“HARD TO TELL IN A WORD”: NARRATIVES OF BISEXUALITY IN HUNGARY

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Abstract

In this thesis I examine meanings of bisexuality in present-day Hungary. I explore personal meanings, acquired through the analysis of in-depth interviews conducted with people who claim to have attractions towards women and men; however, I argue that personal meanings have roots in broader social-cultural narratives. Therefore my aim is to detect the influence of socially available discourses in the personal accounts. I examine bisexual meanings first connected to interpretations of the post-socialist Hungary to show how these meanings are mediated through temporal and spatial-national binaries. Then, given that bisexuality lies in the intersection of sexuality and gender, I focus on how they are conceived and linked to bisexuality in the interviews. I argue that through binary categories structuring understandings of Hungary, sexuality, and gender, people define the character of their bisexuality – and, at the same time, their lives full of overlaps and ambiguities force them to challenge these categories.

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Introduction

It's hard to tell in a word, when there isn't place for a long explanation. And then who means what by 'bisexual'. Hell knows. And if I tell it about myself, everyone thinks something different. So I don't know. (Hanna, 32, f)

Is bisexuality something that needs explanation? In our society, certainly. The meaning of bisexuality is not obvious, neither for outsiders, nor for 'bisexuals' themselves. It is so mostly because self-definition is an interactive product: others' doubts makes one doubting. Here I do not only talk about the difficulty of arguing for bisexual identity, although it is an existing phenomenon; I will argue that bisexual experience in general requires explanation considerably longer than "a word", for it has so many dimensions, both in sexual practice and identification. My thesis is inspired by this ambiguous character of bisexuality. I sought for personal narratives of people who in one way or another can be considered bisexuals to see how broader cultural narratives shape their understandings of their sexuality. My main argument is that they use binary categories available in cultural narratives to define the nature of their bisexuality but doing so they continuously challenge these categorizations. Therefore, the ambiguity of bisexuality can demonstrate how these categorizations, including "other sexualities", work – and also, where they fail.

Personal narratives are never purely individual but reflect social discourses. Sexual stories, just like others, are "socially produced in social contexts by embodied concrete people experiencing the thoughts and feelings of everyday life" (Plummer 1995, 16). By the examination of bisexual narratives I can demonstrate how bisexuality is structured and conceptualized in society, specifically in contemporary Hungary. The way people construct their sexualities is influenced by many social factors. It is even more in the case of bisexuality, because it has not got the more or less separate spaces that even homosexuality

owns – despite, or because of, the homophobia present in Hungary. Bisexuality, as Clare Hemmings argues, has not got separate spaces – neither in terms of institutions, either discursively – but exists inside different sexual discourses and communities (2002, 35-9). I would add that given the lack of bisexual spaces in contemporary Hungary, several kinds of discourses and narratives, beside those of sexuality, shape more emphatically the way people conceive and interpret bisexuality; because it is embedded in these structures. Throughout my thesis I show that individuals with bisexual attractions locate and define themselves and their sexualities according to various self-conceptions. As for Hemmings, for me it is important "how bisexuality generates or is given meaning in particular contexts" (2002, 31), precisely because it is not experienced separately from other discourses (34). Similarly, social narratives offer frames for the people I interviewed to give meaning to their bisexual attractions. I follow here Clifford Geertz's notion of 'meaning': it is "the conceptual structures individuals use to construe experience" (1993, 313); these concepts, as human thought in general, are "consummately social" (1993, 360).

A relative lack of bisexual spaces is characteristic everywhere, in comparison to gay and lesbian spaces; however, it is more so in Hungary, where there is no specific institution for bisexuals. The greatest 'gay' organizations already include "… and bisexual" in their names but sometimes only in the English version. The annual gay festival and Pride March is called *LM**B**T*[1] *Fesztivál* since 2005; however, these inclusions, as in scholarly and policy works, often remain on the level of gloss without real and specific consideration of bisexuals (Borgos 2007, 170; Renkin 2007, 53, n. 46).[2] Around the formation of the first gay organizations, in the mid-nineties, discussions about the political outcomes of sexual labels led a couple of people to form a group questioning identity categories. Its name was NINCS,

[1] *Leszbikus*, *Meleg* (Gay), *Biszexuális és Transznemű*, previously *Meleg és Leszbikus Fesztivál*
[2] A promising exception is an educational article about sexual minorities (Geresdi-Kuszing-Rózsa 2004).

literally "there isn't any", the short for Group for People without Sexual Identity[3] and it did not exist as a real group but rather as a theoretical provocation (Renkin 2007, 56-7). The same is demonstrated by the leaflets that one of its members distributed in a Pride March, about a fictional bisexual, parodying the stereotypes of sexual identification (Borgos 2007, 181). Nevertheless, we can state that the critique of identity categories remained restricted to a well-educated narrow circle interested in gender theories.

My thesis does not seek for the formal or informal representations of bisexuality in Hungary; and my primary focus is not to interrogate bisexually identified people's experiences of homo- and heterosexual reactions towards them either. The everyday representations and perceptions of bisexuality revolve around notions of infidelity, promiscuity, hesitation, immaturity, and false consciousness. It is apparent in internet forums and ads[4], including gay and lesbian ones (see Borgos 2007, pp. 171)[5] – and these views are also reflected in the interviews I conducted. Some interviews reject these stereotypes in defence, others' life conflicts mirror them, while others affirmatively embrace them. My main concern was to get a variety of life narratives from which, in the analysis, I can trace patterns of broader discursive categories, see below. I will argue that the differences in the interviewees' use of these categories determine the different characters of their 'bisexuality'. I will also try to prove that in these narratives the reinforcement and challenge of categories co-exist.

Given that the cultural context is essential for my investigation, I start my analysis in Chapter 2 with the post-socialist Hungarian context where discourses on sexualities are largely connected to the past-present, East-West, and national-transnational binaries. The interview

[3] *Nemi Identitás Nélküliek Csoportja*
[4] For example search for the word 'bisexual' in the gay site *pride.hu* results mostly in ads for threesomes.
[5] In many sites for homosexuals there is general information about 'bisexuals', promising 'facts' instead of common sense 'delusions', but taken for granted that beside heterosexuals and homosexuals, there are 'bisexuals' (see e.g.: http://pride.hu/article.php?sid=523 accessed April 26, 2010).

narratives were operating with categories implied in these distinctions, mainly to justify the authenticity of one's sexual desires and practices. As for the global context, bisexuality is by definition a field where gender and sexuality are emphatically connected: it implies a comparison between men and women and also an inquiry of sex and sexuality. That is why Hemmings argues that bisexuality ought to be in the focus of both feminism and queer theory, at the same time criticizing the assumed split of the two (2002, pp. 37); and that is why I build my analysis of Chapter 3 and 4 around notions of 'sex' (as sexuality) and 'gender'. My study shows that the ways people think about sex and gender determine their understanding of bisexuality: they posit themselves and others in specific constellation of – sometimes contradictory – categories.

These aspects, although analytically separable, are closely connected. According to the interviews I conducted, temporal change, the importance of sex, and gender differences intersect: in certain parts of the narratives they are inextricably linked and affect each other. Let me give an example for this interconnectedness.

> So this is simply unbelievable how undereducated men still are in sexual terms. This, this is a catastrophe that is going on here. And also in respect of turning on they are more and more lame, and those who are young nowadays, they are much lamer than [those] earlier, as I see. (…) And I can imagine that this is the reason why many [women] choose rather women. Because many of these women tell that sex is much better with women. But this is why I say that for me this is not the case, because for me it is very good to be with men. So I am precisely not an example for that who in despair has become… women's admirer. (Emese, 36, f)

In this excerpt we have (1) a comparison between men and women, to the latter's advantage, where (2) the field of the comparison and the basis of gender choice is the quality of sex: women turn out to be better partners than men; and (3) it also has a temporal aspect, since men seem to be more careless and clumsy than they used to be. In the analysis I will trace these aspects, structured by binary categories and show how they allow the respondents to define their sexuality. In this case, for example, Emese gives an explanation for women preferring women: she characterizes her own interest in women with an inherent rationality

and choice, and at the same time – in a slightly ambivalent way – emphasizes that she can take pleasure in men too. Thus she affirms her bisexual identity both as an intelligible choice and as a result of her capacity to enjoy sex with both sexes.

In Chapter 1, first, I outline the theoretical framework and the existing literature on bisexuality and post-socialism, on which I rely in my study. I argue that an exploration of the ambiguity and variety of bisexuality can powerfully justify its capacity to dissolve sexual categorizations, which is the agenda of queer theory. Then comes a review of the interview-analysis method, for the theoretical discussion is closely connected to my method aiming to get a variety of bisexual experiences. Chapter 2, 3 and 4 are my analytical chapters, concerning the post-socialist, the sexual, and the gender contexts of bisexuality.

I examine bisexuality in the contemporary Hungarian context in Chapter 2, by drawing on post-socialist narratives of sexuality. These discourses work with oppositions between past and present, East and West, national and transnational, traceable even in the terms used for sexualities. The labels my interviewees chose depended on their identifications with and against certain groups. I argue that post-socialist narratives of evolution and degradation, connected to concerns of foreignness as inauthentic, served as a justification of the character and the changes of one's sexuality. In Chapter 3 my focus is sexuality in terms of having sex, either in relationship or in experimentation or in imagination. The function of sex in the personal narratives, I argue, is to define boundaries, either in the desire-act or in the sex-relationship dichotomies. People define the character of their bisexuality through these dichotomies. Chapter 4, finally, demonstrates conceptions of gender which are influenced by the frame of heterosexual matrix. Despite their attractions towards men and women, those people set up hierarchy in gender differences emphatically who want to form serious

relationships with members of one gender. Others even question the viability of gendered and sexual categories on the basis of their life experiences.

All in all, I argue that people use binary oppositions of social narratives to define themselves and their sexuality in relation to bisexuality. At the same time, these categorizations often contradict one another, according to their narrational aims; and in many cases they experience or even articulate the blurring of certain boundaries. The specificity of bisexual ambiguity is the interplay between the reinforcement and dissolution of categories. Therefore bisexuality, on the one hand, is worth examining at the intersection of sexual categories, mainly in relation to hetero- and homosexuality. On the other hand, despite any efforts for inclusion, bisexual identity will stand apart from lesbian and gay identities, as long as sexuality is understood in the homosexual-heterosexual and male-female dichotomies. My research on bisexuality implies the critique of these binaries, embodied in the lesbian-gay division as well. Bisexuality, I argue, is a powerful means in queer theory to call attention to the tracks not considered beaten – given the striking contradiction between the everyday character of bisexuality and its invisibility. Perhaps, if bisexuality were more visible, the term itself would cease to exist.

Chapter 1: Theories, Literature, and Method

1.1. Identity and Queer Theories

The critical examination of bisexuality is significant for the theoretical, and also political, discussions about sexual identities, even if much of this literature does not focus on bisexuality specifically. The conception of bisexuality as middle ground (Hemmings 2002, 2) is facilitated by the dichotomous system of sexual identity, where bisexuality is often denied an identity status and in most cases understood solely as sexual behaviour. This tension surrounding bisexuality appears in my interviews and justifies my argument that various aspects of bisexuality (meanings in terms of identity, and diverse behaviour) need to be interrogated.

Homosexual *identity* is a relatively new phenomenon in history, according to Foucault's well-known argument (Foucault 1978, esp. 43). In Western modernity, sexuality became a notion deeply connected to the self, in contrast to earlier periods concerned with sexual *acts*. This new notion resulted in discrete sexual identities, which were primarily conceived in the mutually exclusive categories of heterosexual and homosexual as personal characters. One of the first, publicly significant challenges to this binary framework was Alfred Kinsey's surveys conducted in the U.S. around 1950.[6] He asserted that sexual differences are "matters of degree rather than kind" (Robinson 1976, 54), symbolized with his seven-grade scale from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual. It is still a common knowledge, and a number of my interviewees referred to it in the attempt to define the character of their bisexuality. However, Kinsey's focus on sexual acts[7] excluded many forms of sexuality, for example desires or fantasies; which my research embraces on purpose

[6] Robinson argues that these surveys had strong theoretical implications.
[7] Embodied in the number of orgasms; although in the second volume about women he refined this starting point (Robinson 1976, 99).

(see Methodology). Moreover, although his scale gave some place for bisexuality, he was not concerned by its special position in terms of identities and retained gender as the organizing principle in sexuality (see Gagnon and Greenblat 2005, 156).

U.S. homosexual politics from the 1970s affirmatively drew on the dichotomous concept of sexual identity, interpreting the gay movement in the frame of socio-political agenda of ethnic minorities. Later, critiques of this politics emerged from the internal margins of homosexuality: people of colour, bisexual and transgender people, and those engaged in various non-conventional sexual practices voiced their sense of exclusion (Seidman 1993, 110). They did not only demand inclusion but also visibility against being assimilated into rigid sexual categories, which led to the critique of identity labels as such.

These critiques of identity politics gave impetus to the emerging queer theory and politics that argued against the adequacy of sexual categorizations operating with essentializing notions of identity. (Gamson 1995, 390) As Diana Fuss argues, binary oppositions are general tools of thinking and self-definition – but a lot of sexual possibilities are not conceivable in the inside-outside dichotomy. Drawing on the poststructuralist questioning of subjectivity, she states that identity itself contains its difference and its Other. "Borders are notoriously unstable, and sexual identities rarely secure" (Fuss 1991, 3). Queer theory therefore set up the blurring of group boundaries as its main task and embraced the concerns for other sexualities, beside lesbians and gays.

Another starting point of the queer critiques of identities aimed at the gender of object choice as the basis of sexuality, pointing out several possible aspects in sexuality that, for many, can be primary to gender. Sedgwick lists a number of dimensions of sexuality, which the heteronormative discourse attempts to connect but which do not necessarily build on each other: genital acts, other acts, thinking of sex, gender, sexual object, sexual role, autoeroticism, fantasies, identity, etc. (Sedgwick 1990, 25-6 and 1993, 8). Butler does

similarly, critically interrogating the foundations of 'lesbian experience': if it is about gender, sexual act, fantasy, or just a shared oppression of homophobia (1993, 310); showing how important the examination of 'sex' is, which I attempt to do in Chapter 3.

Consequently, bisexuality is viewed by queer theory in an ambivalent way: on the one hand, bisexuality is approved by queer theorists for highlighting the fallacies of binary sexual identification and hence subverting it; on the other hand, they warn against bisexuality as something potentially consolidating the hetero/homosexual and wo/man dyads (Hemmings 2002, 7 and pp. 31). Still, in Hemmings's understanding, bisexuality certainly deserves being acknowledged as queer; not only because it transgresses the gender boundaries of object choice, but also because of the constitutive partiality of identifying as bisexual, since this requires a (mostly temporal) fragmentation of the self. The post-structuralist approach, inspiring queer theory as well, underscores this partiality of self and experience (Hemmings 2002, 12, 42), which a number of my interviews justify. Further, against Butler's interpretation of the bisexual femme as rejecting heterosexuality only with her butch present, Hemmings argues that the critique of the hetero/sexist world does not necessarily requires a repudiation of male bodies: it can be a cultural repudiation too (1998, 96).

Drawing on the findings of my research, I argue that one cannot decide if bisexuality is an identity or not, because for some it is not, for others it is; similarly, one cannot claim that bisexuality retains identity boundaries nor that it does not, precisely because there are so many faces of bisexuality. Yet, I will argue that (1) identity is an adequate issue in the examination of bisexuality, because it can create tensions for bisexuals, especially among those attached to homosexual communities and that (2) bisexuality bears the potential for blurring categories of sexual act, emotions, object choice, and identity (see more in Chapter 4).

1.2. Literature on Bisexuality

Generally, there is a lack in literature substantively engaging with bisexuality. In my view, it is not only a disadvantage for theorizing bisexualities but also for theorizing homo- and heterosexualities. As long as the significance of bisexuality is not acknowledged, lesbian, gay (and the fewer) straight studies risk to use their primordial categories – like homosexuality or identity – without problematizing them. I hope that my research can contribute to the challenge of terms taken for granted. Among the restricted number of works on bisexuality available, Clare Hemmings's *Bisexual Spaces* (2002) is pre-eminent in the critical examination of sexual categories and also in the sound and sophisticated approach of bisexuality as discursively embedded in other sexualities. This is also the focus of my research and the basis for my critiques concerning a great deal of other works on bisexuality, exemplified by the two below. Later I will also point to aspects where my approach differs from that of Hemmings. She blames most bisexual theories for taking for granted what bisexuality is, without critically examining the terms that (re)produce such a category (19-20). I would add that with this assumption, a number of possible meanings of bisexuality are excluded from the scholarly scope. My study engages in the exploration of these terms and meanings.

