectional approaches, women's rights and other rights-based NGOs such as the Open Society Forum, the National Center Against Violence, and the MONFEMNET National Network played key roles in mainstreaming LGBTIQ+ rights (Tumursukh, 2013).

After Tavilan ceased operations, the Mongolian Lesbian Information and Community Center (MILC) was established in 2004 under the Mongolian Women's Fund, but it also ended when the project concluded. In the early 2000s, LGBTIQ+ rights in Mongolia were often linked to sexual health promotion programs targeting men who have sex with men (MSM). As of 2017, three MSM organizations operate jointly as the MSM and Transgender Community Center, merging resources to implement Global Fund projects aimed at reducing HIV/AIDS prevalence. The LGBT Centre, founded in 2007 and officially registered in 2009 after prolonged efforts, was the first explicitly pro-LGBTIQ+ advocacy and human rights organization in Mongolia. The Sayanaa Welfare Association (SWA), established in 2014, focuses on transgender sexual and reproductive health and rights, and Trans4Unity is the youngest trans* organization.

The LGBT Centre has been pivotal in advancing the Mongolian LGBTIQ+ movement through advocacy at the United Nations. Following recommendations from the Universal Periodic

Review (UPR), Committee against Torture (CAT), and the Committee on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR) in 2010, the Mongolian government became obligated to protect LGBTIQ+ rights domestically. This progress catalyzed nationwide public sensitization, inclusion of LGBTIQ+ issues in the NHRCM's annual reports (2013), parliamentary discussions (2013-2014), and the eventual amendment of the Criminal Code in 2015 to prohibit SOGIESC-based discrimination.

The NGO registration process drew significant attention to LGBTIQ+ rights. Beginning in 2007, the LGBT Centre's nearly three-year struggle to obtain official registration faced resistance; in 2009, the State Registration of Legal Entities at the General Authority for State Registration of Mongolia rejected the name "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Centre," claiming it conflicted with Mongolian customs and risked negatively influencing youth.⁷ The Centre mobilized international human rights organizations—including Outright Action International, Human Rights Watch, and FORUM-ASIA—to pressure the government. This external advocacy, coupled with domestic support from key political figures such as Ms. Oyungerel Tsedevdamba, Advisor to the President on Human Rights, and Ms. Oyunchimeg Purev, Commissioner of the NHRCM, ultimately secured official registration in December 2009.

In my view, the culmination of events that unfolded from the founding of the LGBT Centre of Mongolia in 2007 to the staging of the first Pride Week in September 2013 represents a turning point. Contributing factors to these milestones include the following: the 1997 Law on NGOs; the 1998 Law on Media Freedom, which enabled print and media outlets to cover issues related to LGBTIQ+ people; the establishment of the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia (NHRCM) in 2001, which addressed human rights and freedoms holistically, including those of sexual and gender minorities; the official registration of the LGBT Centre in 2009; the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) session on Mongolia held in November 2010; the 129 recommendations issued to the Government of Mongolia by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in March 2011; the NHRCM's submission of the 12th human rights status report to Parliament on April 24, 2013; the open session of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs (SCLA) to discuss the NHRCM report on May 13, 2013; the plenary session of Parliament to discuss the report on May 22, 2013; the closed session of the SCLA also held on May 22, 2013; the adoption of

⁷ See: <https://forum-asia.org/mongolia-new-step-for-the-lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-centres-registration-2/>.

Resolution 13 by the SCLA—including a section on actions to implement the UN recommendations concerning LGBTIQ+ individuals⁸—on July 3, 2013; and the first LGBT Pride Week, held from September 22 to September 28, 2013.

In conclusion, the contemporary Mongolian queer movement emerges from a complex matrix of historical legacies, political transformations, cultural narratives, and social challenges. Understanding this movement requires situating it within broader processes of democratization, globalization, and identity formation. This section aimed to provide a brief but not comprehensive background on these intersecting factors, setting the stage for further analysis of Mongolian queer experiences, activism, and representations in subsequent sections.

3.5. Social Attitudes, Nationalism, and Intersectionality

In Mongolia, sexual and gender minorities face profound social stigma and systemic discrimination rooted in entrenched cultural, familial, and institutional norms. Despite legal progress, such as the decriminalization of homosexuality and formal hate crime protections, these measures remain poorly enforced, and dominant social narratives continue to frame queer identities as shameful, unnatural, and non-Mongolian. The 2013 report by the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia indicates widespread negative attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities, especially in the workplace (UNDP & USAID, 2014, p. 22). Moreover, trans* students continue to face significant challenges in schools, as “there is a significant lack of support for trans students in the school and there has not been much positive improvement in teachers’ attitudes towards LGBTIQ+ students over two decades of teaching sexual identity and gender identity” (Ganbaatar et al., 2023, p. 53).

In practice, as it will be illustrated later in Chapter 5, the media frequently portray homosexuality as a “*Western import*,” something “*un-Mongolian*,” a “*shame to family honor*,” a “*failure as a human being and a citizen*,” and as “*unnatural and perverse*.” Homosexuality is commonly framed as a violation of moral norms and a threat to social security and public health,

⁸ Resolution No. 13 of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs mandates that the government (1) take effective measures to implement recommendations concerning the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals, as issued by the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Committee Against Torture, and the Human Rights Committee; and (2) implement an effective policy of educational and promotional activities aimed at addressing negative attitudes and harmful stereotypes about LGBT people.

largely due to its perceived association with HIV/AIDS—despite Mongolia being classified as “a very low HIV-1 epidemic country” (Takano et al., 2020).

Nationalism remains a significant barrier to equality and non-discrimination. From Russia to Uganda, and from Indonesia to India, ultranationalist, neo-Nazi, political, and conservative groups often regard LGBTIQ+ identities as Western imports, thereby framing sexual minorities as threats to cultural integrity. In the Mongolian context, far-right ultranationalists and neo-Nazi groups have intimidated LGBTIQ+ communities in similar ways. These groups have also perpetrated violence: for example, in 2009, three transgender girls were allegedly kidnapped, tortured, and sexually assaulted. After speaking out in a documentary by the LGBT Centre, two of them received death threats and ultimately fled Mongolia for safety.

From an anthropological perspective, the localization of international human rights norms regarding LGBTIQ+ issues intersects with broader themes of democracy, national identity, gender, and sexuality. Both sexual minorities and women who deviate from traditional gender norms are often viewed as threats by far-right nationalist groups. In Mongolia, where ethnic identity is framed around fears of cultural extinction—particularly the risk of Chinese cultural encroachment (Billé, 2010)—marriage and sexual partner choices carry political weight. These choices are framed in binary terms: either patriotic and group-serving or treasonous (Billé, 2014).

In this context, LGBTIQ+ individuals are frequently portrayed as imitating the West or betraying traditional gender roles by rejecting binary norms. For instance, Mongolian women marrying Chinese or Western men, or Mongolian gay men traveling to Beijing, Western Europe, or the United States to visit gay bars and saunas, are seen as violating both traditional gender expectations and national identity, thereby symbolizing the double risk of Chinese and Western influence.

In nationalist discourse, historical figures such as Genghis Khan symbolize masculine ideals and leadership. Since the 1990s, when Mongolia transitioned to democracy and opened up to global influences, the discourse around Mongolian identity has increasingly drawn on historical symbols such as Genghis Khan⁹ to construct a narrative of masculine strength and national unity.

⁹ It has recently been spelled “Chinggis Khaan” in English domestically.

Genghis Khan serves not only as a political icon but also as an idealized embodiment of traditional masculinity, valor, and leadership. This symbolic representation often excludes or marginalizes non-normative gender expressions and sexualities, reinforcing heteronormative and patriarchal conceptions of Mongolian identity.

Nationalist rhetoric frequently frames LGBTIQ+ identities as antithetical to this idealized masculinity and, by extension, to the nation itself. The construction of sexual minorities as “Western imports” or threats to cultural purity reflects anxieties about globalization and the perceived erosion of traditional values. This positioning fuels resistance to LGBTIQ+ rights and visibility, contributing to social stigma, discrimination, and at times, violence.

Moreover, the politicization of sexuality intersects with broader ethnic and cultural insecurities. As Mongolian identity is often articulated in opposition to Chinese influence, personal choices related to marriage, family, and sexual orientation become sites of nationalistic scrutiny. Individuals who deviate from heteronormative frameworks may be perceived as undermining collective efforts to preserve Mongolian cultural heritage and sovereignty. Consequently, LGBTIQ+ individuals must navigate a complex terrain where their personal identities are deeply entangled with nationalistic narratives and historical anxieties.

Public attitudes often conflate queerness with foreign influence, exacerbating the social exclusion of sexual and gender minorities. These attitudes reinforce the perception that queer identities threaten traditional masculinity, citizenship, and national identity. Furthermore, widespread misunderstanding of gender and sexuality, stemming from limited education and societal awareness, fuels prejudice and violence, including school bullying and domestic abuse, which can result in homelessness and mental health crises.

3.6. Cultural Expressions and Queer Visibility

Despite these challenges, Mongolian queer communities have developed resilient forms of self-expression and activism, largely due to international and regional support, including core funding for the LGBT Centre and technical and financial assistance from foreign embassies and international development agencies operating in Mongolia. The increased visibility of LGBTIQ+

people through cultural events like Pride Week, as well as arts, literature, and media campaigns, has begun to challenge dominant narratives. These initiatives create spaces for alternative conceptions of gender and sexuality that are rooted both in Mongolia's unique history and in contemporary global human rights discourses.

Increased visibility of the LGBTIQ+ community and legal reforms have spurred media and scholarly interest in how sexual minorities are represented in Mongolian arts and literature, both historically and in contemporary culture. For instance, a 2013 edition of *Undestnii Toim* (National Review) dedicated to Pride Week featured analyses disputing claims that homosexuality is a Western import. One journalist highlighted a painting by Sharav Balduu (1869–1939) depicting two men engaged in sexual activity, arguing that same-sex relations have long existed in Mongolian society.

Following the democratic movement of the 1990s, Mongolian intellectuals—including playwrights and poets—began exploring themes of homosexuality and homoeroticism. In 1997, *Ijil Khuisten* (*Homosexuals*), a play by Russian playwright Nikolai Kolyada, was staged in Ulaanbaatar, sensitizing audiences to homosexual issues through a tragic love story between two Russian men. Similarly, Batregzedmaa Bayartogtokh's (1972–2024) 2004 play *Taichigch Khuvguud buyu Saaral Gudamj* (*Stripping Boys and Gray Street*) examined gay themes, receiving mixed responses from the LGBTIQ+ community and critics alike. Batregzedmaa was a renowned Mongolian poet, author, and playwright who consistently challenged societal norms and illuminated marginalized identities through her work.

During the socialist era, scholarly engagement with homosexuality and homoeroticism was virtually nonexistent due to social taboos. More recent cultural works, however, reveal historical representations of gender and sexuality. For example, Rinchen Byamba's novel *Uriin Tuya* (*Ray of Dawn*, 1947–1952) depicts a boy with effeminate traits, subtly implying homoeroticism. Likewise, Lodoidamba Chadraabal's *Tungalag Tamir* (1970–1973) describes homosexual relationships within monastic settings, reflecting the historical practice known as *bandi shuumriin yos*—sexual relations between boys and adult men in monasteries where monks were celibate. As Terbish (2013) explains, homosexuality during this period was described as an activity or “as a way of doing sex (referred to as *bandi shuumryn yos*, ‘ways young monks act/behave’)” (p. 262).

Cultural imperialism manifests through dominant heteronormative narratives that frame queer identities as deviant, foreign, or morally corrupt. Marxist-Leninist ideology was at the core of the criminalization and pathologization of homosexuality, reflecting a Soviet form of cultural imperialism (Nyamdorj, 2012, p. 49), whereas the Western counterpart tends to be framed in liberal democratic and capitalist terms. Media representations of LGBTIQ+ people are sparse, often stereotypical, and heavily moralized, reinforcing social othering. Likewise, violence—both physical and symbolic—remains a tangible threat, including harassment, family rejection, and social exclusion, contributing to internalized shame and the ambivalent affective experiences discussed in *Gay Shame*.

The interplay between structural oppression and affective experience is particularly pronounced in Mongolia, where shame operates as both a social and political force. Drawing on Halperin and Traub, shame can create a sense of collective belonging while preserving difference, offering pathways for community-building even under conditions of marginalization. As in Western queer theory, Mongolian LGBTIQ+ communities may leverage shame to articulate critiques of mainstream societal norms, resist assimilationist pressures, and cultivate solidarity that embraces multiplicity rather than uniformity. Moreover, Young's insistence on intersectionality resonates with Mongolian realities: sexual orientation intersects with gender, ethnicity, class, and rural-urban divides to shape lived experiences of oppression. For example, queer individuals in provincial areas often face heightened isolation, fewer supportive networks, and more rigid gender norms, intensifying marginalization and powerlessness. In urban centers like Ulaanbaatar, emerging queer spaces and Pride events since 2013 provide visibility and community, yet they remain constrained by societal ambivalence and structural barriers.

Chapter 4: An Exploratory Study of Shame in Queer Mongolian Communities

“Shame dies when stories are told in a safe space.” – Survey Participant 3

“I always try to fight it immediately, as best I can, using all my resources. But in most cases, I am defeated.” – Survey Participant 41

4.1. Introduction of the Study

Shame is a complex social and psychological phenomenon that can profoundly shape the lived experiences of queer individuals, influencing their self-perception, social interactions, and access to community and support. In Mongolia, discussions of sexuality and gender diversity have historically been constrained by social norms, cultural expectations, and the lingering effects of socialist-era policies, which often marginalized non-heteronormative identities. While global research has increasingly examined shame in queer populations, there remains a scarcity of empirical data on Mongolian queer-identifying individuals, particularly regarding how contemporary social, cultural, and historical factors intersect with personal experiences of shame.

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the experiences of shame among queer individuals in Mongolia. Specifically, it examines how gender identity, sexual orientation, and broader SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics) categories relate to feelings of shame and self-concept within the Mongolian context. The research also aims to document the diversity of queer identities in Mongolia and to highlight emerging trends in self-identification, including the growing recognition of non-binary and fluid gender identities. using a small-scale survey of queer individuals and allies. By situating contemporary experiences of shame within both historical and social frameworks, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersections between culture, identity, and emotional wellbeing among queer populations in Mongolia.

In May 2023, I conducted field research in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, over a two-week period. On May 13, 2023, I presented my research at the *LGBTIQ+ Human Rights Bootcamp* at the National Legal Institute of Mongolia and conducted a small-scale survey of queer individuals and

allies who attended the event. The survey included 52 queer participants. Most completed the consent form, the information sheet, and the survey during the Bootcamp, while others did so later at the Youth for Health Center office at a time convenient for them.

Demographically, all participants were Mongolian citizens residing in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, except for one participant who currently resides in Budapest, Hungary. Due to intensive internal migration from rural areas to the city and inconsistencies in civil registration practices, it was not possible to determine participants' places of origin or administrative jurisdictions through this survey. Participants' ages ranged from 16 to 61 years, with a mean age of 28.78 years and a median age of 28 years. The most frequently reported ages were 18 ($n = 5$); 17, 22, and 39 ($n = 4$ each); and 20, 24, 28, and 31 ($n = 3$ each).

Details regarding survey participants and the full list of survey questions are available in Appendix IV. Of the survey respondents, 32 identified as male (including female-to-male transgender men), 12 as female (including male-to-female transgender women), and 4 as non-binary. Two participants chose not to disclose their gender, one selected "Other," and one wrote in "Queer." Regarding sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), 20 participants identified as gay men, 14 as transgender, and 9 as bisexual. Six participants identified as heterosexual, and one participant each identified as genderqueer, demisexual, and pansexual.

The data indicates that most respondents were residents of Ulaanbaatar, with a mean age of 28 years. The majority identified as male, and a substantial portion identified as gay, bisexual, or transgender. Compared to earlier studies, a greater number of individuals now identify their gender as non-binary, "Other," or fluid. Additionally, more participants recognize and use diverse SOGIESC terms, including pansexual, genderqueer, and demisexual.

The survey was conducted in the Mongolian language, transcribed in the same language, and translated into English. The transcribed and translated data were then organized by question type and analyzed using critical discourse analysis. Direct quotes from survey participants are provided in subsequent sections, with specific participant numbers referenced in parentheses. These numbers correspond to the table in Appendix IV (pp. 167–168).

This exploratory study has several limitations. The survey results are not representative and are subject to careful interpretation by the researcher. They should be regarded primarily as illustrative rather than definitive findings.

4.2. Survey Questions

The survey questionnaire included demographic questions (age, gender, and SOGIESC) as well as a combination of closed- and open-ended items.

The closed-ended questions focused on participants' perspectives regarding:

- the definition of shame,
- personal experiences of discrimination, bullying, or hatred based on their SOGIESC,
- whether they believe Mongolian queer individuals should be shamed for their identities, and
- perceived sources or contributing factors to shame in Mongolian society.

The open-ended questions were:

1. "What is your opinion and position in general on 'shaming' sexual minorities?"
2. "How do you think people of sexual minorities react when they are shamed?"
3. "What are the advantages or disadvantages of subjecting them to social shaming?"
4. "Do you think that people of sexual minorities who have been told 'you should be ashamed of your sexuality' ever overcome shaming?"
5. "Do you have any additional comments or suggestions regarding the concept of shame and the shaming of sexual minorities?"

When asked, "Do you experience any discrimination, bullying, or hatred against LGBTIQ+ people among your peers?" 41 participants responded "yes," 7 responded "no," and 3 responded "I don't know." The vast majority of respondents reported experiencing discrimination related to their SOGIESC. One participant elaborated:

“Since I accepted my sexuality and myself quite late, I have not experienced shaming. But once people hear that I am bisexual, they immediately assume that I have sex with both men and women at the same time.” – Survey Participant 29

This response suggests that sources of discrimination, bullying, or hatred may include common misconceptions and a lack of understanding about diverse sexualities.

When asked, “Do you think that LGBTIQ+ people should be ashamed of being born as such?” 48 participants responded “No,” 2 responded “Yes,” and 2 responded, “Sometimes I am ashamed.” Although this was a direct question, the small number of responses indicating shame suggests the possible presence of internalized stigma, unresolved shame, or internalized homophobia or transphobia among some participants. These responses may reflect the complex and deeply personal ways in which social messages about sexuality and gender are internalized.

Regarding factors contributing to the shaming of LGBTIQ+ individuals, the majority of survey participants (n = 46) selected “social environment and social norms,” followed by “family environment” (n = 31), “cultural norms” (n = 26), “morality” (n = 23), and “religion” (n = 21). This question allowed multiple selections, and many participants chose more than one factor. These results suggest that rigidly enforced social norms are perceived as the primary source of shame for queer individuals, with the family environment emerging as the second most influential factor.

During the LGBTIQ+ Human Rights Bootcamp, participants engaged in discussions about the distinctions between “cultural norms” and “social norms,” particularly how cultural traditions, values, and belief systems inform and intersect with broader social expectations. Additionally, participants critically debated the tension between “morality” and “religion” as overlapping but distinct sources of normative pressure.

However, the law remains ambiguous regarding what constitutes a restriction of freedom, and it does not provide clear definitions of discriminatory acts, hate crimes, or hate speech. This lack of legal clarity contributes to ongoing impunity, as perpetrators of violence or discrimination against LGBTIQ+ individuals may not be held legally accountable in the absence of enforceable legal standards.

Although these closed-ended questions were limited in number, they effectively captured participants' perceptions of shaming factors within Mongolian society. The findings suggest that many queer individuals continue to experience discrimination, bullying, and hatred from both society and their families.

While media was not listed as a response option in the multiple-choice question, some participants selected "Other" and provided further elaboration. Their responses included references to "wrong or incorrect information," "comedy," "individuals having no information or knowledge," and "work environment" as additional sources of shame. These responses point to several unlisted but significant contributors, such as disinformation, distorted or biased media portrayals, insult-based comedy targeting sexual minorities, and deliberate media silence around controversial issues like sexuality. Additionally, some participants identified hostile or discriminatory work environments as barriers to stable employment for queer individuals.

During a panel discussion at the LGBTIQ+ Human Rights Bootcamp, Enkhmaa Enkhbold, Executive Director of the LGBT Centre, noted that no cases have been resolved under the revised Criminal Code since its enactment in 2017. The Centre has conducted training sessions for prosecutors on identifying crimes under Article 14.1 of the Code. However, the law remains ambiguous regarding what constitutes a restriction of freedom and does not provide clear definitions of discriminatory acts, hate crimes, or hate speech. This lack of legal clarity contributes to ongoing impunity, as perpetrators of violence or discrimination against LGBTIQ+ individuals may not be held legally accountable in the absence of enforceable legal standards.

In summary, the survey and accompanying discussions provide a nuanced understanding of shame and discrimination as experienced by Mongolian queer individuals. The majority of participants reported experiencing discrimination, bullying, or hatred, highlighting the persistence of social stigma despite increasing visibility and recognition of diverse SOGIESC identities. Social norms, family expectations, cultural traditions, and moral and religious pressures were identified as primary sources of shame, with additional contributors including misinformation, biased media portrayals, and hostile work environments. While most participants rejected the notion that queer individuals should feel ashamed, a small number indicated internalized stigma, underscoring the deeply personal and complex ways societal messages are internalized.

The findings also illuminate structural and legal challenges: current legislation lacks clear definitions of discriminatory acts, hate crimes, or hate speech, which contributes to impunity and limits legal protections for LGBTIQ+ individuals. Overall, these results suggest that both social and institutional factors continue to shape experiences of shame, highlighting the importance of multifaceted interventions that address societal attitudes, family dynamics, media representation, and legal frameworks to reduce discrimination and support queer communities in Mongolia.

4.3. Defining and Experiencing Shame

One of the key open-ended questions in the survey, aimed at generating a collective understanding of shame, asked: *“What is your opinion and position in general on ‘shaming’ sexual minorities?”* Survey respondents commonly describe shame and shaming as harmful processes that negatively impact a person’s dignity, self-confidence, and mental health. Several participants emphasized that shaming constitutes a form of psychological and emotional abuse. It was described as the *“tip of the iceberg”* (Survey Participant 3), representing deeper and more pervasive forms of internalized stigma and discrimination experienced by LGBTIQ+ individuals.

According to participants, shame has long existed in Mongolian society and is perceived as a root cause of widespread discrimination against sexual and gender minorities. It is often fueled by inaccurate social perceptions, persistent stereotypes, and interpersonal dynamics where individuals are unable to accept differences due to entrenched cultural or communicative norms. Many queer respondents expressed strong opposition to the act of shaming, characterizing it as *“negative, rude, unnatural, improper, and a form of misconduct”* (Survey Participants 1, 17, 22, 27, 38, 42, 51, etc.) For some, the internalization of societal rejection was deeply painful. As one participant noted, *“They say we are an issue that should not exist in society, so some of us start to feel like we shouldn’t be alive”* (Survey Participant 20).

Several participants linked the origins of this shame to a broader lack of accurate information within society. They emphasized that the extent of harm caused by shame often depends on cultural norms, levels of education, and public awareness.

Respondents consistently identified gender stereotypes and limited understanding of sexual and gender diversity as driving forces behind societal shaming. One explained, *“It is unacceptable for conscious people to shame, discriminate, and hate others”* (Survey Participant 9). Another added, *“It is unfortunate. I would like to live in a society that is not like this”* (Survey Participant 8), and a third remarked, *“No one should discriminate or blame someone for their inborn, natural rights [in other words, for being a member of LGBTIQ+ communities]. That kind of behavior violates human rights and respect”* (Survey Participant 11).

More importantly, several participants described shaming as a psychological strategy deliberately used to marginalize minority groups. They observed that strong and hurtful language, along with degrading actions, is often employed to instill self-hatred, repress self-esteem, and ultimately undermine the identity and humanity of queer individuals.

Reflecting on the inevitability of shaming, one respondent shared: *“It is very difficult. No matter how hard you try or how well you do, and even when you are being yourself, shaming always comes our way”* (Survey Participant 41). This comment reflects a broader theme of resignation and exhaustion, suggesting that shaming is perceived not only as widespread but also as an unavoidable part of queer life in the current social context.

The responses indicate that the experience of shame is perceived as a universal human phenomenon. As one participant stated, *“I think that all people experience shame to a certain extent”* (Survey Participant 48). However, for many queer individuals in Mongolia, shame is not only common but also persistent and socially reinforced. One respondent described its enduring nature, *“It is unacceptable, and shaming and insulting sexual minorities in Mongolia for being born who they are will follow us forever throughout our lives”* (Survey Participant 30). Similarly, another participant added, *“I think about it every step of the way when I enter into relationships in social environments and with other people”* (Survey Participant. 31).

Participants frequently characterize shame as a harmful social phenomenon with damaging psychological effects. Even participants who had not personally experienced shaming emphasized its ethical implications. As one participant expressed, *“I have not directly experienced it myself, but I think that shaming is a human rights violation and is outright discrimination. Therefore, it is*

such a negative thing. It is shaming someone for being born as a human being” (Survey Participant No. 28).

On a more serious note, some participants reflected on the attitudes and behaviors of those who shame sexual and minorities. A recurring perception was that the public views sexual minorities as “*unprotected and weak*” (Survey Participant No. 29), making queer individuals vulnerable to arbitrary and discriminatory treatment. Participants also noted that individuals who shame others based on their SOGIESC do not recognize them as fully human. One respondent suggested that such behavior reflects a “*lack of or deteriorating conscious mind,*” while another remarked, “*Shaming is about people who don’t love themselves—people who feel like losers—shaming queer people and getting pleasure from it*” (Survey Participant 21) Some participants attributed persistent shaming to increasing homophobia in society. This dehumanization is evident in the following statement: “*It is a form of violence, and it’s problematic that they view us as non-humans*” (Survey Participant 43).

These responses reflect the deeply felt perception that shaming is not only a form of social, emotional, and psychological violence, but also an act that stems from ignorance, insecurity, and structural inequality. Participants’ responses indicate that shame carries strong psychological effects, suggesting it may be a symptom of shaming or trauma that leaves lasting marks. These reactions may also reflect a shared educational and cultural legacy in which the concept of shame is closely tied to psychological, spiritual, or religious meanings. Participants also widely regarded shaming as a human rights violation: “*a serious infringement on personal space*” (Survey Participant 32).

This response signals an ongoing engagement with identity politics among Mongolian minority groups, particularly over the past three decades following the collapse of the socialist regime. As one participant noted, “*Everyone has the right to live equally and without discrimination. People shaming sexual minorities is entirely a meaningless act*” (Survey Participant 33). Indeed, this appears to represent an initial phase of transformation within Mongolia’s queer community, as it begins to move beyond identity politics toward broader frameworks, including queer theory.

While rigorously condemning shame and shaming, survey participants also expressed a strong desire to live in a society free from shame, recognizing shame's links to depression, pain, abuse, and violence. Many expressed a hope for spaces where they can live authentically without relying on others' approval. One participant reflected, *"If people accept others as the same human beings, there will not be any discrimination"* (Survey Participant 26). Others acknowledged and embraced their vulnerabilities, with one noting, *"Generally, I am a very sensitive person, so it is very common that I feel vulnerable"* (Survey Participant No. 24).

Over the past three to five years, several respondents observed improvements in the situation for LGBTIQ+ people in Mongolia. One participant explained, *"The younger generation hardly shames others, as they understand it better."* Participants also noted differences in experiences of shaming within the community: *"People who are subject to shame more than gays and lesbians are bisexual people."*

4.4. Overcoming Shame

To discuss strategies for overcoming shame, it is first necessary to examine how queer individuals respond to being shamed by others. Survey respondents commonly reported reactions such as hiding, feeling depressed or paralyzed, remaining silent, and experiencing sadness. Many described inactivity driven by guilt, accompanied by worry and perceptions of themselves as weak or inferior. Frequent emotional responses included self-hatred, isolation, self-harm, anger, self-sabotage, and fear (Survey Participants No. 3, 37, 39, 43, 44, etc.).

More strategic responses to shame included denial or redirecting attention to other activities. Silently waiting was also common, likely reflecting strong underlying emotions. In many cases, participants reported feelings of anger. Participants who reported feeling knowledgeable and confident tended to defend themselves using facts and reasoned arguments.

In specific contexts, such as the workplace, feelings of shame often lead participants to withdraw, avoid the situation, or ultimately resign from their positions. Leaving environments where shaming occurred was a common strategy to protect personal safety and well-being. Some participants responded strongly to shaming, while others appeared more indifferent; however, the

long-term effects of these reactions were generally negative. The intensity of shame corresponded with the strength of emotional responses. In many cases, participants reported isolating themselves from social interactions altogether.

Shame can produce a range of uncomfortable feelings and behaviors. In most cases, participants remained silent and did not openly oppose shame, partly because the criticisms were perceived as containing some truth. A common visible sign of experiencing shame was a change in gaze. Physically, some participants appear confused or withdrawn, sometimes seeming disengaged from the present moment. Conversely, participants who reported self-acceptance and psychological resilience tended to exhibit more positive reactions.

When confronted repeatedly with shaming, some individuals actively resist, while others become indifferent. However, most avoid confrontation and compromise rather than asserting their rights. As Direk (2020) notes, “In shame, I discover the other’s gaze, which I can at other times ignore or escape from” (p. 42). The Other’s gaze is particularly harmful because it enforces moral and social norms rooted in patriarchal ideals, gender stereotypes, and restrictive traditional values.

Because shame typically does not cause financial harm, its impact may be perceived as minimal, leading many to respond with indifference to shaming. One survey participant explained, *“I think that we react by escaping the situation of shaming as soon and as far as possible and remain silent while being violated.”* This response can contribute to depression, but it may also escalate into quarreling or physical confrontation. Depression manifests in various ways, often masking feelings of self-blame, self-denial, self-silencing, and a diminished desire to socialize.

Most participants reported remaining silent or feeling afraid to discuss topics related to sexual minorities, especially at the workplace and at school. Some participants even interrupted conversations when such topics arose. One participant stated, *“In my opinion, most of us take shaming acts and words seriously and sometimes even believe that shaming could be psychologically justified”* (Survey Participant No. 28). This illustrates how patterns of self-blame and self-hate can reinforce the long-term psychological effects of shame, leaving a lasting mark on the lived experiences of queer individuals. Consequently, many participants remain reluctant to come out, both at home and in public, and prefer to remain hidden and silent.

The fear and concealment caused by shame increase vulnerability, particularly in the context of HIV and AIDS, thereby undermining fundamental rights to life, education, and mental well-being. Due to negative social attitudes associated with HIV, AIDS, and other STIs, this fear persists even in the era of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). Over time, emotional breakdowns, depression, and engagement in risky behaviors can have devastating effects, causing individuals to internalize their suffering and become withdrawn.

Some participants adopt strategic responses, such as “*distancing themselves from perpetrators or pretending to agree with the shaming agenda to conform to the group*” (Survey Participant 40). Conversely, others respond with anger and confront the shamers, attempting to express themselves, although these efforts may prove futile. Reactions also vary depending on participants’ educational backgrounds; some may choose to remain silent, experience fear, and exercise caution by not fully expressing themselves.

Although most participants reported no benefits from the social shaming of queer individuals, some identified potential advantages, reflecting a complex relationship with shame. One participant suggested that shaming might expose individuals to prevailing laws and dominant ideologies, such as nationalism, thereby encouraging the development of defensive strategies and resilience. This perspective aligns with resilience theory, which posits that adversity, including social stigma, can sometimes promote psychological growth or increased political awareness (Masten, 2001).

Another participant noted that shame could foster courage and sharpen one’s resolve, suggesting that overcoming shame might strengthen personal identity and promote activism. However, many participants noted that these perceived “advantages” are overshadowed by the broader structural effects of shame, particularly its role in reinforcing patriarchal norms and social hierarchies. The reinforcement of patriarchy through shame reflects feminist and queer theoretical critiques linking social shaming to the policing of gender and sexuality norms (Butler, 1997; Foucault, 1978). This highlights shame as not merely an individual emotion but a social mechanism that controls and marginalizes sexual minorities.

As one participant noted, *“If we manage to develop greater psychological immunity, only then can we effect meaningful change in our surroundings”* (Survey Participant 18). This statement highlights the importance of building collective resilience and psychological empowerment among marginalized communities to resist and transform oppressive social structures. It also underscores the need for supportive environments and education to foster such resilience.

Nevertheless, the disadvantages of social shaming are significant and far-reaching, affecting multiple dimensions of individual and collective life. From a psychological perspective, shame undermines personal development and social relationships by fostering feelings of worthlessness, isolation, and internal conflict. It also infringes on fundamental human rights, perpetuating cycles of discrimination and marginalization. One participant described the broader societal implications, stating, *“It means that the whole society is unfriendly and cruel. It could be a sign that other marginalized groups are also living in shame. Economically, we also lose enormous human resources and participation because of shame. Development is being pulled down”* (Survey Participant No. 5) This insight highlights how the consequences of shame extend beyond individuals, hindering social cohesion and economic progress.

The primary disadvantage of shame is that it obstructs living authentically, often resulting in lost self-confidence and a diminished sense of purpose. This internal struggle frequently leads to a denial of self-acceptance, with further negative repercussions on family dynamics and intimate relationships. As one participant expressed, *“We came to this earth as human beings, we are not disposable”* (Survey Participant 7). This statement underscores the fundamental human right to dignity and recognition, which shame systematically undermines.

Theoretically, these outcomes illustrate shame’s detrimental role as a social control mechanism that constrains identity formation and reinforces hegemonic norms (Brown, 2006; Scheff, 2000). The perpetuation of shame sustains structural inequalities by inhibiting marginalized individuals’ ability to participate fully in society, both socially and economically. Consequently, addressing shame is essential not only for individual well-being but also for fostering inclusive social development and protecting human rights.

The burden of shame on the psychological well-being and personal lives of queer individuals is substantial. Shame can have dual effects. It may motivate some individuals to cultivate pride and actively resist discrimination, as noted by Brown (2006), who discusses shame resilience as a pathway to empowerment. Conversely, shame often leads to social isolation and concealment of identity, resulting in the internalization of stigma and psychological distress (Herek, 2009). The profound mental and emotional pressures caused by shame can lead some individuals to become hyper-vigilant and determined to overcome these experiences, demonstrating a complex interplay between vulnerability and resistance (Sedgwick, 2003).

Shame reinforces social inequalities by perpetuating negative stereotypes and sustaining the systemic marginalization of queer communities (Scheff, 2000). By fostering exclusion and invisibility, shame thereby contributes to ongoing social injustice and limits the ability of marginalized individuals to fully participate in society. Understanding and addressing shame is therefore critical not only for individual psychological health but also for promoting social equity and protecting human rights.

Coping mechanisms to overcome shame often involve improving education and self-development to enhance resilience and self-acceptance. This approach emphasizes empowerment through learning and personal growth (Brown, 2006). As one survey respondent insightfully notes, “*Shame dies when stories are told in a safe space*” (Survey Participant No. 3), highlighting the crucial role of narrative and communal support in healing (Herman, 1992). Another participant emphasizes the urgent need for establishing “*safe zones*” in rural Mongolia, accompanied by access to psychologists and other professionals, underscoring the importance of protective environments for sexual minorities. They further stress the necessity of introducing the concept of shame more broadly in society to foster understanding and empathy, a foundational step in addressing stigma and promoting mental health (Gilbert, 2007).

4.5. Conclusion

Survey respondents consistently described shame and shaming as harmful processes that undermine dignity, self-confidence, and mental health, often constituting psychological and

emotional abuse. Shaming was referred to as the “*tip of the iceberg*” (Survey Participant No. 3), reflecting deeper, pervasive forms of internalized stigma and discrimination experienced by LGBTIQ+ individuals. Participants linked the roots of shame to entrenched societal stereotypes, limited understanding of sexual and gender diversity, and a broader lack of accurate information, emphasizing that the harm caused by shaming often depends on cultural norms, education, and public awareness. One participant explained, “*Shame is a punishment, which is equal to an aggravated sentence in legal terms. It violates human dignity profoundly—like a deep, eternal scar that cannot be chiseled off*” (Survey Participant No. 5).

Many respondents described shaming as a deliberate “*strategy to marginalize minority groups*” (Survey Participant 39), employing hurtful language and degrading actions to instill self-hatred, repress self-esteem, and undermine identity. Reflecting on the inevitability of shaming, one participant shared, “*It is very difficult. No matter how hard you try or how well you do, and even when you are being yourself, shaming always comes our way.*” Participants also highlighted the ethical and human rights implications of shaming, perceiving it as a form of social, emotional, and psychological violence stemming from ignorance, insecurity, and structural inequality.

Respondents observed that individuals who shame sexual minorities often fail to recognize queer people as fully human. Some attributed persistent shaming to rising homophobia, while others emphasized its link to cultural and interpersonal dynamics. One participant noted, “*Shaming is about people who don’t love themselves—people who feel like losers—shaming queer people and getting pleasure from it.*” These perceptions underscore the vulnerability of sexual minorities and the lasting psychological impact of societal rejection.

Despite these challenges, participants expressed a strong desire “*to live in a society free from shame*” (e.g., Survey Participant 16), connecting it to depression, abuse, and violence. Many hoped for spaces where they could live authentically without relying on others’ approval. One participant reflected, “*If people accept others as the same human beings, there will not be any discrimination.*” Observations of generational shifts suggest improvements among younger Mongolians, with reduced shaming and greater awareness of sexual and gender diversity. Participants also noted differences within the community, reporting that bisexual individuals sometimes experience greater levels of shaming than gays and lesbians. Overall, responses indicate

ongoing engagement with identity politics and early movement toward broader frameworks, including queer theory, highlighting both the persistence of societal stigma and the resilience and aspirations of Mongolia's queer community.

Queer individuals respond to social shaming in diverse ways, ranging from passive to strategic coping mechanisms. Many participants reported feelings of depression, fear, guilt, and self-hate, often accompanied by social withdrawal and reluctance to discuss topics related to sexual minorities. Emotional responses frequently included anger, self-blame, and a diminished sense of self-worth, while physical manifestations such as changes in gaze and disengagement were common. Some individuals responded more proactively, defending themselves with reasoned arguments or distancing themselves from perpetrators, although repeated exposure to shaming often reinforced withdrawal and internalized stigma. These responses highlight the intense psychological burden of shame, which can lead to long-term consequences such as isolation, concealment of identity, and even suicidal ideation, particularly in contexts where support systems are limited.

While some participants identified potential benefits of experiencing shame, such as fostering resilience, courage, and heightened political awareness, these advantages were generally overshadowed by its broader structural impacts. Shame functions as a mechanism of social control, reinforcing patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, and hegemonic social hierarchies. It constrains authentic identity formation, limits participation in social and economic life, and perpetuates cycles of marginalization. From this perspective, shame is not merely an individual emotional experience but a systemic force that sustains inequality and undermines the fundamental human rights of queer individuals.

Shame and embarrassment can also have severe consequences, including loss of interest in life, hopelessness, and the development of suicidal thoughts, as reported by many survey respondents. One community member had reported, *“Nothing is more heartbreaking than being told by your parents that they regret giving birth to me. Many times, [sic] I have heard them say that it is better for me to die than live in such shame. There were several times I felt so terrible [that I thought about] committing suicide”* (LGBT Centre's documentation, 2012).

Coping strategies for overcoming shame often involve personal development, education, and the cultivation of psychological resilience. Narrative sharing and communal support play a critical role in healing, as participants emphasized that “shame dies when stories are told in a safe space” (Herman, 1992). The creation of safe environments, including access to mental health professionals and protective community spaces, is essential to support marginalized individuals. Building collective resilience and psychological empowerment enables queer communities to resist oppression, reclaim agency, and transform social norms that perpetuate discrimination.

Ultimately, addressing shame is critical not only for individual well-being but also for fostering inclusive social development and promoting equity. By understanding its multifaceted effects—from psychological distress and social isolation to systemic marginalization—interventions can be designed to enhance resilience, support identity affirmation, and cultivate societal empathy. Initiatives that prioritize safe spaces, education, and awareness can mitigate the harmful effects of shame while empowering queer individuals to live authentically and participate fully in society.

In the Mongolian language, survey respondents frequently used terms such as *ichguur* (“shame” as a noun at the personal level), *ichih* (“shame” as a verb at the personal level), *shivshig* (“shame” as a noun at the social and national levels), *shivshigleh* (“shame” as a verb at the social and national levels), and *jigshih* (“to stigmatize”), indicating that multiple terms capture distinct dimensions and spheres of shame. Some participants reported feeling shamed even by uttering the word “shame.” Although the English term *shame* can encompass these concepts with a single word, Mongolian expressions of shame manifest in diverse discourses that reflect nuanced social and personal meanings.

In conclusion, the concept and discussion of shame, sexuality, and the shaming of the queer community in Mongolia were novel to most survey participants. Participants’ responses to the open-ended questions indicated a desire for transformational change in relation to shame. With respect to social norms, participants noted that they either deviate from or reinforce stereotypical, patriarchal societal expectations by queering or challenging the public’s perceptions of community members, actions, and behaviors (Connell, 2005). Furthermore, queer activism and the broader LGBTIQ+ social movement appear to have positive effects on alleviating shame and experiences

of shaming by addressing systemic and structural injustices and inequalities (Herek, 2009; Meyer, 2003).

Although only indirectly suggested, demanding accountability from perpetrators or those who shame queer individuals emerged as a theme among survey participants as a potential means to overcome shame. Perpetrators can include family members, state authorities, media, and law enforcement, making this strategy largely dependent on the legal framework, including existing laws, judicial procedures, and regulations (Meyer, 2003; Herek, 2009). Conversely, activists and community members propose “*shaming the shamers*” as a strategy to expose their ignorance regarding human rights and social issues affecting sexual minorities (Connell, 2005).

Chapter 5: Media Representation of Shame and Mongolian Queers

“Men cannot live without shame. A sense of shame is the beginning of living with integrity.” – Mencius (Chinese philosopher) (Csikszentmihalyi, 2024)

5.1. Introduction of the Study

This Chapter focuses on the media representation of Mongolian LGBTIQ+ communities in contemporary media. Out of 100 media pieces covering queer topics in this section, 27 were published in English by outlets such as *Al Jazeera*, *Global Voices*, and the *South China Morning Post*, while 73 were written in Mongolian. In addition to English and Mongolian, some articles and interviews have been translated into Russian, Spanish, Greek, Italian, French, and Malagasy. The collection includes 58 articles, 19 interviews, 16 news reports, 2 opinion pieces, 2 special features, as well as a tweet post, a narrative, and a quiz. A detailed list of the media content published between 2010 and 2023 is provided in Appendix III.

The key search terms used to identify media coverage included phrases such as “*Mongolian LGBT*,” “*Mongolian LGBTIQ+ movement*,” “*Mongolian queers*,” “*LGBT rights*,” and “*queer Mongolians*,” among others, in both English and Mongolian Cyrillic scripts. Media coverage in Mongolian predominantly employed the term “sexual minority,” whereas English-language outlets more frequently used the terms “queer” and “LGBTIQ.”

The types of media coverage analyzed include interviews, opinion pieces, articles, news reports, special features, arguments, quizzes, reflections on research reports and studies, and translated articles—predominantly from English into Mongolian. For example, some English-language media outlets, such as *Asia Democracy Chronicles*, contract Mongolian reporters and incorporate audio files to improve accessibility for audiences who may have difficulty reading. Regarding titles, English media coverage tends to focus on themes such as “*LGBTIQ+ people in Mongolia*,” their “*fight for queer rights*” and “*recognition*,” “*LGBT attacks*,” and “*changing attitudes*.” In contrast, Mongolian media articles are often characterized by sensational and scandalous headlines.

Analyzing media representation is a structured process that examines how people, ideas, or events are portrayed in media and what underlying messages or biases may be present. A qualitative approach, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), was employed to focus on language and power structures in texts. During analysis, sentences, phrases, and words referring to shame or conveying negative connotations were highlighted. This process followed several steps: selecting texts from media sources, identifying key themes, metaphors, and narratives, and interpreting how language shapes perception and social meaning.

The contrasting portrayals of LGBTIQ+ issues in Mongolian and English-language media reflect underlying social attitudes and power relations that shape public discourse. From a critical discourse analysis perspective, the sensational and scandalous framing prevalent in Mongolian media can be seen as a discursive practice that reinforces existing heteronormative norms and marginalizes queer identities by positioning them as deviant or controversial. This framing contributes to the reproduction of social stigma and sustains dominant ideological structures that discourage open dialogue and acceptance. Conversely, English-language media, with its focus on rights, recognition, and changing attitudes, often aligns with progressive discourses that challenge these dominant norms and promote inclusion and human rights. These differences in media representation not only mirror but also actively participate in shaping societal understandings of queerness in Mongolia. By analyzing these discourses, CDA reveals how language and media practices are intertwined with broader social practices, highlighting the contested terrain where queer visibility and resistance unfold.

International media often highlight the progress made by the LGBTIQ+ movement in Mongolia while simultaneously acknowledging that hostility and discrimination against LGBTIQ+ individuals persist. Outlets such as *Asia Democracy Chronicles* suggest that Mongolia's lack of a history of institutionalized oppression toward LGBTIQ+ people, combined with increased access to information from the West through television and social media, may have contributed to these positive developments.

Major stories in English-language media have focused on significant events in the queer history of Mongolia, including alleged attacks by far-right ultra-nationalist groups on transgender girls in 2009 and incidents of police brutality against trans* women in 2019. These accounts also highlight key milestones such as the establishment of the LGBT Centre and its struggle to obtain

legal registration between 2007 and 2009, the Centre's advocacy efforts at the United Nations through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism, and the 2017 amendment of the Criminal Code of Mongolia to include provisions addressing hate crimes and hate speech. The first Mongolian Pride event was organized in 2013, initially attracting a small number of participants. Attendance grew steadily, with over 50 participants in 2017 and approximately 250 reported in 2019, reflecting increasing visibility and mobilization within the queer community.

The main characters, interviewees, and sources featured in media coverage include key staff members of the LGBT Centre, such as Enkhmaa, the current executive director; Kenna, youth program manager; Jack, health program manager; Oulen, psychologist and youth coordinator; and Baldangombo, legal program manager, alongside prominent queer figures like Anaraa and Marta. English-language media often broaden the range of voices by interviewing scholars, government officials, and even ultra-nationalists to present a balanced and ostensibly unbiased perspective. For example, *Global Voices* consulted a political sociologist from the Independent Research Institute of Mongolia to obtain official statistics and expert analysis, while outlets such as the *BBC* and *Al Jazeera* contacted representatives from far-right nationalist groups, including Dayar Mongol and Bosoo Khukh Mongol.

5.1. Media Ownership and Social Practice

An essential component of the social practices shaping media discourse in Mongolia is the structure of media ownership. Ownership patterns both reflect and reinforce broader power relations, concentrating control of the media among political elites, economic actors, and state institutions. As Fairclough (1995) argues, discourse is simultaneously shaped by and constitutive of social practice, making it critical to examine how the institutional and structural conditions of media production influence representations of marginalized groups, such as queer individuals, in public discourse.

Although Mongolia's media landscape appears largely privatized, ownership is frequently tied to political and economic interests. According to the Press Institute of Mongolia (2022), 63% of newspapers, 50% of journals, 72% of radio stations, 90% of television channels, and 86% of online news portals are privately owned. However, many of these outlets are controlled by non-

governmental organizations or political parties that use them as platforms to advance elite economic and political agendas. The only public television channel, Mongolian National Broadcaster (MNB), is directly influenced by the ruling Mongolian People's Party (MPP), which determines both its budget and reporting priorities. These patterns of ownership consolidate control of media narratives among politically and economically dominant groups, restricting the diversity and independence of public discourse.

Since Mongolia's transition to democracy in the 1990s, legal protections for freedom of information and freedom of expression have formally expanded the range of permissible media content. The *Freedom of Media Law* (1998) enshrined these rights in line with constitutional principles. This liberalization has enabled some public representations of queer identities, which had previously been suppressed under socialist-era norms that prioritized heteronormativity and "asexual" citizenship (Takács, 2015). However, the structural concentration of media ownership continues to constrain pluralistic discourse, privileging narratives aligned with heteronormative, patriarchal, and elite interests while marginalizing counter-hegemonic or inclusive perspectives. Within this constrained social context, the discursive strategies employed to represent queer identities in Mongolian media remain deeply entangled with the institutional and ideological forces shaping media production.