The starting point of Paula C. Rust's article (1993) on identity formation among lesbian and bisexual women is a social constructivist critique of previous work. She examines the assumptions underlying the concept of "coming out": developmental models of sexual identity assumed a linear and goal-oriented process, which rendered bisexuality neglected or, at best, as a transitory phase between heterosexuality and homosexuality (51). Although without referring to her, this point echoes Sedgwick's queer critique of the dichotomous framework of both sexuality and coming out (1990, pp. 67). Rust thus interprets sexual identity as a permanent process to position oneself in changing social environments (1993,

50), which proved to be an important approach in my research as well, given that bisexuality (even if not as an identity) is always experienced in a temporal scale, with references to past and future. Sexual identities are by no means essential attributes but reflect social processes of experience, learning, and "meaningmaking", as David Valentine writes about transgender (2007, 5). Another useful point for my research is Rust's account on how heterosexual identity can be reconciled with same-sex attractions and experiences (1993, 71), to which I will refer in the analytical chapters.

Nevertheless, Rust fails to take her critical understanding further, and uses key concepts unreflectively, such as "coming out", thus retaining the developmental framework she criticizes. She does not define what she understands by "coming out", and assumes, contradicting to her previous points, that it happens once. A basic element of the queer critique, represented first of all by Sedgwick and Butler, of identity politics and coming out is that they assume this once-and-for-all character, while in fact "coming out" has to be permanently repeated (Sedgwick 1990, 68, Butler 1993, 309). Rust reduces a wide range of identity categories to the two: lesbian or bisexual, without providing analytical criteria for these categorizations (1993, 56). In contrast, drawing on the queer critiques of identity categories, my research will stress what certain terms mean for the participants, which is facilitated by my qualitative method (see later). I argue that exploring different personal meanings is necessary exactly because they are so not unequivocal: it turned out in my research that people's definitions of the same term or experience can differ, and even one person can attach different meanings to one phenomenon, depending on the context.

Gagnon and Greenblat (2005), from a constructionist sociological base, offer a historical overview of the formation of dichotomous sexual identities to argue that bisexuality is culturally less determined than heterosexuality and even homosexuality, where conventions rule stronger – which results in greater variety of bisexual "scripts" (172). The notion of

sexual script, i.e. the guides and understandings of sexuality one acquires through social interactions (Epstein 1992, 247), allows for mapping out the meanings people attribute to their sexualities. Gagnon and Greenblat show that bisexual behaviour is dissolved in various heterosexual scripts, like in adolescence, in group sex occasions, in the case of male prostitution, or among heterosexually coupled men with male lovers. Unlike Rust, they underscore the diversity of sexualities beyond identity categories.

Nevertheless, they express a noticeable revulsion towards the attempts to give bisexuality an identity status. In their view, the claims to identity risk a return to essentialism (Gagnon and Greenblat 2005, 157, 173) – precisely what queer theory sought to dissolve, although the authors do not refer to it. This argument I find odd, since from a social constructionist stand they call attention to the fact that a great variety of sexual conduct can be labelled bisexual: among which, I argue, bisexual identity is obviously one, with increasing popularity indeed. My data demonstrates that people do label themselves bisexuals and this act does not bring them close to essentialism, often on the contrary. Here it is worth to remember Hemmings's remark that fragmentation of experience and self is formative in bisexual identity (Hemmings 2002, 12, pp. 37): therefore it is always differently structured than gay, lesbian, or even straight identities, which are tied to discrete communities.

Although I mostly rely on Hemmings, particularly on her critiques of previous work on bisexuality, I still distance myself from some of her considerations. On the one hand, in *Bisexual Spaces* she does not focus on bisexual subjects but rather on the epistemological role bisexuality plays in other sexual discourses (2002, 42). Unlike her, I was primarily interested in individuals' understandings to see how bisexuals themselves conceive their sexuality; in broader discourses only to the extent they are reflected, to see how social and individual understandings intertwine. On the other hand, she – deliberately – omits the place of bisexuality in heterosexual contexts, because her own bisexuality has been formed in relation

to homosexual spaces, and also because of "the relative lack of spatial theorizing of heterosexuality" (51). In contrast, my research is built on the argument that the relation between bisexuality and heterosexuality is determinant in the production of bisexual meanings. One of my general findings is that bisexuality is not necessarily tied to lesbian and gay groups and identities, but it has an important place in certain heterosexual environments as well: both discursively and in terms of experience. Although unlike Hemmings, I do not use spatial approach, my research can contribute to theorizing heterosexuality.

At the same time, the spatiality stressed by Hemmings is useful for keeping in mind the local context. She remarks that the meanings of bisexuality depend on its particular cultural-historical-social context (2002, 35), which I find primarily important for my own study, admittedly focusing on present-day Hungary. I will draw on post-socialist theories to locate 'bisexuality' both in space and time.

1.3. Theories of Post-Socialism and Sexuality

I have talked about bisexuality in the U.S. context of sexual identity, because this is the focus of the available literature on the topic – and which, of course, affects sexual politics and discourse in other parts of the world. However, given that my research is about bisexuality in Hungary, it is important to examine the specific post-socialist context, specifically in connection to issues of sexuality.

Post-socialist studies, drawing on postcolonial theories (see Chari and Verdery 2009), point to processes of otherizing between 'Western' and 'Eastern' Europe; the differentiation, however, is not confined to the ex-borders of the Iron Curtain but expands inside the post-socialist region (often in the distinction between 'Central' and 'Eastern' Europe) and inside each country. As Larry Wolff points out, the invention of East as undeveloped had its roots in the Enlightenment and re-emerged in the ideological vacuum after 1989 (Wolff 1994, 356-72;

Buchowski 2006, 470). Buchowski further shows dimensions of "internal social orientalism" in the oppositions of urban/rural, un/educated, and loosers/winners of the transition, all following the civilized us-primitive them pattern (2006, 466). Böröcz aptly demonstrates how certain groups in CEE countries posit themselves as allies of the enlightened Western Europe and its moral values, in opposition to groups defined as backward and depicted as morally resembling to socialism (2006, 113). Drawing on Wolff, Böröcz underlines that these views follow a theological developmental scale, characterizing Eastern Europe between civilized Europe and barbaric Asia (127).

Other scholarship, building on these ideas argues for the great role sexuality plays in these differentiations conceived in developmental terms. Baer's remark, that for Russians, homosexuality is inseparable from modernity and the international place of the country (2002, 513), is valid to most CEE countries, where sexuality is a "means to debate capitalist democracy" (Owczarzak 2009, 11). Hadley Z. Renkin shows how the Hungarian political right and conservative culture defines homosexuals as transnational and not national, not Hungarian enough; in turn, homophobia is interpreted by the left and sexual minorities as antidemocratic and anti-Europe (Renkin 2009, 23-5). Of course, the transnational affinity of LGBT movements throughout the region is a fact; a great deal of sources of homosexual representation comes from the western media and homosexuality as identity is influenced by the U.S. ethnic model of identity politics discussed above (Moss 2007, 264). Nonetheless, local LGBT activists try to modify these trends with invoking national images (Renkin 2007).

The importance and applicability of the post-socialist (i.e. Hungarian, transnational, political) context for bisexuality were apparent in the interviews I conducted and are discussed in the next chapter. To give account of their sexuality, people used the topos of Hungarian backwardness, originating in socialism and, in contrast, the notion of 'West' as enlightened and tolerant for sexual minorities. However, it was striking that most of them

positively engaged with values both defined as national and transnational (as in Renkin 2007) and that some argued for moral loss, owing to western-capitalist influences, despite the gains these transformation brought about. The combination of narratives about losses and gains by the same people is absent in a lot of post-socialist theorizing[8] and perhaps can be explained by the contradictory character of bisexuality.

1.4. Literature on Bisexuality in Hungary

As for my special context of contemporary Hungary, there is even less literature than about bisexuality in general. Among the few, they discuss bisexuality in relation to gay and lesbian communities and identities – hence, the ignorance of the heterosexual embeddedness of bisexuality is the feature I miss the most.

Virtually, there is only one text accessible on bisexuality in Hungary, specifically. Anna Borgos's article (2007) provides a complex overview on the everyday contexts of bisexuality. Examining some personal narratives, gay and lesbian forum debates and semi-satirical political efforts of awareness-raising[9], it gives us telling examples of both the 'insider' and 'outsider' meanings of bisexuality. But doing so in the restricted space of an article results in a fragmented picture of the phenomenon, without a coherent conclusion. That is why I narrow my scope to interviews, and try to cover with them as large a field as possible: the personal experience.

There are two more works where important remarks on bisexuals in Hungary can be found dispersedly. Judit Takács has a whole Hungarian-language book on gay men (Takács 2004), from which an excerpt was published in the volume *Beyond the Pink Curtain. Everyday Life of LGBT People in Eastern Europe* (2007), containing the two other articles discussed here. Drawing on interviews conducted with men identifying as gay (or as

[8] I thank Hadley Z. Renkin for pointing this out.
[9] As the NINCS group; see Introduction.

sometimes bisexual), she demonstrates the role of bisexuality in gay identity-formation. For example, the general opinion that bisexuality only refers to sex, in contrast to awareness and acceptance of identity, is a reaction to public representations of homosexuality as sex-oriented (2004, 198, 211). Still, there are men in her sample who has sex or relationship with women, despite their gay identity, and also who (sometimes) identify as bisexual. Takács's work contributes to see bisexuality as both embedded in (in terms of experience) and often (discursively) excluded from gay identity. Another important element in her remarks is that bisexuality is conceived along the sex-relationship-identity relations which I will elaborate on in Chapter 3.

Rita Béres-Deák's article on lesbian representations in the same volume is important for its post-socialist scope. She mentions how notions of lesbianism are connected to what Hungarians perceive to be Western. The women she interviewed perceive themselves less butch-like than Western lesbians (2007, 91), whereas they suspect that too feminine women are in fact bisexuals (88). One of my interviewee told me the same from a bisexual point of view, see in Chapter 4. These categorizations are important if one wants to see how sexuality and gender define each other[10] and I will argue in that chapter that bisexuals particularly rely on this link.

Takács's and Béres-Deák's articles provide a challenging comparison of male and female homosexual communities through the perception of bisexuality: among men, it mostly concerned sex, and femininity-masculinity in appearance among women. The importance of these factors is demonstrated in my following chapters about sex and gender. However, my data proves that in heterosexual discourses sex – as defining bisexuality – has importance among women too, as femininity-masculinity among men similarly. This is one aspect of why

[10] I thank Hadley Z. Renkin for this point.

I feel it necessary to consider bisexuality inside predominantly heterosexual settings, which dimension all the three articles on Hungary lack.

Overall, building all these theories, I will argue that bisexuality needs to be examined in relation to the homo/heterosexual dyad, because their system renders it ambiguous. This system is based on a Western European-U.S. model; therefore the local context should also be taken into consideration, for which I will use post-socialist theories about other cultural oppositions. The framework of sexual behaviour versus identity can be useful to see how bisexuality is embedded in various cultural systems. Therefore, the formation of bisexual identity is similarly worth theorization as bisexual acts reconciled with other identities. It is thus fruitful to see bisexuality as part of heterosexuality, as I will demonstrate in the last two chapters. These possible 'routes' of bisexuality prove how relevant queer theory is in its research. I will argue that even bisexual identity can result in the blurring of gendered and sexual categories.

1.5. Method: Interview Analysis

The diversity of the forms that can be defined as bisexuality requires a broad scope of investigation, embracing as many bisexual meanings as possible. Qualitative analysis of personal interviews lets bisexual subjects set up the co-ordinates of understanding their sexuality and avoids the uncritical use of arbitrary terms, discussed above. Because of the lack of institutions for and the under-representation of bisexuality, personal accounts are especially useful to grasp how the personal meanings are formed and negotiated in relation to available cultural narratives, structuring the respondents' experiences (Geertz 1993, 312-3).

Bisexuals in many ways can be seen as a marginalized group (even if not necessarily as individuals), so giving them voice is useful for research (Alistair 1998, esp. 584). Given the

fragmented and contradictory discourses on bisexuality, it is difficult to define who is a bisexual person; yet, I needed to have a definition in order to find my interviewees. I avoided looking exclusively for people identified as bisexuals, precisely because I am interested in the multiple places bisexual experience can have in different sexual formations. This led me to use the notion of *attraction*: I interviewed people who report to have attractions towards both men and women.[11] The term has the potential to refer to all kinds of sexual encounter, identity, love – or what I might not even intend. It allows the interviewee to define her/his sexuality; and it can be a way of problematizing the notion of bisexuality and point to the constructedness of also what the 'sexual' is (see Chapter 3). One could object, nonetheless, that my broad definition of bisexuality presupposes my findings about the looseness of the category.[12] Yet, firstly, I find this definition more fruitful than those restricting bisexual meanings, see above; second, my argument is not solely about the variety of forms considerable 'bisexuality' but about the categorizations determining these forms and understandings.

The same characteristic of bisexuality (i.e. that it does not have separate spaces) that makes it an interesting topic for qualitative research, makes it difficult to access people concerned. I was talking with my acquaintances and their acquaintances. I did not want to influence the respondents with any declaration of values; actually, they all seemed to assume that I share their basic values, or even their experiences. Thus I got explicit sexual details and even homophobic remarks. Also, the explicitness of intimate matters did not depend on the level of acquaintance: some were willing to talk to me at length and depth regardless of the fact that we had just met.

[11] Despite its general use in the English-language literature, the Hungarian word for desire, '*vágy*' sounds quite serious and sexual, and was rarely used by the interviewees. Attraction ('*vonzalom*') is more neutral and was much more common in the accounts.
[12] I thank Éva Fodor for this point.

I conducted 13 interviews in Budapest[13]. Despite my effort to find people with various social characteristics, I anticipated that my final sample would represent a narrow circle. My greatest concern, however, to equally meet people identified as heterosexuals and also those from LGBT communities, has been fulfilled. The age rate is between 19 and 40, there are seven women and six men. In fact, each of them has participated in higher education, completed or still in process. Still, the validity and the access to the "respondents' own constructions of the origins and meaning of their sexual identities" is secured (Whisman 1996, 7.) Owing to the snow-ball method, many interviewees know each other. Despite the commonalities this fact creates in the narratives, the peculiarities of each approach proved for me that these personal connections do not weaken the validity of the research. Rather, they highlight the interactive social impact on thoughts.[14]

The interviews took place between March and May 2010, face-to-face, digitally recorded.[15] I heard largely differing narratives, from a quick chronological listing of sexual experiences to a fragmented series of ideas. I assured the interviewees of anonymity, also with pseudonyms chosen by themselves.[16] Given that I was interested in the narratives people tell about the formation of their sexuality, my first question referred to a biographical narrative (see Riessman, 1993). Being told that the topic is bisexuality, their first, uninterrupted main narrative of sexual life was crystallized around that. Hence, I got a picture of their use of words and train of thoughts; besides, it highlighted the changes in their life. Afterwards, I posed them some inner questions related to their narrative, to make details more clear (Riessman, 1993); furthermore, I asked a series of external questions, linked to momentums that might have influence on forming the interpretations of their sexualities.

[13] The language of the interviews was Hungarian. All the quotes are my translations; if needed, I mark the original terms.
[14] On the social character of human thought see Geertz (1993, 360). In the Appendices I sketched out the interviewees' most basic data, including the relations between them. See there the interview questions as well.
[15] I thank Szandra Gonzalez for the tehnical help.
[16] Quoting them, I will indicate these names, their age and gender (m/f).

I am aware of the interactional nature of these accounts ("conversational narrative", Grele, 1998, p. 44).[17] It also happens that the situation of narration contributes to the formation of subjectivity (Diamond 2006, 479-481): some interviewees might start to think of the topic or of their "bisexualness" more from this point. If they asked about my experiences and opinions, I answered in order to keep the trust, but in a way that directed the interviewee's account the least.

When analyzing my data, I use narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993) for the most part: it gives me a picture of the place bisexuality has in their stories, and also of the meanings they attach to it, including the terms they use (Gurium and Holstein, 2003). My three main themes of investigation are narratives about post-socialism, sex, and gender. I examine recurrent patterns in the interviews of conceiving sexuality in these frames; for example, in terms of sexuality, most of the interviewees used the sex-relationship distinction (see Chapter 3). Then I try to find how these organizing elements help people classify themselves and others: the sex-relationship binary allowed many respondents to differentiate between the character of their attractions towards women and men. Meanwhile, I draw parallels and contrasts between the interviewees. I also underscore points where the categorizations that they use fail, overlap, or become challenged.

[17] Hence in the interview quotes I mark my questions and comments too, with font *italics.*

Chapter 2: *"Now the society is enlightened"* – The Post-Socialist Hungarian Condition of Bisexuality

Before turning to the two basic questions regarding bisexuality, i.e. if it is about sex and about gender, I want to examine reflections of bisexuality in the contemporary Hungarian context. The question now would sound, is bisexuality a new and foreign thing or not? While discussing it, I hope I can also give a semi-introduction to the present state of sexual discourses in Hungary.

The post-socialist condition of Hungary, I argue, can be divided analytically in two elements, both binary distinctions: first, it refers to the transformation from the socialist past to the capitalist present; second, it refers to the East-West distinction, often interpreted as national-foreign. They are all inherent in each other; nevertheless, I argue that they can be and are separated. For instance, the "enlightenment" of Hungarian society, compared to socialism can be questioned when compared to the West. My emphasis on the importance of post-socialism – and my temporal-spatial distinction inside the post-socialist aspect – is justified by Judit Takács's study on Hungarian gays. She found that when gays evaluate their situation – if it is good to be gay in Hungary –, they most often compare that to the (socialist) past, next to others' social status, and thirdly define it in geographical terms: Budapest to the countryside and the 'West' to the CEE region (2004, pp. 186).

Socialism re-created the boundary set up by the Enlightenment project (Wolff 1994, 356) between the 'First' and the 'Second World', which is still embodied in the sexual image both have about the other. From the 'Eastern' point of view, sex (both as indecency and as homosexuality) represents one of the "Western cultural ills" and is perceived foreign to the nation (Owczarzak 2009, 11). Therefore this split is brought into the everyday politics along the national-transnational division: sexual minorities are considered to be less national than

international and cosmopolitan. This view is shared by those tolerant for nonnormative sexualities, since they see homophobia as backwardness (Renkin 2009, 23-25).

In this chapter first I show the terminologies used by the interviewees because they reflect the post-socialist condition to a large extent. Then I examine the argumentational role of the temporal aspect in the narratives, i.e. the comparison of present with socialism, and finally the spatial distinction of East and West, where Hungary is considered East.[18] Closely connected to this dichotomy is the national-transnational binary, where nonnormative sexual terms and practices appear as not national, not Hungarian enough. I argue that these terminologies and distinctions have their own role in the people's life narratives, self-perceptions, and identities. These binary oppositions allow the subjects to understand the changes in their sexual lives and to position themselves as authentic, or rebellious, or moral, compared to others.

2.1 Terminologies

David Valentine in his book about transgender writes:

> People everywhere categorize themselves and others; this is one of the most fundamental aspects of human language and meaningmaking. But the ways in which these categorizations are made, and which categories come to have effects in the world, are never neutral. (2007, 5)

Examining the terminologies, I also want to point out their meaningmaking role in the personal narratives and show what these words tell us about the understanding of bisexuality and other sexualities, especially in terms of sexual identification. Given the heterosexual-homosexual binary and the exclusive logic of sexual identity, bisexuality is, for the most part, internalized by other sexualities (Fuss 1991, 2) and denied having an identity-status (Hemmings 2002, 27). I say "for the most part", because there are words for bisexuality in

[18] In my data there was no conceptualization of Hungary as West, compared to more 'Eastern' countries.

Hungarian too, and there are people who identify as bisexual. Nonetheless, many people do not, despite sexual experiences with both women and men – and this is the reason why I start discussing the terms used by my interviewees with others than 'bisexual'.

Let me first talk about the Hungarian equivalent of gay, '*meleg*'. '*Meleg*' literally means 'warm' and is considered the only non-derogatory and non-medicalized term for homosexuals. The term '*meleg*' embodies the post-socialist condition of Hungary and the national and transnational flows affecting the Hungarian LMBT movement. Before the '80's it was not frequently used, but the first homosexual association formed after the democratic transition included it in its name[19], which generated opposition by formal authorities who considered the term not widely used and not official enough (Renkin 2007, 47.). But later the term '*meleg*' became very popular and blocked the spread of the English term 'gay', being the only term in the name of the Hungarian L*M*BT[20] Festival and community without direct foreign roots in form (although it originates in the German *Warme*). The term thus has a special national-transnational state: it can be viewed as more national, therefore more authentic than others – even as a word with German origin, since Hungary is historically strongly connected to the German culture.[21] On the other hand, it can be also viewed as an equivalent of foreign, i.e. English – i.e. imperial American – terms (and hence, the original meaning of '*meleg*' as stolen). Both of these connotations are reflected in the interviews.

The popularity and generality of the Hungarian term for gay is also proven by the frequency respondents identified as such, despite their bisexual attractions or experiences. The most striking example is István (40, m), who is going to marry his female partner but still identifies as gay and rejects the 'bisexual' label. For him, the meaning of 'gay', as opposed to bisexual, has been acquired throughout a life: first, because of his age, 'bisexual' is a new

[19] *Szivárvány Társulás a Melegek Jogaiért*, Rainbow Coalition for Gay Rights
[20] *Leszbikus, Meleg, Biszexuális és Transznemű.* See more on terminology for gays Takács (2004, 181-186).
[21] I thank Eszter Timár for this specification.

term, but the emergence of the term 'gay' happened parallel to his first same-sex relations. Second, he has taken a great part in the Hungarian gay movement in different levels but always, including the present, actively. Gay is therefore his identity, justified also by his admitted exclusive interest in men (with the only exception of his partner).

'*Meleg*', just like 'gay', can be understood for both men and women, although it is more associated with men. Still, there are two female respondents who used the term for themselves, but for completely different reasons. Vera (36) identifies as gay, which struck me, because she was my "most lesbian" interviewee, with exclusively female relationships and sexual partners and with only some kissing experiences with men. She said lesbian ('*leszbikus*') sounds very medicalized, i.e. cold, formal, and distanced for her, similarly to homosexual ('*homoszexuális*'). Using 'gay', she does not need to emphasize the female side of her homosexuality, since it is obvious: "I hope it is visible that I'm a woman". Nana (23), on the other hand, claims to have "bisexual tendencies" because once was attracted to a woman. She told me a particular case when she called herself gay: in reaction to one of her colleagues' homophobic comments, aimed at homosexuality in general, she declared herself gay and "made him believe that". This is a politically motivated tactic of her against stereotypes; she uses that for defence of the Roma too. It means that she *pretended* to be 'gay' in this situation; that is, she considers herself outside the relevance of these homophobic comments. Her attraction towards some women – which is widely accepted in her friendly circles – does not make her identifying with 'gays'. Identification as 'gay' in all these cases depends on the familiarity and cosiness of the term, largely invoked by its "Hungarianness"; also, these features make it adequate to express the authenticity of identity, compared to foreign labels.

Despite its general use, not everybody likes '*meleg*'. Viktor (23, m), after using it throughout the interview, had a remark at the end that he felt a negative connotation in it. In

his opinion, it was an unfortunate attempt to invent an equivalent to the English term 'gay' and he would prefer a more close translation, something like '*pajkos*' ('naughty'). This argument fits into his broader critique of the Hungarian LGBT movement, which, according to Viktor, tries to copy the Western movements without taking the social-cultural differences into account. In this view the split between East and West is reinforced: a backward Hungary is under the influence of the developed 'West' and should better find its own ways. Hence his preference for Hungarian terminologies of sexuality, compared to transnational ones (see more on page 32).

If '*meleg*' is considered the newly born politically correct term for homosexuals, '*buzi*' – which I will translate 'fag' or 'faggot' from now on, following Renkin (2007, 28) – is the universally used Hungarian derogatory term, especially for men, with a long etymological history (see Nádasdy 2001). Labelling someone '*buzi*' was generally avoided in the interviews, supposedly because of an unuttered expectation of tolerance, facilitated by the topic. For Dávid (36, m), being called '*buzi*' in his childhood is a determinant negative experience, against what he keeps defining himself. When Bob (19, m) is talking about fags, it is obvious that he distances himself from them, despite his attractions towards men. In both accounts, '*buzi*' is part of a negative and old world – old as past for Dávid, belonging to older men for Bob –, which is not totally erased.

As for 'bisexual' ('*biszexuális*'), the interviewees' reactions were quite ambiguous. When they were asked how they would define themselves, many were hesitating about the adequacy of 'bisexual' because they often could not decide whether their sexual relations count as *real* bisexuality or not. Bisexual identity is thus less obvious than hetero- or homosexuality and its authenticity is more often questioned. Bisexuality as *act* of course always existed, but before 1989, usually as a compromise with the expectations of

compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980); this behavioural bisexuality has little to do with the celebratory liberated experimentalism that connotes bisexuality recently.

Herdt and Boxer say, with a tangible aversion, that bisexual is "a new twentieth-century species, the liberated hedonist" (1995, 82). The narrow-mindedness of this claim is proven by the accounts about sexual adventure in Chapter 3, which also demonstrate the fallacy of viewing this bisexuality exclusively as "state[s] of becoming and being that [is] transitional" (82), because these experimentations often last long in thoughts or actions. Yet, Herdt and Boxer are right in detecting contemporary youth's bisexuality in sexual liberty and as something new (which is especially so in the post-socialist context, connected to transnationality; see below). Some of my respondents' own life reflected this meaning, while others talked about the phenomenon pejoratively.

> I don't know, five thousand girls, every girl kisses with her [female] friends in adolescence, I missed even that. So my younger sister also tried that and also, I know about numerous friends of mine who tried that. *Numerous*, indeed. Well, it's so trendy ['*trendi*']. Above all now, those emos, they do anything with anybody. (Nana, f, 23)

In this account, Nana links a general female bisexuality to chic, fashionable behaviour, largely influenced by foreign and international trends. It is expressed in the foreign words she uses: '*trendi*', '*emo*', and contains a moral condemnation, also in terms of age: those who are even younger than her represent a sense of modernity and Westernness that she rejects. This notion of bisexuality is also marketed in its connection to primarily music subcultures: beside emos, gothic-dark youth is also marked by a tolerance for nonnormative gender and sexuality, as it happened in Viktor's (23, m) life as well.[22] That bisexuality is a chic sign of sexual freedom, is evident from Bob's (19, m) account who contrasted his bisexuality to older men's gayness as I mentioned above in connection to his use of 'fag'. Emese's (36, f) determinant

[22] On bisexuality and Russian techno subculture see Baer (2005, 203)

identification as bi ('*biszex*')[23] is motivated differently because she is consciously in quest for serious relationships either with a man or with a woman.

It is a striking finding that heterosexuality is so taken for granted that it does not need to be named.[24] It mostly happened in those cases where the interviewee's same-sex relations did not challenge their 'heterosexuality'; for example kissing between young women (see the quote above) does not need an explanation in terms of sexual identity. Instead of labels, they usually paraphrase their attractions, like "men are my main track", "I'm attracted to women". Among those whom I consider to be in this group, it was only Tekla (22, f) who said she is "a basically straight ['*heteró*'] woman". This affirmative claim shows that her heterosexuality is questioned to some extent, precisely because her same-sex attractions *went beyond* the situationality of teenager kissing: she tried to figure out what she wants from three particular women whom she liked. That is why she needs to stress her basic heterosexuality.[25]

Overall, according to my data, labels matter more for those who are more closely connected to homosexual identities and communities. Péter (31, m) and Vera (36, f) from an early age reflected about sexual identity categories, connected to their sense of difference. It is Bob (19, m), Dávid (36, m), and Emese (36, f) who unequivocally identify as bisexual. Neither of them is living in a partnership at the moment and – mainly because of it – all of them are *looking for* sexual or other relationships with both men and women. I argue that the latter is the determinant in bisexual identity. Nevertheless, there is no clear-cut causal connection between the two; other factors of the life stories also affect how one names her/his sexuality. Viktor (23, m), for example, is also looking for relations with both women and men

[23] I am following here Anna Borgos's (2007) translation of '*biszex*' to 'bi'.
[24] In the thesis, I generally use the labels for the respondents that they use; but given that often they do not label themselves unambiguously, I sometimes indicate their sexuality outlined in their narrative.
[25] It was also only her who used the label 'feminist' ('*feminista*'), although I had expected that it would emerge more because of its connections to lesbianism. Tekla's use of the word is quite common in Hungary: "I'm not such a huge feminist type, but…" and she complained about the double standard regarding female and male promiscuity.

but puts himself somewhere between gay and bisexual ("bisexual while turning gay"[26]) since he feels recently liberated from the norm of exclusive heterosexuality. In each case, the terms of identification express distance from some groups and discourses and community with others, including national or transnational communities.

2.2 Haunting past

A lot of interviews followed an *evolutionist narrative*, in which things related to sexual freedom (including the freedom of nonnormative sexualities) are getting better by passing of time. This discourse revolve around the concept that Foucault calls "repressive hypothesis": that sexual oppression culminated in the 19th century and the 20th promises a liberation of 'sexuality' and of the talk about sex (Foucault 1978, pp.17).

The falling of socialism in Central-Eastern Europe fits into this (Western) narrative. 1989 is understood as a turning point of improvement because Hungary then became connected to the more developed part of Europe[27] – supposing that 'West' represents a better world in many (economical, liberal, political) aspects. Affinity with the 'West' in many CEE countries resulted in the move of identity from "westernness in the East to easternness in the West" (Owczarzak 2009, 13). Yet, the socialist past, denied and condemned by the interviewees, haunt, because many of them feel that Hungary has not caught up to the West. In this sense they represent western values in the local backwardness (Böröcz 2006). Moreover, a *degradation narrative* emerges in the accounts, as a response to the felt loss of some gendered and sexual traditions. Here, on the contrary, the subject is affiliated with traditional (often understood as national) values, in contrast to new tendencies (often understood as imported). However, as we will see, these concerns mingle in some interviews,

[26] "*biszexuális melegbe hajlás közben*"
[27] Hungary's accession to the European Union is not mentioned in the interviews as such an emblematic date (2004) but there is a lot of reference to it in the general discourse about 'Europeanness', i.e. 'Westernness'.

according to the frame of modernity, which has brought positive, as well as negative changes to people's lives. Modernity is conceived as an external force, coming from the `West`, that is why it is always an issue of transnationality, imperialism, and authenticity.

The oppression of socialist past first and foremost was embodied in the lack of *talk* at that time, mentioned by several respondents, which blocked the beginning of many relationships. For the teenager Hanna (32, f), it was evidently not proper to talk about her relationship with another girl, which made the relationship itself difficult, though filled with some secret. Her ex-girlfriend, Vera (36, f) asserts the same:

> Today people are already more open. They dare more to talk about things. Back then, back then, it was still communism. One did not really say things like this. Or I myself did not dare to say things like this. So it was not so… The Russkis ['*ruszkik*'] were still here. For example, so. In this respect, it was a different world.

Comparing these accounts to those of Bob (19, m), for instance, who is "boasting" with his bisexuality in companies, the difference between political periods and generations becomes clear. Moreover, the difference is meaningful in terms of identity: Bob's bisexuality is less struggled for, and he implies that it might be less an expression of strong internal desires. He says that experimentation and revolt against norms played a great role in his same-sex attractions – although, he adds, "it was about more than that", claiming a relative authenticity.

In the interview with Dávid (36, m), the evolution narrative was emphasized. Similarly to many other respondents, he interprets his life in terms of liberation. From his childhood he was ridiculed and called a fag ("*buziztak*"); "at that time, especially in a village, it was horrible": the developmental binary is repeated in the Budapest-countryside relation where the capital is 'West'. Dávid's life has been a struggle for better social perception, self-esteem, and relationships. He contrasts this struggle with today's youth, mentioning a 17-year-old boy who "is an experienced gay and has an evolved identity". That is, for him, identity-formation requires all the possibilities denied in socialism and offered in present: visibility of gays,

resulting in talk of them and modelling them, and gay places and forums, including magazines and internet.

For Emese (36, f) present-day Hungary is a "free environment", an "enlightened society" where one can freely pursue their nonnormative sexualities, whereas in the past it was primarily the interiorized fears that blocked the realization of desires. She talks about meeting an old friend after several years; this woman was the one who, as Emese says, has sent her in her way to be attracted to women, but with whom nothing had happened but a kiss on the lips because of the restrictive socialist atmosphere.

> [The affair] couldn't be left without settling it, mainly now when the society is so enlightened, so though unuttered but it was in the air that if we meet again, after so many years, then *finally* we can fall to each other. (Emese, f, 36)

In this scene the oppressive past meets the liberating air of present to fulfil the old desires – actually, Emese, disliking the corporeal change of her friend, rejects the opportunity. The evolutionist post-socialist framework serves Emese as a means to assure the consistency of her sexuality, because as Diamond writes, all types of narratives attempt to give a coherent picture of the self (2006, 478). The evolution narrative allows Emese to have had same-sex attractions, not acted upon, in the past, and to see the future promising in terms of having more and more same-sex experiences.