5.2. Critical Discourse Analysis of Queer Representation in Mongolian Media

Biased or conservative media, politicians, and religious leaders often portray LGBTIQ+ individuals as threats to public health, national security, and "traditional structures such as family or marriage" (Kozary, 2019, p. 31). In Mongolia, societal acceptance of LGBTIQ+ people remains limited, leading to widespread discrimination, harassment, and violence perpetrated by family members, peers, colleagues, classmates, community members, and even the police (NHRCM, 2013). This stigmatization is deeply rooted in cultural norms and reinforced by the lack of comprehensive legal protections for sexual and gender minorities. Consequently, many LGBTIQ+ individuals face significant mental health challenges, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Comparable patterns of marginalization have been documented in other regions, underscoring the global persistence of anti-LGBTIQ+ sentiment.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA), as a problem-oriented approach to social research, employs multiple analytical frameworks, including Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach, van Dijk's socio-cognitive discourse analysis, Jäger and Meier's Duisburg school, van Leeuwen's social actors' theory, Scollon and Scollon's mediated discourse analysis, and Wodak's discourse-historical approach (Bartley & Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2016, pp. 6–7). Among these, this study adopts Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach, which conceptualizes discourse as a form of social practice that both shapes and is shaped by social structures. This framework emphasizes three interrelated levels of analysis: the textual, which examines linguistic features and organization; the discursive practice, which considers processes of text production, distribution, and consumption; and the social practice, which situates discourse within broader social and cultural contexts (Fairclough, 2010). Given its capacity to reveal connections between language use and power relations, this framework is particularly suited to examining how Mongolian media texts construct and represent queer identities. Accordingly, this analysis seeks to identify the discursive strategies employed in these representations and to assess critically how they reproduce or challenge dominant ideologies and social norms.

During the socialist regime, sources of knowledge about sexuality included media representations, school programs, and research projects (Takács, 2015). Although Takács (2015) specifically refers to the socialist-era Hungarian context, similar forms of knowledge production can be observed in post-socialist Mongolia, including media coverage, a national educational curriculum with sex education, and research projects funded by international organizations. In particular, media discourse on sexuality was largely confined to heteronormative narratives, with little to no discussion of homosexuality.

At the textual level, this silence is evident in the absence of terminology or representations of non-heterosexual identities in media texts. At the level of discursive practice, media production and consumption processes reinforced heteronormativity by privileging narratives aligned with Marxist-Leninist state ideology and excluding alternative perspectives. At the level of social practice, this discursive pattern reflected broader socialist moral norms that, as Takács (2015) argues, “celebrated a specifically asexual state—socialist reproduction” (p. 161), systematically silencing sexuality. This analysis highlights how discourse was shaped by the political and

ideological imperatives of the time, constructing an idealized socialist citizen whose sexuality was subordinated to demographic and ideological goals.

The structural constraints on press freedom in Mongolia form an essential component of the contemporary social context within which media discourse about queer identities is produced. At the level of social practice, as conceptualized by Fairclough's (2010) dialectical-relational approach, the concentration of media ownership among political and economic elites, combined with the state's weakening commitment to press freedom, shapes the ideological parameters of acceptable public discourse. This environment limits critical or counter-hegemonic narratives and reproduces dominant heteronormative and patriarchal ideologies while marginalizing queer voices. The legal framework, including the *Law on Freedom of Media* (1998), formally protects freedom of expression; however, these guarantees are undermined by structural and institutional practices that constrain journalistic independence (Reporters Without Borders, 2024). Accordingly, the analysis of media texts in this study attends not only to textual and discursive features but also to the broader social practices of ownership, regulation, and political influence that condition queer representation in Mongolian media.

The marginalization of queer identities in Mongolia can be further analyzed through the three levels of Fairclough's (2010) framework. At the textual level, media and public discourses often employ pejorative terms such as "*abnormal*" and "*perverse*" to construct queer individuals as deviant, reinforcing heteronormative values linguistically and ideologically. These textual choices not only stigmatize queer identities but also normalize heterosexuality as the unquestioned standard or unstated norm (Minow, 1987). At the level of discursive practice, heteronormative discourses are reproduced through institutional mechanisms such as state-controlled media and cultural narratives. In response, queer activists attempt to disrupt these discourses by producing counter-publicity through Pride events, podcasts, and radical messaging. At the level of social practice, these discursive struggles reflect deeper power relations embedded in Mongolian society, where patriarchal and heteronormative structures continue to dominate despite democratic reforms and legal protections of expression. Analyzing queer representation through this multi-level framework reveals how linguistic choices, institutional practices, and societal norms interact to maintain or contest queer marginalization.

Public shaming operates as a key mechanism across both the discursive practice and social practice levels of CDA. At the level of discursive practice, public shaming shapes the production, distribution, and consumption of discourse by constructing certain individuals or groups as morally deviant and unworthy of inclusion in the normative social order. Through repeated circulation in media and public forums, such shaming contributes to the intertextual reproduction of stigmatizing narratives, which audiences internalize and perpetuate. At the level of social practice, public shaming reflects and reinforces broader ideological and institutional structures that sustain social hierarchies and inequalities. Specifically, it enacts the moral and cultural norms of dominant groups by policing the boundaries of acceptable identity and behavior, thereby maintaining heteronormative, patriarchal, and authoritarian orders. At the same time, public shaming can be appropriated as a counter-hegemonic strategy, enabling marginalized groups to contest authority, expose injustice, and mobilize collective resistance. Thus, analyzing public shaming through CDA highlights its dual potential as a discursive resource that both upholds and challenges existing power relations within society.

5.3. Shaming of Mongolian Queers in Media

In Mongolia, derogatory terms historically used to refer to queer individuals are deeply rooted in the socialist past and continue to shape contemporary media representations of the queer community. These terms function as mechanisms of social control, stigmatizing queers and reinforcing heteronormative norms. However, the queer community actively struggles to challenge the power of such terms while simultaneously coping with the shame attached to them. Judith Butler (1993) argues that the term “queer” itself operates as a linguistic practice aimed at shaming the subject it names, producing a subject through this very act of shaming. Butler notes, “Queer derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, [and] insult” (p. 18). This repeated citation creates and sustains social bonds among oppressing communities, enabling the transmission and reinforcement of stigma across generations. To avoid public shaming, members of the LGBTIQ+ community have historically adopted pseudonyms and fabricated stories as protective strategies, a practice that predates social media. In digital spaces, queer individuals often use anonymous or pseudonymous

identities, effectively “inventing” themselves and wearing metaphorical masks as shields to safeguard their identities and safety (Thomas, 2018).

In 2015, the LGBT Centre filed a complaint with the Media Council of Mongolia regarding the portrayal of LGBTIQ+ individuals in false and discriminatory narratives by domestic media outlets. In recent years, the primary medium of such representations has shifted from print and conventional press to social media and other digital platforms, with the format of each medium shaping both the scope and substance of its content. The LGBT Centre, along with its staff, activists, and volunteers, has been at the forefront of queer activism and the LGBTIQ+ human rights movement in Mongolia, leading advocacy efforts both openly and at the grassroots level. For example, in the 2010s the Centre produced a series of audio podcasts addressing issues relevant to the queer community. Since 2018, the *Mongolian Queer Podcast* has provided a platform for openly queer individuals to share their coming-out stories, discuss pressing concerns, and engage with broader topics affecting the community. Additionally, other queer community members continue to give interviews to both domestic and international media, choosing to speak either openly or anonymously depending on their circumstances.

From a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective, queer activists and influencers in Mongolia operate within and contribute to shifting discursive and social practices surrounding sexuality and visibility. At the level of discursive practice, these influencers produce and circulate digital content that challenges traditional heteronormative narratives by representing diverse queer identities and experiences. Through their online presence, they negotiate the boundaries of acceptable public discourse, often encountering resistance and negative public reactions that reflect entrenched societal norms. At the social practice level, their visibility disrupts dominant cultural scripts rooted in historical marginalization and silence around queer lives, contributing to the gradual transformation of social attitudes and power relations. By blending commerce, culture, and activism, these influencers exemplify how queer subjectivities are constructed and contested in contemporary Mongolian society, highlighting the dynamic interplay between media representation, identity formation, and social change.

Most recently, several queer influencers in Mongolia have emerged as visible public figures, using digital platforms to promote their work and engage with broader audiences. For example, Gan-Od, a formerly intersex and now trans* woman; Osorjaamaa, a trans* woman or

gay man; and Solongo, a transsexual woman, regularly use Facebook Live videos to market their own and others' businesses by selling various products. While these activities indirectly raise awareness of LGBTIQ+ issues, their presence and messaging have often been met with negative reactions from the public. In contrast, other queer influencers such as Kadr (1988-2024), a late gay fashion designer; Lana, a trans* female fashion model, singer, and actress; Daariya, a trans* piano teacher; Vanity, a gay man and drag queen; Sodoo, a gay male entrepreneur; and Margad, a gay male singer, have shed a more positive light on the intersection of queerness with business, human rights, art, culture, and social issues.

Most of these influencers appear on various television and YouTube talk shows and podcasts. Kadr, a semi-openly gay fashion designer, discussed fashion trends on media channels and dressed famous artists and performers in Mongolia. Likewise, Lana, the first androgynous model in Mongolia who later transitioned, gives interviews on TV channels, walks in major fashion shows, and participates in national singing contests. Daariua, a transgender woman (male-to-female), has led her students to win piano competitions both internationally and domestically, and she became a sensation in 2024 when one of her students won prizes at Carnegie Hall in New York City, USA. Openly gay singer Margad challenges the public with his unapologetic presence. Together, these figures illustrate the diverse ways in which queer individuals navigate public visibility and negotiate societal attitudes in contemporary Mongolia.

International media narratives that emphasize progress in Mongolia's LGBTIQ+ movement play a significant role in shaping both local and global understandings of queer rights in the country. By highlighting the absence of institutionalized oppression historically, these discourses frame Mongolia as a unique context where positive change is possible, especially through the influence of Western media and social platforms. However, such narratives also implicitly acknowledge ongoing hostility, revealing the tensions between dominant social norms and emerging counter-narratives of inclusion. These international portrayals contribute to the discursive practice of framing Mongolia's queer movement within a global human rights discourse, which both challenges and complicates local social practices. They can empower activists by providing symbolic resources for advocacy yet may also oversimplify or obscure the complex realities faced by Mongolian queer communities..

Media coverage of Mongolia's queer history reveals the complex interaction between text, discursive practices, and social practices. The reported incidents of violence against transgender individuals and the struggles of the LGBT Centre function as critical sites where competing discourses of power and resistance converge. At the level of text, the media frames these events through particular linguistic and narrative choices that can either stigmatize or legitimize queer identities and activism. Discursively, the media acts as a platform where dominant heteronormative ideologies, nationalist rhetoric, and emerging human rights narratives contest each other. For example, nationalist media narratives may pathologize queer activism as a threat to social order, while activist-oriented coverage highlights resilience and calls for legal reforms. On the social practice level, these representations both influence and are influenced by broader sociopolitical dynamics, including Mongolia's legal reforms and increasing queer visibility through Pride events. Together, these layers illustrate how media discourse participates in shaping public perceptions, reinforcing or challenging power structures, and contributing to the evolving social realities of Mongolian queers.

The inclusion of a broad spectrum of voices—from LGBT Centre staff and queer activists to scholars, government officials, and far-right ultra-nationalists—reflects the media's attempt to construct a narrative of balance and neutrality. However, this discursive strategy also reveals underlying power dynamics in the production of knowledge and legitimacy. By positioning opposition voices alongside queer activists, the media often frames queer rights as a contested issue, reinforcing the idea of societal division and conflict. This can serve to normalize hostility toward queer communities by legitimizing extremist perspectives as part of a “balanced” debate, which may marginalize queer voices despite their direct lived experiences. Moreover, the selection and representation of sources at the discursive practice level reveal how media texts negotiate ideological struggles, reproducing or challenging dominant social practices. At the social practice level, this multiplicity of voices impacts public perception and political discourse, influencing policy debates and social attitudes toward the queer community in Mongolia. Thus, media discourse functions not only to inform but also to shape the conditions under which queer identities are understood and contested in society.

Apart from official statistics on social and sexual discrimination, harassment, violence, physical assault, unemployment rate, and poverty, they elaborate on struggles such as rape,

domestic, sexual, and physical violence, and even suicide and killings the community members suffer and succumb. For example, law being viewed as a dead letter, Erdene in Global Voices, elaborates, “Sexual discrimination is a crime under Mongolian law. Harming people because of their sexual orientation or sexual identity [should] involve severe punishments. But this remains a dead letter: everyone ignores the law. If you call the police saying that you’ve been discriminated against, no one will come. And many people – many cops as well as many LGBTQ+ people – don’t even know that such a law exists” (Bastiano, 2020)

The media’s highlighting of the disconnect between Mongolia’s national laws and their ineffective enforcement reveals crucial insights into the discursive and social practices surrounding queer rights. At the text level, narratives such as Erdene’s expose the symbolic function of law as both a promise of protection and a site of institutional neglect, portraying legislation as “*dead letter*” to emphasize the dissonance between formal legal frameworks and lived realities. Discursively, these texts challenge dominant social narratives that portray Mongolia as progressively embracing human rights by exposing systemic silences, ignorance, and active denial within law enforcement and society. This discourse disrupts hegemonic ideologies that maintain social order by rendering discrimination invisible or normalized. At the social practice level, such media representations may influence public awareness and political accountability, potentially mobilizing communities and stakeholders toward legal reform and social change. However, they also reflect and perpetuate the marginalization of queer individuals by underscoring their vulnerability within state structures. Thus, media discourse functions as a critical site where power relations, institutional failures, and resistance are articulated and negotiated.

Compared to English-language media outlets, Mongolian media tend to focus on more fundamental questions, such as the estimated number of LGBTIQ+ individuals in Mongolia, their identities, human rights violations, and health-related concerns. This approach provides LGBT Centre staff with opportunities not only to raise awareness but also to elaborate on their ongoing activities and challenges faced by the community. For instance, when asked about pressing health issues, the Centre’s health program manager offers detailed responses addressing gender reassignment surgery, gender transition processes, mental health, and reproductive and sexual health concerns specific to queer individuals, extending beyond the commonly highlighted issues of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

The contrast between Mongolian and English-language media in their treatment of LGBTIQ+ issues reveals important dynamics at the levels of text, discursive practice, and social practice. Mongolian media's emphasis on basic questions—such as population estimates, identity clarification, and general human rights violations—reflects broader social unfamiliarity and the nascent stage of public discourse on queer issues. This framing positions the LGBT Centre as a key knowledge broker, enabling it to shape and expand public understanding through detailed elaborations on health and social concerns. In contrast, English-language media's more advanced and nuanced discussions of queer health and rights reflect established discourses in global human rights contexts. At the discursive practice level, these differences illustrate how local media mediate between global queer narratives and Mongolia's unique social realities, negotiating cultural acceptance and knowledge dissemination. On the social practice level, the Mongolian media's foundational framing can both empower community activism by raising awareness and simultaneously limit discourse by focusing on “basic” issues, potentially slowing societal recognition of the complexity of queer experiences. Thus, media coverage plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions, informing policy debates, and influencing the social inclusion of queer individuals in Mongolia.

Mongolian media outlets often employ sensational or scandal-driven headlines, framing queer identities as a growing threat to national security, population growth, and overall national development. Such headlines aim to provoke public alarm by drawing attention to the perceived increase in the number of queer individuals. Additionally, media narratives frequently revisit the enduring question of whether queerness is innate or socially acquired—a question that remains scientifically complex and unsettled. This ambiguity provides a discursive space for skeptics and opponents to maintain and legitimize their opposition to LGBTIQ+ individuals, reinforcing stigmatizing and discriminatory attitudes within the public sphere.

5.4. Shaming Discourse

Being “shamed” or made to feel “ashamed” by derogatory discourses such as *gaj donton* (pervert, deviant), *eriin orontsog* (a sorry excuse for a man), *er em ni medegdekhgui* (neither male nor female), and *niigmiin khog, shaar* (social scum), Mongolian queers exhibit a range of responses—from avoidance, anger, and depression to strategic compliance or resistance. Those

who comply may choose silence, which is often misinterpreted as passivity or disinterest. However, as Glenn (2004) argues, silence can function as a form of rhetorical agency, a communicative act that holds political weight. Though not physically present at public LGBTIQ+ events, these community members may support the movement affectively and ideologically.

On the other hand, individuals who resist or reframe shame—such as the drag performer Vanity—engage in acts of queer performativity that disrupt dominant heteronormative and patriarchal discourses. A long-term outreach worker and project manager at the Youth for Health Center, Nyamka capitalized on his prominence, potential, and talent to become the drag queen Vanity. Vanity first debuted many years ago during the Mister Beauty contest organized annually by the Center, and she now leads a group of drag queens and kings who perform at the Mongolian music festival *Play Time* and other queer events. As Butler (1993) argues, the performative repetition of stigmatizing language, such as “queer,” can paradoxically be reclaimed and redeployed as a form of resistance. By ridiculing both heterosexual and queer audiences, performers like Vanity strategically navigate visibility and critique through subversive aesthetics. These acts help consolidate a sense of shared belonging—what some describe as a “chosen family” or “imagined community”—grounded not only in non-normative gender or sexual identities, but also in common needs, lived realities, and mutual affective investment.

Shaming discourses are deeply rooted in the moral and legal frameworks of the socialist era, which emphasized rigid heteronormative values. For instance, terms like *ger bulees gaduur khariltsaa* (extramarital relations) and *yos surtakhuunii dogoldol* (morally flawed) were often used to label individuals who deviated from the idealized nuclear family model and socialist moral expectations. Similarly, the expression *eriig emleh* (making a man one’s woman), which originates from the pre-1980s Criminal Code, reflects the historical criminalization of same-sex sexual relations between men. These discursive constructions serve to marginalize and pathologize queer identities, reinforcing binary gender norms and institutionalizing homophobia as part of both legal and cultural heritage. Within a Critical Discourse Analysis framework, these narratives represent ideological tools that contribute to the reproduction of social inequality at both the discursive and social practice levels (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1993).

Mongolian language contains idiomatic expressions that reflect deep-rooted cultural notions of shame and shamelessness. One such saying, *ichih nüürée elgendee naasan*, literally

translates to “having one’s shameful face stuck to the liver.” This metaphor implies a degree of shame so intense that the face must be hidden within the body, particularly against the liver—an internal organ traditionally associated with cleansing or filtering toxins. Another common expression is *ichikh bulchirkhai ügüi*—“having no shame gland”—which imagines shame as an innate biological feature, embedded within one’s anatomy, suggesting that a person either possesses or lacks the physiological capacity to feel shame. These embodied metaphors not only naturalize shame as biologically predetermined but also reinforce normative boundaries around acceptable behavior, gender roles, and moral character. Such culturally specific idioms function as part of the discursive and social practices that regulate bodies and behaviors (Fairclough, 1995). They contribute to the reproduction of normative expectations around gender and sexuality by framing shame not merely as a social emotion but as an anatomical trait—one that disciplines the queer subject by positioning them outside the boundaries of proper moral embodiment (Butler, 1993; Sedgwick, 2003). These phrases serve as linguistic acts of interpellation that sustain heteronormativity and moral surveillance in everyday discourse.

Shaming discourses are less commonly found in international media but appear frequently—both implicitly and explicitly—in Mongolian-language media coverage. One notable strategy of implicit shaming involves the use of scandalous or sensational titles. Even when the main content of an interview or article presents accurate, educational, and supportive perspectives from experts and queer community members, Mongolian media outlets often extract provocative phrases for headlines to attract readership. For example, titles such as “10 percent of the population could be LGBTIQ+” are framed in ways that may trigger public anxiety or moral panic, rather than promote understanding. Moreover, these articles often invite hostile reader responses in the comment sections of online platforms. Common public reactions include statements such as: “*It’s a mental illness,*” “*Protect our children,*” “*Send homos to prison,*” “*Kill yourself, faggot,*” “*Why cover this topic for the masses?*” or even historical myths like “*Chinggis Khaan used to kill these people without hesitation.*” These reactions reflect widespread societal homophobia and illustrate how media discourse not only informs but also reinforces discriminatory public attitudes. However, “there is no evidence that Genghis Khan or his descendants banned man-on-man sex” (Terbish, 2023, p. 124).

Such sensational headlines function as *discursive practices* that mediate between the *text* and *social structures* (Fairclough, 1995). They serve as gatekeeping mechanisms that frame queer identities in pathologized or threatening ways, despite the overall content being educational or affirming. This dissonance between content and headline reveals how media institutions negotiate commercial pressures (e.g., clickbait), editorial norms, and prevailing social ideologies—thereby reproducing heteronormativity and moral conservatism through seemingly neutral journalistic practices. Furthermore, comment sections become spaces of public discourse where shaming, hate speech, and violent rhetoric are normalized, reinforcing the marginalization of LGBTIQ+ individuals within broader social practices.

Mongolian media outlets display a wide spectrum of approaches in covering queer issues. While some genuinely strive to maintain balance and objectivity, others deliberately sensationalize or distort these topics, often reinforcing shame and stigma. Increasingly, media discourses have shifted from overtly hostile or explicitly negative portrayals to more insidious forms of bias. These “hidden scripts” are conveyed through seemingly neutral or carefully crafted questions and framing techniques that subtly reinforce heteronormativity and social exclusion. Such narratives often tap into conspiracy theories suggesting that queer identities and rights are Western imports aimed at corrupting or destabilizing Mongolian cultural values. One recurring discourse asserts that “these issues did not exist during the socialist era, but have now emerged due to foreign influence,” implying that LGBTIQ+ identities are threats to national sovereignty, morality, and social cohesion. Through this framing, media outlets indirectly endorse discrimination and marginalization while maintaining a façade of neutrality or journalistic objectivity.

From a CDA standpoint, these covert forms of media bias operate at both the *discursive practice* level—through selective sourcing, framing, and headline choices—and the *social practice* level—by reinforcing dominant ideologies such as nationalism, heteronormativity, and cultural essentialism. Fairclough’s (1995) notion of “ideological-discursive formations” is particularly relevant here: the media draw on wider social fears and anxieties (e.g., national identity, cultural purity) to legitimize shaming discourses while marginalizing counter-hegemonic voices. This form of subtle stigmatization is often harder to challenge than explicit homophobia, because it is embedded in the normative assumptions of news production and reception. As a result, these

discourses do not simply reflect public opinion—they actively shape and reproduce it, embedding shame into the fabric of everyday language and media narratives.

The most subversive and dehumanizing feedback directed at LGBTIQ+ people in Mongolian public discourse often casts them as “*non-human*,” “*beasts*,” or suffering from “*mental illness*” or “*congenital defects*.” These extreme labels aim to silence queer voices by stripping them of personhood and positioning them outside the bounds of social legitimacy. When such overt forms of hate speech fail to achieve full public consensus, more moderate sounding but equally exclusionary discourses emerge. These include claims that “*it is not the right time to discuss these issues*,” or that queerness is detrimental to “*population growth*,” “*traditional cultural norms*,” or “*national security*.” While framed in the language of pragmatism or patriotism, such statements function as strategic deferrals—denying queer subjects both recognition and urgency.

In some of the most troubling instances, medical professionals and psychologists in Mongolia reinforce harmful discourses by framing queerness as pathology. Statements such as “*they are victims of negative social phenomena*,” or “*these sexual deviants need to be understood, but not accepted and supported*,” as well as proposals for “*treatment by force, just like we treat alcoholics*,” reveal how biomedical and psychological authority is mobilized to legitimize systemic discrimination. These pathologizing narratives are echoed by self-identified intellectuals who dismiss gender and queer studies as “*unnecessary*,” warning that such frameworks allegedly fragment societies by creating “*divisive labels*” such as “*racists*,” “*homophobes*,” or “*patriarchy oppressors*.”