The evolutionist framework is accounted for also by those interviewees who consider themselves outside of gays' life. Kati (22, f) sees a generational gap between her and her mother in terms of tolerance for same-sex relations. Her mother's total rejection of female same-sex encounters contrasts the universal character of today's female bisexuality.

> In our generation I think it is more acceptable. Or our eyes are more used to it and the like. Though, in my view, it was the same in earlier times as well, so I don't think bisexuality is a new thing, it's totally not so. I think there were people with such an orientation during the whole history; it wasn't so much in sight as now, that's all.

Even if her own same-sex kissing experiences are concealed from her mother, she does not consider herself as oppressed in any way. Her tolerance is aimed at others, that is why her gay-friendly views are more politically than personally based, just like those of Nana.

In spite of the dominance of the evolutionist narrative in the interviews, I can trace some elements that would rather fit into a *degradation narrative*. Interestingly, the two are connected, since the increase of sexual toleration means an increase of moral liberty as well, which some of my respondents condemned. In Dávid's (36, m) narrative, evolution and degradation coexist. In his life the growing visibility and availability of gay models has been important, and he condemns his colleagues' homophobia ("as if we still lived in feudalism") using the narrative of enlightened locals in a backward country (see Böröcz 2006). At the same time, he expresses his discontent about present sexual morals. For him, monogamy is ideal in a relationship, and he feels that it is attacked by expectations that "it's the 21st century, it's not normal anymore that one is faithful; rather [that one has] open relationships". For him, the evolution and the degradation narratives do not contradict each other, because they are linked in his desire for a gay partnership: he wants it to be freed from societal prohibitions (this fits into gay evolutionist narratives) and also wants it to be monogamous, which, according to him, contradict gays` norms. In this sense, the degradation narrative incorporates his critique of the lifestyle of the gay community – which he is also a member of. But expressing his criticism he perhaps has a justification why he was not able to find a long-term male partner yet.

The coexistence of the two narratives is also present in Emese's (36, f) interview. She applies a discourse of degradation to the emascul(iniz)ation of men – she does not explicitly link that to the post-socialist condition but it is a discursive topos. In her view, they tend to be sexually less potent, less polite, less devoted, and less self-supporting than before (see

Introduction). This observation provides her a reason why women would turn to the love of other women. Thus, it implicitly fits into her evolutionist narrative of female homosexuality: desires for women are today more manifested in acts, and more and more bisexual or lesbian women are gaining visibility in the society. The harmony between the two narratives is facilitated by her different views regarding women's and men's nature. "No matter what times we live, women will always remain women", i.e. innately good persons, contrasted to men, who are less and less willing to accomplish their traditional roles.[28] Both in her and Dávid's narrative, sexual (r)evolution happened at the cost of some sort of moral-traditional loss, against which they define themselves and their sexualities. Thus, these narratives of post-socialism provide a supporting structure for their narrative of sexuality.

2.3 "Unreasonable copying of the West"

I have discussed so far the post-socialist condition in temporal terms; now I am going to turn to the spatial differentiation inherent in that, i.e. the Hungary versus West and the national versus transnational binaries.

Viktor's (23, m) argument on the Hungarian LGBT movement illustrates how intertwined the spatial and the temporal distinctions are. In his view of evolution, Hungary is lagging 20 years behind the West. As Renkin (2007, 6-8) critically points out, some authors, like Long (1999), similarly argue for a developmental delay, implying the global similarity of sexualities. Viktor, however, uses the delay-argument for an emphasis on difference. For him, the Hungarian LGBT movement "is unreasonably copying the West", pretending that we live in Western Europe, but we do not; these differences should be taken into consideration, for instance in the question of the effectiveness of the Pride March. It is evident that for Viktor, the tolerance values of the West matter a lot, he mentions race tolerance as well – but he sees

[28] About her (and others') views on gender differences see more in the third chapter.

Hungarian society as not mature enough for the attainment of these values. This view is reflected by his tag of uncertainty, "it's LMBT, right?", expressing a distance from this westernized, transnational terminology for nonnormative sexualities. In his view, Western terms are inadequate for the Hungarian context, which therefore sound foreign and false: Hungarian words would better picture this different state of sexuality. Interestingly, his suggestion is '*homár*' (lit. lobster) for homosexuality, since "these silly plays [on words] are characteristic to the Hungarian language".[29]

Nana's (23, f) account about "trendy emos" experimenting same-sex relations (see on page 27) similarly shows the view that certain sexual issues are coming from the West. In her argument, this fact proves a certain inauthenticity of emos' bisexuality, because of the foreign, *i.e.* copied character, and renders hers more serious. She is quite uncertain about her desires towards women (or one woman), but this comparison allows her to see her bisexuality relatively genuine. I have already mentioned some elements of the socialist-present distinction that can be interpreted in the East-West and national-transnational binaries as well, like the emergence of alternative subcultures (of Western origin) after 1989 that allowed Viktor (23, m) to feel his same-sex attractions less problematic. Another issue is the role of the media: after the transition it served as a source for information and visibility of various kinds of sexualities, often showing them in transnational context. This was a means to assert their commitment to democracy (see Gessen 1995).

Finally I discuss particularly the national aspect of the underdeveloped image of Hungary that allows nonnormative sexualities to be identified as foreign, cosmopolitan, and not national enough. Historically, 1989 brought about not only a proliferation of sexualities but also a discursive renaissance of traditional sexual and gender roles, propagated mainly by right-wing culture (see Renkin 2007, 14). The sharp opposition between the political right and

[29] According to him, '*homár*' has been used for five years in slang. I think it is a bit derogatory term.

left resulted in an identification of the right with 'Hungarianness' and the left with 'internationalism' and *hence* sexual tolerance, by many. Because the orientalizing discourse is also used by LGBT people, for whom homophobia represents an anti-democratic, anti-'Europe', that is, conservative and right-wing stand (Renkin 2009, 21-25).

Hanna (32, f), having lived in relationships with women and men, now lives in a marriage with a man.

> Anybody who looks into our life with a telescope can see that we live a normal family life, I don't know, a classic one, a little bit even appearing right-wing, so we have, we have these big Hungarian dogs, a big house, so the whole, the whole is, I don't know, is very fine.

But she still does not feel like talking to anyone about her bisexual past, which would contradict the image above. Her husband, Márk (35, m) depicts their outsider perception in similar, ironic, terms: "We give the impression of a pious Catholic and true Hungarian family". What he contrasted this image was not a bisexual past but a bisexual present, including threesome encounters between him, Hanna, and men found in the internet. However, neither of them talks about it as hypocrisy; for them, both the decent marriage and the non-monogamous bisexuality are important and viable together. But their accounts reflect a social system where these two can hardly coexist; yet, they also reflect Hungarian LGBT people's simultaneous belongings to national and transnational categories (Renkin 2009, 33). Their case suggests that although people use binary categories, they do not necessarily see these as mutually exclusive: they continuously need to rework the categories to define themselves; or, on the other hand, the categorizations make them reject definitions and labels.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I demonstrated what meanings the past-present, national-transnational, and East-West distinctions attach to sexualities. These binaries structure the discourses in

Hungary about the status of the country in national and transnational relations and are reflected in the interviews, proving that sexuality is not only influenced by cultural-political narratives but is also a means by which these narratives function[30]. I argue that through accounts of sexuality, people negotiate and re-negotiate their various "other" identities, hence intertwining them all. This task is particularly crucial in the CEE region, where the new democratic countries have been seeking for points of identification in a new world order (Baer 2002, Renkin 2007, pp. 10).

The fall of socialism, connected to the intensive entrance of Western influences, was widely experienced as an opening up of possibilities, in terms of sexuality as well (although later followed by disappointments). It is, on the one hand, reflected in the evolutionist narratives of those who had to restrict their sexualities before 1989; for many of them, the term '*meleg*' itself embodies liberation and affinity with transnational (primarily Western) LGBT communities. However, some interviewees condemn aspects of sexuality that they feel "too Western", interpreted as not authentic enough. Still, the transnational alliances does not preclude others to identify with '*meleg*' as a national term showing their homosexual identity the best.

On the other hand, the post-socialist condition of Hungary, with its ambiguous identifications with past and present, nationality and transnationality, also influences the younger interviewees' experience of sex. For many of them, sex is something belonging to (transnational) youth, against (national) traditions: open to experimentations and challenges, a domain of freedom, usually without the confines of identity. Sexual identity labels are often not needed to make a life narrative. For some, an unuttered heterosexual identity is not disturbed by same-sex relations; for others, it is the bisexual experience that makes self-definition equivocal, difficult, or irrelevant.

[30] See Gal and Kligman about the mutual making of reproduction and politics (2000).

At the same time, I have argued that bisexual identity does exist in contemporary Budapest: there are people who affirmatively identify as such, and this identification is influenced by various life experiences, including self-differentiation from homosexual communities and a quest for relationship with both men and women. This finding contradicts many theorists who consider bisexuality only as a phase or temporary experimentation (Boxer and Herdt 1995, 82; Gagnon and Greenblatt 2005, 173).

The examination of bisexuality as a post-socialist phenomenon supports theories about 'sex' as something historical (Halperin 1993; Hemmings 2002, 35). According to some accounts, bisexuality – both as an identity and as an affirmative behaviour – is the newest in a chronological chain of sexual liberation in Hungary, because it seems to have gained a sort of rank or acknowledgement some years after homosexualities have. Emese (36, f) firmly states that approximately three years ago it was hard to find a female partner as a bisexual, but today there are much more bisexual women – which lesbian communities got used to and became more tolerant for.

I thus argue that according to all the interviews emphasizing temporal change and spatial distinctions, sexuality is something that is located in a special cultural-historical point of people's life. Also, this location and time are given meaning through sexuality: the way people negotiate their sexualities depends on their post-socialist identifications, and vice versa. Sex is one of our greatest narratives (Plummer 1995, 4) with time being constitutive in it; especially in the case of bisexuality, the temporality of which always poses a problem (Hemmings 2002, pp. 25). In the next chapter I offer an investigation of how people seek to solve some of these problems through different interpretations about the meaning of 'sex'.

Chapter 3: *"Bisexuality is a sexual, rather than an emotional issue"* – The Role of Sex

To grasp the social environments that define the terms through which people interpret bisexuality, I discuss sex in this chapter, because sexuality in terms of 'having sex' appeared emphatically in each interview[31]. The meanings of sex, I argue, are determinant in constructing the meaning of bisexuality and are highly influenced by social-cultural narratives. Key parts of the meanings of bisexuality are formed around concepts of sex and these concepts can help us further to outline some patterns of bisexuality in present-day Hungary, and also to see how permeable the boundaries between sexual categories are in people's actual lives.

I argue that the meanings of bisexuality are often framed in dichotomous frameworks in personal accounts; this is because binaries and boundaries are tools of thinking, especially, as Diana Fuss shows (1991), about sexuality. In contemporary Hungarian society, the homosexual-heterosexual binary is prevalent, resulting in separate sexual spaces and identities. This fact undoubtedly concerns the meanings of bisexuality; there is, nonetheless, another binary that is worth to examine in order to get a picture of bisexuality: sex – as "just sex, nothing more" – versus long-term, emotionally based relationships. During the 20th century, and in a faster pace after 1989, 'good sex' is getting more valued and sought for; while the romantic ethos and practice of sex-love and long-term commitment – symbolized by marriage[32] – prevails (see Giddens 1992). This opposition, parallel to the soul-body binary, was clearly stated in each and every interview, although was not perceived necessarily mutually exclusive, since sex (its quality, frequency, and exclusivity) is also an issue *inside*

[31] For the sake of clarity, for people I am using the term 'gender'; in Hungarian, there is no sex-gender distinction, both are '*nem*'. Even if some interviewees use sex ('*szex*') and sexuality ('*szexualitás*') interchangeably, I will use the latter only as a comprehensive concept, including, for instance, identity.
[32] Hungarians are especially depicted by value-surveys as (traditional) family-oriented.

the relationship, often opposed to the emotional bonds – and often strengthening them (see at the end of this chapter).

I argue that this opposition provides an adequate means to trace the role of sex in accounts of bisexuality because the way people comprehend sex affects their understanding of the character of their own bisexuality. First, I show how sex is defined and what role does it have in the accounts; second I discuss the desire-action distinction, arguing that both can constitute 'sex' in the respondents' understandings. Then I turn to the sex-relationship binary to show how it functions as a structural element in the meaning the interviewees give to their bisexual attractions and their sexual identities in general. In addition, I discuss the topic of threesomes as a common conceptualization of bisexuality and 'bisexual sex'.

3.1 Defining 'sex'

In the personal accounts, I could find various forms of what the respondents considered as sex. It is important to see how ambiguous the definition of 'sex' can be, because (1) it can give us an impression of why bisexuality is not easily grasped and (2) it can help problematize the concept of 'sex' in general. Garber also argues that this should be the first step in mapping out bisexuality, instead of the examination of the heterosexual-homosexual opposition (1996, 30).[33]

In my interviews, many sexual experiences are questioned if it was really or genuinely sex: caresses and petting are typically categories of uncertainty and liminality. My interviewees were quite consonant in defining oral sex and any type of penetration as sex. According to the interviews, I argue that the definitions of sex that people give always define the boundaries and the nature of their bisexuality.

[33] It is also the reason behind my methodology to interview people who claim to have "attractions towards both men and women" so that they define the sexual or other terms related to bisexuality.

Kissing was the most often mentioned experience: the respondents usually considered it the first step in a scale of sex, and therefore as the (first) sign of bisexuality; though in many cases they defined kiss as *not yet* sex. Indeed, in some situations kiss is seen more determinant in bisexuality than 'sex', meaning oral and genital stimulation. Márk (35, m) told me about men participating in threesomes with him and his wife; he considered 'real' bisexuals those men who kissed him as well. Other respondents differentiated between a kiss on the mouth and deep kiss, where the latter is considered more serious in sexual terms. In all cases, kiss has significance and it defines a boundary: of sex, of friendship, of bisexuality. Tekla (22), a predominantly heterosexual woman tells a story when, as teenager girls, she and her female friend kissed each other while boys were watching and encouraging them for deep kissing.

> And even then we said, why not. And then finally, I don't know, we got into it. I don't say that we felt each other up, or, or that it became a hard erotic show, no. But, but we looked at each other, like wow, like it really felt good.

Tekla in this account emphasizes the limits of their sexual action. Kissing, for a certain extent, was surely a sexual act, for the girls and for the boys too, but it was limited and situational, just like in Kati's (22, f) stories.

Sexual phenomena do not necessarily require bodily interaction or the presence of other persons; desires, attractions, and fantasies are sexual too. Even if not acted upon, they were told in sexual terms ("intensive feeling", "vibration", "excitement"). For Vera (36, f), men as sexual objects first emerged in dreams and fantasies and this led her to reflect whether she was bisexual. Moreover, Péter (31, m) said: "I experience gayness in sexual terms with films, actually with gay sex films. It's also important for me."

Whatever sex means in the interviews, I argue that its role is always to draw a line. I argue with Fuss that "a symbolic order based on a logic of limits" is inevitable, but also that they are continuously transgressed (1991, 1), which is illustrated by the variety of concepts of bisexuality. On the one hand, sex often signals the *limits* of one's bisexuality:

> Well, with women, I haven't been together with women concretely, that is, I haven't, haven't… *slept* with women. Well I had of course these kissings in my life, evidently not just once, these ones most often in a party-way. (Kati, 22, f)

While teenager kisses between girls count as "evident", going to bed would mean something much more serious 'sex' (perhaps, concerning genitals), which Kati distances herself from. In a different case, Emese (36, f) is concerned by mutual sexual satisfaction: she was not sure if she counts as a bisexual, because although she had sex with some women, there was only one case when both of them reached climax.

Or, on the other hand, sex can mark the *nature* of one's bisexuality. Consider my previous example of Vera (36), a primarily lesbian, who have sexual dreams and some kissing experiences with men and thinks if she was still homosexual. Péter (31, m) has had sex with one woman and with several men – but he lives in a partnership with the woman, and this fact complicates his locating himself in sexual terms. Hanna (32, f) had sex with women but her masturbational fantasies were exclusively about men, and she missed men when having had sex with women – still, she is willing to identify as bisexual.