These discourses reflect interdiscursivity—the blending of medical, moral, and political language to naturalize queer exclusion. At the discursive practice level, they shape the production, distribution, and consumption of knowledge about LGBTIQ+ identities, reinforcing stigma under the guise of professionalism and rationality. At the social practice level, they sustain dominant ideologies that define normativity and health in ways that marginalize non-heteronormative identities. Drawing on Fairclough’s model, such language reproduces institutional power asymmetries and contributes to the broader societal regulation of queer lives through what Foucault might call “biopolitical control.” In this context, “expert” discourses do not just describe queerness—they actively produce it as deviance, justifying moral and legal marginalization.

These shaming tactics also mirror broader discursive formations of internalized homophobia and transphobia, often driven by unresolved societal anxieties and fears. In particular, the discourse around same-sex marriage is deeply saturated with affective and moral panic. The idea that “if same-sex marriage is legalized, the traditional family institution will disappear,” or “our society and tradition will be ruined by same-sex couples,” illustrates how queer relationships are constructed not only as unnatural but as existential threats to national identity, cultural continuity, and demographic stability. Such rhetoric positions LGBTIQ+ people as outsiders—not only in terms of sexuality but as enemies of the nation-state.

These narratives also echo xenophobic and nationalist logics, such as the claim that “*these people are sick and try to import these issues through foreign funding or agents*,” closely aligning with the “*foreign agent*” laws in countries like the Russian Federation. Here, queerness is framed as a Western imposition—a neocolonial strategy—rather than as an indigenous, lived reality. These discourses function at the discursive practice level by legitimizing censorship and exclusionary laws, while at the social practice level they reinforce ideologies of heteronormativity, moral superiority, and national purity.

This type of fear-based discourse reflects ideological state apparatuses that work through education, media, and religious rhetoric to cultivate collective paranoia. In doing so, it inhibits the formation of inclusive policies and reinforces the marginalization of LGBTIQ+ individuals not just as morally deviant but as politically dangerous. Through constant repetition, these narratives become hegemonic—accepted as “common sense” truths—thereby silencing dissent and undermining possibilities for rights-based or justice-oriented conversations.

The interview with N. Orchlon, a Mongolian judge at the International Criminal Court, by the progressive news outlet *iToim* offers a striking example of how discursive authority alters the reception of queer-related narratives in Mongolian media. Unlike activists or openly queer individuals who are frequently targeted by derogatory comments and personal attacks, Judge Orchlon’s professional stature and international legitimacy seem to shield him from public shaming or insult. His capacity to challenge stereotypes and dismiss misinformation with confidence—grounded in legal expertise and global perspective—demonstrates how epistemic authority can suppress backlash and create discursive space for rational, evidence-based dialogue.

This illustrates how power operates not only through what is said but also through who says it. The audience's relative silence in this case reflects an implicit acknowledgment of institutional and social hierarchy—where a high-ranking legal expert is perceived as more credible or untouchable than a queer activist. It also exposes a double standard in public discourse, where the same ideas, when voiced by less powerful individuals (especially queer-identifying people), are dismissed, ridiculed, or aggressively attacked. This dynamic reinforces existing social inequalities and contributes to the discursive marginalization of queer voices, while allowing “respectable” elites to speak on their behalf without facing the same risks.

Within the public discourses surrounding Mongolian queerness, shame is deployed not only as a tool of external discipline, but also as a means of intra-community stratification—where degrees of perceived acceptability or deviance are unevenly assigned to different queer identities. As seen in online comments that “*pity*” intersex individuals while simultaneously dehumanizing gay men, the public performs moral sorting that aligns with ableist, medicalized, and heteropatriarchal logics. These rhetorics reflect what CDA identifies as ideological positioning, where bodies and identities are discursively organized according to social values, those seen as congenital (e.g., intersex) may be “*tolerated*” within a frame of pity, while others (e.g., MSM) are vilified through hypersexualized, disgust-oriented language. Accusations such as “*making a man one’s woman*” or using the “*defecation hole*” reinforce sex-negative discourses, weaponizing anal sex as a metaphor for emasculation and abjection. This demonstrates how shame operates not just on moral terms, but also viscerally, aiming to silence and invalidate queer existence by reducing it to imagined, transgressive acts. In this way, shaming functions as a linguistic policing of desire and gender roles, reinforcing normative masculinity and denying queer subjectivity any legitimate social standing. It seems that the most brutal and degrading insults toward sexual and gender minorities through the worst forms of “unstated norm” (Minow, 1987, p. 39) imposed on them, could be the very purpose of shaming because “unstated assumptions work in subtle and complex ways” (p. 57).

Furthermore, the intentional adoption and translation of foreign derogatory terms like “*homo*,” “*light blue*” (a direct translation from the Russian term, *голубой*, pronounced as ‘*goluboy*’) and “*lesbi*” into Mongolian language signifies a deliberate effort to mainstream globalized stigmatizing language. The word *gomo*, a transliterated version of “*homo*,” carries

derogatory connotations comparable to the English slur “faggot.” It is often used in everyday parlance with an added association to the similarly sounding Mongolian word *goomoi*, which means “dodgy.” The LGBT Centre also considers *lesbi* derogatory, as it reflects a direct Russian transliteration rather than an accurate rendering of its English counterpart.

These borrowed terms carry heavy semiotic weight, reproducing external models of homophobia within a local context. The use of such lexicon reveals a discursive hybridization of hate, where local prejudices are reinforced and rearticulated through transnational vocabularies of exclusion. This linguistic importation also reflects media complicity in reproducing shame, as these terms are not only normalized but embedded in narratives that signal moral panic, cultural contamination, and deviance. Overall, these practices constitute an ideological operation that systematically devalues certain lives, enforcing a discursive regime where structural marginalization is naturalized and reproduced.

Early Mongolian media coverage of queer topics reflects dominant heteronormative and patriarchal ideologies embedded in both language and narrative structure. The recurrent framing of queerness as something to be debated—“inborn versus acquired”—reveals a discursive attempt to medicalize or moralize LGBTIQ+ identities, implicitly denying their legitimacy. Moreover, the portrayal of closeted gay men as capable of “turning/converting straight” through marriage and procreation suggests a disciplinary discourse, where heteronormativity is framed as corrective, even redemptive. Such representations reinforce the regulatory power of traditional gender roles, positioning fatherhood and heterosexual marriage as both moral obligations and pathways to reclaiming social acceptance. Media texts that idealize these conversions implicitly position queerness as a temporary deviance, thus promoting internalized homophobia and discouraging self-acceptance among queer individuals. By privileging these narratives, the media not only delays the progression from basic awareness to rights-based discourse, but also perpetuates social practices of erasure and compliance, forcing LGBTIQ+ individuals into silence, conformity, or shame.

5.5. Sensationalism and the Reproduction of Stigma in Mongolian Media

The sensationalist framing of queer issues in Mongolian media reflects and reinforces dominant heteronormative ideologies at the text, discursive practice, and social practice levels. At the text level, alarmist headlines construct queer identities as a societal “*problem*” or “*threat*,” invoking metaphors of danger and decline that resonate with nationalist and pronatalist ideologies. At the discursive practice level, such representations perpetuate a binary and pathologizing discourse, enabling opponents of queer rights to claim legitimacy by citing cultural, moral, and demographic “*concerns*.” At the social practice level, these discourses sustain structural discrimination and impede social inclusion, as they normalize public hostility and hinder evidence-based discussion of sexuality and human rights. Thus, media sensationalism not only informs but also actively shapes and reproduces the stigmatization of queer individuals in Mongolia.

Media coverage—both in Mongolian and English—plays a crucial role in enhancing public knowledge and shaping perceptions of LGBTIQ+ individuals, their social and human rights issues, and their acceptance in society. Indirectly, such coverage supports the agenda of the LGBT Centre by fostering attitudinal changes and building public awareness. A further advantage of media lies in its ability to inform audiences about key milestones in queer history, including legislative amendments, landmark events such as Pride, and the pressing need to train public officials—such as law enforcement officers, healthcare providers, and educators—on issues affecting the queer community. Increased media attention to queer individuals and their struggles also contributes to the refinement of advocacy narratives: as coverage becomes more detailed, experts, activists, and queer individuals learn to communicate more effectively, articulating accurate and evidence-based arguments supported by relevant data, statistics, events, and sources. This process not only deepens their own understanding of the issues but also helps identify gaps and new perspectives in their messaging, thereby advancing the goals of ethical journalism and responsible activism grounded in scientific knowledge and evidence-based advocacy.

Media discourses on LGBTIQ+ issues in Mongolia operate as contested sites where power relations, ideologies, and resistance are negotiated. At the text level, media stories and narratives frame queer identities in ways that can either reinforce heteronormative ideologies through sensationalism and stigmatization or challenge them through more nuanced and humanizing portrayals. At the discursive practice level, the interaction between journalists, activists, experts, and audiences creates a space for counter-hegemonic discourses to emerge, enabling activists and

queer individuals to articulate alternative narratives, claim visibility, and redefine public understanding of sexuality and rights. At the social practice level, repeated and increasingly sophisticated engagement with media helps normalize queer presence in public discourse, erode entrenched prejudices, and push for institutional reforms—such as legal protections and professional training—necessary for greater social inclusion. Thus, media coverage does not merely reflect societal attitudes but actively shapes them, making it a critical arena of struggle between dominant power structures and marginalized voices seeking recognition and justice.

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that media representations of LGBTIQ+ individuals in Mongolia operate as powerful mechanisms of both marginalization and resistance. Through biased reporting, sensationalist headlines, and the use of derogatory language, dominant media reproduce heteronormative, patriarchal, and nationalist ideologies that frame queer identities as deviant, foreign, or threatening to social cohesion. Historical legacies from the socialist era, combined with contemporary structural constraints on press freedom, continue to shape public discourse, leaving queer individuals vulnerable to stigma, harassment, and violence. These findings underscore the persistent gap between legal protections and societal attitudes, demonstrating how media both reflects and reinforces systemic inequalities.

Critical Discourse Analysis, particularly Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach, has illuminated the multi-layered processes through which these representations operate. At the textual level, language and framing choices—ranging from sensationalist headlines to medicalized and pathologizing terminology—construct queer identities as morally and socially aberrant. At the level of discursive practice, media production and consumption reinforce dominant ideologies while simultaneously providing opportunities for counter-narratives through activism, digital content, and community storytelling. At the social practice level, these discourses interact with broader sociocultural and political structures, revealing how shame, stigma, and heteronormativity are institutionalized yet contested through grassroots and global interventions.

Mongolian queer communities have developed adaptive strategies to navigate these hostile discursive environments. From pseudonymous digital engagement to the emergence of visible

queer influencers and activist-led media, these practices challenge dominant narratives and create spaces for alternative understandings of gender and sexuality. Media also serves as a site for negotiating the tension between local cultural norms and global human rights frameworks, highlighting both the potential and limitations of visibility in effecting social change. The chapter demonstrates that even subtle forms of bias, such as covert framing or selective sourcing, contribute to the reproduction of stigma, while the active participation of queer actors and allies can disrupt entrenched patterns of exclusion.

Ultimately, the analysis emphasizes that media discourse in Mongolia is neither neutral nor static. It functions as a contested arena where ideological, moral, and political battles over queer visibility, legitimacy, and rights are fought. While pervasive shaming and sensationalism continue to shape public perception, the growing influence of informed activism, inclusive reporting, and digital platforms offers pathways toward greater social inclusion and recognition. This dynamic interplay of power, language, and resistance underscores the critical role of media in both sustaining and challenging the structural marginalization of sexual and gender minorities, illustrating the complex processes through which societal norms and identities are constructed and contested.

Chapter 6: Shamed Citizens in Exile

“Often my life seemed suspended in the middle of nowhere given the waiting time and the living situation that was not always safe.” – Anaraa Nyamdorj (1976-2023), co-founder of the LGBT Centre of Mongolia and a former queer asylum seeker

“Shame is an experience of the self by the self.” – Silvan Tomkins

6.1. Introduction of the Study¹⁰

This chapter explores the lived experiences of repressed Mongolian queers and their exilic journeys. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted through purposive sampling with 20 queer individuals and allies reveal that shame—an important identity construct among Mongolian queers—serves as a trigger for both forced and self-imposed exile. Forced exile occurs when individuals or groups are banished from their home country against their will due to political, ethnic, or religious persecution, legal punishment, or safety concerns, whereas self-imposed exile refers to the voluntary departure of a person from their country due to a hostile environment. I argue that the embraced and resolved shame experienced by queer Mongolians in exile, facilitated by exposure to relatively more accepting environments abroad, eases their exilic experiences and transforms shame into self-acceptance and self-esteem.

The study examines queer Mongolians living abroad who have escaped the stigma associated with their sexual and gender identities, resulting in lives characterized by exile as refugees, asylum seekers, or educational and economic migrants. A notable incident involved the physical and sexual assault of three transgender women in 2009 by an ultranationalist group, as reported by the LGBT Centre of Mongolia (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] & United States Agency for International Development [USAID], 2014, p. 23). Two of the survivors later sought asylum in other countries. Since then, LGBTIQ+ Mongolians have continued to leave the country. However, this was not the earliest case; one interviewee recounted that a gay man was granted refugee status in the United States as early as 1980. This chapter explores how queer Mongolians navigate their sexual and gender identities through the intersecting experiences of

¹⁰ This Chapter is based on my peer-reviewed article, “Shamed Citizens: Exilic Lived Experiences of Queer Mongolians Abroad,” published in *Intersections: East European Journal of Society and Politics* in January 2023.

shame and exile. Within this framework, leaving one's homeland due to precarious political circumstances and restrictive social norms constitutes a form of exile. As Schwartz (2018) explained, "shame is a wound of not belonging," a condition that evokes feelings of exile and stems from being perceived as different or misunderstood within one's family.

The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol permit LGBTIQ+ individuals to seek protection under the category of "a particular social group." However, this designation has been the subject of debate due to its simultaneously restrictive and broad interpretations (Buscher, 2011, pp. 93–94). These interpretive ambiguities carry significant implications for queer refugees, as they may either limit or facilitate legal access to protection. Furthermore, shame—alongside homophobia and repressive legislation—often prevents asylum seekers from openly disclosing the true reasons for leaving their home countries (Buscher, 2011, pp. 95–96). For those who are both refugees and members of the LGBTIQ+ community, this dynamic can result in what Buscher (2011) describes as "double marginality" (pp. 97–98). Unlike most refugees, who flee due to armed conflict or political persecution, queer individuals are often "banished, exiled, evicted, rejected, and betrayed for being an unworthy citizen" (Dixon, 2017).

The primary research question guiding this study asks: *How does the concept of shame shape the lived experiences of queer Mongolians in relation to identity, citizenship, and exile?* To address this question, I conducted interviews with 20 participants using purposive sampling. The in-depth, semi-structured interviews collected demographic information, including age, SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics), country of residence, and length of time living abroad. Open-ended questions focused on participants' life histories, including asylum-seeking processes, refugee identification and status, relocation, and related experiences. The interviews also explored participants' understanding and experiences of shame, both in Mongolia and in their countries of residence. Interviews were conducted in Mongolian, transcribed in the same language, and subsequently translated into English. One logistical challenge was coordinating interview times across multiple time zones, particularly for participants living in North America and various Asian countries. Most participants were willing to have their cameras on during interviews, which allowed the researcher to observe facial expressions, gestures, and other nonverbal behaviors.

Over 20 queer individuals and allies were contacted for interviews, with a list of participants provided in Appendix V. Some declined participation after learning about the study's topic and interview questions, citing a desire to avoid revisiting potentially distressing experiences as LGBTIQ+ individuals in Mongolia. It was not possible to obtain contact information for two transgender women who sought asylum and became refugees in 2009–2010; they currently reside in the Netherlands. Conversely, Anaraa Nyamdorj—a queer trans* man, co-founder, and former Executive Director of the LGBT Centre of Mongolia—agreed to participate. Anaraa, who sought asylum in the Netherlands and lived in asylum seekers' centers (AZCs) for three years and eight months, consented to the use of his name and Facebook/Meta posts for this study and provided brief responses to interview questions.

Among the 16 individuals interviewed or contacted briefly online, two were community leaders representing non-governmental organizations: the LGBT Centre and Youth for Health. These organizations work on LGBTIQ+ rights and on issues related to HIV, AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and the sexual and mental health of GBTQ+ community members. Of the 16 participants, six identified as gay men, one as a heterosexual woman, three as trans* women, two as lesbians, two as non-binary queer individuals, and two as trans* men. Participants were located in countries across the Americas, Europe, and Asia, including the United States, Switzerland, Germany, Mongolia, and Thailand. Among the 12 queer participants who sought asylum—whether their applications were successful or not—the duration of residence in host countries ranged from 2 to 8 years. Additional demographic information and the full list of interviewees are provided in Appendix V.

6.2. Shame of Sexuality

In Mongolia, it is relatively common for people to conflate sexual acts and behaviors with sexual and gender identity, a misunderstanding frequently reflected in media representations. Public discourse—particularly among conservative and ultra-nationalist groups—often centers on imagined same-sex sexual acts between men, which are met with strong disgust and moral panic. The broader society continues to struggle with conceptualizing sexuality beyond explicit or pornographic imagery, especially in relation to gay men. This limited perspective impedes public understanding and acceptance of the emotional and sensual attractions experienced by sexual and

gender minorities, the innate nature of gender identities and expressions, and the broader spectrum of gender and sexual diversity.

In this context, gay men and lesbians are often unable to sustain same-sex relationships without facing hatred and intimidation, while transgender individuals frequently experience physical and sexual violence, in addition to lacking access to adequate healthcare services. As J.Z. (personal communication, 2022), a gay man who attempted to seek asylum, explained, it was impossible for him to live openly with his partner in Mongolia. This was the primary reason he sought to travel to Turkey and then enter Hungary via Serbia; however, he was stopped, returned, and detained in Turkey. An anonymous lesbian participant (personal communication, 2022) noted, “Mongolian newspapers depict transgender individuals as sex workers, while television outlets and ultra-nationalist groups raid hotels to expose and shame them.”

The case of M.S. (personal communication, January 2022), a refugee and trans* woman residing in Thailand at the time of interview while awaiting determination of her destination country, reveals severe police brutality and abuse. On November 26, 2017, she was arrested based on a false accusation of public nuisance and taken to a sobering-up cell, typically located in the basements of police stations. There, she was physically assaulted by four police officers, who restrained her limbs and forcibly removed her pants to determine her sex. The officers then exposed her genitalia in front of others in the holding area. M.S. later described the incident as the most intense shame she had ever experienced. As a trans* woman who felt deep discomfort and dysphoria about that part of her body, having it publicly exposed was, in her words, her “worst nightmare.” This experience left her deeply traumatized, with lasting emotional and psychological harm.

Another aspect of the shaming experienced by queer individuals—particularly trans* people—in Mongolia is the prevailing public perception that SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics) is static. Individuals who feel or identify differently from the sex assigned to them at birth are often labelled as “sexually aberrant.” Anaraa (personal communication, 2022) shares his experience of gender and sexual fluidity, explaining how his transition from identifying as a lesbian to identifying as a trans* man unfolded organically. He described:

“Even prior to my transition, I identified as genderqueer, especially given the fact of my marriage to a cisgender lesbian that precluded my open identification as a trans man. When I began my transition, my sexual orientation became wider than it was, as I no longer had the limitations of my body and my mind. I have always been attracted to femininity; it is still the case, no matter whether the femininity I am attracted to is in women or in men” (personal communication, 2022).

Reflecting on questions such as “Why am I a subject of shaming?”, “Who am I to the queer community?”, and “Who am I to a certain category within the community?” allows individuals to explore and reframe the sense of self within a shifting mental and emotional landscape. For many, especially those who have lived abroad for extended periods, developing a deeper understanding of their identities has helped them alleviate the pain of shame. Through this process, they have come to recognize that some Mongolians struggle to accept differences and diversity, particularly in the context of a largely homogenous society.

More than a decade after the groundbreaking 2010 documentary by the LGBT Centre, Anaraa still feels the same about what he reflected on regarding shame, sexuality, and public perception. He reiterates:

“I am still the one who is not hiding, for whom it is no longer possible even to hide, neither am I ashamed of myself or my life. Shaming was imposed from external parties, and that is still the case” (personal communication, 2022).

Indeed, the reasons he applied for asylum included death threats; potential violence from past perpetrators, which the police refused to investigate; and the need for better health and mental services as a trans* man.

It is most hurtful and heartbreaking when shaming attacks come from friends, fellow queers, family members, and loved ones. As G.T. (personal communication, February 2022), a queer, non-binary individual residing in Berlin, shared, their elementary school classmates even composed a four-line poem to ridicule them, which goes: “G.T. the Sissy / You are a human shit / Together with other [queer] people / You are a dog shit.” Their classmates, who were six- or seven-year-olds living in the countryside, recited it every time they saw G.T. on the way to and from school. This illustrates how ‘sophisticated’ shaming strategies can be, even from an early age, regardless of the experience or locations of both the shamers and the shamed.

Many interviewees referred to metaphors of “dog” when describing how they were treated as less than human. Although the dog is a universally recognized domesticated pet, referring to someone as “*living like a dog*” in Mongolian means being treated as an animal or as less than human. The police would threaten M.S. that she would die “*a dog’s death*,” implying that no one would know how or why she died, or that her death would be miserable. As for G.T., the poem composed by those who bullied them also included “*dog shit*,” an insult equating a human being with an object. B.Z. explained that his condition in a refugee camp was awful, as if he “*lived like a dog*.” This kind of subhuman, degrading treatment led M.S. to think, “*I do not want to be a citizen of Mongolia if they treat me like this.*”

Intersectionality shapes how shame manifests among Mongolian queer individuals living abroad. Queer individuals who are single, live with HIV or AIDS, come from a lower socio-economic class, or are refugees are doubly or triply marginalized and particularly vulnerable. In the case of E.G., a trans* woman and refugee, her HIV status and gender identity alienated her from both her biological and chosen families, exposed her to constant shame, and put her at risk of physical and sexual violence. A gay man living with HIV, who is an economic migrant in Europe, described feeling lonely and “*broken*,” as he also hides his sexuality because he works with many heterosexual Mongolians (personal communication, January 2022).

Race, class, gender, and sexuality complicate marginalization and vulnerability. T.N., a single mother living with AIDS and raising a daughter of African and Asian descent, is seeking asylum in Germany after unsuccessful asylum applications in Canada and Germany. Despite being a heterosexual woman, T.N. says she feels a queer kinship with Mongolian queer individuals due to shared experiences of shame, discrimination, and marginalization with LGBTIQ+ peers. As the saying goes, “the personal is political,” and one’s SOGIESC, intersecting with socio-economic background, physical appearance, HIV status, sexual roles in same-sex relations, and other signifiers, intensifies the queer lived experiences of shame, so that its complexity and trauma shift from the individual level to the interpersonal and community levels.

Anaraa is an openly trans* man, academic, activist, poet, translator, and author of multiple LGBTIQ+ studies, translated books, and training manuals. He formerly identified as a lesbian and genderqueer and was married to an Australian lesbian partner in Canada. He co-founded the LGBT Centre in 2007 and later recognized his trans* identity. Through his queer activism since then—

including running a queer bar called “100%” in the 2010s—and by living authentically in both private and public, he experienced disownment by family, physical violence from strangers and family associates, and police brutality. This autobiographical account of a trans* man’s lived experience illustrates how societal and cultural norms shaped his life, initially making him feel like a shadow or “*a second-class citizen*,” but ultimately empowering him to embrace and share his story publicly. On his blog, Anaraa described his personal life as a young lesbian in the 1990s, sharing love stories, intimate narratives, and his journey as a vocal leader in the queer community.

He recalls one of his exes praising his transition: “*I am in no way, shape, or form scared or ashamed of the fact that you began your transition. I’m actually happy for you, in fact, proud of you because you, someone I’d loved so much at one time, are finally trying to become his true self.*”¹¹ As Tomkin (1995) observed, “Shame is indeed felt as an inner torment and sickness of the soul, making the ‘self’ feel naked, defeated, alienated, and lacking in dignity or worth” (p. 133). The strong affect of shame is evident in Anaraa’s blog, particularly in his poetry. The title of his blog, *Theories and Thoughts*, reflects his life-journey from identifying as a lesbian to a trans* man, opening a wonderful window into his inner world—both during his lifetime and posthumously. This “inner, tortured self” powerfully conveys his struggle for identity within a hierarchical, patriarchal society. He writes:

“Hounded, I’m shrunk in the corner of my mental cell,
Hounded, I howl and whimper with tortured, muted gasps,
Hounded, I’m shaking inside my own skin – my prison,
Hounded, I’m floating out of it all... to only return to my body again.” (Anaraa, personal blog, November 7, 2002)

This passage reflects an enormous sense of resilience, perseverance, and resistance.

6.3. Shame of Family and Sexual Citizenship

Nyamka, a community leader and manager at the Youth for Health Center specializing in HIV/AIDS, sexual health, and mental health among LGBTQ+ community members, confirms that public and familial acceptance of queer Mongolians remains largely superficial. Although many

¹¹ Theories and Thoughts: <https://4n4r44.blogspot.com/>.

verbally acknowledge and claim to accept sexual minorities, underlying stigma and discriminatory attitudes persist, revealing a dissonance between public discourse and lived realities. This contradiction aligns with Erving Goffman's (1963) seminal concept of stigma as a social process where individuals are devalued based on characteristics deemed "deviant" by dominant norms, leading to both social exclusion and internalized shame.

Nyamka's report of a closed-door session with high-ranking politicians and government officials, wherein LGBTIQ+ issues were explicitly labeled taboo, illustrates how institutional silence perpetuates queer marginalization. This political avoidance mirrors the systemic repression characteristic of Mongolia's socialist era, when discussions around sexuality and gender nonconformity were heavily censored. The legacy of such censorship endures, reinforcing queer invisibility and limiting opportunities for public education and policy reform.

The persistence of this "taboo" reflects broader structural power relations, as described in Foucault's (1978) theory of power/knowledge, whereby dominant discourses regulate what is considered acceptable knowledge and who may speak. In this context, queer identities remain constrained by hegemonic moral and nationalistic narratives that prioritize heteronormativity and social conformity. Understanding these dynamics is critical for advancing advocacy strategies that challenge stigma not only at the interpersonal level but also within institutional and state frameworks, thus fostering more meaningful acceptance and inclusion of queer Mongolians.

The most frequently reported familial reaction to coming out in Mongolia is a directive to "*go abroad and never come back.*" Interviewees commonly reference concerns such as "*family honor,*" "*shame of the family,*" and the pervasive perception that family members feel ashamed to have LGBTIQ+ sons or daughters. Emotional responses are often gendered: mothers and sisters tend to express their distress through tears and pleas for the individual to leave the country, while fathers and brothers more commonly respond with silence or violence throughout the disclosure process. Beyond the formal exile experienced through asylum-seeking, many Mongolian queers engage in self-imposed exile, choosing to leave for educational or employment opportunities and subsequently expressing reluctance or refusal to return. This decision is frequently motivated by the lived realities of entrenched societal hatred, discrimination, and violence linked to sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC).

This pattern of familial rejection and self-exile reflects a broader sociocultural framework where the concept of “family honor” functions as a mechanism of social control, enforcing heteronormative conformity and marginalizing queer identities. Drawing from Ahmed’s (2004) affect theory, shame experienced within kinship networks operates as a powerful force shaping individual subjectivities and life trajectories, often compelling individuals toward geographic and emotional displacement. Moreover, the gendered dynamics of familial responses resonate with feminist and queer critiques of patriarchal power structures, whereby silence from male relatives signals complicity in maintaining heteronormative family integrity (Butler, 1997; Connell, 2005).

The decision to pursue self-exile also foregrounds the intersection of individual agency and structural oppression, highlighting how Mongolian queer individuals navigate exclusionary environments by creating alternative spaces abroad. However, this movement raises critical questions about the cultural and political costs of such displacement, including the potential loss of community ties and the reinforcement of global hierarchies that valorize Western contexts as sites of queer liberation. Addressing these complex dynamics requires further research into the lived experiences of Mongolian queers both within and outside national borders, alongside efforts to challenge the societal norms that precipitate such profound forms of exclusion.

Reporting a family member to the police or pursuing legal action for hate crimes or domestic violence remains exceptionally challenging within the Mongolian queer community. Deeply ingrained notions of family honor and the stigma attached to neighbors’ opinions often discourage victims from seeking justice. For instance, M.S. endured physical abuse and death threats from her brother, yet when her case reached trial, a state prosecutor shamed her in a closed session for “*bringing such a situation upon her family.*” This institutionalized shaming exemplifies how social and legal systems may reinforce familial and communal pressures to silence queer victims. Interviewees frequently voiced a preference for their chosen LGBTIQ+ families over their biological kin, underscoring the rupture that shame inflicts within intimate relationships.

Male relatives—brothers, uncles, and others—often emerge as primary aggressors, threatening violence to preserve the family’s public reputation. This dynamic illustrates the collective nature of shame as described by Scheff (2000), where the fear of social dishonor extends beyond the individual to implicate the entire kinship network. Such shame not only enforces

conformity but can also transform loved ones into adversaries, embodying Butler's (1997) notion of performativity wherein familial and social expectations produce both identity and repression. The intersection of gender, power, and cultural norms manifests in these violent protections of "family honor," making the pursuit of justice a fraught and painful endeavor for queer individuals.

T.B., a 35-year-old gay man, endured profound personal sacrifices, including the dissolution of a decade-long partnership and separation from their adopted son, whom they had raised together. As the sole male heir, T.B. faced immense familial pressure to fulfill traditional expectations of procreation and lineage continuation, illustrating the powerful intersection of kinship obligations and heteronormative norms. In his professional life, he was compelled to perform rigid, stereotypical gender roles—adopting a hyper-masculine façade to conceal his authentic sexual identity, embodying Goffman's (1963) concept of stigma management through "passing" and impression management.

Similarly, T.K., a 30-year-old gay man, remains closeted to his Mongolian relatives, burdened by shame and fear of familial rejection. Despite this, he married his partner in the United States in 2016, highlighting the diasporic strategies employed by queer Mongolians to navigate the tension between personal authenticity and cultural expectations. Their stories underscore how queer individuals negotiate identity within a sociocultural landscape that valorizes heteronormativity, lineage, and traditional masculinity, often resulting in profound emotional and relational costs.

A gay male refugee who has lived in Europe for the past 20 years shared that he continues to hide his sexual identity from his family and refrains from contacting them on social media, fearing rejection. Despite his deep desire for family reunion, the persistent fear of being disowned holds him back. He recounted a painful journey from self-blame for being born gay to a place of self-acceptance and longing for reconciliation. Tragically, his family never informed him of his parents' passing, and the greatest wound he carries is the lost opportunity to say goodbye to those he loved.

Interviewees asserted that, in order to be regarded as decent, proper citizens, individuals are expected to fulfill reproductive duties toward the nation. A lesbian participant shared that people often behave as though her refusal to engage in heterosexual reproduction is a direct

impediment to the continuation of the next generation. Questions such as “When will you get married?” and “Will you have a baby?” are frequently directed at lesbian, bisexual, and queer women—not out of concern, but to provoke, challenge, and invalidate their identities. Gay men are excluded from the heteronormative ideal of citizenship due to their inability to marry women and father children. Lesbian women are often blamed for “*wasting*” their reproductive capacity, while trans* men and women are accused of mutilating their bodies and rendering themselves incapable of procreation. Female-identified participants reported that even casual encounters, such as conversations with taxi drivers, included unsolicited pressure to bear children for the sake of national population growth. As one foreign queer refugee living in Australia poignantly stated, queer lives and bodies are valued by the nation only when they serve the roles of “submission, reproduction, subjugation, and conformism” (Dixon, 2017).

For some interviewees, being recognized as “*decent citizens*” is perceived as more desirable than having their queer identity serve as their primary social marker. In this context, national identity does not necessarily need to be positioned in opposition to human rights. As Hannah Arendt (1951) famously asserted, citizenship constitutes “the right to have rights.” Although Arendt formulated this idea within the context of statelessness and the collapse of citizenship under interwar totalitarian regimes, her claim remains salient today. It underscores the ongoing struggle of individuals—including queer individuals—to express their authentic selves while claiming their fundamental rights within the framework of national belonging (Azar, 2019).

Finally, I highlight Crimp’s (2003) concept of *queer responsibility* as reflected in the narratives of Mongolian queer individuals. Having witnessed the political urgency of AIDS activism in the United States during the 1980s, Crimp calls for a rejection of moralistic binaries—such as those that distinguish between “good” and “bad” gay sex—and instead advocates for the reclamation of affective freedom and collective resistance that characterized the pre-AIDS era. In the context of Mongolia, where queerness continues to be met with systemic shame, familial rejection, and nationalistic pressures to conform, *queer responsibility* takes on renewed significance. Rather than seeking assimilation into heteronormative ideals of respectability or citizenship, older queer individuals are positioned to act in solidarity with younger activists by resisting shame-based narratives and fostering spaces of mutual care, intergenerational learning, and political action. This shared commitment to authenticity, dignity, and collective well-being

represents a form of ethical resistance—one that challenges both state-sponsored marginalization and internalized shame, and that affirms the capacity of queer communities to reimagine kinship, responsibility, and belonging on their own terms.

As Tomkins (1995) notes, “shared shame strengthens the sense of mutuality and community, whether between parent and child, friend and friend, or citizen and citizen” (p. 156). This insight is particularly resonant in the context of Mongolian queer lives, where experiences of shame—whether imposed by family, state, or society—often lead to the formation of intimate, self-sustaining networks. Within smaller circles of trusted friends, many queer individuals forge what Tomkins might call *group solidarity*, a protective and affective community that not only mitigates isolation but also enables survival in the face of societal rejection. These micro-communities are often created not simply to express identity but as a strategic response to collective shame and the fear of public exposure. In this way, shame becomes both a wound and a binding force, generating new forms of queer kinship and relational resilience.

Another powerful example of queer kinship and the creation of alternative intimacies can be seen among trans* women in Ulaanbaatar, who have cultivated chosen families and mutual care networks. Many of these women are makeup artists, performers, and activists—roles that not only allow for some expression of identity and artistry but also provide spaces for emotional support and resistance. As documented in the *Being LGBT in Asia: Mongolia Country Report* (UNDP & USAID, 2014), transgender individuals in Mongolia are frequently pushed to the socio-economic margins due to systemic discrimination, lack of access to formal employment, and familial rejection. Survival sex work remains one of the few available options, and communal living in inexpensive hotels or rented apartments becomes a mechanism of both necessity and solidarity.

Yet, beyond mere survival, these living arrangements represent an affective and political mode of life that echoes Michel Foucault’s (1997) concept of “*friendship as a way of life*.” Foucault writes of same-sex intimacy not necessarily grounded in sexual identity but in shared care, embodiment, and social imagination: “Women do each other’s hair, help each other with makeup, dress each other. Women have access to the bodies of other women: they put their arms around each other, kiss each other...” (pp. 138–139). This observation resonates with the daily lives of trans* women in Ulaanbaatar, who actively cultivate spaces of warmth, trust, and relational

interdependence—often in direct defiance of a public sphere that treats their existence as disposable or deviant.

Significantly, these forms of queer dwelling are not limited to trans* women. Increasingly, young gay men also cohabit and create similar support systems, refusing heteronormative scripts of nuclear family life and instead investing in emotionally interwoven communities. In this sense, queerness becomes not only a sexual or gendered identity, but also a modality of living together—of making home, kin, and intimacy amidst hostile conditions. These affective formations challenge the prevailing notions of citizenship, family, and belonging in Mongolia, offering a glimpse into what a queer politics of care and solidarity might look like beyond institutional frameworks.

6.4. Discussion: ‘Exilic’ Lived Experiences

This study has examined the layered and intersecting experiences of queer individuals in diaspora, foregrounding the emotional, political, and social dimensions of shame, belonging, and resistance. Drawing on interview narratives, affect theory, and queer theoretical frameworks, it underscores how queerness in Mongolia is deeply shaped by both local and transnational discourses of citizenship, kinship, nationalism, and morality.

A recurring theme throughout this work is shame—not only as a personal affect but also as a social and political force. Shame, as described by Tomkins (1995), is not only isolating but can also be relational, fostering what he calls “*group solidarity*.” Shared experiences of stigma, rejection, and marginalization often bring queer individuals together, forging affective communities rooted in care, survival, and mutual recognition. These chosen families—particularly among trans* women and young gay men—offer an alternative form of kinship, echoing Foucault’s (1997) notion of “*friendship as a way of life*.”

Yet, these alternative forms of relationality often emerge in response to rejection from biological families and patriarchal kinship structures. As highlighted in many interviews, family honor—rooted in flesh, blood, and bone (Fox, 2021)—becomes a site of struggle. Personally, my family accepted my sexual orientation in the early 2000s, rationalizing it by saying that “I was a piece of the family’s flesh and bone.” Coming-out frequently provokes crisis within families, with

mothers and sisters pleading for queer kin to leave the country, and male relatives resorting to violence or silence. In this context, queerness is positioned as a direct threat to reproductive future, national continuity, and traditional masculinity (Mosse, 1985).

Queer exile, therefore, is not merely a legal status or a response to persecution—it is also an emotional geography. As one interviewee noted, the feeling of exile persists long after legal recognition as a refugee or migrant is obtained. The “exilic condition” described by Said (2000) resonates here—not as nostalgia for a lost homeland, but as a lingering dislocation, compounded by familial estrangement and institutional silencing. Whether through asylum, education, or work abroad, many queer Mongolians live in permanent states of unbelonging, suspended between geographic, emotional, and social spaces.

And yet, resistance emerges not only in protest, but also in the quiet endurance of everyday life. Older queers, though less familiar with Western terminologies, embody what Douglas Crimp (2003) calls “*queer responsibility*”—a commitment to community, history, and the nurturing of new generations. Through storytelling, caregiving, and presence, they serve as custodians of memory and resilience. Meanwhile, younger queers, more fluent in the language of human rights and social media advocacy, demand structural transformation—challenging dominant norms through public visibility, digital organizing, and transnational solidarity.

Rather than viewing citizenship and queerness as mutually exclusive, this research suggests the possibility of a more inclusive framework—what Arendt (1951) calls “*the right to have rights*.” In the Mongolian context, this right remains fragile, often withheld in the name of nationalism, tradition, and morality. Yet, the voices in this study—painful, defiant, hopeful—suggest that queerness in Mongolia is not only livable, but also deeply political, generative, and transformative.

Ultimately, this project opens the door for future studies on queer affect, migration, kinship, and post-socialist nationhood in East and Central Asia. It affirms that shame, while historically weaponized to discipline queer lives, can also become a site of political consciousness and communal strength. In reclaiming their stories and bodies, queer Mongolians not only resist shame—they reimagine citizenship, love, and home.

In exile, many queer Mongolians wrestle with the meanings of *home*, *citizenship*, and *belonging*. While “home” is often idealized as a place of safety and unconditional acceptance, for queer individuals it is frequently marked by exclusion, fear, and dislocation. Unlike heterosexual, reproductive citizens who are celebrated as fulfilling their national duty, queer Mongolians are often denied the full affective and legal experience of belonging.

In May 2020, Anaraa’s asylum appeal was rejected by the Zwolle regional court in the Netherlands. The court deemed that the Mongolian government was “sufficiently equipped to deal with SOGIESC-based violence,” overlooking the *fragile rule of law* and *prevalent queerphobia* in Mongolia. Anaraa had already spent nearly four years in the asylum system, enduring persistent harassment and death threats from other asylum seekers. His experience underscores the paradox of seeking refuge—escaping one form of violence only to encounter another within the very structures meant to provide protection.

Similarly, B.Z., a trans* man and refugee in Switzerland, waited nearly five years for his asylum claim to be recognized. Following his identification determination in February 2016, he was housed in a bunker-like facility with 77 men—conditions he likens to a prison. There, he endured physical assaults, threats of rape and murder, and relentless psychological terror. “*Once you’ve cried for five years,*” he reflected, “*you can’t feel joy at the end.*” For B.Z., the *pain of transitioning* and undergoing related surgeries paled in comparison to the *daily trauma of survival* in the asylum facility. The experience left deep emotional scars: insomnia, hallucinations, and a profound sense of loneliness. “*Even in the most developed country in the world,*” he said, “*I feel imprisoned—inside my own heart.*”

These stories reveal that exile does not necessarily guarantee freedom or healing. Instead, it often prolongs the emotional turbulence and precariousness that began long before departure. Safety is not simply geographical—it is political, emotional, and social. For many queer Mongolians, exile is not an escape but a continuation of struggle in another language, another system, and another body of law.

Interviewees consistently emphasize that, regardless of whether they are in Western countries or highly developed nations, the conditions in these detention facilities are strikingly similar—harsh, oppressive, and akin to imprisonment.

Once in a country where they apply for asylum, LGBTIQ+ individuals face further harassment and gender-based violence (GBV). For instance, between April and June 2020, M.S. endured multiple instances of sexual harassment and violence perpetrated by male neighbors and fellow refugees in her accommodation. Similarly, J.Z. was detained for 12 days in an immigration detention center in Turkey, confined in a cramped, windowless room with 6–7 others. Without his mobile phone, he kept track of time by the meals served. He recalls how hunger caused people to fight over food, and sexual harassment and rape attempts frequently occurred in the toilet—the only place without surveillance cameras.

Ashamed of this experience, J.Z. rarely speaks about it, sharing only with queer friends when he feels strong enough. Though never held in a sobering-up cell in Mongolia, he describes his detention as “*beyond shame*.” The most humiliating moment was being handcuffed for a drug test. Many refugees describe these exilic experiences as “*a prison with better conditions*.” M.S. echoes this sentiment, saying, “*Even if you are free, your freedom is limited*.” Such accounts reveal that fleeing one form of oppression does not guarantee safety or dignity in exile, but instead often leads to new forms of trauma and isolation.

Queer bodies, especially those residing in shelters, camps, and other liminal spaces during their asylum or refugee processes, are frequently subjected to sexual abuse, harassment, and various forms of gender-based violence and exploitation. Men often perpetrate these abuses with impunity, inflicting deep, often irreparable harm on both the physical bodies and emotional well-being of queer individuals. Physical violence ranges from rape and sexual assault to beatings and other brutal acts, while the chronic stress and trauma of ongoing shaming manifest in milder but persistent symptoms such as skin rashes and pimples. In response to these compounded assaults, asylum seekers and refugees increasingly seek psychological and mental health support to reclaim control over their bodies and minds, addressing issues of anger, despair, anxiety, fear, and the profound uncertainty that shadows their journeys.

It poignantly captures the complex and often painful liminality queer refugees experience between belonging and alienation. The feeling of being “*neither in your homeland nor a foreign land*” highlights a profound identity dislocation, raising the deeply personal and political question of “*where is home?*” For many sexual and gender minorities, citizenship is not just a legal status but entwined with the expectation to conform to heteronormative ideals. Failure to fit these norms leads to further marginalization and dehumanization by the state and society.

Despite a persistent love for their homeland, queer refugees often face exclusion and erasure, which compounds their sense of exile as a necessary journey toward a future free from past shame. The firm resolution of “*I will never go back to Mongolia*” reflects both a survival strategy and a statement of self-preservation amid ongoing stigma and discrimination. In a digital age, social media partially bridges the isolation by enabling contact with loved ones, yet the physical loneliness and absence of community remain profound challenges.

Importantly, exile can serve as a space of unlearning and transformation—a painful but necessary “*undoing*” of old identities shaped by shame and oppression. Tina’s words, “I am learning how to be at home, in exile” (Dixson, 2017), evoke a resilient process of redefining home as an internal, embodied experience rather than a fixed geographic location, suggesting hope amid displacement. This nuanced perspective on exile underscores not only the vulnerability but also the agency of queer refugees navigating their complex realities.

It highlights the profound emotional and psychological burden that exile imposes on queer Mongolians. The isolation from homeland and loved ones intensifies their inner struggles around identity—both sexual and national—and forces a deep reevaluation of what “home,” “belonging,” and “citizenship” mean to them. J.Z.’s reflections in detention about his homeland and the hope for a better life capture the tension between despair and resilience many queer refugees live with.

The practical restrictions on refugee rights, such as needing permission to visit a dying family member, add layers of control and limitation that further fracture their connection to home and family. The fact that some families meet at border cities underscores the painful reality of fractured kinship, where even family reunions become acts of negotiation and compromise, limited by political borders and societal stigma. It’s a vivid reminder that exile is not just physical

displacement but also a complex emotional and bureaucratic labyrinth queer refugees must navigate—often without adequate support, and with their sense of self and community hanging in the balance.

Anaraa's description of his mission as a "*life-long journey to my true Self/Other*" beautifully captures the ongoing process of self-discovery and acceptance, especially in the face of exile and societal rejection. The linguistic note about the Mongolian term for "*refugee*" linking to war adds a poignant layer—highlighting how survival for queer refugees is a continuous battle, both external and internal.

Anaraa's reflection on karma and love as the most significant life lessons introduces a hopeful and quasi-spiritual dimension to the experience of adversity. This perspective underscores that beyond the manifold hardships and trauma endured, the central narrative of their journey revolves around connection, healing, and the cultivation of self-love and compassion toward others despite considerable obstacles. Such a framing fosters empathy and promotes a more nuanced understanding of queer refugees—not merely as victims or survivors, but as individuals engaged in profound processes of self-realization and the pursuit of love. This conceptualization challenges dominant narratives by foregrounding resilience and agency within marginalized populations, thereby enriching scholarly discourse on identity formation and psychosocial adaptation in contexts of displacement.

Tomkins (1995) delineates shame-humiliation as the negative affect associated with love and identification, whereas contempt-disgust corresponds to the negative affect linked with individuation and hate. He further clarifies that shame-humiliation does not result in permanent renunciation of the object, unlike contempt-disgust, which signifies outright rejection: "Contempt is the mark of the oppressor, and contempt and shame cannot be completely distinguished" (Tomkins, 1995, p. 139). The figure of the oppressor, in this context, is multifaceted, encompassing loved ones, the nation, community, or even complete strangers. When one individual expresses contempt toward another, the recipient is more likely to internalize shame rather than self-directed contempt (Tomkins, 1995, p. 139). Within a family-oriented, patriarchal society such as Mongolia, the experience of internalized contempt-shame is particularly pronounced, often resulting in the substitution of contempt with intensified shame. Regarding the relationship between shame-

humiliation, guilt, and internalized contempt-disgust, Tomkins (1995) emphasizes the importance of focusing on the affective experience of the ashamed individual. He suggests that, for certain analytical purposes, the term guilt—more directly associated with moral transgressions—may be preferable to distinguish it from other forms of shame (Tomkins, 1995, p. 143).

6.5. Conclusion

As a queer educational migrant who has been living abroad since 2015, I empathize deeply with the exilic experiences of fellow Mongolian queer individuals. Whether Mongolian queers migrate for educational or economic reasons, or seek refuge as asylum seekers due to sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC)-related persecution, they encounter varying degrees of shame and exile. Although I have benefited from scholarship opportunities and comparatively more favorable socio-economic circumstances, which confer a certain degree of privilege and entitlement, I remain critically aware of these positionalities. This reflexivity is essential to mitigate potential biases in my analyses and judgments, ensuring a more nuanced and ethically grounded engagement with the lived realities of Mongolian queer migrants.

My positionality as a queer researcher informs and complicates my relationship to the research community, simultaneously granting insider perspectives and necessitating vigilance against overgeneralization or unintentional erasure of divergent experiences. By foregrounding reflexivity, I seek to balance the privileges inherent in my socio-economic and educational status with a responsibility to amplify marginalized voices and critically interrogate power dynamics that shape exile, migration, and queer identities.

The motivations for Mongolian queer individuals and their allies to migrate abroad—whether as refugees, educational migrants, or economic migrants—are multifaceted and deeply interconnected. These include experiences of sexual, gender, and racial discrimination; SOGIESC-based violence and hate crimes; pervasive poverty; family rejection; and even death threats. Such adversities are rooted in entrenched patriarchal and stereotypical social norms and practices that marginalize sexual and gender minorities. Moreover, the systemic failure and reluctance of law enforcement and state authorities to effectively address or intervene in these violations further exacerbate the hostile environment faced by queer communities. This hostile social milieu

engenders feelings of exclusion and stigmatization, positioning queer individuals as disqualified, secondary, and “failed” citizens within the national body politic.