It is important to add that *imagination*, in contrast to actual experiences, plays a great role in defining sex or bisexuality itself. I use here 'imagination' as distinct from sexual fantasy (though the two can connect): it is rather an intellectual move when people posit themselves in situations and try to find out how they *would* act. Imagination can play a role in future actions by envisioning alternatives (often provided by global flows, see Appadurai 1991); and it always reflects the present self-definition, which is showed by the frequency respondents had claims like "I could not imagine" or "I can imagine" to define, border, and interpret their bisexuality. Imagination is the first step in creating sexual stories and identities and its telling in the interview situation might be the second step (Plummer 1995, 126). Narration, remarks Plummer, is always aimed at communities as potential audience, whose narratives the subject has already built into the story (16). Also, "I can't imagine" could be read "I don't want to (try to) imagine" because it would mean the presence of desires; or

rather, because it would allow desires to be born: as Žižek says, "imagination constitutes desire" (1997, 7).[34]

Nana (23, f) can imagine kissing a woman, but is not sure if she wants to touch her breasts. She questions her attractions towards women on the basis of certainly not being able to imagine oral sex with a woman, which would be the proof of genuine attraction.

> So I was just really charmed by someone's personality. And like… So like, in fact, there is a very vulgar and crucial question when it is asked if you would lick somebody. And this I wouldn't be able to do. So perhaps, here aren't really [attractions for women on my side].

In this example as well, sex marks the boundary of a person's broader sexuality. Nana admits to have "bisexual tendencies" but, because of the limits in sex imagined, does not consider herself a real bisexual. For her, imagination and reality – the lack of serious same-sex desires – fit together: she argues, as implied in a lot of interviews, that she cannot imagine, therefore she does not desire. Still, I cannot say that with it she or others necessarily suggest the essential and pre-given nature of their desires, because they often reflect on its non-evidency and malleability, see the following.

3.2 Desires and Acts

Before turning to the sex-relationship dichotomy, let me first examine another one: the tension between desires and acting upon them, since it is a common structuring binary in conceptions of sex and sexuality[35]. In many interviews this tension was tangible. For a few, desires were not obvious *because* they did not lead to action:

> …but when I should step on the fields of action, I fucking don't know what to do because, probably, the drive or the attraction is not strong enough… (Nana, 23, f)

[34] Imaginations can also promise the realization of prohibited desires; in so doing, they might reinforce the boundary between fantasy and reality, hence maintaining the rule of the latter (Žižek 1997, 13-14.). I thank Hadley Z. Renkin for drawing my attention to Žižek.
[35] Here I consider desire ('*vágy*') and attraction ('*vonzalom*', more commonly used) as equivalents.

On the contrary, for most of the respondents, desire got its meaning through its *opposition* with the act. For example, they long for some people whom they cannot get, or pursue sex without much desire. Also, for many, it is precisely desire that represents a bisexual potential, even if not acted upon; it is in the case of primarily heterosexual women who have already gained some same-sex experience (kissing), without going further but who feel open for more action. "If it had been up to me, we wouldn't have stopped" (Éva, 25, f). Interestingly, this kind of desire does not really cause frustration to them, and their identity as heterosexual is not disturbed by the acknowledgement of either desires or acts with other women. I would say that desires and acts can equally be evidences and hindrances for claiming certain sexual identities. For Viktor (23, m), for example, a long-repressed desire for men was frustrating not only because it did not get fulfilled but also because it made him question his heterosexuality. Apparently, gender is a decisive factor in experiencing same-sex desires and acts, for women have more freedom in them without risking heterosexual status; I will soon turn back to this.

According to the interviews I made, in most cases there seems to be a primary orientation towards people of one gender, *in addition to* which the other gender as object of interest emerges. It is a common feature of life stories, primarily because none of the interviewees but one had long-term commitment with people of both genders.[36] Even in the experiences of Emese (36, f) and Péter (31, m), who have had alternately girlfriends and boyfriends for a couple of years, one gender came first in their life, as the 'default' one and the other one later. Most of the respondents had opposite-sex relations before engaging in same-sex ones, which move is typically told as a result of some liberation or self-acceptance. Vera (36, f) and Márk (35, m) are the only exceptions for whom the default objects of desire are from the same sex; I think this proportion is due to the social-cultural forces that render

[36] It has much to do with the age of the respondents, since the oldest is 40 years old.

heterosexuality the "programmed default" (Whisman 1996, 56) given its compulsory character, which many respondents explicitly refer to. Compulsory heterosexuality, I would argue with Adrienne Rich, does not simply ban same-sex desires but also blocks their development by pressing heterosexual patterns of romance and sex; therefore sexuality is hardly a question of innate orientation or "preference" (i.e., choice) (1980, 178-185). That is why, as Hanna (32, f) tells, sex with her girlfriend was formed very slowly and with difficulties, whereas sex with her boyfriend went gradually, continuously, and more smoothly.

Therefore, it turned out, desires towards persons of one gender (usually the same as that of the respondent) are perceived as a question, because it is compared to the default (opposite-sex) one. I argue that these attractions always pose a *question* for the person and forces a self-examination concerning identity, desires and acts; nevertheless, it is not always a *problem*. For the predominantly heterosexual women, same-sex relations can be unproblematically embraced into their heterosexuality as experimentations. Rust (1993, 71) writes:

> Same-sex attractions and intimate relationships that might otherwise be viewed as homosexual can be interpreted as platonic or transitory or attributed to nonessential causes, such as drunkenness or situational constraints, whereas comparable other sex attractions and relationships are interpreted as reflections of heterosexual essence.

Specifying her argument, I would add that heterosexuality – owing to its compulsory and default character – usually does not need to be named. Also, the predominantly straight women can use the words "bisexual attraction/experience/tendency" for themselves without questioning their heterosexual identity. Thus Hemmings is right that bisexuality is present in other sexual spaces, like heterosexuality (2002, 35-39). According to my interviewees' stories, kisses between teenager girls were considered sexual and were enjoyed, but not *desired* previously, as their continuation was also not *desired*; it was limited to the situation it happened in. Nevertheless, these past experiences led the young women in my research, Tekla and Kati *imagining* more sex with women, although they claim to not long for that. On the

contrary, although Nana (23) is also a primarily heterosexual woman, she as a teenager had not had these kisses with girls but reflects whether she is attracted now to a particular woman. I argue that it is precisely this constellation of acts and desires that poses her problems in terms of sexual identity; whereas, in another constellation, Kati and Tekla have not really got problems with these bisexual experiences and imaginations.

3.3 Sex and Relationships

Although both actions and desires are included in sex, the desire-action binary is to some extent paralleled by the sex-relationship binary. Sex and action, i.e. sexual action is, I argue throughout this chapter, is perceived as a decisive factor in bisexuality. On the one hand, it is usually considered as an obvious sign, as an easy definition of bisexuality – although I showed above how contradictory the meaning of 'sex' can be. On the other hand, sexual act is often devalued as superficial, in opposition to desires – or, in opposition to emotionally loaded relationships, unifying sex and soul; which comparison is the topic of this subchapter.

The tension and relation between sex and relationship were in fact a universal phenomenon in the interviews, even if the words for the latter varied, from love to romance to emotions. Bisexuality in most cases is interpreted in the sex-relationship framework. The experience of bisexuality, as I tried to show, is hardly ever an unequivocal issue for the individual. In almost all of the cases, interviewees felt the need not only to explain it, but also to *justify* it. They need to justify their attractions towards persons of the 'second gender'; it is at the same time a justification of their (hetero-, homo-, or bisexual[37]) identity. The predominantly straight women emphasize the limits of kissing to distance them from 'real', more sexual lesbianism; Vera (36, f) considers her sexual dreams about men as the sign of bisexuality and as a potential for leaving her lesbianism (as lifestyle and identity) for

[37] I thank Yi Xing Hwa for this specification.

heterosexuality. According to the interviews, both good sex and close relationship can justify and legitimate attractions towards persons of the 'second gender', but relationship alone, without anything called 'sexual', can never. This indicates the fallacy of the soul-body distinction, since a good soul-relationship (as the notion of sex-love) requires 'good sex' too.

There is a common interpretation of bisexuality in the interviews (as in its everyday perception): when there are temporal sequences, i.e. periods in the attractions towards both women and men, the subjects often feel that they ought to choose: that one attraction should/will replace the other. That it is often the case gives evidence of the effect of compulsory heterosexuality: people forced in heterosexual relationships might want to completely quit them when experiencing homosexual ones. Interestingly, none of my respondents claimed that they exclusively want to be with persons of only one gender. Viktor (23, m), who have long struggled with his attractions towards men *as well*, words this either-or idea:

> I was reflecting a lot on that [bisexuality] is perhaps just a through…building, or something like an anteroom by definition.
> - *And what do you think about yourself?*
> Uhm, I say this also because I experienced that after I let these things in me liberated, actually, since the last couple of years I am much less concerned by women [laughs]. I mean, sexually.
> - *But can you still imagine, say, to be together with a woman?*
> Of course. Of course, and I'm attracted, too. Though, this is what I don't really know. How it goes.

While Viktor explicitly expresses uncertainty, other accounts implied it. It is important to see experience as potentially "partial, fragmented, and contradictory"; for the poststructuralist examination of which bisexuality provides a great field (Hemmings 2002, 37). Viktor's uncertainty concerns more the ambiguity of sexual identification than of actual sexual desires, which is experienced by other interviewees (e.g. Péter) as well; whereas for others (Tekla, Nana), it is the equivocal character of desires that poses questions.[38] I thus would not say that Viktor's is simply a case of repressed homosexuality, since at some point he said that even

[38] I thank Jess Hardley for suggesting the elaboration of this point.

after his 'self-liberation' in terms of same-sex desire he gets attracted to women as well, "in an absolutely evident way".

Also, Péter's (31, m) case can highlight how the results of repression can be real emotions: growing up in a very religious family, he convinced himself to be able to convert to a heterosexual and formed a relationship with a woman that is still on, despite his affairs with men. I do not deny that for many, heterosexual relationships are forced and later totally quitted; but in many cases, like that of Péter, I argue that heterosexuality is *learnt* to some extent and that the ties, developed towards a certain person or even a certain gender are hard to quit. Péter claims that he could imagine sex with other women as well, even if he wants to form relationships with men and feels sex more pleasurable with them. Still, it happens in the other direction too: Márk (35, m) explicitly says that he had to learn hetero sex in his first relation with a woman, at the age of 30. "I have learnt, say, to love female body as well, and we have learnt how to have sex with each other". As Garber writes: "We learn to love. We learn to desire. (…) We 'model' our erotic feelings" (1996, 305). Yet, those who admit that they have learnt sexuality of some sort, imply a *choice* in the decision for one or the other gender (e.g. rationally looking for relationship with a woman), in contrast to those who stress having given shape to pre-given desires.[39]

Now I show how the sex-relationship dichotomy frames bisexuality, regardless of how sex is defined. First I discuss the important role sex plays in the conceptions of bisexuality, second the role of relationships. Third, I examine the recurrent topic of threesomes, for this is an issue often tied to bisexuality and contained in the sex-relationship binary. To illustrate what I mean by the constitutive role of this opposition in the meanings of bisexuality I quote Dávid (36, m) who, similarly to Péter, had lived long with a woman (but split up a year ago):

[39] I thank Eszter Timár for this differentiation in claims.

> It happened to me that we were in a threesome or a foursome [with other men], but it is just sex. So, what I miss is exactly… And this might be exactly why I remained in that relationship [with the woman], because even if there are problems to be solved and difficulties, it is still so good to wake up together with someone, take care of him/her, know everything, feel, cuddle up, etc. I mean, I need it very much.

For some, the presence of *sex* is determinant in bisexuality. Vera (36, f), for example, claims to be sexually attracted to men, whereas she cannot form emotional bonds with men and never exceeded kissing with them. But she considers this sexual relation honest and *genuine* in a way. Similarly, Kati (22, f) and Éva (25, f) claim to become sexually excited by women, differentiating themselves from typical teenager girls who (as they see it) do not take these same-sex kisses seriously, for them it is just play. It was apparent that even in those cases where the 'second gender' is only related to sexually, people differentiate themselves from other people, claiming a certain authenticity. Kati makes the role of sex, compared to love, in bisexuality explicit:

> I could never fall in love with a woman. It is improbable that I could. But sexually another woman can be attractive for me. (…) What I see, what I experience is that bisexuality is a sexual issue, rather than something emotional. (…) One might experiment with this or that person, and then stays at one side. But in the long run, I think, emotionally I can fall in love with either one gender or the other. Isn't it right?

The fundamentally sexual character of same-sex relations beside opposite-sex ones is proven by many accounts directly linking the former to an intensive sexual life. Bob (19, m) explained to me his "theory" that sexual needs grow parallel to the number of attractive people around; first for members of the same gender, and next for those of the opposite gender, too. This appreciation of 'sex' is in contrast with its certain condemnation, see below. Interestingly, both can lead people to members of the 'second gender', i.e. bisexuality.

Sex can be also a determinant factor in the *choice or decision* between genders. Emese (36, f) is highly concerned with the importance of sex and sexual satisfaction in her life. Also, for her it is a great experience to be the "man", as she said, in the sexual act, i.e. penetrating the other. Generally, she thinks that sex is the same with men and women. However, she says:

> and what I see as another advantage of being with a woman is that I can be man next to her, which is very good for me from the sexual aspect. This could be done with men, too, but when I raised to some guys what if I fuck them in the ass, well, not everyone [laughs] not everyone was fond of the idea, I must tell.

For Emese, the advantage of women to have sex with is that they let her "be the man"; but if she could do that with men, it would be fine too. It means that sexual satisfaction (not only in terms of orgasm) is the decisive factor for her, not the gender of the partner. Péter (36, m) is different, because he detects the greatest sexual pleasure[40] when being with men and therefore claims that he is more close to be homosexual than bisexual; despite of his relationship with a woman and of the lack of relationship with men.

Péter's case brings me to the investigation of the role of *relationships* in forming (bi)sexualities. Long-term commitments were highly valued by all of the respondents. It was posed as the final, ideal aim. Péter, Vera (36, f), and Dávid (36, m) said that sexual experience is worth nothing without emotional ties.

> It's like when one, I don't know, is eating from the floor and everything is filthy and covered with vomit, and I'm eating the food of average quality there, from the floor, from the filth, or. Sex without love is just like this, I think. (Vera, 36, f)

Her devaluation of sex in itself is represented by her own term, "sexualling" ('*szexuálni*'), that underscores the 'just sex' aspect of sexuality. We can see that the view of these (relatively older) interviewees is opposed to that of young women and men in heterosexual environments, for whom sex as 'just sex' is valued. Péter's problem is framed in the sex-relationship binary, because it is his long-term partnership with a woman that renders it difficult to (1) contact with men in the long run, and therefore to (2) define himself in terms of sexual identity. He echoes a lot of interviewees' opinion that good sex requires a deep relationship and vice versa. Dávid (36, m), István (m, 40) and Márk (35, m) complained that although it is easy to get impersonal sex, especially among gays, it is very difficult to find a

[40] The Hungarian word Péter used, '*gyönyör*' is less commonly used than 'pleasure' and expresses a stronger sexual character.

long-term, emotional relationship – where, actually, sex itself would be more enjoyable. Indeed, Márk said that he does not hold sex in high esteem; which is in relation to his bisexuality. After an exclusively gay life, he said to Hanna, the woman he liked:

> that I don't hold sexuality in high esteem, but I feel great with her, so if… and I want a family very much and I want children very much. So if, like, if she also thinks it can work, then for me it's OK.

And they got married and live in a well-functioning relationship, including sex. Unlike the predominantly heterosexual youth, he engaged in bisexuality because of a certain condemnation of sex.

On the other hand, for the predominantly straight women, relationship was also an ideal aim; but it was obviously a heterosexual partnership. For them, relationship represented their definitive heterosexuality (since, as I showed, bisexuality only concerned sex). In connection with that, they claimed they cannot imagine having sex with a woman who is emotionally too close to them. Friendship means for them a committed relationship which they do not want to destroy with sex. However, when teenagers, they were kissing with friends then back; perhaps, they retrospectively see that as not really sex, in comparison with what they would now do with women.

The significance of friendship emerged in Viktor's (23, m) account as well: he fell in love with best male friends three times and these were painful periods because he struggled not to transgress the border of sexuality. But his reasons why he did not want to mingle friendship and sex were different from those of the predominantly straight women: simply, he would have been rejected. On the other hand, he learnt in these friendships how a committed relationship could work between two men. The boundaries between friendship and relationship (or sex) are mingled, in others' stories as well: Márk (35, m) was also in love with one of his best friends. The slippage between these two types of relation between men proves Sedgwick's thesis of the "potential unbrokenness of a continuum between homosocial

and homosexual" (1985, 1). However, in a different sense, the continuum is true for opposite-sex friendships as well: Bob (19, m) said he has long-term friendships with women, "which are a little more [than purely friendship], but there isn't sex in them. Or, or at least not in a daily basis"...

Having examined the binaries structuring the meaning of sexual experiences, it is apparent how the borders blur between categories of relations. People try to keep friendship and love separate in vain and 'just sex' often results in attachments. I argued that these moves and tensions between sex, friendship, and relationship give us a picture about the personal approaches of bisexuality because people use these boundaries to define their sexuality. For some, same-sex friendship precludes sex; for others, friendship leads to love. For some people, women are relationship partners and men are only sexually interesting; for some young women, same-sex experimentation is normal but men are potential partners. For some, sexual liberty embraces same-sex adventures, whereas others became bisexuals because of a relative devaluation of sex. Sex, I have argued, is a means for people to give meaning to their different relations towards women and men. Finally, I am going to explore the topic of threesomes, because it is also interpreted by the interviewees in the frameworks of imagination and desire, and sex versus relationship.

3.4 Threesomes

Threesomes are typically scenes that people try to imagine in order to understand their bisexuality (see Garber 1996, 430).

> He had a relationship [with a man] even during his marriage, in a way that… in a threesome. So this tradi… this classical bisexuality word. So it was my closest encounter with this classical interpretation. (Péter, 31, m)

It was astonishing that almost all interviewees raised the topic of sexual threesomes without me asking about it. This fact shows that threesomes are widely known and they offer

an issue in which bisexuality can be more easily conceptualized than in general. It is because in a threesome of two genders one can be together with a woman and a man at the same time; as Hemmings argues, it is the temporality of bisexuality that renders it unintelligible to the greatest extent (2002, pp. 25).

There are two patterns concerning threesomes: one is when the person has no experience in it. Most of them said they can *imagine* that with a woman and a man, which claim served as a proof of their bisexuality; whereas some women said they can imagine that only with two men, hence they reduced the level of their bisexuality, and often highlighted that of the men participating.

The other pattern is when people had actually been in one or more threesome situations. Most of these respondents claimed that it was not a good experience because they would rather concentrate on just one person (i.e., they wanted one of them more, or could not really act in two directions). It means that their participation in these situations did not prove their bisexuality. For Emese (36, f), for example, a threesome was only a compromise because the woman she dated otherwise would not have had sex with her.

I argue that threesomes represent *sex*, as opposed to relationship, for people concerned with bisexuality: regardless of whether they imagined or did it, whether they enjoyed it or not, threesomes are situations defined in terms of sex and in opposition to high-intimacy sex, which is a prerequisite of a serious relationship. However, to blur the boundaries further: Hanna's (32, f) example shows that threesome can have a place inside the relationship too: she and her husband, Márk (35, m) experience it occasionally, inviting men found on the internet. Still, they both perceive these events as 'just sex' with the man and *therefore* as potentially contributing to the strengthening of emotional ties between themselves. For Márk, the bisexual character of these threesomes offers a solution for his needs because they include his wife and also a man of sexual adventure. "This way this encounter is cosy, and at the same

time there's always this novelty in it." Threesomes are not only a solution for his contrasting needs for men (sexually) and partnership (which he found with a woman) but also for the general tension between "stability of marriage and the unruliness of sexual desire": bisexual marriages, writes Garber, just make this "imperfect fit" visible (1996, 419).

3.5 Conclusion

I argued in this chapter that to trace the meanings of bisexuality it is helpful to examine how people give accounts of sex. Different bisexualities, in turn, can show us the ways sexuality in general is structured and how overlapping its categories are.

I argued that the role of sex in the narratives is to set up a boundary. The way the interviewees define sex, the differentiation between sexual acts and sexual desires, and the sex-relationship binary all served as means to draw lines between sexual experiences, between genders, between phases of life. I argue that my interviewees need these lines to be able to make sense of their bisexual attractions, phenomena given an ambiguous status by the dichotomous social categorization of sexuality. Bisexuality is especially rendered problematic in the post-socialist condition of Hungary where sexuality is an issue of ambiguous political, and trans/national self-definitions (Renkin 2007). Dealing with bisexuality as a question, people use frames available in society, and narrowly in their more local social environments. For example, the emphasis on committed relationship in many interviews is often a result of some religious thinking (Péter, Emese, Éva, Vera); certain circles of artists or progressive intellectuals facilitated the respondents' self-acceptance or also their invention of non-conventional sexualities (Nana, Viktor); and many experimentations were approved by friends in parties (Kati, Tekla, Bob).

According to the different concepts the respondents have in terms of sex, different patterns of bisexuality can be distinguished, showing how fluid and arbitrary the category of

bisexuality is. I want to argue that although patterns of bisexuality are possible to draw analytically, according to constellations of sex, relationship, and gender, a closer look can show how much they are overlapping and fluid. On the one hand, even inside one pattern, there are differences. The predominantly heterosexual women are not the same, in spite of their similar past experiences in kissing: Tekla, for example, watches some women "as if she was a man", see the next chapter, while Kati did not mention any particular woman at present interesting her. On the other hand, to define themselves compared to others, people use certain aspects (desire, kiss, love, etc.) according to which they put themselves in one or the other side of binary oppositions. Therefore, choosing or emphasizing other aspects would group them differently. Consequently, I argue that the ambiguity of bisexuality as an experience gives us evidence how mingling every sexual categorization is, how many definitions and arbitrary boundary-makings they depend on. Analyzing personal narratives lets us see these processes on the level of everyday practices and attitudes and also on the level of sexual story-telling.

In fact, interpretations of 'sex' are already about gender because it is a means for people to differentiate between their relations towards women and men. In the next chapter I am exploring specifically these gender differentiations.

Chapter 4: *"If I were a man, I'd so fuck her"* - Feminine and Masculine Men and Women

Is bisexuality about gender? It is certainly; I am now going to investigate how it is so in the interviews. I examine the role of gender in the personal narratives by focusing on (1) what the interviewees think about the differences between men and women, specifically regarding them as sexual/relationship partners; (2) also, complicating the gender binaries, what they say about feminine men and masculine women and what they regard as "masculine" and "feminine" traits; finally, (3) if the gender of the partner counts for them at all.

The first two topics will be discussed together, both linked to the butlerian concept of *heterosexual matrix* (Butler 1990, esp. Chapter 2). It is "a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility" (151), which assumes that body, sex, gender, desire, and sexuality give a coherent causal chain. That is, a female body makes one a woman and this presupposes desires for men, i.e. heterosexuality; and vice versa. Homosexuality appears in this framework as abnormal; and given that the desire is aiming at the same sex, it is rendered intelligible by an assumed gender inversion: gays are feminine and lesbians are masculine. I argue that narratives of bisexuality revolve around the framework of the heterosexual matrix; in many cases taking the gender-sexuality link for granted, and in some cases challenging or reworking that. In any case, the respondents made sense of their (bi)sexuality with its help.

As for the third topic, intertwined with the first two, I will name *queer potential* those arguments in the interviews which imply that gender does not really matter in sexuality, because, for example, there are other personal attributes that are more determinant in choosing a partner. In connection to that, I show if there is a queer potential in terms of sexual identity categorization as well: here I mean those accounts questioning – as queer theory does, see Chapter 1 – the relevance, usefulness, or necessity of distinct (homo-, hetero-, or even bisexual) categories. Indicating what I mean by queer potential I refer to Sedgwick's thoughts

in *Queer and Now* (1993). According to her, one of the meanings of queer is

> the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made, (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically. (8)

That is, her notion of queer echoes Butler's critique of the heterosexual matrix in *Gender Trouble* (1990): queer dissolves the assumed coherency between body, gender, desire, and sexuality. If one states that the gender of partner is not determinant in their sexuality, it means a queering of both gender and sexuality because the two cease to mutually define each other. I will argue that this queer potential is tangible in some interviews and is often connected to the bisexual experience. With the use of "potential" I indicate that in most cases it is not an explicit view or contradicts the person's other views; but contains elements implying the critique of gendered categories.

Overall, I found that the respondents took the bodily aspects of gender less into consideration than its social aspects: even if they stated that women and men are different, they did it on the basis of the display of certain roles and behavioural patterns, not on the basis of biological differences of sex. If I wanted to follow the sex-gender distinction (Butler 1990, 6-7), I would say that it is not sex, but gender, that counts. Therefore it happened that many personal accounts proved the reduction of the importance of gender in sexual choice – hence offering an implicit or explicit critique of the sexual categorization based on the gender of object choice. However, gender is an important issue in each story, and arguments about it define the character of the person's bisexuality: I argue that the interviewees always take gender into consideration but often suggest that they chose this or that person *regardless of, or despite* her/his gender.

I argue that in the interview narratives the interpretation of gender differences provides a lens through which bisexual attractions are understood. For my interviewees, gender categories imply sexual categories, including sexual identities, and help them to posit themselves. Gender differences serve as a means for people to draw lines between categories

and to define themselves in, or even against, these categorizations. The use of arguments linked to heterosexual matrix (including gender complementarity, see below) characterized those who could imagine long-term relationship only with the opposite sex. The emphasis on gender differences thus serves as a justification of the interviewees' sexuality: of the dominance of their "monosexual" interests[41]; or of their bisexual attractions, compared to something different (lesbianism, or male bisexuality); or, on the contrary, of their bisexual identity.

4.1 The heterosexual matrix of gender and sexuality

> I think that as a woman, I certainly look for masculinity in men. So I myself am specifically attracted to those men who are like... masculine men. So uhm, and therefore I think that at least most of, with no exception, indeed practically every women I talk to, most of them want the same in a relationship. To be paid attention to, to be understood, to be taken care of, etc, etc, so these are what a woman typically needs, this safety, that I can be a *woman* next to the other, next to the man, that I can appear on his side, and that he is even muscular [laughs]. So yes. And that makes impossible for me to imagine that a woman would find these things in another woman. (…) Therefore it is precisely, that is why it often happens that in lesbian couples one woman is usually very masculine. (Kati, 22, f)

From the rich material of this excerpt I would underline the logic of masculinity understood in terms of the heterosexual matrix. Kati argues that women look for masculinity, be it in a man or in a woman. She characterizes masculinity in terms of support, which, in turn, defines femininity as well: "I can be a woman next to him". This circular definition – i.e. that masculinity means making women feel feminine[42] – is based on the taken for granted nature of heterosexuality: opposite-sex relation defines one in gender terms. One might notice that most of the masculine traits she lists have no direct connection to manly characteristics; they are not only roles but roles that can be women's attribute in a relationship as well. When I later asked her what she meant by "masculinity" she likes, she already mentioned physical

[41] Monosexuality means the desire of one gender (heterosexuality and homosexuality) (Hemmings 2002, 28).
[42] This definition evokes Aratha Franklin's song that Butler refers to (1993, 317). Although she points out the potential subversive meanings of „you make me feel like a natural woman", according to this interview it is by all means masculinity, normally belonging to men, that renders the partner a woman.

characteristics, like hairiness and heftiness. And realized that then she does not know why she is attracted to women as well – and concluded that because "that's a different category".

By this she meant that she looks for (i.e. prefers) different traits in men than in women because she expects different kinds of relationship; in the excerpt above she stated that in a relationship, she needs masculine men. In the light of her argument in the previous chapter, same-sex relations mean only sexual affairs for her and this sexual aspect is that she appreciates in a woman – who, therefore, can be really feminine. Thus I argue that for her, gender difference reflects the difference in her relation towards them. According to her, a good *relationship*, fulfilling the couple's needs, consists of both masculinity and femininity (see the next subchapter about complementarity). In case of a lesbian couple, the masculine woman can provide the masculine traits. Femininity in women can be just *sexually* exciting for a woman. She said she does not even watches women and does not know what traits she likes in women: perhaps because it is only the situation of kissing that can bring her desire. Therefore her notions of femininity and masculinity justify the primacy of heterosexual relationships compared to same-sex sexual experimentations between women. It is similar to what other interviewees told me, see below.

I will argue that heterosexuality is not only defined in sexual terms: given that female bisexuality is accepted by social settings under certain circumstances, it is the adherence – both in statements and in behaviour – to exclusive notions of femininity and masculinity that prove these women's fundamental heterosexuality, both for themselves and for others. It is because in heterosexual environments, bisexuality of a certain kind has an important role. Kissing between girls is part of the sexually loaded life of the teenagers, part of the parties with dancing and booze. It makes women sexier and *more* feminine, therefore even more heterosexual, since it is an event between "great chicks", as Tekla (22, f) called her and her best girlfriends. Heterosexuality is brought in their relation by an assumed male gaze, judging

their attractiveness, which is increased by kissing.[43]

Society is dominated by heteronormativity, assuring that heterosexuality is normal and evidently given, which functions as an imperative (Warner 1993, esp. xxi). The heteronormativity implied in certain female same-sex relations is not only reflected in accounts of relationship – although that is the dominant pattern – but also in terms of sex. Tekla (22, f) frequently used the phrase "If I were a man" to express her sexual thoughts towards some women. She provides the quote in the title talking about an attractive woman: "And if I were, say, a man, in a given case, then, then… Now for the sake of effect, can I formulate it in strong language? *(- Of course.)* So like, I'd so fuck her." The fact that she imagines sex with women in case she was a man reveals a number of assumptions related to the heterosexual matrix. First, that sex is default between men and women; second, that her womanness relates to men and precludes desires for "fucking someone"; and finally, a distance from these feelings, as if they only exist in an imagined world. Referring back to the previous chapter, I argue that her kissing experiences with girlfriends were more able to be embraced to heterosexuality than these thoughts resembling more serious desires.

4.2 Gender complementarity in relationships

The combination of heterosexual primacy and gender is a pattern in the interviews; most of the women who seemed predominantly heterosexual addressed issues related to gender differences by themselves, while these were totally absent in some interviews conducted with people more attached to same-sex partners and more willing to claim a non-heterosexual (gay or bisexual) identity. One consequential feature of the heterosexual matrix is the idea of gender complementarity (Butler 1990, xxiv), i.e. the different character of men and women,

[43] For men, it's different because same-sex contact bears the danger of appearing faggot, *i.e.* feminine in the public view – even if men's kissing tends to get acclaimed by women, it is because of the femininity implied. I thank Velid Beganovic for this point. On differences in female and male bisexuality see more in Whisman (1996, 25) and Garber (1996, 426)

which form together a whole, assuring the harmony of heterosexuality. It is by definition a gender- and heteronormative concept, even if applied to same-sex couples containing a "masculine" and a "feminine" member.[44] Gender complementarity is thus implied in the heterosexual matrix and can be traced in the examples so far; but now I turn to accounts explicitly depending on the concept. I will argue here too that people who can imagine relationship, not only sexual encounter, with members of the same-sex, do not refer to gender complementarity.

When Nana (23, f) tried to formulate her sexuality and her attractions towards one particular woman, she told me that she cannot imagine a long-term relationship with her (that she called a "lesbian relationship", echoing others' view that it is relationship that makes two women lesbians). She argued that two women in a relationship "would kill each other", because of their similarity, for "yin and yang is needed". This is the gender complementarity argument, emerging in other interviews as well: they see women and men as different but completing each other. In Nana's argument, it explains her primary and long-term interest in men – similarly to Kati above – and assures that women can only have a restricted place in her life. In other words, that her fundamental heterosexuality is self-understood.

However, the gender complementarity argument is not only found in accounts of women with some same-sex experimentation. Márk (35, m), who – after an exclusively gay life – is living with a woman, while occasionally pursuing sex with men, also used the complementarity argument. He says he could not find a man with whom he could have formed a harmonic life together, but he could do that with his wife (Hanna). He argues that "a woman is put together psychologically, and a man is put together psychologically in ways so that they can form a harmonic life together". For him, the complementarity of gender differences explains why relationship is not possible between two men and explains his

[44] Well-known is Butler's argument about the subversive potential of these couples' gender-performance (1993) but for the interviewees, this view was not an option.

choice: his marriage with a woman. His argumentation are very similar to those of István (40, m), identifying as gay, who said he had not got many things from men that he needs in a relationship and finally found in a woman.

> One can get many things from a man, but not those few things that I would by all means need. So monogamy, desires, safety. It would be good if I got them in a man-relationship, but I didn't.

Consequently, their narrational motives for the complementarity are the same as in the predominantly heterosexual women's case: they can/want to form long-term relationship with opposite-sex persons, therefore argue that it requires a man and a woman.[45] But they both maintain a dominant sexual interest in men – unlike the women who where more interested in men both sexually and in terms of relationship.

In contrast to the evidence of male and female complementarity in these interviews, in other accounts it was not the dominant argument. I argue that these are told by people who can imagine relationship with same-sex people. Although Bob (19, m) thinks that men and women are different, for him this fact increases the chance that a same-sex partnership would work better. When I asked him what he wants to do with boys[46] (to whom he is attracted without acting upon it), he started to reply with the common view, discussed in the previous chapter, that same-sex relations are for just sex; but afterwards changed his mind.

> Well, nothing. A one-night stand. So not such a very serious relationship. Because I want to try this with a girl first. So, and. And I don't know how two boys… Although it is an attractive fact that a boy-boy relationship could last long, because two boys understand each other better than a boy and a girl, don't they? I mean so, yeah. Because they have different… personality traits. The two sexes; and therefore I think…that it is better that way [i.e. two boys being together].

When I asked him what personality traits he meant, he mentioned that girls do not like untidiness and infidelity; for the first sight, these two seem to belong to different dimensions, but I think they both embody rebellion against norms, important for him. The point in Bob's

[45] To do justice to István and Márk, it should be told that later they restricted the validity of their claims to their own experiences.

[46] In Hungarian, even an older man can be called a boy ('*fiú*'). My use of 'boy' is justified here not only by his young age but also by his dispreference for 'men' ('*férfiak*') who are too old, compared to 'boys' – see later.

argument is that *because* women and men are different, same-sex couples can function better, compared to the complementarity argument where a good relationship requires (gender) difference.

Emese (36, f) seems to hesitate between these two contrasting opinions. She said, "like looks for the like", and, on the other hand, "it is told that masculine women like feminine women"[47]. Unlike others, she was talking only about women in these terms: she frequently described women by reference to their femininity and masculinity, without expanding on the notions: apparently, they are evident for her. She said that as a feminine woman, she was attracted to other feminine women, but recently she is getting interested in masculine women too: with little success – despite the "opposites attract" principle. In her narrative, I argue, female femininity and masculinity embodies the lesbian-bisexual opposition.

> In the meantime I realized that I was not such an ardent supporter of feminine women any more, now I would be more into the more masculine types. And I had such tries. However, they aren't bisexual women; they are unequivocally the lesbian woman category.[48]

Emese identifies as bi ('*biszex*'), and her bisexual identity is formed by her experiences of failure or even discrimination among lesbians. Her distance from lesbianism is expressed by her occasional use of the term '*leszbi*', a short for lesbian, which lesbians might feel derogatory.[49] She gave the only explanation what female masculinity is when stated that she will not become masculine only to be more liked by lesbians: she will not "dress manly" and "shave the head bald". Therefore she links her femininity to her bisexuality and explains her difficulties in finding a female partner in these terms.

[47] These are common sayings in Hungarian: "*hasonló a hasonlóhoz*" (like takes pleasure in the like) and "*ellentétek vonzzák egymást*" (opposites attract).
[48] This gendered division is echoed by lesbians as well (Béres-Deák 2007, 88).
[49] According to pride.hu, it connotes lesbians in porn for straight men (http://pride.hu/article.php?sid=523. accessed May 28, 2010).

4.3 Feminine gays[50]

Beside male-female complementarity, the heterosexual matrix appears in another way in the interviews: that homosexuals violate gender norms, which most of the interviewees conceived in terms of appearance and gestures. As Kati (22, f) noted, "It doesn't show on the person if s/he[51] is bisexual" while gayness is "much more recognizable". I will argue that the way the topos of feminine gays is used by the respondents expresses their understanding of their bisexuality: regardless whether they reject or accept gay femininity, it marks their identification against certain groups.

The fact that for Éva (25, f), male and female bisexuality are completely different, has a reason in her life, which also explains her motivation to give me an interview. Plummer writes that sexual stories have personal motivations (1995, 34) and I think it is true even in my case when I was the one who asked people to talk to me, because it was their decision to participate. Éva's case clearly shows that they had their own motives: she recently split up painfully with a man who – as Éva found out at some point during their relationship – had had sexual experiences with a man. Given that Éva had same-sex experiences as well, the hierarchical comparison between male and female bisexuality is emphatic in her account. She says that it is "healthy or natural" for a woman to be interested in other women, while "it is a thing working totally differently in men". She implies that bisexuality does not hinder women in having a family, which they all want; whereas it is more exclusionary for men: even if they are bisexuals, "after a while they will go with men anyway".

> Because, because in order to be together, or live together with a woman, one has to give up things. So for example in order to be a father. Or to support a family. So for this, one has to be a man, there have to be masculine traits, have to be, has to be a strong hand. Even who is a bisexual man, hasn't got simply that vibration. So he hasn't got this authority, or or it is not really about authority, but he hasn't got that energy with which to support a family…

[50] I will not talk about lesbian masculinity, because in the interviews lesbianism was mentioned less emphatically in terms of gendered behaviour/appearance, except in Emese's account above.
[51] In Hungarian, there is no gender differentiation in third person singular. Here she probably meant men, because of continuing with gays.

She means that gay and bisexual men are less masculine, but bisexual, even lesbian women are feminine – here masculinity and femininity are connected to family life in a complementary and heteronormative way. The femininity of gays turned up later in the interview: she differentiated between her gay friends and other gays whom she condemns. Of course, she says, her friends' femininity is also noticeable "for those having an eye for it", but overall, they are "normal men" and "gentlemen" – echoing post-socialist narratives of civilized us versus barbaric, mob others (Buchowski 2006, 470). She contrasts them to gays who are affectionate, wearing tight women's pants and who provoke others – also by going to the Pride March, which her friends would never do. I argue that the acceptance of "good gays"[52] is important for her not only because they are her friends, but also because they are musicians like her and thus her musician identity needs to embrace sexual tolerance. All in all, gender differences allow her to differentiate among nonnormative sexualities, and hence assure her and her friends "normalness", understood in the accomplishment of gender norms, against those who threaten her feminine and heteronormative values.

The socially set up link between femininity and gayness affected Dávid's (36, m) life as well. Despite his bisexual attractions from the beginning, he has been struggling throughout his life with his perceived femininity: as a kid, he was mockingly called faggot ('*buzi*'), because of his hobbies: he did not like football but playing the flute and cooking. Even later, he considered himself unmanly and it blocked his rapprochement towards women as well. By now, he explicitly valorises "femininity" understood in terms of sophisticated taste and manners and criticizes gays too for the pressure to be an active macho. Apparently, there is a discrepancy between "outsiders'" and "insiders'" perception of gays, because while the former usually see them as too feminine, the latter can critique them as too masculine. The fact that in each case they are perceived homogenous shows that people distance themselves

[52] I borrowed the term from Warner (1999) who accuses promoters of gay marriage with the good gay-bad gay distinction.

from them. Although Dávid seems totally a member of gay culture, he specifies this belonging by critiques. His bisexual identity has been formed against the accusations of femininity by the homophobic environment and now has to be defended against gays: this might be the reason why he experiences expectation of masculinity here too.

Bob's (19, m) opinion is similar to that of Dávid to a certain extent, i.e. in the affirmative use of male femininity and in the critique of gay machoism. However, their narrative motivations differ. For Bob, male femininity is closely tied to young age. He says he prefers "girlish boys", compared to "body-builder fags"; at a point when I asked if he knows other male bis – since he identifies as such, '*biszex*' –, he said, only whom he does not like, because they are "old, they're such… men.". For him, it turned out from the interview, youth is not just an age but also a lifestyle and a community, whose values he appreciates and follows, allowed to be proudly bisexual. In this regard, he uses a temporal narrative, distinguishing between generations, and, perhaps, between phases of his own life. Just like in Tekla's (22, f) frequent phrase: "the young has to live", meaning intensive, free, and varied sexuality, also in terms of partners (for her, it is the prerequisite for a good marriage, which "everyone wants").

The social environment Bob is part of valorises openness, tolerance, rebellion, and sexual experimentation. His attraction towards other boys, admittedly, is partly for the sake of rebellion, and also experimentation. I argue that the fact that he declares his bisexuality, "boasting", is facilitated by his huge amount of sexual experience with girls. One remark of him clearly proves this: talking about a homophobic male student group he notes, "people who can get off with a woman just in every sixth month, what shall I say? Then they are also on the verge of being a fag ['*buziság*'], according to society". Consequently, both his bisexual identity and his valorisation of male femininity are facilitated by the acceptance of sexual liberty in youth.

4.4 Queer bisexuality?

With the help of the concept of heterosexual matrix, I showed so far the importance of gender in people's accounts of bisexuality: those arguing for opposite-sex partnership did it on the base of gender difference. However, others also address the difference between women and men as partners, without prioritizing one gender; I will argue that these accounts bear a queer potential for challenging gender as the basis of sexual choice, and hence, of sexuality. And even those, for whom one gender is more adequate than the other, argue on the basis of social – rather than biological – gender differences.

We live in a society of two, distinct genders, products of social forces, and the notion of bisexuality is structured around gender.[53] Thus no surprise the interviewees address the topic of gender differences often by themselves. But they do it in various ways. Dávid (36, m) tells how different he feels when having sex with either a man or a woman.

> I can't tell… There is a difference in the fragrance, in the taste, different sensations, I feel differently and in different places [of my body]. I can't explain it. But also physically: differently and in different places. So when I'm with a woman (…) there are completely different feelings, say, during an orgasm, or even before, and in different places, I am excited differently and feel different, different things, but physically, than with a man.

However, the fact that he distinguishes between sex with a woman and sex with a man does not force him to choose or to set up a hierarchy. Actually, he is the only person in my sample who claims to be attracted *equally* to men and women: referring back to the previous chapter, apparently, he has not got a 'primary' and a 'secondary' gender as object of attraction. He identifies as bisexual and often has to defend the authenticity of his identity, especially in gay environments. I argue that this is the reason why he stresses his equal attraction to both genders, in spite of his different reactions to them.

[53] Given the invisibility of transgender people in Hungary (see Solymár and Takács 2007), what women and men are was taken for granted in the interviews (and not challenged by my questions either). However, one remark can show the viability of critiquing the gender dichotomy implied in 'bisexuality': Éva told me about a male bisexual friend who had lived "with a transvestite, then with a man, and then now with a woman".

Viktor (23, m) does not attribute gender differences in sex to bodies but to different behaviour: men's chasing each other and their sexual rapprochement is more direct, whereas in a relationship with a woman more courting is required before sex. He linked that to men's more practical, "technocratic" character versus women's more emotional one. However, he did not set up a hierarchy of gender preference alongside these differences either.

Drawing the conclusion of the interviews (some arguing for gender differences, some for hierarchy in preference, others not) I argue that *bodily* gender differences count little for the interviewees. It is rather the different social roles that render women and men different (behaviour in sexual act or emotional support), at most they s see the traits I consider roles as given by nature. Even in cases where the difference in female and male body is emphasized (as in Dávid, who said the sensation differs to a great extent, or in Péter's quote in the previous chapter that pleasure is greater with men), I argue that it is their *reaction* that shows the gender difference and not the bodies on their own.

To give the most extreme example for this bodily gender indifference, let me quote Emese (36, f), whose account mirrors and contrasts with that of Dávid above.

> Having sex with a woman is very similar to having sex with a man. So the genitals, somehow they are very similar. So I don't know how to say, the whole thing causes a similar sensation. (…) She did it the same way as a man, nothing extra, nothing plus. I can't say that she was tenderer, on the contrary. So… I tell you, the sensation, the flash, the skin, and everything, are practically almost the same as with a man.

Still, in other parts of the interview she was speaking about the different mental traits of women and men. I am going to argue that paradoxically, these stated differences can be read as signs of a queer potentiality, i.e. the possible dissolution of the relevance of gender categories. As I discussed in Chapter 1, queer theory underscores aspects of sexual desire beyond gender, critiquing that 'sexual identity' is primarily defined by it. Emese's comparisons between men and women imply that she chooses between them on the basis of general human values. Looking at the pros and cons of men and women, she listed for me that

women are more unselfish, more devout, more open, and more faithful. She finished by saying that

> Somehow, I think, women are better as persons than men, by definition. Perhaps it's also because they are coded this way, that once they'll have to take care of – if it's so – a second person, by all means.

Her views on women coded by nature for (child)care[54] contrast her later arguments about social gender roles. Giving me possible reasons why women could choose other women instead of men, she is complaining about today's men's laziness, impoliteness, unhelpfulness even in minor things like carrying the bag.

> … and when it is visible that he is not even good for these, than what for? [laughs] I'm right, aren't I? Because if he doesn't produce the things expected by traditional men's roles, then why to be with him? At that rate, one can be with a woman, too.

Here for her it is only the social roles that differentiate between men and women – although, as I have showed, she considered women's characteristics naturally given. Therefore, she does not consider gender as an essential difference between women and men but something that can change – and, importantly, that is not necessarily the point in sexual object choice. Overall she states that for her, "it doesn't matter whom love comes from". Also, referring back to her sexual preferences discussed in the previous chapter, I would say that for her, it does not matter whom sexual satisfaction comes from, if it is satisfactory. In her queering of gender differences, I argue, the notion of choice is primary: whom she chooses for sexual partner is influenced by other factors than gender. This is why she identifies as bisexual; but for me, it is also an evidence for the challenging of identity categories on the basis of gender choice (see queer theory in Chapter 1; Sedgwick 1990, 25-6 and 1993, 8).

I argue that Emese is not an exception, instead, she worded explicitly what others implied: that men and women are only different in what they do; that is, sex counts less than gender. Keeping in mind the sex-relationship binary from the previous chapter, we can see

[54] Interestingly enough, she is very determined not to have children; also, once, after a chatting acquaintance, a woman sent Emese a photo of her and her baby, hence making Emese totally disenchanted and disinterested.

here that gender differences are more important for the respondents in terms of relationship than in terms of sex.

> …sex. It's sex with a man, it's very good with men, but with women, similarly. When one arrives to the point that OK, here is my love, then it is not… then we get beyond (…). Sex is sex. (…) But I think and this is how I always experienced so far that if it was good with somebody, it was very good. And if it was bad, I could have even been with a man, [it was bad], because I've had very shitty sex with men, too. With Dóri [my female partner], too: if it's good, then it's good. (István, 40, m)

The first aspect I examine as queer potential is the questioning of the relevance of *gender* differences. I argue that for some, the gender of the partner is secondary in contrast to something more important, hence dissolving the categories of gender and sexuality as each other's condition. István is one of those interviewees whose whole life narrative gives evidence of this potential. He says he got from Dóri what he has always needed and does not miss men, sexually or otherwise; but he has a "gay brain" because he notices only men in the street. But for him, like for several other respondents, gender is secondary if harmonic relationship is at stake.

The second aspect of queer potential that I want to address is the questioning of the relevance of *sexual* categories. Most of the respondents did not question them explicitly; some had difficulties with self-definition in terms of sexuality; but a few did elaborate on the question. For Péter (31, m), bisexuality represents a conflict between his deep attachment to his female partner, on the one hand, and his desires towards men on the other, with whom he has sexual or friendship relations.

> … I think it is useless to define, because. Because, on the one hand, it can change during the years, and on the other hand, relationships have a vast number of types of deepness, and… We can experience differently soul relationships and sexual relationships, too. So for me, I have a deeper relationship with my [female] partner in spiritual terms. But I haven't had a really deep relationship with a man yet...

I argue that here Péter gives one of the "queerest" account of sexualities, because beside the acknowledgement of the grades from exclusive heterosexuality to exclusive homosexuality – like other interviewees, for instance Márk (35, m), mentioning the Kinsey-scale –, he sets up

grades *in other dimensions* as well (see Sedgwick in Chapter 1). His life situation allows him to see differences between relationships in terms of spirituality, sexual pleasure, frequency of sexual encounter, time, and number of persons in a certain gender; this complicates the notion of sexual orientation so much that categorization becomes in fact impossible. The "number and *difference* of the dimensions" of sexuality is precisely that Sedgwick considers as an evidence for "queer", in opposition to the heteronormative presumption that these dimensions monolithically fit each other (1993, 8). We could see in several interviews the multiplicity of sexuality, for instance in the "gender-unfit" between relationship and sex or between factual relations and fantasies. However, these discrepancies often did not result in the questioning of categories, as it did in Péter's case, which I see therefore as "more queer".

Later Péter complained about the binary categorization of sexuality, that in everyday talks in various environments, the possibility of "loving this and that, too" does not simply come up. When I asked if he would need it, he said thus it would be easier to talk about it – for it's an internal conflict of his life. A lot of other respondents expressed the need to talk – and those who could talk about their sexuality (for instance in certain gay communities encouraging reflexive self-understanding), could also talk to me longer and more coherently. The queering of categories, I argue, is both needed and already present, even if not noticeable for the first look.

4.5 Conclusion

I attempted to demonstrate in this chapter how people give account of gender differences and that the meanings of sexuality are deeply embedded in discourses of femininity and masculinity. I argued that the interviewees' accounts of gender differences are related to their sexual identity and also to whom they can/want to form relationship with. Those respondents who emphasize gender differences attaching value hierarchy to it want to live in a relationship

with a person of one gender. Also, after a comparison with the previous chapter where the role of sex was discussed, I have found that gender counts more in one's sexual identification than sex did. That is, the respondents who stress the different character of women and men are more likely to view themselves as basically heterosexual, in spite of same-sex sexual relations; whereas those who are more committed to same-sex relationships discuss the issue of gender differences less.

Let me now turn back to the debate discussed in Chapter 1 whether bisexuality dissolves gender and sexual binaries and boundaries or not. According to my research, first, I do not think we can say something about "bisexuality" without defining what it consists of, since it can have so many aspects (see, for example, my demonstration of the numerous definitions of 'sex' in the previous chapter). Second and therefore, I would argue that some bisexualities do represent a critique and transgression of sexual boundaries, while others maintain them. Third, I suggest that it is not so easy to distinguish between these two because narratives can be contradictory while obeying to their own internal logic and also because boundaries can be transgressed while being rebuilt, and vice versa (see Fuss 1991, 3). For example, István (40, m) sticks to the label "gay", and questions the viability of bisexual identity. Or, I argue, the teenager girls' kissing, restricted to the situation, is not obviously maintaining a heterosexual-feminine privilege, because these early experimentations can make them open to new, "more serious" same-sex relations. Or take Nana's (23, f) example: she became charmed by an extraordinary woman, whose speciality "could make an extreme impression to both genders": here again, gender is secondary, compared to something more important (here, a special personality).

Having seen the emphasis and frequency with which the interviewees discuss gender (facilitated by the open-endedness of narrative interviews), we can state that bisexuality is absolutely about gender. But the fact that most interviewees drew a line between men and

women does not preclude the possibility of queering gender categories; I showed examples of accounts erasing the *importance* of gender differences or, more radically, the *existence* of these differences, for instance in sexual situations. Queering gender involves the queering of sexuality, since it shows the irrelevance of sexual categorization.

I argue that, first, bisexuality does allow for queer views of gender and sexuality because the way it emerges in people's life highlights, also for themselves, the complexity and variety of relations, from sexual experimentation to threesomes to soul-mate relationships. The radical questioning of categories, however, renders 'bisexuality' itself inadequate, since it is also a one-dimensional term, focusing on gender alone. Even if people call themselves "unequivocally bisexual", the label has a story, an explanation, an elaboration, signifying its equivocalness.

Nevertheless, there are cases where bisexual experiences do not seem to allow for queer reflections by the subject; indeed, they reinforce heteronormativity. These cases lead me to argue that heteronormativity and queer potential do not exist in separate spheres. Even the most gender- and heteronormative interview contains elements that I consider queer, e.g. that desire is the same for men and women, because one loves love itself and the object counts less (Éva, see page 61-2). As Fuss says, identity is not identical to itself and has multiple, even contradictory meanings (1990, 98). The research of bisexuality hence can demonstrate how fluid the boundaries are between queer and heteronormative; moreover, not only between bisexuality and heterosexuality *and* bisexuality and homosexuality, but also between homo- and heterosexuality. People with identical experiences can claim/be claimed to be heterosexual or homosexual or bisexual, because their lives are going inside various contrasting experiences and opinions that continuously cross and interact with each other.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have been seeking answers to the question of what meanings bisexuality bears in contemporary Hungarian society for the individuals concerned; for this, I defined bisexuality in terms of attraction towards both men and women. Further, I asked what discursive frames these personal meanings depend on and interact with. In the in-depth interviews that I conducted for my research, I highlighted three main themes which have impact on how people make account of their bisexuality: these are broader cultural narratives about post-socialist Hungary, about the role of sexuality in identity and relationship, and about the significance of gender differences.

As I have argued, bisexuality is embedded in these frameworks, since 'sexuality' in general is far from being an essence: it is located in the specific social and cultural context of a specific historical time (Katz 1990, Halperin 1993). This social context defines what 'sexuality' is about; my respondents used the social discourses in order to position and define their sexuality. For this, people mostly rely on binary oppositions structuring the discourses and allowing them to differentiate themselves from certain groups and forms of belonging, and identify with others. I have argued that the reliance on categories is, on the one hand, necessitated by the social ambiguity of bisexuality in a dichotomous sexual system of hetero- and homosexuality.

On the other hand, social ambiguities determine any post-socialist self-definition (Renkin 2007, esp. 19). Hence I have argued that bisexuality is especially worth examining in post-socialist discourses, providing another couple of binaries. Discourses in Hungary are attempts to find points of identification in an ambiguous state of becoming since 1989 when the national and transnational relations of the country were transformed (Renkin 2007, 19). The post-socialist narratives about the situation of Hungary operate with binary oppositions,

which are reflected in the interviews (right-left, national-foreign, East-West, socialist-capitalist). My research follows those who argue that the post-socialist categories of identification define how people think of sexuality, primarily due to the heteronormativity of the resurgent nationalism in the region (Owczarzak 2009; Renkin 2007, pp. 10). Bisexuality lies in the intersection of mutually exclusive discursive categories beside heterosexuality and homosexuality: like sexual freedom and committed relationship (see Chapter 3), gender normativity and gender bending (see Chapter 4), monogamy and promiscuity, young and old, traditional family and libertarian experimentation. These categorizations are all given meaning in the post-socialist competing discourses; for example homosexuality is depicted by nationalist right-wing discourse as not Hungarian, whereas Hungarian lesbian and gay activists are creating their own symbols of national belonging (Renkin 2007). I argue that these ambivalent, often contradictory values and identifications render bisexuality – as it was tangible in the interviews – something in need of explanation, specification, and justification; especially in the CEE region. At the same time, by these explanatory processes, people constantly negotiate and re-negotiate the terms and boundaries of categorizations.

I agree with those who see bisexuality as deeply embedded in homosexual and heterosexual discourses but, at the same time, as able to complicate the boundaries on which these discourses depend (see Hemmings 2002). I have showed, particularly in the final chapter, to what extent bisexuality can be read as queer, dissolving gender and sexual categories. I have argued that given its equivocal character, many forms and meanings of bisexuality are excluded due to arbitrary definitions in previous work. Owing to the common inclusion of bisexuality by gay and lesbian studies, research often ignores its forms that are related to heterosexual communities, practices, or identities (e.g. Esterberg 1997, Hemmings 2002, Borgos 2007). It made me emphatically focus on points of interwovenness between

heterosexuality and bisexuality. Scholars of empirical sociology, on the other hand, tend to deny bisexual identity (Herdt and Boxer 1995), or to understand it as an essentialist aspiration, contradicting the principles of constructionism (Gagnon and Greenblat 2005). In contrast, my data prove that people do identify as bisexuals, some assertively and for long, while others do so depending on the situation. The interviews demonstrate that bisexually identified people are aware of the impact of social forces on their sexual lives, far from essentializing it. Indeed, they often see their bisexuality as an outcome of choice, not of essence. I argue that it is exactly the experience of bisexuality that allows them to do so, for it often results in an (admittedly) rational comparison or even choice between women and men as partners; more than in a realization of internal desires (see Whisman 1996, pp. 21).

To avoid restricting its richness, I defined bisexuality as broadly as I could: in terms of attractions. This definition and the qualitative interviewing helped me to see, for example, that bisexuality and heterosexuality maintain each other, especially in the sexual experimentation of the young. That is why I doubt the validity of the common phrase "gay, lesbian, *and bisexual*": bisexuals do not necessarily belong to or share the experiences of lesbians and gays. Indeed, reconciling same-sex attractions and relations with 'heterosexuality' at the same time re-produces the notion of 'homosexuality' as distinct and bounded.[55]

A number of interviewees, on the other hand, constantly negotiate their bisexuality in homosexual communities; whereas, it is important to see, there are many who cannot be classified in either group. This fact again points out the fallacy and reductionism of clear-cut categorizations, which was one of my claims in this study. Moreover, despite the blurring of boundaries, they are reproduced, often by the same people: I argue with Sedgwick (1990) and Fuss (1991) that the discursive categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality need each other to set up themselves as distinct or even essential phenomena. 'Biphobia' is not

[55] I thank Hadley Z. Renkin for pointing me this out.

necessarily experienced by bisexuals but certainly functions in the reproduction of other, "mono"-sexualities (Hemmings 2002, 28-9). Bisexuality is thus a means to explore the boundary-making processes of any sexuality. I think it could also challenge the division between gays and lesbians, because bisexuals belong to gender-mixed spaces as well. First, their need for these spaces can call attention to those lesbians and gays who also need them; second, a stronger co-operation between nonnormative sexualities could result in more effective politics, also in highlighting the commonalities with heterosexuality. What is more, with notions of bisexuality the exploration of people's experiences with transgender partners would be facilitated because of the concerns of what makes a man and a woman.

I examined narratives of bisexuality in a broader scope and argued that it is worth investigating in cultural contexts of post-socialism, sex, and gender, in general – since bisexuality is not in a vacuum and for the exploration of its personal meanings their backgrounds and interactions should be investigated too. Sexuality is interpreted in relation to others' sexualities and others' reactions, experienced or imagined; hence the significance of the national context. When people in Hungary give account of their sexuality, they position themselves along the coordinate axes of post-socialist narratives. As I have argued, the especially sharpened discourses in CEE countries alongside binaries of belongings render sexuality a key issue for people's self-definitions in terms of Hungarianness, internationalism, political stand, the European Union, East and West.

All the three discourses work with binary oppositions: as for post-socialism, they are the socialism-present, East-West, and national-transnational distinctions, which in a lot of interviews structure the way people interpret their bisexuality. They tell about it as a temporal change, or a normal-nonnormal tension, or something authentic compared to inauthentic sexualities. Also, accounts of having sex depend on the desire-act and sex-relationship binaries, with the help of which people can explain the 'level' or character of their bisexuality.

Finally, the topic of bisexuality unavoidably invokes comparisons between women and men, masculinity and femininity, which often serves as a justification of preference for this or that gender. At the same time, many interviewees gave account of the irrelevancy of gender distinctions – which fact, of course, shows how much the notions of sexuality depend on gender.

However, throughout the thesis I kept underscoring certain elements of the interviews which reflected the importance of narrower cultural narratives. People give account of their sexuality according to their belongings to circles of friends, sexual communities, religion, profession, and politics. As in the case of broader discourses, here they also, on the one hand, draw on the values of these groups, by accepting or rejecting them – and, on the other hand, they modify and challenge these values, by recreating them for their own narrational needs. Therefore I argued that people do not only apply socially available categorizations to themselves but, in negotiating the categories in the light of their various life experiences, question them as well. The questioning of categories expands beyond sexuality to other fields: for example, the interviewees' lives mix values of nationalism and transnationalism, heteronormativity and sexual tolerance. As Renkin argues, the challenge of concepts of participation in the society by sexual minorities has the potential to modify these concepts (2007, 24). Bisexuality thus allows everyday people, as well as scholars, to see categories overlapping and blurring. In this sense, bisexuality is a self-annihilating notion: it gives us a chance to deconstruct categorizations, but given that it is build on these categorizations – argues queer theory –, the notion of 'bisexuality' itself is getting destroyed.

Also, I argue that these processes of negotiation are not confined to bisexuality: similar strategies of identity-formation and self-differentiation work in other sexualities as well (see Renkin 2007, 23). I did not only claim that bisexuality is not an exceptional and discrete phenomenon – I also stressed that any sexuality can be hardly understood without the

examination of others, precisely because they overlap and interact. Thus, the ambiguity of bisexuality, I have argued, is important to give more attention to than in previous literature; with its help we can better grasp how homo- and heterosexualities are constructed: in complex re-negotiations with their environments, as it happens also in the process of telling personal stories (see Plummer 1995, esp. 34).

Throughout this thesis I showed how people give their sexuality coherence in relation to past, present, and future. My material would be worth analyzing with special regard to course of life as interpreted in terms of im/maturity and also in terms of free choice versus determination (which is also connected to post-socialist discourses). Moreover, it would be of great scholarly impact to continue this research longitudinally: even a few years can bring emphatic changes in conceptions of life and sexuality (Diamond 2006) that would be worth examining. Although there is relatively much research on how bisexuality is seen in homosexual communities (Hemmings 2002, Borgos 2007, Takács 2004), it can be completed, e.g. with focusing on heterosexual discourses as well. Further research could also compare and contrast Hungary with other post-socialist countries, then also with 'Western' or even 'Third-World' regions to detect the national specificities versus regional commonalities and to highlight the socially-historically-culturally constructed character of bisexuality. I myself expect more forthcoming research on bisexualities from diverse aspects – since bisexuality is certainly something that is hard to tell in a word.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interviewees

Bob 19, m. university studies pending

Dávid 36, m. secondary school teacher

Emese 36, f. supply assistant

Éva 25, f. musician; friend of Kati`s and Tekla`s

Hanna 32, f. administrator; Márk`s wife and Vera`s ex-girlfriend

István 40, m. electrician, university studies in process; knows Dávid

Kati 22, f. university student; friend of Éva`s and Tekla`s

Márk 35, m. product manager; Hanna`s husband

Nana 23, f. university student

Péter 31, m. social worker

Tekla 22, f. university student; friend of Éva and Kati

Vera 36, f. language teacher; Hanna`s ex-girlfriend

Viktor 23, artist; knows Kati and Tekla

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

I try to pose questions in quite a vague form so that it largely depends on the interviewee what aspects she/he emphasizes or understands by them.

Introduction: - My research is focused on people who feel attracted both to men and women so in these interviews I hope I can get a picture of their sexualities, how they feel about them.

(Olyan emberekről kutatok, akik nők és férfiak iránt is vonzódnak. Remélem, hogy az interjúk segítségével képet kapok a szexualitásukról, hogy hogyan éreznek ezzel kapcsolatban.)

Initial question: - Could you please tell me how your sexuality was formed in your life?

(Elmondanád, hogyan alakult az életed során a szexualitásod?)

Definitions of sexualities: If not stated, I ask what they think of themselves at present:

-What do you think you are now in terms of sexuality?

(Minek tartod magad most a szexualitás szempontjából?)

In many cases where the person does not take her/himself as bisexual, a definition of 'genuine' bisexuality is implied which I would clarify:

- Who do you think the 'real' bisexual is? What makes one a bisexual?

(*Szerinted ki az igazi biszexuális? Mi tesz valakit biszexuálissá?)*

If it is not clear what kind of sexuality she/he has with/towards certain persons of a certain gender (kissing, fantasies, petting, intercourse, etc.) and she/he seems willing to tell, I would ask him/her to see the behavioural patterns:

- What kind of sexual experiences do you have with men and women? What do you wish to do with men and women?

(Milyen szexuális tapasztalataid vannak férfiakkal és nőkkel? Mit szeretnél csinálni férfiakkal és nőkkel?)

- To what extent do you think sex differs when you are with women or men?

(Szerinted mennyire különbözik a szex, ha nővel, illetve ha férfival vagy?)

- To what extent do you think relationship differs when you are with women or men?

(Szerinted mennyire különbözik a kapcsolat, ha nővel, illetve ha férfival vagy?)

If the person had already talked about certain relationships, my latter two questions would be formed in more concrete form. Then I will pose the following questions, but their order would be defined by the topics emerged during the main narrative or the replies until told.

Environments: - How do you relate to the LGBT movement? How much are you in?

(Hogy viszonyulsz a melegmozgalomhoz? Mennyire vagy benne?)

If specification of my question is needed, I ask here if they have homosexual friends, if they go to lesbian/gay places and communities, or to programs of the Hungarian LGBT Festival.

- Do you know [other] bisexuals?

(Ismersz [más] biszexuálisokat?)

- Have you talked to someone about your attractions towards wo/men? What reactions did you experience?

(Beszéltél valakinek a nők/férfiak iránti vonzalmadról? Milyen reakciókat tapasztaltál?)

Here it is important to touch family, friends, and colleagues. Also, the actual partners:

- Does your partner / Do your partners usually know about this?

(Tud a párod általában erről?)

- Have you ever had difficulties owing to your attraction toward both men and women? Have you ever experienced prejudice or discrimination?

(Okozott valamilyen nehézséget az, hogy férfiak és nők iránt is vonzódsz? Tapasztaltál előítéletességet vagy diszkriminációt?)

- Have you ever thought of getting married, registered [in partnership], or having children?

(Gondoltál már arra, hogy megházasodj, vagy regisztrálj [élettársként], vagy hogy gyereked legyen?)

Final questions: - How can you see your future in terms of sexuality?

(Milyennek tudod elképzelni a jövődet a szexualitás szempontjából?)

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

(Van még valami, amit szeretnél elmondani?)

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