Theoretically, these exclusionary dynamics can be understood through the lens of nationalism as a gendered and heteronormative construct. Billé (2010) elucidates how nationalism is not only imbued with sexist and patriarchal logics but also enforces heteronormativity as a central tenet of national identity. This framework privileges heterosexual, cisgender norms as markers of legitimate citizenship and belonging, thereby rendering non-normative sexualities and gender expressions as threats to national cohesion. Yuval-Davis (1997) further argues that nation-states often rely on regulating bodies and desires to reproduce dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality, linking citizenship to normative family structures and reproductive futurity. In this context, the marginalization of queer individuals is not incidental but structurally embedded within the symbolic and material practices of nation-building.

Patriarchy operates in tandem with heteronormativity to maintain rigid social hierarchies, where deviations from prescribed gender roles and sexual behaviors are punished socially, economically, and legally (Butler, 1990). This intersection creates a compounded vulnerability for queer Mongolians, who navigate a socio-political landscape that simultaneously enforces gender conformity and suppresses sexual diversity. Consequently, migration emerges as a strategic response—an act of resistance and survival—that challenges these exclusionary state and societal practices. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing more nuanced policies and support systems that acknowledge the intersecting oppressions faced by queer migrants from patriarchal and heteronormative contexts.

Shame and shaming constitute central factors, triggers, and causes compelling Mongolian queer individuals to seek asylum abroad. Restrictive social and cultural norms—perpetuated not only by traditional conventions but also amplified through social media—function as mechanisms of control and exclusion. The deployment of shame by various actors, including the police, authorities, and even intimate social circles such as family members, friends, and classmates, operates as a deliberate strategy to discriminate against, alienate, and violate queer Mongolians. Such dominant discourses serve to silence queer voices and erase their lived experiences, as Glenn (2004) asserts. More gravely, police brutality remains pervasive in Mongolia, with law

enforcement agencies, prosecutor's offices, and courts demonstrating systemic reluctance to investigate, prosecute, or resolve hate crimes—particularly those perpetrated by police officers themselves. Meanwhile, frontline police officers frequently engage in acts of violence and hate crimes, underscoring the urgent need for institutional accountability and reform.

Mongolian queer individuals and their allies who participated in this study appear to navigate a complex spectrum of shame experiences—ranging from embraced to rejected, or unresolved shame—with the sensation of shame rarely dissipating entirely. While higher levels of education, increased knowledge, and greater exposure to diverse cultures and lifestyles abroad may mitigate the intensity and frequency of shame, such feelings are nonetheless frequently reactivated by encounters with discriminatory and hostile attitudes and behaviors in foreign contexts. For those living in exile or self-imposed exile, shame emerges not only from leaving one's homeland behind but also from the myriad challenges endured in the process of survival.

For trans* refugees and asylum seekers, the journey of exile often centers on the pursuit of an authentic selfhood—one realized through the embodiment and affirmation of their gender identity by fulfilling long-held aspirations related to gender transition. Both trans* men and women frequently undergo various medical interventions, including hormone therapies and surgeries, which profoundly impact their physical, mental, psychological, and emotional well-being (Budge, Adelson, & Howard, 2013). This corporeal transformation is integral to their sense of self and survival in exile, reflecting the complex interplay between identity, embodiment, and health.

In contrast, for gay men, lesbians, and other queer individuals, priorities often emphasize the establishment of meaningful, same-sex partnerships and families within safe, queer-affirming environments that provide social stability, job security, and access to social welfare. Together, these experiences illustrate the multiplicity of ways in which queer refugees and migrants navigate exile, negotiating personal authenticity, safety, and belonging in the context of intersecting social, political, and cultural challenges.

In the process of identity negotiation, self-expression, and the rediscovery of their sexualities, queer Mongolians living abroad actively challenge the gender and sexual normativities and stereotypes ingrained in their home society. This transnational context enables them to reconstruct and invent new names, identities, and modes of expression, often drawing on foreign

languages and terminologies to articulate their experiences in ways previously unavailable or unacceptable at home. Central to this process of reclaiming, re-identifying, and redefining sexual and gender identities is the enduring impact of familial denial and rejection—particularly from parents. Many queer individuals recount being told by their fathers and mothers, “*There was no one like you in this family line ever!*”—a powerful repudiation that typically occurs at moments of vulnerability, such as during coming-out disclosures or unintended “*accidents*.” Such rejection leaves an indelible mark on the psyches of queer individuals, embedding memories that continue to trigger feelings of shame throughout their lives. This persistent emotional trauma underscores the profound and lasting effects of familial alienation in shaping queer identity and affective experience (Sedgwick, 2003; Ahmed, 2004).

Queer Mongolians in exile frequently grapple with complex and often conflicting notions of citizenship, patriotism, motherland, family, and belonging. Amidst these reflections, survival emerges as their foremost priority, accompanied by a profound sense of shame for having left their homeland behind—often with the belief that they will never return. Their lived reality centers on enduring the multifaceted hardships encountered as queer individuals navigating new sociocultural landscapes, while simultaneously striving to suppress or forget the painful experiences endured in their country of origin. For many, exile signifies a permanent rupture, encapsulated in the resolute declaration, “*I will never go back to Mongolia!*” Yet, this refusal to return is not merely physical but also symbolic, underscoring the paradox that exile, while offering refuge, can never fully replicate the ontological security of the motherland as ‘home.’ This enduring sense of temporal and spatial liminality perpetually haunts queer Mongolians in exile, positioning them as multiply marginalized subjects—queer, refugee, and Other—across diverse contexts.

Chapter 7: Discussion

Building upon the conceptual foundations established by Scheff (2000), Liu (2017), and other scholars, this study situates shame not merely as an individual affect but as a socially mediated and politically potent experience, particularly within LGBTIQ+ communities in contemporary Mongolia and queer Mongolian migrant communities. Empirical evidence from interviews reveals that shame operates both as a mechanism of exclusion and as a complex, ambivalent affect that can be reappropriated in processes of identity negotiation and resilience. The sociological perspective on shame illuminates how structural inequalities related to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class intersect to produce and reproduce experiences of marginalization and stigma among queer individuals (Ahmed, 2004).

7.1. Queer Theory and the Reconceptualization of Shame

Queer theoretical approaches further complicate traditional notions of shame by challenging the binary framework of shame versus pride. As Liu (2017) argues, breaking away from this binary allows shame to be understood as a productive and politicized affect that can foster community formation, self-reflexivity, and resistance against normative structures. This reconceptualization aligns with the lived experiences of Mongolian queers in exile, who engage with shame not only as a source of pain and alienation but also as a catalyst for self-redefinition and collective empowerment. Their narratives demonstrate that embracing shame can facilitate the construction of new, non-normative subjectivities that challenge dominant heteronormative and patriarchal paradigms, thereby contributing to broader discourses on queer resilience and transformative affect.

Thus, incorporating a sociological and queer theoretical framework on shame provides critical insight into how shame functions both as a tool of oppression and as a potential resource for political agency and identity reconstruction within marginalized communities. This dual understanding is essential for developing more nuanced strategies for supporting queer migrants and refugees, whose experiences of shame are deeply intertwined with social exclusion and the pursuit of authentic selfhood. Exploring queer theory arguments has reinforced the idea that

heterosexual and non-heterosexual identities exist on a broader spectrum of gender and sexual fluidity, rather than being conventionally understood as strict opposites.

Shame is fundamentally implicated in the construction of contemporary gay identity, as Munt (2018) contends, reflecting its pervasive role in shaping self-perception and social positioning within queer communities. This affective experience is not incidental but rather constitutive, operating as a regulatory mechanism that disciplines and polices non-normative sexualities. Butler (2004) further elucidates the intrinsic entanglement of shame and homosexuality within Western societies, emphasizing the enduring influence of Christian moral frameworks that have historically pathologized and stigmatized queer identities. These religious roots embed shame deeply into the social fabric, rendering it a structural and collective experience rather than merely an individual psychological state.

This theological and cultural legacy manifests in complex ways, informing both public discourses and intimate subjectivities, and contributing to the internalization of shame among gay individuals. The pervasiveness of shame thus demands that any structural analysis of gay life and identity must account for its dual role as a force of social control and as a site of potential resistance. As queer theory advances, it increasingly recognizes how shame can be reframed as a productive affect, enabling queer subjects to negotiate, resist, and subvert heteronormative paradigms (Liu, 2017). This reconceptualization challenges reductive interpretations of shame solely as a negative emotion and instead highlights its capacity to foster new modes of selfhood and community formation in contexts marked by exclusion and marginalization.

In the context of Mongolian queer experiences, these insights are particularly salient, as individuals negotiate shame shaped by both local patriarchal norms and broader global cultural influences, including religiously inflected moral discourses. Understanding shame's role within this complex matrix is essential for comprehending how queer identities are produced, experienced, and transformed in both homeland and exile.

7.2. Affective Theory and the Dynamics of Shame and Joy

The nuanced conceptualization of shame as an inner torment rooted in the interruption of positive affects (Tomkins, 1987; Sedgwick & Adam, 1995; Foucault, 1997) provides a valuable lens through which to interpret the lived experiences of queer Mongolians in exile. Their narratives frequently reflect the oscillation between moments of joy—such as affirming identity, community belonging, or self-expression—and the resurgence of shame triggered by memories of familial rejection, societal stigma, and internalized norms. This dynamic aligns with Tomkins' (1995) assertion that shame is activated by the incomplete reduction of interest or joy, underscoring how queer individuals' pursuit of authentic selves is continually challenged by affective disruptions. Foucault (1997) hints at a queer aesthetics of existence—life organized around desire, creativity, and care rather than shame and repression.

For instance, many interviewees describe feelings of exhilaration upon embracing their sexual and gender identities abroad, juxtaposed with persistent internalized shame linked to past experiences in Mongolia. These experiences illustrate the affective tension Sedgwick and Adam (1995) describe, wherein positive feelings are intermittently inhibited or restored, reflecting the fragile balance between shame and joy. This interplay can be understood as a continual affective negotiation, shaped not only by individual psychology but also by broader social and cultural forces that sustain heteronormativity and patriarchy.

Moreover, the differentiation among shyness, shame, and guilt (Tomkins, 1995) resonates in participants' accounts of varied affective responses to social encounters. For example, some queer Mongolians report a generalized social reticence or shyness in new environments, while others experience more acute shame when directly confronted with discrimination or familial estrangement. This suggests that the conscious awareness and intensity of these emotions are context-dependent, further supporting Tomkins' model.

By applying this affect theory framework, this research elucidates how shame functions both as a regulatory force—enforcing conformity and exclusion—and as a catalyst for transformation and resilience within queer diasporic subjectivities. Understanding the affective rhythms of shame and joy in queer Mongolians' lives enriches our comprehension of their identity formation processes and highlights potential pathways for psychosocial support and community-building interventions.

7.3. Coping Mechanisms: Nathanson's Compass of Shame

Nathanson's (1994) Compass of Shame provides a nuanced framework for understanding the complex, phased nature of shame, which is particularly relevant to the experiences of queer Mongolians navigating identity formation and social belonging. The model's emphasis on shame as an interpersonal and interactional affect underscores how social expectations—especially those grounded in heteronormative and patriarchal values—intersect with individual affective experiences. For Mongolian queers, the triggering source of shame often originates from deeply ingrained cultural and familial norms that reject or stigmatize non-normative sexualities and gender identities.

During the physiological and cognitive phases, queer individuals may experience intense bodily responses and internalize negative self-appraisals, respectively. This internalization frequently manifests as the belief that “there is something wrong with their sexuality” (Nathanson, 1994, p. 126), reflecting the weight of social and familial expectations. The decision phase involves the individual's conscious appraisal and choice regarding how to cope with shame, which can lead to various reactions in the final phase, such as withdrawal, attack, avoidance, or attempts at repair.

Within the Mongolian queer community, these reactions may take the form of self-imposed exile, concealment of identity, or, conversely, activism and community building as acts of resilience. The Compass of Shame thus elucidates how shame operates both as a mechanism of social regulation and as a catalyst for individual and collective responses. This framework enriches our understanding of how queer Mongolians negotiate the tension between internalized shame and the desire for authentic self-expression amid external pressures, highlighting the multifaceted impact of shame on identity and survival strategies.

Nathanson's (1994) Compass of Shame provides a crucial framework to interpret the varied strategies Mongolian queers employ to cope with the overwhelming affect of shame. For example, several participants in this study described a withdrawal response, whereby they chose to live “*small*” or diminished lives by concealing their sexual and gender identities to avoid further stigma and rejection. This withdrawal often manifested as social isolation or depressive episodes,

highlighting the profound psychological toll shame exacts. One interviewee shared, “*I stopped speaking about who I am to anyone back home, just to avoid bringing shame to my family,*” illustrating how withdrawal functions as a survival mechanism within oppressive social contexts.

Alternatively, avoidance was observed through behaviors such as substance use or deliberate distraction, as some participants reported turning to alcohol or other means to numb the pain associated with shame. This aligns with Nathanson’s (1994) conceptualization of avoidance as an attempt to cover up or escape the internal experience of shame.

The “*attack self*” response was evident in narratives where individuals internalized blame and engaged in self-punishing behaviors, ranging from self-isolation to negative self-talk and internalized homophobia or transphobia. For instance, one participant recounted feelings of self-loathing: “*Sometimes I felt I deserved the rejection because there was something inherently wrong with me.*” Such accounts illustrate how shame can manifest as self-directed aggression, deeply impacting mental health.

Lastly, “*attack other*” was reflected in instances where individuals redirected their shame outward through anger or confrontation, sometimes expressing frustration toward family members, societal institutions, or even within the queer community itself. This externalization of shame can be understood as a protective, albeit potentially divisive, mechanism to reclaim agency in the face of marginalization.

Together, these response patterns illuminate the complex ways in which shame operates within queer Mongolian identities, serving both as a source of constraint and as a potential catalyst for resilience and transformation. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing supportive interventions that acknowledge the multifaceted experiences of shame and foster pathways toward healing and self-acceptance.

7.4. Recognition and the Social Dimensions of Shame

Drawing on Tomkins’ foundational insights, Sedgwick (as cited in Gould, 2009) argues that early shame experiences arise not from simple parental refusal but from a disrupted communicative circuit marked by nonrecognition (Gould, 2009, p. 222). This disruption results in

feelings of being “naked, defeated, alienated, and lacking in dignity or worth” (Tomkins, 1995, p. 133). For marginalized groups such as Mongolian queer individuals, this social nonrecognition is a recurrent and salient experience. Participants in this study frequently described how key relationships—especially with parents, siblings, and close community members—were sites of misrecognition, where their sexual and gender identities were denied or invalidated. One participant recounted the pain of coming out to family only to be met with silence or dismissal, underscoring how recognition is not simply an interpersonal nicety but central to identity validation and psychological well-being.

This dynamic reveals the deeply relational nature of identity formation, where the struggle for recognition becomes a critical site of both suffering and resistance. Understanding shame through the lens of recognition theory thus offers a powerful framework for analyzing the lived experiences of queer Mongolians and highlights the necessity of fostering social environments that acknowledge and validate diverse identities to mitigate the damaging effects of shame and social exclusion.

This absence or distortion of recognition does not merely cause emotional discomfort but constitutes a form of social harm and oppression, echoing Taylor’s (1994) assertion that misrecognition “imprisons someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (p. 25). For queer Mongolians negotiating identity both within their families and the broader societal context, this imprisonment manifests as internalized shame, self-alienation, and the often-painful necessity of living in exile—whether physical or emotional. The failure of close social networks to provide recognition forces many to reconstruct their identities in foreign contexts, as they seek alternative communities and modes of self-expression that affirm their authentic selves.

7.5. Shame, Queer Resistance, Failure, and Queer Future

Beyond philosophical and academic debates surrounding its definition, the term “social evils” generally refers to issues that affect members of a society and are widely regarded as controversial or problematic in relation to prevailing moral values. Central to this concept is the emphasis on “moral values,” with common social evils typically encompassing phenomena such as prostitution, disease, gambling, alcoholism, racism, and organized crime (Watts et al., 2008).

Historically, the identification of social evils has reflected the socio-political climate of the time; for instance, in 1904, British philanthropist and social reformer Joseph Rowntree delineated “poverty, war, slavery, intemperance, the opium trade, impurity, and gambling” as the primary social evils confronting British society (Watts et al., 2008, p. 3). Given the inherently complex and socially constructed nature of the concept, it follows that each society discursively produces its own array of social evils, encompassing both human and non-human elements.

From the perspective of queer theory, these socially constructed “evils” often operate to enforce heteronormativity and gender normativity by marking non-conforming sexualities and identities as deviant or pathological. Queer theorists argue that the designation of LGBTIQ+ identities as “weak,” “ill,” or morally wrong is not merely a reflection of inherent social values but an active process of social regulation aimed at maintaining dominant power structures (Warner, 1999). Such labeling functions to marginalize and stigmatize queer individuals, legitimizing exclusion, violence, and systemic discrimination as necessary measures to preserve societal “order.” This perspective highlights how moral panic around queer identities is both produced and reproduced through discourses that frame queerness as a threat to social cohesion. Consequently, queer theory challenges the naturalization of these “social evils,” exposing them as contingent, politicized constructs that serve to uphold heteropatriarchal norms and inhibit the full expression of sexual and gender diversity.

In Mongolian society, where a communal lifestyle operates continuously and shapes interpersonal relationships both temporally and spatially, a shared affect of shame is ever-present. This collective experience of shame holds the potential to unite or reunite communities through a common emotional bond. Drawing on Cvetkovich’s (2007) assertion, shame is both historically and discursively constructed. Moreover, shame is a fundamentally relational affect, which can serve a preventative function by reinforcing moral values and deterring future violence (Munt, 2018, p. 4). Far from being solely destructive, shame is also generative; it can foster social transformation. Resolved shame often leads to the formation of new attachments—frequently to “communities of shame”—which offer alternative sources of ontological security and safety (Munt, 2018). Conversely, unacknowledged shame can produce both physical and symbolic violence. It severs social bonds, generates disidentifications, and fosters an orientation toward victimhood (Munt, 2018, p. 15). Nathanson’s (1992) *The Compass of Shame* suggests that shame

is most effectively addressed through “attacking self,” or taking ownership of one's shame, rather than through avoidance, withdrawal, or the displacement of shame onto others.

While the past remains essential for understanding the present, a pronounced emphasis on the now, as Maika suggests, reveals a degree of uncertainty and ambivalence. This heightened focus on the present, particularly when entangled with affective experiences such as shame, opens space for what Halberstam (2011) conceptualizes as “queer failure.” In a capitalist society where success is narrowly defined by productivity and profit, embracing failure becomes a radical act. As Halberstam articulates:

“Failure, of course, goes hand in hand with capitalism. A market economy must have winners and losers, gamblers and risk-takers, con-men and dupes; capitalism requires that everyone live within a system that equates success with profit and failure with the inability to accumulate wealth. But this boom/bust economy leads everyone to expect that they will win and so in the wake of the realization that in actual fact, no one wins from such a market except the bankers and investors, losing has become a way of life, a new reality and failure is something with which we must reckon existentially, economically and politically” (p. 89).¹²

This perspective challenges normative success narratives and suggests that “failing well” might serve as a strategic form of resistance. In this light, shame and failure become productive tools—not only for individual reorientation but also for broader socio-political critique.

This chapter examines the multifaceted role of shame within queer Mongolian communities, situating it as both a socially mediated and politically potent affect rather than a purely individual experience. Drawing on sociological and queer theoretical frameworks, shame is analyzed as an intersectional phenomenon shaped by gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class. Through participants’ narratives, the chapter demonstrates how shame operates both as a mechanism of exclusion—reinforcing heteronormative and patriarchal norms—and as a potential resource for resilience, identity negotiation, and community formation. Queer theory further reframes shame beyond the conventional pride/shame binary, highlighting its capacity to foster self-reflexivity and collective empowerment.

¹² See: Embrace Queer Failure: <http://www.jackhalberstam.com/11/>.

The chapter also explores the historical, cultural, and religious roots of shame, particularly in Western and Mongolian contexts, emphasizing how moral frameworks have pathologized non-normative sexualities and embedded shame into social structures. Affective theory and the Compass of Shame provide tools for understanding the physiological, cognitive, and behavioral dynamics of shame, including withdrawal, avoidance, self-attack, and attacking others. Participants' accounts illustrate how these affective processes intersect with social misrecognition, familial rejection, and societal stigma, shaping both psychological experiences and strategies of coping, resistance, and self-redefinition in exile.

Finally, the chapter situates shame within broader socio-political and cultural discourses. Concepts such as “social evils” and queer failure highlight how shame and failure are not merely personal burdens but socially constructed mechanisms that enforce heteronormativity while also offering avenues for critique and transformation. Collectively, these insights underscore the dual nature of shame as both a tool of social control and a potential catalyst for queer resilience, identity reconstruction, and the creation of alternative communities grounded in recognition, empowerment, and affective solidarity.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1. Answering Research Questions

The overarching research question is: “How has shame discursively constructed the lived experiences of the queer community in contemporary Mongolia?” Previous chapters have shown that various actors, including the state as a duty-bearer, the media as framers of public discourse, schools and other educational institutions, workplaces, and even family members and household settings, participate in shaming mechanisms targeting sexual and gender minorities. These mechanisms may occur directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, and consciously or unconsciously. Specific examples are provided below when addressing each research question.

Regarding the primary research objectives, I believe they have been achieved through three main approaches: exploring how the queer community and the public in Mongolia perceive shame and sexuality (through the small-scale survey/exploratory study), analyzing media representations related to shame and queer identities (through the critical discourse analysis), and investigating the lived experiences of Mongolian queer individuals in relation to shame, shaming, and sexuality (through the study on exile). The media often frame LGBTIQ+ communities and the public in opposition, whereas I argue that both groups are Mongolian citizens who naturally exist along a spectrum of sexual and gender diversity. Understanding each other’s uniqueness and differences represents what Minow (1987) calls “the dilemma of difference.” Martha Minow’s *Justice Engendered* offers a foundational framework for understanding how legal and cultural systems construct difference, and how this construction often leads to the shaming of sexual and gender minorities. By unpacking the politics of sameness versus difference, voice versus silence, and legal inclusion versus erasure, it provides a rich basis for exploring how shame is both experienced personally and enforced structurally (Minow, 1987, p. 65).

It is human nature to have an innate capacity to feel and respond to shame, but shame has been socially, discursively, and affectively constructed for queer communities due to power relations rooted in patriarchal and heteronormative systems and structures. Within queer communities, lesbians, gays, trans* individuals, intersex people, and other subgroups experience shame differently, depending on socio-economic and other contextual factors. Shame, as an affect manifesting at sub- or unconscious and transpersonal levels, can be regarded as a foundational and

indispensable component in the constitution of queer identity. Central to the mechanism of shame is the exercise of power: it reinforces systems of privilege and oppression, enabling the empowered to maintain the status quo while silencing, disempowering, and rendering marginalized voices invisible or irrelevant.

These aspects of queer identity and behavior challenging the status quo—such as enshrining same-sex marriage into law, having the legal ability to change one’s sex and name to reflect gender identity and preferred pronouns, and accessing public bathrooms and facilities—significantly provoke resistance from authorities, state institutions, and some citizens. For some, this “utopic” vision of sexual and gender minorities is perceived as a potential source of demographic, political, and social instability. For others, it represents an inherent human right and the dignity to live authentically.

The Mongolian experience of shaming and being shamed is deeply rooted in a cultural heritage that emphasizes family orientation and family-centeredness. There are few degrees of separation when it comes to privacy, personal space, and living authentically. The flexible, adaptive lifestyle and mindset of nomadic life can help mitigate individual suffering or the perceived excess of desires such as same-sex marriage or gender transition when these are unattainable at home. Survey respondents and interviewees, however, shared insights into the uniquely Mongolian way of dealing with shame: they maintain connections with their biological families even while experiencing immense satisfaction with their chosen families.

Research questions and their sub-questions are as follows: Research question 1: “How do contemporary Mongolian queers define the concept of shame? What is the definition of shame by contemporary Mongolian queers? What are its cultural and social implications? What are the layers or dimensions of shame (resolved, unresolved, embraced, unacknowledged shame, etc.” Research question 2: “How does shame or shaming affect the lived experiences of contemporary Mongolian queers? What does it mean to be shamed in a Mongolian way? How does shame manifest in lived experiences of Mongolian queers? How do acts of shame or shaming affect Mongolian queers in short- or long-term? Who are the stakeholders involved in shame and what are their agenda or strategies of shaming sexual minorities in Mongolia?” Research question 3: “What other concepts could be revealed about sexuality in Mongolia through exploring the notion of shame? Which new paths or topics of research can shame lead you to? Are there other concepts lurking beneath or

waiting to be discovered and explored to better understand lived experiences of contemporary Mongolian queers? What are the potentials or transformative powers of shame that contemporary Mongolian queers can benefit from?”

I address these questions in groups based on the tripartite conceptualization of shame: the national-political level, the social-group level, and the personal-individual level. At the national-political level, sexual and gender minorities are often portrayed as public health and national security threats due to the perceived risks of HIV, AIDS, and other sexually transmitted infections. Dominant narratives perpetuate national anxiety and political agendas, suggesting that the growth of queer communities will lead to population decline and reproductive crises. Drawing on examples from some Western nations, where increasing visibility of LGBTIQ+ populations is often framed as a sign of societal decline, certain actors in Mongolia argue that humanity, human civilization, and national unity will suffer—if, as they claim, “*these perverts*” are supported.

At the social-group level, prevailing public attitudes often frame homosexuals as individuals who “recruit,” “convert,” and threaten “our innocent future” through so-called “unnatural” and “perverse” sexual acts. Dominant narratives and public discourse about sexual and gender minorities include statements such as: “all they do is have sex,” “perverse sexual acts bring them AIDS,” “they suffer because of their hedonistic lifestyle,” and “they are a shame to their family and the nation.” These negative societal attitudes and misconceptions foster binary logics and discourses that construct heteronormativity versus queerness as natural versus unnatural; normal versus perverse; pride versus shame; necessary versus disposable; human versus non-human or dehumanized; decent citizens versus secondary or non-citizens; and treasures versus “scums.”

At the personal-individual level, stigmatizing beliefs persist not only among the public but also within sexual and gender minority communities themselves. For example, gay men are often stereotyped as effeminate and feminine, lesbians as butch and masculine, and trans* individuals are sometimes viewed—within the gay community—as bringing shame by “making us look bad” in the eyes of the public or even being labeled as “self-mutilators.” Furthermore, the English term *shame* tends to be used generically across contexts. In Mongolian, however, this research revealed nuanced variations: “national shame” is *undesnii shivshig* (үндэсний шившиг); “social shame” is

niigmiin gutamshig (нийгмийн гутамшиг) or *niigmiin hog shaar* (нийгмийн хог шаар, literally meaning “social scum”); and “individual shame” is simply *ichguur* (ичгүүр).

The nuances of these terminologies amplify the severity of shame as it moves from the individual level to the social and national levels. This suggests that while one may endure shame privately, openly expressing one’s sexuality or building solidarity with others subjects the entire community to harsher and more stigmatizing connotations of the term. These socio-cultural and socio-linguistic implications often translate into dehumanization or animalization (including associations with bestiality). For example, some interviewees reported being referred to as “dogs,” while others cited proverbs and expressions such as “Better broken bones than a broken reputation,” “with no shame glands,” and “scum bringing shame to the family honor/reputation.”

Through this study of shame and sexuality in contemporary Mongolian LGBTIQ+ communities, I have also discovered theoretical concepts such as the “dilemma of difference” and “categorical thinking” (Minow, 1987), the “category of identities” (Terbish, 2013), “friendship as a way of life” (Foucault, 1997), “covering” (Yoshino, 2006), and the emerging idea of “queer Asia as a potential methodology” (Luther & Loh, 2019). Drawing on the works of Ahmed, Foucault, Sedgwick, Minow highlights how sameness and difference within marginalized communities often clash due to “unstated norms.” As Minow (1987) states:

“We can pursue possibilities of difference behind seeming commonalities and seek out commonalities across difference, thereby confronting the ready association of sameness with equality and difference with inferiority. One route is to emphasize our common humanity, despite our different traits” (p. 80).

Finally, my contribution to the study of queer shaming emerges from my dual position as a queer Mongolian activist turned academic and as a researcher who began his scholarly exploration in the field. This study shed light on shame as socially and affectively constructed within the bodies, minds, and lived experiences of Mongolian LGBTIQ+ communities in deeply anatomical ways, as argued by Fox (2021), who studies Mongolian identity through the lens of bone, flesh, and blood. Furthermore, this embodiment of shame is closely linked to Mongolian philosophical traditions of nomadism and Tengrism, where family bloodlines, bones, and flesh are deeply entwined with national identity. As a result, being a member of a sexual or gender minority

often exists in tension with these cultural ideals, with shame manifesting strongly at the personal-individual, social-group, and national-political levels.

8.2. Lived Experience as a Journey to Authenticity

In conclusion, the categorization of shame depends largely on how it is perceived by subjects, objects, and witnesses—whether as a feeling, an emotion, or an affect. A *feeling* is typically understood as a personal, internal experience, whereas *emotion* introduces a more social and collective dimension. In contrast, *affect* refers to embodied, often pre-conscious responses that relate to lived experience, relational dynamics, and social processes. This layered understanding aligns with the tripartite structure of shame proposed by Frost et al. (2021, p. 34). Within this framework, shame involves a relational orientation of the self toward itself, marked by reflexivity and exposure. Guilt, by contrast, pertains more directly to a morally transgressive action, focusing on what one has done rather than what one is.

Shame, when employed as a strategy, functions as a mechanism of social control and can operate as a double-edged instrument with positive, negative, or neutral implications for both individuals and collective groups. When strategically deployed—particularly by those in positions of authority or power—it serves to enforce dominant norms of ethics, morality, normativity, and patriarchal ideals. These are often maintained and reproduced through political rhetoric, legal frameworks, social narratives, and public shaming, especially via mainstream and digital media. Central to the mechanism of shame is the exercise of power: it reinforces systems of privilege and oppression, enabling the empowered to maintain the status quo while silencing, disempowering, and rendering marginalized voices invisible or irrelevant.

As Munt (2018) observes, “shame is a peculiarly relational affect” that can engender “status anxiety” and compel the subject to “neurotically re-attach to dominant culture” (p. 4). Because shame is inextricable from social bonds, experiences of unfulfilled entitlements or the sense of having failed against communal expectations frequently give rise to unacknowledged shame, which in turn may manifest as anger or rage. Ideally, shame functions as a transient or transitional state: once it is acknowledged and worked through, the subject can move beyond its hold. On this spectrum, shame ranges from unresolved, unacknowledged, prolonged, intended, and

internalized forms to temporary, healthy, resolved, and acknowledged variants. While the former often perpetuate cycles of rage, hatred, and contempt, the latter can catalyze “communities of shame” and yield emotions such as relief, empathy, or solidarity (Munt, 2018).

Focusing on the lived experiences of contemporary Mongolian queer individuals reveals authentic narratives of life as it has been lived—highlighting the venues, practices, and modes of communication that sustained community ties long before the formal emergence of organized queer spaces, activism, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the establishment of Equality & Pride Days. These early, often informal networks reflect the resilience and adaptability of the community in navigating invisibility and marginalization. Encouragingly, recent developments indicate a growing cultural and political visibility. The LGBT Centre has spearheaded initiatives to promote queer literature and art, fostering platforms for creative expression and community building. The Mongolian version of Pride—Equality & Pride Days—marked its 10th anniversary in 2023, symbolizing a decade of collective visibility and resistance. In parallel, the *Mongolian Queer Podcast*, launched in 2018, has provided a space for community members to share their stories and perspectives, contributing to a richer and more nuanced public discourse around queer life in Mongolia.

Shame, as an affect manifesting at sub- or unconscious and transpersonal levels, can be regarded as a foundational and indispensable component in the constitution of queer identity. Prior to conducting this research, I perceived shame primarily as a negative experience, overlooking its potential as an empowering and transformative affect. Shame, when embraced authentically, can signify a process of ‘becoming civilized’ or a form of relief through genuine emotional engagement. Framing shame as a tool for empowerment enables contemporary Mongolian queer individuals to reimagine their identities beyond the marginalizing label of “sexual minority,” seeing themselves instead as “decent citizens” within society. Analogous to how socialist-era colonial power dichotomized the nation into polarized extremes throughout much of the twentieth century, queer citizens have likewise experienced profound separations along moral and normative boundaries, shaped by national, gendered, and sexual identities. Recognizing shame’s complexity thus opens avenues for challenging these divisions and fostering new forms of social belonging.

While many queer individuals experience the cognitive phase of shame as a sense that “there is something wrong with their sexuality” (Nathanson, 1994, p. 126), this feeling often stems

from societal and cultural expectations, as well as pressures exerted by family members. Unlike the cultural studies perspective, which locates shame as an affect originating primarily from within the self, sociological approaches emphasize shame's role in identity formation through processes of recognition and nonrecognition, alongside the influence of social and cultural norms. This distinction highlights the multifaceted nature of shame as both an internal experience and a socially mediated phenomenon.

Findings from the small-scale survey, media content analysis, and interviews indicate that most contemporary queer individuals in Mongolia tend to focus on the psychological experience of shame rather than on the specific roles of perpetrators and witnesses. Family members, despite instances of physical and psychological violation, often remain fundamentally supportive, even though this may result in lifelong isolation for some queer individuals. Concurrently, the frequent use of human rights rhetoric and references to international and national human rights standards during conversations and interviews suggests that many queer people are in the early stages of transitioning from identity politics toward queer theory and, ultimately, the queering of shame.

Some participant comments illustrate the discomfort and ambivalence that community members may feel toward the term *queer*, reflecting the complexity and fluidity of identities constructed by individuals. This echoes concerns raised by Sinnott (2010) in the literature review regarding the contested use of *queer* in non-Western contexts. For example, one anonymous participant, who identifies as bisexual, explained that she perceives herself as heterosexual when in a relationship with a man and non-heterosexual when with a woman, yet does not identify as *queer*. Her rejection of the label may suggest an attempt to articulate an identity that transcends fixed gender and sexual categories. Additionally, her skepticism toward aspects of queer activism—particularly around the normalization of same-sex marriage—indicates unease with political agendas that seek assimilation into dominant norms. This case highlights not only the plurality of queer experiences in Mongolia but also the emergence of intergenerational dialogue and mutual learning within intimate and familial circles, where such conversations are beginning to take place.

Another point warranting closer analysis is how notions of citizenship emerge in the responses of interview participants. Older or more mature queer individuals often emphasize the aspiration to lead a "decent life" and to be recognized as morally respectable and valuable citizens.

In contrast, younger generations tend to foreground human rights discourses, including the right to same-sex marriage and the broader framework of civil and political rights. These generational differences reflect deeper tensions around nationalism, respectability, and sexuality. As Mosse (1985) argues, “the clearly defined moral and aesthetic boundaries of what it means to be a figure of ideal manliness or masculinity in society became an important symbol of the threat to nationalism and respectability in the modern era” (p. 31). He further notes that “the concept of respectability was itself part of new ways of regarding the human body and sexuality” (p. 4), and that “the distinction between normality and abnormality became central to modern respectability” (p. 8). In this context, ideal masculinity in contemporary Mongolian society is commonly associated with heterosexuality, formal education, moral decency, reproductive capacity, and public respectability. Conversely, men who are perceived as morally “*polluted*,” “*dirty*,” “*evil*,” or reproductively “*infertile*”—including gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer men, as well as others with non-normative gender and sexual identities—are frequently positioned as abnormal and excluded from the idealized citizenry.

8.3. Queer Solidarity to Overcome Shame

The application of concepts such as *queer responsibility*, *friendship as a way of life*, *imagined community*, and affect and shame theories has illuminated the intricate, multifaceted, and temporally situated realities of lived, living, and livable experiences among contemporary queer individuals in Mongolia. This study represents the first of its kind, opening new pathways for academic inquiry and activist engagement, with implications for both policy development and future research. The presence of state mechanisms, media discourse, and public shaming—while often oppressive—has paradoxically contributed to shaping the emotionally and politically charged terrain in which Mongolian queer lives unfold. Without these socio-political forces and their consequences, both positive and negative, the rich and painfully colorful tapestry of queer experience in Mongolia might not exist in its current form. However, it remains an open question whether shame, as an affective force, has had a cohesive or transformative impact on queer communities in a collective sense.

As young and middle-aged queer activists increasingly introduce Western discourses of human rights and queerness into Mongolian contexts, it is anticipated that older queer individuals

will gradually adopt and engage with these terminologies and concepts—slowly yet steadily—driven by their relevance, applicability, and growing urgency. While younger queers tend to focus on issues such as gender transition, same-sex marriage, technological proficiency, and social media engagement, older and more mature individuals are often concerned with matters of citizenship, family reconciliation, economic and financial stability, health, and sustainable relationships. Those who lived through the socialist regime dominated by the Soviet Union represent the unsung heroes of the queer Mongolian community. By embracing and, at times, openly confronting shame, they participate in activism in ways that are less visible yet equally significant. Their personal narratives—"shame stories"—serve as subtle forms of advocacy, offering historical insights that inform both the queer community and the broader public. In doing so, they challenge the marginalization of generational voices within LGBTIQ+ discourse and affirm their rightful place in the evolving history of queer Mongolia.

Pathologization of queer identities remains widespread in Mongolia. In some cases, parents still seek "*cures*" or subject their children to conversion therapy upon discovering their non-normative sexual or gender identities. Such conversion practices are especially encouraged in rural areas, where they are carried out by shamans, community leaders, and other pseudo-medical professionals. Disturbingly, public discourse continues to conflate homosexuality, being trans*, and queerness with pedophilia, the spread of disease—particularly HIV—and threats to national security. Against this backdrop, Anaraa Nyamdorj, a trans* man and co-founder of the LGBT Centre, has emerged as a prominent public figure, frequently interviewed by both national and international media. His narrative, which includes his marriage as a lesbian, his leadership in the Mongolian LGBTIQ+ rights movement, and his personal journey through gender transition, has inspired many within the community. Anaraa was the first Mongolian lesbian to marry abroad in 2005 and later became the first openly transgender man to co-found the country's only LGBTIQ+ rights NGO. He has described his journey through identity and embodiment as "being born thrice": first as a human being, then as a lesbian, and finally as a transgender man. His story stands as a powerful testament to queer resilience and visibility in the face of entrenched social stigma and institutional marginalization.

Queer individuals who have studied, lived, or worked abroad—or whose parents or close family members have had international exposure—often report feeling more empowered than

those without such experiences. This difference is frequently highlighted in media interviews and public narratives. For some, transnational experience appears to play a key role in the decision to come out, offering exposure to more affirming social environments and discourses of sexual and gender diversity. However, this dynamic also provokes backlash within Mongolian society, where critics accuse returnees of importing “Western perversions,” thus reinforcing the persistent myth of homosexuality as a Western import. Despite this, many young queer individuals attribute growing social acceptance to increased international mobility, suggesting that Mongolians who have spent time abroad tend to return with more open-minded and inclusive attitudes toward LGBTIQ+ identities.

Regardless of political affiliation, most Mongolian politicians remain largely indifferent to LGBTIQ+ issues and the concerns of queer individuals. This indifference may not stem from ignorance or naïveté regarding the political implications of queer discourses, but rather from a strategic reluctance to take a public stance. When such discourses are selectively introduced through state-orchestrated media campaigns, they are often left open to public interpretation, which can result in their distortion, exploitation, or politicization. In contrast to this institutional disengagement, Foucault (1997) proposed the concept of “friendship as a way of life,” arguing that what threatens societal institutions is not merely the moral or sexual dimensions of same-sex relations, but their radical potential to redefine social bonds and relational structures. As he puts it, institutions are concerned with “the potentiality of same-sex love and its impact on society,” rather than with “expressed notions of morality and sex concerns” (p. 137). This perspective reframes queer existence not as a moral debate but as a profound challenge to the normative fabric of social and political life.

Although the LGBT Centre maintains an active online presence through social media platforms such as Meta, YouTube, and podcasts, several community members report that limited outreach and insufficient promotion of the Centre’s activities and services have left many queer individuals feeling isolated, unsupported, and hopeless. This highlights a crucial gap between institutional visibility and actual accessibility. More broadly, the evolution of queer activism in Mongolia reflects a gradual discursive shift from a human rights framework toward more nuanced queer theoretical approaches. Activists and community leaders increasingly move beyond the foundational narrative of “LGBT rights are human rights,” embracing terminology and conceptual

frameworks rooted in queer theory—such as *duality*, *non-binary identity*, *gender non-conformity*, *fluidity*, *sensuality*, and *sexuality*. In doing so, some also draw explicitly on the works of queer theorists like Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, integrating academic theory into local activism in an attempt to reframe queer existence not merely as a matter of legal recognition but as a challenge to normative epistemologies and power structures.

8.4. Queer Shame as a Lifetime Experience

Shame, as experienced by queer individuals, can manifest as a lifelong scar, a persistent affective state, or a resolved episode transformed through reflection and resilience. For some, it remains a source of trauma, deeply embedded in memory and identity; for others, it evolves into a catalyst for personal growth, activism, or community formation. One participant in the small-scale survey likened shame to “herpes”—a latent, often stigmatized condition that resurfaces when triggered or when one’s emotional resilience is compromised. This analogy, though stark, highlights the chronic and cyclical nature of unresolved shame. In this context, what I refer to as “self-work” becomes an ongoing, perhaps lifelong, process through which queer individuals navigate, negotiate, and sometimes transcend the affective burdens of shame. This form of labor—emotional, psychological, and political—may persist throughout one’s life, ending only with death. Yet within this endurance lies the potential for transformation, resistance, and the reclaiming of queer subjectivity on one’s own terms.

When Anaraa passed away in April 2023—eight months after his deportation to Mongolia following an unsuccessful asylum application in the Netherlands—his funeral became a stark illustration of the persistent familial and societal struggles faced by openly queer individuals. During the reception, his mother reportedly kissed a childhood photograph of him as a biologically assigned female, saying, “That is who she is.” This act, coupled with the prolonged silence and rejection from his sisters, underscores the enduring shame his family associated with his gender identity and highly visible queer activism. Anaraa, known as Mongolia’s first publicly out lesbian-turned-trans* activist, remained a symbol of pride and resistance for the queer community, yet was never fully accepted by his own family. His death did not mark the resolution of his lifelong struggle for recognition and belonging, but instead amplified the unresolved tensions between

queer visibility, familial rejection, and the cultural burden of shame in contemporary Mongolian society.

As a former asylum seeker recently deported from his country of refuge—due, in part, to his lawyer’s failure to submit essential documents on time—Anaraa reflected on the arduous nature of the asylum process. He stated:

“I can attest that the asylum process is lengthy and challenging, demanding a great deal of patience. As a queer person of color, I found the asylum system to be inadequate in protecting individuals from gender-based harassment, particularly within refugee camps. Frequently, I was housed alongside individuals who did not identify as sexual or gender minorities, which created significant safety concerns. At times, my life felt suspended in limbo due to prolonged waiting periods and living conditions that were far from secure” (personal communication, 2023).

The Mongolian proverb, “Suffer with your own rule, rather than frolic under someone else’s rule,” resonates deeply within many queer experiences. When asked about this saying, Anaraa affirmed, “I think agency of our actions is always informed by who we are, so I agree with this proverb” (personal communication, 2023). His words and actions—marked by boldness and vulnerability—ultimately spoke louder than the shame he endured from loved ones, authorities, media, and society at large. While the norms governing how we should live, behave, and exist are often predetermined and imposed by those in power, the ways in which we confront and navigate repressive conditions, shaming mechanisms, and discrimination remain within our control. This process of self-determination is fraught and painful; some, like Anaraa and others marginalized by Mongolia’s queer-phobic, patriarchal, and conservative system, may succumb to these pressures. Yet, they leave behind legacies of aspiration, resilience, and resistance—demonstrating that shame, while powerful, can also be challenged and overcome.

The deep-seated sense of shame experienced by queer individuals, particularly when it originates from family and loved ones, is profoundly rooted in kinship ties that are symbolically encoded in concepts of bone, blood, and flesh. In Mongolian culture, “matrilineal and patrilineal lines of descent” are understood through the metaphors of “flesh and blood” (*mah tsus*) and “bone” (*yas*), respectively (Fox, 2021, p. 289). This kinship symbolism is further reflected in the popular saying, “Better broken bones than a broken reputation,” which conveys the paramount importance of respect, honor, and social esteem within the community. While this proverb traditionally upholds values of familial pride, in the context of sexuality and shame, it underscores the pressure

to preserve family honor by avoiding behaviors that might be perceived as threatening or “unnecessarily” flaunting one’s sexual identity. Consequently, queer expressions of identity are often entangled with fears of dishonoring the family, reinforcing the complex interrelation between personal affective experiences and collective cultural expectations.

As one survey participant poignantly noted, “shame is like herpes”: when emotional resilience wanes, past traumas can resurface unexpectedly. Shame, for many queer individuals, represents a lifelong emotional stress, injury, and trauma that requires sustained inner struggle to overcome. Central to this process are self-acceptance and self-love, which, alongside community support and the establishment of personal boundaries, become essential resources for healing. While social stereotypes and stigma persist, individuals either resist or succumb to their influence; those who overcome shame often continue this work throughout their lives, ultimately striving to live free from its burden. This testimony also points to a broader structural imperative: the need to transform social, cultural, political, and economic systems in order to empower queer movements more effectively. Despite perceptions that honor culture may be less pervasive compared to developed countries, lived experiences and community testimonies suggest its strong and continuing influence. Therefore, honor culture warrants further critical study, public discourse, and transformative action to dismantle its oppressive effects.

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Appendix I: Interview questions

Thank you very much for agreeing to answer my questions for the research. The research aims to document the lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ community members of Mongolia with the theme of shame and shamed citizens.

Personal background questions

1. Could you please introduce yourself briefly?
2. How is or was growing up as a LGBTIQ+ person in Mongolia like?
3. Are you open about being LGBTIQ+ to your friends and family? How about your coming-out story?
4. How do you meet other LGBTIQ+ people?

Questions on mature or old LGBTIQ+ community members

5. What are the current situations/realities/challenges for the mature LGBTIQ+ Mongolians?
6. Do you think educated, multilingual and successful LGBTIQ+ people in Mongolia feel more comfortable and secure to express their sexuality in today's society? If so, why? (If not, why not?)
7. What are good and bad sides of being an openly LGBTIQ+ person in Mongolia?
8. Do you think this mature/older generation played a role on the current legal and policy reforms (amending the criminal code to include non-discrimination provisions)?

Engagement with the LGBTIQ+ rights movements

9. What is your involvement in the recent LGBTIQ+ rights movement? (For example, do you participate in activities and events organized by LGBTIQ+ organizations, Pride, etc.?)
10. How well are you connected to mature/older LGBTIQ+ community members?
11. What is your engagement with the younger LGBTIQ+ community members like?
12. What are the reasons of older LGBTIQ+ people not actively participating in events?

Cross-generational questions

13. In your opinion, what could the young LGBTIQ+ people learn from their previous older generations?

14. What are your ideas on how the mature/older and younger LGBTIQ+ community members could exchange their knowledge and skills in order to improve the lives of LGBTIQ community?

Looking into the future

15. What are your future dreams and goals?

Thank you so very much for taking your time to answer my questions and being part of the research!

Appendix II: Information Sheet for Research Participants

(Date of producing the information sheet: January 15, 2023)

Invitation to participate in the research:

I, Otgonbaatar Tsedendemberel, would like to invite you,, to participate in my qualitative research themed “Shamed Citizens: Lived Experiences of Contemporary Mongolian Queer.”

This research is being conducted to fulfill the requirements towards obtaining the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) at the Department of Sociology, Institute of Social and Political Sciences, Corvinus University of Budapest.

I would like the senior students at your school to participate in my research for a focus group interview to explore their understandings on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression among peers and views on discrimination and hatred against sexual minorities.

Your participation is voluntary and if you change your mind, you can refuse to continue your participation for any reason during the interview process. There will be no harm done to you because of your refusal to participate in the research.

Purpose of the research:

The main purpose of this research is to analyze how Mongolian LGBTIQ+ communities have been accepted, understood, or discriminated in society, in school, and at home through the concepts of shame. In doing so, focus areas would be to understand how members of sexual minorities are educated in school and peer environments from their childhood, how they experience shame due to their sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, and how they overcome the notion of shame and shaming.

Form of participating in the research:

As a researcher, I will conduct a focus group interview. Depending on your availability, the interview will last from 30 to 45 minutes. It will be conducted on your chosen date and venue.

Before the interview, I will briefly introduce the research topic to students and then will have them fill out the form with closed and open interview questions. Information sheets and other documents related to research ethics could be signed by a teacher or training manager on behalf of their students.

Probability of risk or inconvenience:

There is a very low probability of any risks or inconveniences by participating in the research.

Outcome of the research:

Research findings would contribute to improving state policies and programs on human rights of Mongolian LGBTIQ+ community members, as well as strategies, programs, and actions of NGOs and international development organizations working in this field.

Confidentiality:

Your name and position will not be openly publicized, and school name will be used in this research as “a school of ... district,” “a public school,” or “a private school.” In addition, I will not ask student names, but only obtain data on their age and gender. As a researcher, I will ensure the confidentiality of your school and students by generically referring to them as "a student from a school of ... district," and "a school" in the research.

In case you decide to leave the research before the data collection process ends, the data you provided will not be used for the research.

Deadline to inform whether you would like to participate in the research:

I would appreciate it if you could inform me of your decision to participate in the research within one week after receiving this information sheet.

Form of informing about the research participation:

You can inform me of your decision via email. If you decide to participate in the research, I will bring a copy of the consent form when we meet at the agreed location and date for your signature to confirm your decision.

Publication of the research findings:

I will publicize research findings through forms such as a publication in a journal. I will also send you an electronic link of the final version of my dissertation after its defense and upload it on the university website.

Contact details in case of questions raised regarding the research:

In case of clarifying the content and nature of my research, you can contact my supervisor Dr. Judit Takacs, Researcher, Professor, Center of Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences via: takacs.judit@tk.hu, and (+36) 203 136 943.

In case of clarifying the research ethical guidelines, you can contact Dr. Lilla Vicsek, Associate Professor of the Institute of Social and Political Sciences, Corvinus University of Budapest, in charge of research ethics and Head of Equal Opportunities Committee: lilla.vicsek@uni-corvinus.hu.

Contact details in case of inquiring about the research:

Contact details of the researcher:

Otgonbaatar Tsedendemberel, PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology, Institute of Social and Political Sciences, Corvinus University of Budapest.

Email addresses: otgonbaatartsedendemberel@hotmail.com and
otgonbaatar.tsedendemberel@stud.uni-corvinus.hu

Phone number: (+36) 203 105 529

Contact details of the supervisor:

Dr. Judit Takacs, Researcher, Professor, Center of Social Sciences, Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Email address: takacs.judit@tk.hu

It is approved by the Code of Ethics of the Research Ethics Committee of Corvinus University of Budapest.

Consent Form

Thesis Topic: “Shamed Citizens: Lived Experiences of Contemporary Mongolian Queers”

Supervisor: Dr. Judit Takacs

Researcher: Otgonbaatar Tsedendemberel

- ☐ I have read the information sheet on ... (month) ... (day) of 2023.
- ☐ I have had all the opportunities to ask and to clarify about this research.
- ☐ I am aware that the researcher and/or his assistant will take notes and audio-record during the interview, which will be followed by transcription.
- ☐ I am fully aware that I can leave the research before the data collection process ends without harming myself and can retrieve the information I provided.
- ☐ I understand that the data concerning myself will not be used for the research in case I leave the interview process.
- ☐ I have decided to participate in this research.
- ☐ I choose the following (please tick one):

Limited confidentiality ☐ Partial confidentiality ☐ Without any restrictions ☐

I understand that I can revise this option when I check the notetaking of the interview.

I would like to receive an online link of the research after its publication (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

I would like to receive any information about the publication of research findings in English (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

I would like to receive any information about the publication of research findings in Mongolian (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Signature of the participant:

Participant name:

.....

Date: 2023/.../...

It is approved by the Code of Ethics of the Research Ethics Committee of Corvinus University of Budapest.

Note: A copy will be kept with the participant.

Appendix III: List of Media Content (2010-2023)

No	Year	Title	Type	Language	Link
1	2023	More pride and less prejudice	Special feature	English	https://adnchronicles.org/2023/05/26/more-pride-and-less-prejudice/
2	2023	Is exile the only solution for queer Mongolians?	Interview	English	https://globalvoices.org/2023/03/29/is-exile-the-only-solution-for-queer-mongolians/
3	2023	My impression of being with LGBT Center during Pride and Equality Days	Interview	Mongolian	https://medium.com/
4	2023	“Sexual minority” trends commonly spread in foreign countries	Article	Mongolian	https://www.caak.mn/post/view/266446
5	2023	There is no study in Mongolia which found the reliable number of sexual and gender minorities	Article	Mongolian	https://mfcc.mn/factcheck-643/
6	2022	It is shame if a modern youth is not human rights sensitive.	Interview	Mongolian	https://itoim.mn/article/mzSY3/31453
7	2022	NHRCM: Rights of sexual minority	Article	Mongolian	https://mpress.mn/p/5072
8	2021	There is no meaning in denying and insulting LGBT which is scientifically proven	Interview	Mongolian	https://isee.mn/n/25460
9	2021	Would the amendment to the Constitution protect sexual minorities?	Article	Mongolian	https://eagle.mn/r/91385
10	2021	First transgender soldier of the Republic of Korea died	News	Mongolian	https://news.mn/r/2407331/
11	2021	Let’s “brighten” other’s rainbow without dimming or harming it!	Article	Mongolian	https://unread.today/c/2030-lgbt
12	2021	Decision was issued for Odsuren Badarch to apologize to sexual minority	News	Mongolian	https://www.ulsturch.mn/a/45602
13	2021	If you die, no one will notice you	Tweet	Mongolian	https://twitter.com/hariad_uyanga/status/1362781357928194049
14	2021	Deputy Mayor entered a post discriminating sexual minority	News	Mongolian	https://urug.mn/news/11042
15	2021	10 facts about sexual and gender minorities	Article	Mongolian	https://mpress.mn/p/1547

16	2020	B. Khulan: Do not think that you are inferior to others	Interview	Mongolian	https://ergelt.mn/news/120/single/1977
17	2020	N. Gan-Od: Everyone knows that a person of sexual minority is running for election	Interview	Mongolian	http://www.zaluu.mn/p/53876.html
18	2020	Shall we pity or kick sexual minorities?	Article	Mongolian	https://eguur.mn/241686/
19	2020	Are sexual minority people still in the limelight in society?	Article	Mongolian	https://couplerecipemongolia.family.blog/2020/11/01/бэлгийн-цөөнх-хүмүүс-нийгмийн-анхаар/
20	2020	For LGBTQ+ people in Mongolia, stigma is a fact of life	Interview	English	https://globalvoices.org/2020/08/21/for-lgbtq-people-in-mongolia-stigma-is-a-fact-of-life/
21	2019	Transgender sex workers	News	Mongolian	https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2463790513850042
22	2019	We did not choose to become sexual minorities	Article	Mongolian	https://gogo.mn/r/244076
23	2019	Morning meeting was held on “LGBTI human rights and criminal legal environment”	News	Mongolian	https://news.mn/r/2135681/
24	2019	Growing up gay in Mongolia	Opinion	English	https://www.gaystarnews.com/article/gay-mongolia-stonewall/
25	2019	B.Khulan: Despite sexual orientation, we are human beings	Interview	Mongolian	http://time.mn/nrj.html
26	2019	We have not chosen the path to be sexual minorities ourselves	Article	Mongolian	http://gogo.mn/r/244076
27	2019	Same sexual and bisexual flowers are example. Homosexual flowers.	Article	Mongolian	https://dversam.ru/mn/odnopolye-i-oboepolye-cvetki-primery-odnopolye-cvetki.html
28	2019	Charges in Mongolia LGBT attack hint at changing attitudes	Article	English	https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/charges-mongolia-lgbt-attack-hint-changing-attitudes-191002073105218.html
29	2019	Why is it difficult for gays to have long-term relationships? (2014)	Article Russian	Mongolian	https://forum-uchastkov.ru/mn/lajfhak/pochemu-geyam-tyazhelo-postroit-dolgosrochnye-otnosheniya-prichiny.html
30	2019	Aljazeera: the crime of physical attack against a transgender citizen changes social attitude	Article	Mongolian	http://dardas.mn/news/view/12095

31	2019	LGBT people are discriminated mostly by strangers	Article	Mongolian	http://udriintoim.mn/lgbt-hvmvvs-tanihgvi-hvmvvsiiin-ylgawarlan-gaduurhaltad-ilvv-ortdog/
32	2019	Is same sex (homosexuality) related to sexual relations?	Article Russian	Mongolian	https://pro-lgbt.ru/mn/5193/
33	2019	Majority of those with AIDS is men of sexual minorities	News	Mongolian	https://montsame.mn/cn/read/208548
34	2019	My child is a same sex person (homosexual)	Article Russian	Mongolian	https://transportoskola.ru/mn/muzhc-hina-i-zhenschina/moi-rebenok---gei-predgomoseksualnost-detei-ili-kak-ne/
35	2019	Why did S. Amarsaikhan fire the son of N. Jantsannorov?	News	Mongolian	http://www.sonin.mn/news/easy-page/102841
36	2019	LGBT short films celebrated during Mongolia's pride week	News	English	https://www.apcom.org/lgbt-short-films-celebrated-during-mongolias-pride-week/
37	2018 2017	LGBTI in Mongolia fighting for rights and recognition	Article	English	https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/long-reads/article/2103383/lgbti-mongolia-fighting-rights-and-recognition
38	2018	Meet transgender Mongolian beauty queen breaking barriers	Article	English	https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001307551/meet-transgender-mongolian-beauty-queen-breaking-barriers
39	2018	Mongolian Pride: LGBTQ Activism In One Developing Country	Article	English	https://theestablishment.co/mongolian-pride-lgbtq-activism-in-one-developing-country/index.html
40	2018	The Coalition for Equality and LGBT Human Rights Launched in Mongolia	Article	English	https://mongolia.un.org/en/14401-coalition-equality-and-lgbt-human-rights-launched-mongolia
41	2018	G. Dorjjantsan: In any country, it is possible that 10% of its population is LGBTI	Interview	Mongolian	https://ikon.mn/opinion/1ea8
42	2018	G. Dorjjantsan: Behind LGBT, there are different health issues	Interview	Mongolian	http://eagle.mn/r/44456
43	2018	M. Munkhjargal: There are many feminine boys lately. Let's protect male gender of our boys.	Interview	Mongolian	https://www.n24.mn/a/1134
44	2018	E. Tseren: There are gays among Mongolian politicians	Article	Mongolian	http://factnews.mn/mly
45	2017	LGBTI in Mongolia fighting for rights and recognition	Article	English	https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/long-

					reads/article/2103383/lgbti-mongolia-fighting-rights-and-recognition
46	2017	“Blue” guys managed to get 20 million tugriks from a gay man with a wife by threatening him with a video they recorded	News	Mongolian	http://nuuts.mn/news/17471 . Цэнхэр” залуус эхнэртэй ижил хүйстэн эрийг бичлэгээр сүрдүүлэн 20 сая төгрөг “салгажээ
47	2017	Solongo: I am afraid of the dark, but I am not afraid to work for a better future for LGBT people.	Interview	Mongolian	https://lgbtamantuukh.wordpress.com/2017/01/08/солонго/
48	2017	Embracing the LGBT Community in Mongolia	Article	English	https://medium.com/@WorldLearning/embracing-the-lgbt-community-in-mongolia-563f230d0f37
49	2017	“A tolerant and hate-free Mongolia” project trainings happening during August 2-15, 2017	News	English	https://mn.usembassy.gov/tolerant-hate-free-mongolia-project-trainings-happening-august-2-15-2017/
50	2016	Working with the LGBT Community in Mongolia	Article	English	https://www.apa.org/international/pi/2016/03/lgbt-mongolia
51	2016	Mongolia: Tales of a Dusty City, Friendly Nomads and a Few LGBT Natives	Article with interviews	English	http://www.sfreporter.com/santafe/blog-3973-sapphic-nomads-two-santa-feans-explore-mongolia.html
52	2016	LGBT Oral Histories	Narratives	Mongolian	https://lgbtamantuukh.wordpress.com/page/2/
53	2016	Peeking into the one and only gay bar in Mongolia	Article	Mongolian	http://www.ub.life/p/3886
54	2016	Is the number of same sex people increasing or not?	Article	Mongolian	http://www.ugluu.mn/201133.html
55	2016	Mongolia backs UN watchdog for LGBT rights	Article	English	https://www.montsame.mn/en/read/125917
56	2016	Inside Mongolia’s Only Gay Bar	Article	English	https://gawker.com/inside-mongolia-s-only-gay-bar-1778436860
57	2016	Quiz: test to define sexual orientation through a mathematical method	Quiz	Mongolian	https://ikon.mn/quiz/v71
58	2016	On the rights of sexual minorities	Opinion	Mongolian	https://gogo.mn/r/4vnlm
59	2015	Disease towards homosexuality	Article	Mongolian	http://innovations.mn/article/get/ Хүйсээ ижилсүүлэх эмгэг
60	2015	Are the sexual minorities a cause for pride or discontent?	Article interview	Mongolian	http://www.mnb.mn/i/70716

61	2015	Yes We Khaan: Fighting for equality in Mongolia	Article interview	English	https://www.postpravdamagazine.com/yes-we-khaan/
62	2014	Mongolia plans anti-discrimination laws	Article	English	https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/06/mongolia-plans-anti-discrimination-laws-2014617101854814248.html
63	2014	Mongolia: LGBT Activists Cheered by Potential Gay Rights Gain	Article	English	https://eurasianet.org/mongolia-lgbt-activists-cheered-by-potential-gay-rights-gain
64	2014	CNN: “Secret lives of Mongolian same sex people”	Article	Mongolian	http://tsag.mn/2906-cnn-mongol-dah-izhil-hystndiyn-nuuc-amidral.html
65	2014	Mongolian sexual minorities or secret lives of LGBT people	Article	Mongolian	https://www.24tsag.mn/a/53683
66	2014	N. Anaraa: 10 percent of Mongolian population is sexual minorities	Interview	Mongolian	http://www.grandnews.mn/content/read/52205.htm
67	2014	Mongolian homo, “blues” are extinct by suicide and alcoholism	Article	Mongolian	https://www.buzznews.mn/news/155/single/12225
68	2014	Tomorrow will celebrate the equality and pride day of sexual minorities	News	Mongolian	https://dnn.mn/бэлгийн-цөөнх-тэгш-эрх-бахархлын-өдөр-ийг-мэргэж-тэмдэглэнэ
69	2013	From Shamans to gay bars: Booming Mongolia’s LGBT people	Article	English	https://www.gaystarnews.com/article/shamans-gay-bars-booming-mongolia%E2%80%99s-lgbt-people050413/
70	2013	I am different from you, but it does not mean that I am pervert.	Article	Mongolian	http://www.shuud.mn/a/298755
71	2013	Feature: Pride on the Steppe – Being Gay in Mongolia	Feature	English	https://www.starobserver.com.au/features/feature-pride-on-the-steppe-being-gay-in-mongolia/110852
72	2013	Human Rights: Theory and Method Journal by NHRCM, pp. 70-78	Academic Article	Mongolian	http://www.nhrcm.gov.mn/media/documents/1500604698_setguul_2013_02.pdf
73	2013	There will be a parade of same sex people in Mongolia	Translated interview	Mongolian	http://www.assa.mn/a/13200
74	2013	Sexual minorities have still been in the center of attention	Article	Mongolian	https://ikon.mn/n/lv
75	2013	Mass media and sexual minority	Article	Mongolian	https://news.mn/r/649087/
76	2013	How does a person become homosexual or heterosexual?	Article	Mongolian	http://www.sonin.mn/news/culture/14882

77	2013	Intersex person ...	Interview	Mongolian	http://baabar.mn/article/5034
78	2012	O. Gerelee: I killed my husband out of real hatred because he was a same sex person.	Interview	Mongolian	http://www.sonin.mn/news/gemt-hereg/3263
79	2012	Gay Mongolians see flickers of progress amid fear and ostracism	Article	English	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jun/27/gay-mongolians-progress-fear-ostracism
80	2012	Gay people have very delicate sensibility	Interview	Mongolian	http://www.unen.mn/a/15975
81	2012	The French protested homo families as lame	Article	Mongolian	https://vip76.mn/content/15301
82	2011	“Mongol Rally” tour which attracts same sex people makes Mongolia a dumpsite of metal garbage	Article	Mongolian	https://news.zindaa.mn/6jb
83	2011	The most generous in the world are Mongolian men	Interview	Mongolian	Mongolnews.mn
84	2011	Being interested in a person of same sex is not perverse	Article	Mongolian	http://unuudur.mn/ижил-хүйстнээ-сонирхох-нь-гаж-үзэгдэл-биш/
85	2011	DJ Shaman drew handsome, clean Mongolian guys into his perverse, sexual habits	Article	Mongolian	http://www.fact.mn/20977.html
86	2011	LGBT Rights: Path of Courage and Defiance	Article	English	http://www.masa.org.mn/article/lgbt-rights-path-of-courage-and-defiance
87	2010	Mongolian LGBT Activists at the Human Rights Council	Article	English	https://outrightinternational.org/content/mongolian-lgbt-activists-human-rights-council
88	2010	Victory at the Human Rights Council	Article	English	https://outrightinternational.org/content/victory-human-rights-council
89	2010	Ts. Otgonbaatar: The Constitution should be amended to protect rights and interests of sexual minorities	Interview	Mongolian	http://shudarga.mn/?dazo=news&newsid=5557&catid=11
90	2010	Rights and interests of same sex people will be protected	News	Mongolian	http://shuud.mn/print.php?type=1&news_id=10848
91	2010	Meeting will be held among the representatives who attended as observers for the 9th session of the UN Human Rights Council	News	Mongolian	http://shuud.mn/print.php?type=1&news_id=10855
92	2010	Stop discrimination against LGBT people	News	Mongolian	http://news.guren.mn/content/11999.shtml
93	2010	Stopping the discrimination against sexual minorities is called upon	News with interview	Mongolian	http://news.gogo.mn/news/print/79160

94	2010	“Gay” men’s rights are being violated	News	Mongolian	https://news.mn/r/538492/
95	N/A	How I knew that I was a same sex person	Translated article	Mongolian	https://www.tailal.mn/a/505Izhil.html
96	N/A	Why does one become a same sex person?	Article	Mongolian	https://denluu.mn/у/яагаад-ижил”хүйстэн-болдог-вэ/
97	2010	Sexual orientation - homosexual	Article	Mongolian	https://solo.blogmn.net/38405/
98	N/A	Is it possible that Catholics accept same-sex marriage?	Article	Mongolian	https://mn.eferrit.com/католик-ижил-хүйсийн-гэрлэлтийг/
99	N/A	Gay colors and rainbow flag	Article	Mongolian	https://mylandrover.ru/mn/test-drajvy/rascvetka-geev-erudit-pod-chernym-flagom.html
100	N/A	Transmongolian: The Secret History of the Mongols.	Article photos	English	http://www.thestoryinstitute.com/transmongolian

Appendix IV: List of Survey Participants

№	Name	Age	Gender	SOGIESC	Location
1	Tom	19	Non-binary	Bisexual / Transgender	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
2	Kh,	22	No answer	Gay / Transgender	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
3	A.G.	31	Female	Heterosexual	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
4	D. A.	30	Male	Heterosexual	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
5	A.A.	35	Female	Heterosexual	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
6	N.M.	23	Female	Transgender woman	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
7	P.D.	32	Female	Bisexual	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
8	N/A	39	Female	Heterosexual	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
9	M.T.	20	Female	Heterosexual	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
10	N.T.	36	Male	Bisexual	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
11	D.M.	43	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
12	B.L.	28	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
13	B.E.	31	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
14	N.G,	31	Male	Bisexual	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
15	B.Z.	42	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
16	N/A	42	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
17	B.E.	33	Female	Transgender woman	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
18	O.G.	28	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
19	B.B.	61	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
20	G.N.	39	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
21	C.G.	39	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
22	A.N.	18	Female	Transgender woman	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
23	O.E.	28	Queer	Genderqueer	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
24	L.T.	24	Male	Transgender man	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
25	T.S.	16	Male	Bisexual	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
26	B.N.	18	Female	Bisexual	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
27	O.C.	20	Female	Bisexual / Transgender	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
28	Yan	20	Male	Gay / Transgender man	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
29	A.S.	29	Female	Demisexual (B, T & I)	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
30	M.N.	45	Other	Transgender	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
31	G.B.	21	N/A	Transgender	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
32	B.G.	45	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
33	C.J.	22	Male	Bisexual	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
34	E.S.	18	Male	Transgender man	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
35	B.O.	35	Male	Transgender man	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
36	B.Z.	17	Non-binary	Lesbian	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
37	K.C.	18	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
38	T.G.	30	Male	Heterosexual	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
39	S.N.	17	Non-binary	Pansexual	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
40	O.Y.	24	Male	Transgender man	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

41	B.N.	25	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
42	A.J.	17	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
43	E.J.	17	Female	Bisexual	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
44	L.S.	18	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
45	H.K.	22	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
46	E.S.	22	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
47	G.E.	41	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
48	M.B.	37	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
49	E.S.	39	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
50	M.E.	24	Male	Gay	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
51	A.D.	34	Non-binary	Transgender	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
52	D.M.	32	Male	Bisexual	Budapest, Hungary

Appendix V: List of Interviewees (Exile)

APPENDIX VI: List of Interviewees

№	Name / Birth year	SOGIESC	Status abroad	Years (abroad)	Country of residence	Reason of emigration
1	T.N., 1976	Heterosexual cis woman	Asylum seeker (past attempts (-))	4 years (15 yrs.)	Germany (Canada)	Racial and AIDS disc.
2	J.Z., 1980	Gay man / drag queen	Failed to live abroad / asylum	In 2018 (6 months)	Mongolia (Turkey)	Economic / SOGIESC
3	M.S., 1988	Trans* woman transitioned	Refugee status gained already	2+ years	Thailand (+destination)	Police torture and brutality
4	T.B., 1987	Gay man, divorced	Green card winner (?)	4 months	USA	Economic after divorce
5	T.K., 1992	Gay man, married	Work and travel visa	6 years	USA	Work and marriage
6	B.Z., 1984	Trans* man transitioned	Refugee status gained already	8 years	Switzerland	Violence against trans*
7	E.G., 1990	Trans* woman	Refugee status gained already	2+ years	Thailand (+destination)	HIV status, family viol.
8	Anonymous, 1980s	Gay man, HIV+	Contracted worker	3 years	Europe	Economic migration
9	A.Z., 1991	Lesbian, queer	Contracted worker	6 years	USA	Studies and work
10	Anonymous, 1980s	Lesbian, queer	Refugee status gained already	7 years	N.A.	Family violence
11	Nyamka, 1988	Gay man, Com. leader	Youth for Health NGO	N/A	Mongolia	Social worker
12	Enkhmaa Enkhbold	Queer, Com. leader	LGBT Center NGO	N/A	Mongolia	Educated in the USA
13	Anonymous, 1980s	Gay man, married	Migrant worker	5 years	USA	Studies and Work
14	G.T., 1990	Queer, gay, non-binary	Educational migrant	3 years	Germany	Studies
15	B.B. 1950s	Heterosexual man	Migrant worker	Over 40 years	Hungary	Work

16	Anaraa Nyamdorj, 1976	Trans* man (deceased in April 2023)	Asylum seeker, now in Mongolia	2019-2022 as asylum seeker	Netherlands	Police, violence, hate crime
17	Munkhnasan, 1977	Trans* woman	Sayana Wellbeing		Rural area, now in UB	
18	Asuri, 2006	Trans* man	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia			
19	Erkhes, 1996	Trans* man/ genderqueer	Rural area, now in UB			
20	Bama, 1975	Lesbian	Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia			