

**Straight Women in Budapest Gay Male Community: Identity
Games, Community Dynamics, and Homosociality**

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Abstract

This thesis examines Budapest straight women and gay men's friendships using Sedgwick's theory on homosociality. I argue that straight women and gay men are in a similar position in the gender asymmetry triangle, and despite their gender differences, this makes them forming friendships that are challenging heterosexual norms. During the process of interactions and friendship, gay men's identity is being reinforced, while several straight women do try to escape the heterosexual culture by forming a "way of life".

Straight women and gay men share a life-world, which is differently perceived by the men and women. During the analysis of the participant observations and the interviews I conducted at Budapest gay and private spaces, I have pointed out to the fact straight women are ambiguous members of the gay community and they actively contribute to the community dynamics of the gay male community.

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1. INTRODUCTION

It is 11:30 p.m. on a Saturday evening. Club Alterego, one of the most frequented gay bars in Budapest, is crowded mostly with gay men. The view of men dancing with each other, chatting with others, sharing pálinka with their buddies or their lovers welcomes those, who just enter the narrow and dark underground place. If I look at it more closely, I realize some women in the mass; they seem to be having a fun time with their gay male friends. One of them bursts out in laughter because of a just cracked joke, while another woman in the other corner is having her shoulders massaged by a man whose hands are sometimes wandering “too” down.

It is not uncommon that gay places are being visited by straight women, moreover, several women claim their best friend is a gay men, whom with they spend a lot of time together. These women often contribute to the gay male community in several ways, for example, they help their gay friends call other men’s attention on them, they help ease internal group conflicts as they are being perceived “neutral” due to their different gender identity. In many cases, however, these women are being used by gay men to achieve their goals, such as “more experienced” women introduce young gay men to the community, several women are considered as means to get other gay men’s attention. Despite these, straight women tend to enjoy themselves within the gay community as they can “play sexy” with their gay male friends, who touch the women in intimate body parts where usually not every straight men or even women are allowed to do so. The members of straight female–gay male friendships usually consider their relationship based on equality as they tend to emphasize their shared similarity: it is sexual interest in men, and in many cases their *symbolic* femininity, despite the fact several of these people get involved in such friendships due to different motivations these people have.

What are the motivations of these straight women to have gay male friends? What are their gay friends' motivations? How do these relationships affect the gay male community and/or the heterosexual culture, if they do affect them? Are these friendships challenging heteronormativity, heteronormative identity performances? How these people's identities are perceived through these interactions?

In my thesis I discuss the topic of straight women and gay men's friendships in Budapest, Hungary. As Borgos (2007) and Renkin (2007) point out, after the political/economic transition in 1989, Hungarian LGBT identities have emerged from previous silence and secret since, and these identities have become fixed, stable ones in order to claim political recognition in the postsocialist system. My research shows that while gay men, who have straight female friends, consider their relationship as such that reinforces their gay male identity. At the same time, many of the straight women challenge heterosexual norms.

Although this thesis does not aim to analyze whether or how the former state socialist system has effects on current social life in Hungary, it is worth at least to mention that straight women's intention to become members of the gay community may be due to the special public/private distinction of the socialist era. During state socialism, the so called secondary economy was very alive (people sold privately manufactured or grown goods to each other, which was against any socialist ideas). Everybody knew yet not talked about it, therefore people resisted the system (Rév 1987). According to Gal and Kligman (2000), everyone "implicitly knew [that] the 'we' of the 'private' and the 'they' of the public were often the very same individuals ... Instead of any clear-cut 'us' versus 'them' or 'private' versus 'public', there was a ubiquitous self-embedding or interweaving of these categories" (p. 51), and this distinction was made in everyday interpersonal interactions. In this system, women could occupy some positions in the public sphere as they

were supported to take up professional jobs, moreover, due to this interweaving distinction, they had a prominent role in the secondary market as they participated in the production process of goods. However, after the fall of the socialist system, the public and the private sharply have divided; women – unlike men – lost their jobs, therefore they were relegated back to the private sphere. Traditional gender norms were reinforced. It may be possible that straight women looking for gay men's company try to regain the recognition they by escaping to the homosexual male community, which is more or less different from the heterosexual social order.

This thesis consists of four chapters. In Chapter 2, I discuss relevant theories and provide a literature review on the key aspects of my analysis: identity formation, community and friendship as identity making factors, homosociality, gay imagination and life-worlds. After the theoretical chapter, I briefly discuss the methodology I used in this research (participant observation and interviews), as well as the difficulties I faced during my research. I provide the analysis of my findings in Chapter 3.1 and Chapter 3.2. Chapter 3.1 focuses on how identity games, which occur during straight female-gay male interactions, are being perceived by the straight women, and this section argues that the sexual and the non-sexual intimacy gay men and straight women share have a transgressing effect on heteronormativity and homosociality. In Chapter 3.2, I analyze how straight women's presence in the gay community contribute to group dynamics, and I will show how the triangle of homosociality is being altered by their interactions within the Budapest gay male community.

2. FRIENDSHIP, SEXUAL/GENDER IDENTITY, COMMUNITY, HOMOSOCIALITY, AND SPACE: THEORIES

In this chapter I discuss relevant theories that provide the analytical framework for my thesis.

First of all, I reflect on several anthropological concepts of friendship, then I will call attention to theories that suggest friendships are being constructed through the social discourse, and this process affect the formation of individuals' and communities' identities. Discussing identity and norm transgressions, I will also introduce the concept of homosociality – a structure of identity and attitude formations that regulate sexuality and gender identities.

2.1 “FRIENDSHIP AS A WAY OF LIFE?” – FRIENDSHIP AS IDENTITY AND LIFEWORLD-MAKING

2.1.1 Friendship and Gender/Sexual Identity

In my thesis I examine straight female–gay male friendships in Budapest, hence to understand how friendship as a social interaction and construction affects relationships and communities in our globalized, post-modern, capitalist world, it is important to discuss Giddens' (1999) concept of “pure relationship” and its critiques. He argues friendship is a relationship between individuals, who are equal to each other, in their reciprocal obligations as well. He claims people in these pure relationships are free to choose each other's company as their relationship remains unaffected by any social restrictions, unlike kinship or traditional social institutions such as

marriage. As he theorized, these friendships lack any imbalance and asymmetry of power between the members of these relationships, regardless of the gender identity of its members. However, as several have pointed out (Bisset and Oldenburg 1982; Obeid 2010; Gillian 2010), despite friendships are more democratic as social hierarchies are less rigid in the post-modern West, they are not free of rules of sociality (Obeid 2010), but rather their “situated-ness” in the actual social system is significant. According to Evans (2010), due to each situation’s “own structural, spatial and temporal constraints, [in each situation] an economy of value is being constituted through particular kinds of exchange and physical competencies in relation to which each person must make sense of their position vis-à-vis others”(p. 188). To illustrate this claim, Evans uses the example of schoolboys living in London. She explains young males choose their friends according to their aims of which community they want to belong, so by being in friendship with certain persons they want to take up a certain gender, race, and class identity. To paraphrase it in other words, one’s (gender) identity is constantly being defined by how one chooses one’s friends, and one’s situated-ness in a particular society or community gives (only) certain possibilities of choice to whom and why should one be friend with. Hence, friendship is an “intersection of self and society” (Nardi 1999 p. 13) or community, as well as a “social process, embedded in a society’s institutions, cultural norms, and structural opportunities” (Nardi 1999 p. 2).

Using these concepts, I suggest that in the case of Budapest straight female–gay male relationships, each member has her/his own particular aim, interest, even strategy for committing themselves to their friendship. By having these aims, they try to define their identities through their interactions with each other, but in different ways for the women and the men.

As I will show, neither these women nor these men tend to apply identity categories for themselves that define or at least refer to their relationship itself (e.g. “fag-hag” in the case of women, which term is often yet differently used in the U.S.), rather they want to become members of the Budapest gay (male) community. While this sense of community is being perceived as liberatory, free from heterosexual, masculine hegemonic norms by the women, while gay men intend to find help to make themselves “fit” into the gay community – the community, which has its own restrains, rules, and inequalities. Moreover, other gay men reported that by having a female friend and being gay, they were to “make women happier” by letting them transgress heterosexual norms. In other words, gay men seek to take up a gay male identity according to a certain identity category, while these women would not like to live up to their traditional, presupposed female identity, due to different reasons which I will point out to discussing my fieldnotes.

During my research I have found 3 types of Budapest straight women who like to spend time with gay male friends. (1) Many of these women create a relatively fluid identity by feeling not part of the heterosexual world anymore (e.g. they are desexualized by the mainstream society), yet acknowledging they are neither gay. (2) Other female respondents reported they only occasionally “let themselves free”. As I will show later, those women who only occasionally hang out with gay men, have two types regarding their relation to the gay community: (2a) they are transgressing heterosexual norms even if it is temporal or (2b) they do not consider any change in their relation to their “straight womanness”.

Except for the last case (2b), these women challenge their gender identity and in several case, try to challenge their gay friends’ sexual identity as they many times feel sexual attraction to them. The Butlerian (2004) idea of queering identity is at stake at the case of the “(1) women”.

According to Butler, the “being original” sense of an identity falsely comes first to make sense, and we rely on the idea of “copy” which is the opposite of the original. But rather these terms co-emerge thus reinforce each other in a process, since the original needs the copy, but the copy can never be the original (e.g. masculine men are regarded as natural men, but they copy their masculinity from other copied masculinities). She further suggests that undoing an identity category may be possible when one breaks with one’s prescribed attitudes and does identity differently, not according to heterosexual norms. However, these women do not tend to identify themselves with a constructed identity category, rather they claim they are “straight but different”. “2a” women do challenge their identity only occasionally; in situations where the norms of straight female identity – attitudes that are supposed to constitute a “good woman” is “left behind” (“they are too sexual”, though in environment where it cannot be taken seriously). However, their identity is not changed, only temporarily challenged. Therefore I will argue their identity is varying, but unlike Warnke (2007) concept of each individual’s multiple, situationally emerging different identities (e.g. one can be a mother while in another situation a worker), they do not form a specific, alternative identity, rather they have variant *attitudes (instead of identity)*, which emerge only by interacting with their gay friends, when their “original identity” is left behind.

Are these friendships indeed egalitarian? What is it that makes them different from other friendships? According to Foucault’s (1997) ideology or (or sort of utopia) of the “friendship as a way of life”, being homosexual requires a certain group consciousness that goes beyond individuality (p. 142-143), and as such, it constructs a “way of life”. This special gay way of life may be important to transgress and change existing social norms and the social discourse, because it would have a potential for creating “the instruments for polymorphic, varied, and

individually modulated relationships” (p. 139) , whose norms were being defined not by the large society but by only those individuals who participate in these relationships, friendships. He also emphasizes that friendship is important to gay men, because due to lacking traditional norms of courtesy or sexual partnerships, gay men have friendships which they creatively build up – or at least not in the same way as in the heterosexual world. Does this mean that, if gay men are assumed to be liberatory, gay men can involve (straight) women in their friendships? Would these cross-sex and cross-sexual friendships will indeed be the ideal gay way of life?

I assume this leads us back to the concept of “pure relationship”. I will argue that straight female-gay male relationships are egalitarian if we examine the people who form these friendships.

However, if I take into consideration that the friendship as an institution is being formed as a counter-culture to the straight world, I come to a conclusion that gay men and straight women in these friendships are not independent of, rather the contrary, are subject to the external, heterosexual, hegemonic social system. The system makes the possibility for straight women to hang out with their gay male friends, because these women are either rejected thus relegated by the mainstream society to the gay community, or other women just for the seek of new experiences by temporarily, not permanently transgressing heterosexual norms (Holt and Griffin 2003). Their interactions and friendships presupposes a dialogue between them and the heterosexual society, as these relations are being constructed as a counter-community. As several have argued (Foucault 1988; Klein 2005), resistance to the system may be not possible – just like undoing a specific identity -, because the system can shift its powers as the result of resistances. Therefore there is at least one attribute the straight women permanently or temporarily share with those women who are permanently part of the gay male community: they are part of the social discourse, even if they more or less successfully try to transgress it.

2.1.2 Friendship in the Imagined Gay Community

As I have mentioned earlier, the straight women and the gay men I examined during my research both expressed their intention to belong to the gay male community. Thus it is inevitable to discuss how gay communities are perceived. In doing so, I will introduce the term “life-world”. In this subsection I will also point out the inequalities within the gay community.

2.1.2.1 *Life-world and Imagination*

The LGBT community is considered to be heterogeneous, because it is divided into different subgroups and different interests. I will argue in my analysis that even the members of one community or subgroup can have different attitudes, relations to and imaginations about the same community. Gonzalez (2009), using Tönnies’ (1887) theory, argues “the concept of *one* LGBT community may be problematic or unrealistic” (p. 8. emphasis in original), as it is not being “organized around common values and social cohesion within a shared geographical cohesion” (p. 8), rather can be characterized as an “imagined community”. Gonzalez explains Anderson’s (1983) term in relation to LGBT people as “many individuals who cannot find their own space within heteronormative society [such as LGBT people] do require some kind of emotional union within a larger group as part of their identity. (p. 9)” These sentences support the idea that any gay community is being constructed through a mutual, mental imagination that each member shares, even if the members are not bounded to a certain spatial reality (Weston 1998).

The term life-world can be explained as “an environment that cannot be defined but that regroups people through their lived experiences and opinions” (Gonzalez 2009 p. 5) and as a term that defines “how persons make sense of the trajectory of their lives by appropriating the social

symbols available at specific points in time and space” (Fee 1996 p. 16). In my understanding, a life-world is also mentally created by an individual during the individual’s social interaction with others, including with those who the individual claims to be friend with. The difference between imagination and life-world is that while imagination presupposes a community that is bounded together by a shared idealistic conceptualization of their community, the life-world is not necessarily idealistic and is being constructed through actual social interactions. However, the mental conceptualization of a particular life-world is both subjective and intersubjective.

Therefore I assume the process of conceptualization depends on the particular social and spatial status of the individual, and since it is a mental process, it implies there can be different mentally constructed life-worlds for different groups of people even within the same community (in the LGBT or in the gay male community). I will show that straight women who seek the company of gay men in Budapest have different understandings, imaginations of the very same gay male society varying according to these women’s agency in the gay male community – for instance, many claim they can achieve “sexual liberty”, many seek “closer, more intimate friendships”. However, at the same time, gay men tend to see the gay community as not necessary liberation, rather they try to “find” and “live off” their “self” within it. They find this act painful many times due to group tensions based on inequalities and several gay men’s exclusion from the community. Hence, while gay men and straight women, who are friends of each other, tend to share the same life-world, they have different imaginations about their relationship.

2.1.2.2 Inequality within the Gay Community

Since the gay male community itself is being fragmented, it is a question how different individuals can exist and manage within it. According to Betsky’s (1997) theory on the queer

space – which is, I believe, only an utopia – , a queer space is where the barriers of the body and any materiality disappear; it is a space that is “appropriating, subverting, mirroring, and choreographing the orders of everyday life in new and liberating ways” (p. 26). On the contrary, empirical research shows that gay male spaces are far from being queer. Queer spaces, according to Betsky, are closed public places where queer people can socialize together without being threatened by heterosexual oppression. However, in fact, gay male communities are considered to reinforce the inequalities of its members based on their age, bodily, and class differences (Bérubé 2011; Durgadas 1998), and it is rich in interpersonal tensions that occur due to sexual interests or disinterests among gay men (Nardi 1999). Bersani (1987) views this as a problem that occurs due to the phenomenon that U.S. gay men do not challenge inegalitarian heterosexual norms. According to him gay spaces may seem to be egalitarian at first where gay men from all backgrounds can gather, however, bodily appearances do matter, and usually the masculine bodies are privileged.

In my analysis, I will show how straight women cope with inner gay male community tensions; moreover, I will point out this kind of tensions make easier for women to get involved with the gay community, because their gay friends often report they are needed to ease (however successfully or not) these group frictions by their being female.

2.1.3. Woman Between Men: Homosociality

I have briefly pointed out to the Foucaudian view in *Chapter 2.1.1*, according to which, the phenomena of several straight women and gay men looking for each other’s company is a product of the social system. Sedgwick (1985) elaborates a theory on how women’s femininity and men’s masculinity being constructed by the social system. She points out that the bond

between any men supposes a thin line between male hetero- and homosexuality, and his thin line has to be not overcome by a man cognitively controlling the symbolical system associated with sexuality (p. 51). She states “men's bonds with women are meant to be in a subordinate, complementary, and instrumental relation to bonds with other men” (p. 51).

According to Sedgwick's explanation, there is an asymmetry between the two genders, due to “erotic triangles”. An erotic triangle consists of one woman and two men, who latter are fighting each other in order to gain the woman's sexual attention. “[T]he choice of the beloved is determined in the first place, not by the qualities of the beloved, but by the beloved's already being the choice of the person who has been chosen as a rival” (p. 21). Hence, when the woman chooses one of the men, the other man ultimately become effeminized and is considered as passive and subjected to the chosen man. Therefore male homosocial bonds and male masculinity always require women, however, “the male path through heterosexuality to homosocial satisfaction is a slippery and threatened one – although for most men, in at least most cultures, compulsory” (p. 50). At the same time, women are necessarily, unavoidably become effeminized thus they are always the victims of masculine hegemony.

On the other hand, Sedgwick argues, male heterosexuality is being compromised by those women who have already chosen a man, because women are ambiguous in constantly offering the possibility of adultery or cheating on, in which case her man would be considered as feminine as well. Hence, I assume heterosexual women can have two possible effects on men in the gender/sexuality matrix: they either reinforce a man's masculinity or his femininity (which is a failure). Due to the heterosexual matrix, the perception of masculinity is automatically connected to heterosexual manliness, and femininity to homosexual manliness in the case of gay men (Gatens 1996 [1983]), thus whether gay men are feminine or masculine, they are perceived as

passive, penetrated people. Therefore I suggest heterosexual women and gay men are on a similar page for the “straight eye”.

However, despite the fact modern societies are still based on heterosexual, masculine hegemony, there is a slight yet evolving change in the relations between/among genders. To address this, Hammarén and Johansson (2014) make a distinction between *vertical and horizontal homosociality*. The authors argue the homosociality Sedgwick writes about is vertical, because it presupposes hierarchy among the actors. However, due to changing gender relations, there are relationships now not only between women, but between men, and between men and women, which are based on closeness and intimacy, and which are nonprofitable. According to them, aspects of both homosocialities might be present in each relationship, because these two intervene each other.

Based on this concept, I shall argue that since gay men and straight women are in similar yet not exactly the same position according to the heterosexual matrix (gay men are failed to be manly, women cannot even be manly), gay men and straight women have more possibilities, legitimations to form “horizontal relationships”. However, due to gay men’s and straight women’s gender differences, they perceive it differently. I will also argue that straight women’s and gay men’s friendships (horizontality) provide possibility to affect the gender asymmetry in ways which may contribute to making the heterosexual and the homosexual life-worlds meet and intersect each other. Thus it might make the gender order less rigid – at least in several people’s lives, life-worlds. I argue it is similar to Giddens’s concept of the pure-relationship, though it is not free of social influences.

2.2. STRAIGHT WOMEN AND GAY MEN'S FRIENDSHIPS: LITERATURE REVIEW

The friendship between straight women and gay men has not been extensively researched yet (neither friendships between straight and gay men). There are two aspects in which these research studies deal with this issue: 1) one that examines gay male activities, communities and friendships which include straight women as well; 2) examines cross-sex and cross-sexual friendships in order to analyze their “queering” impact on identity formation and on the heterosexual world. In this following section, I will briefly discuss the existing literature on this specific topic in order to provide some aspects and to help orient and distinguish my own research from them.

2.2.1 *Fag-hags and Straight Women in the Gay Community*

The term “fag-hag” is commonly being used in the U.S. to refer to straight women who often spend their time with their gay male friends, although it has multiple, mainly negative connotations (e.g. they are ugly women). In Hungary, there is no any special term (identity category) for these women, but to understand the roles, functions of these women and that how they affect the gay community itself, it is important to discuss how they are perceived by the gay male community (in the U.S.). According to Moon's study (1995), straight women are regarded as either welcomed members thus one of the constitutive elements of gay communities, while many gay men feel threatened by their presence implying hanging out with women is against their male homosexual identity (see also Holt and Griffin 2003). However, Moon's those gay male interviewees, who have no objection to be friends with a woman, do not like to use the word “fag-hag” to refer to their female friends, and “it is not uncommon for women to be fully

accepted as members of a particular gay community” (p. 499). Moreover, as Moon further argues, including women in the gay male community “can often been seen as rejecting not only the gay/straight dichotomy, but also refusing to participate in a sexist rejection of women” (p. 500). According to this study, those gay men who like to have female friends, does not feel their gay identity per se is in danger, but other gay men can think of them as not yet full members of the community.

On the other hand, Moon’s interviews with straight women show many of them seek their gay male friends’ company, because they want to get rid of the sexually charged heterosexual male gaze, or they are being desexualized in the heterosexual world hence they fail on the demands of heterosexuality (e.g. they are considered not to sexually appealing). Several gay men reported they thought only young gay men liked the company of females – those, who had not yet been fully become the part of the gay community and still have ambiguities about or objections towards their gay male identity.

Analyzing gay male friendships in San Francisco, Nardi (1999) also calls attention to similar identity tensions straight and lesbian women may cause in gay male groups. His quantitative data on the gender and sexual identity of gay men’s friends show gay men are most likely to choose straight women’s company over lesbians, and straight women. 79.3% of the total 161 gay male respondents had gay male best friends, 9.7% of them had a straight female, 4.8% a heterosexual male, 2.8% a lesbian, 2.1% a bisexual male, and 1.4% a bisexual female as their best friend (p. 107, Table 5.1). In his another analysis, he found that only 2.1% of gay men have mostly only female close friends, and 1.9% casual female friends. At the same time, 60.9% of the gay men have two or fewer close female friends, while 21.3% have two or less casual female friends (p. 108 Table 5.3). These data tells that while relatively few gay men had best and close female

friends, more than half of the respondents had some casual female friends. Hence, I assume most gay men may tend to reinforce male sexism towards straight women as Moon suggests, but those who do not, they may challenge the existing gender order.

According to a recent study on whether straight people are “queered” in Budapest gay bars (Pacziga 2007), gender identity boundaries do remain intact in gay paces where straight women interact with gay men. Pacziga points out to the phenomenon that while most straight women intend to get closer to gay men sexually – and they do so, indeed –, kissing with their gay male friends, competing with other man on how many bisexual or gay men they can seduce, these acts do not seem sexual for the gay man as they find these intimate interactions only playful or even neutral, not so much sexual.

Pacziga, examining only interactions instead of friendships, comes to the conclusion that even if some women and men transgress sexual boundaries in Budapest gay bars, “no other structures in society are attacked, that is, heteronormativity is not interrogated” (p. 22). Since in my research I focus on not only interactions that occur in a specific space, but mainly on gay men and straight women who are devoted to their friendships (1 and 2a women), as well as on friendships in which straight people become somewhat identified with the gay culture (they claim they are not part of the heterosexual culture yet they are neither gay – see the same in Fee 1996), I will argue that if not the entire heterosexual culture, but at least some heterosexuals’ life-world changes. I will also show that these women do have effects on the group dynamics of the gay male community, because tensions and inequalities (mostly sexual, bodily and class based) among gay men can be eased by these women – whether gay men other than their friends feel their gay male identity challenged or not. I am also interested in examining what motivations these women and men

have to spend time together, moreover, I conducted a research not only in (mostly) gay spaces such as bars or cafes, but in other spaces, such as homes, streets, and other public places as well.

3. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH

To conduct my field research, I was looking for straight women and gay men, who live in Budapest and claim they not only have gay male (in the case of straight women) or straight female (in the case of gay men) friends, but they prefer or at least like very much to do so. 12 straight women and 13 gay men voluntarily participated in my research, during which I was able to observe their social interactions in both public and private places. We mostly visited gay bars, parties, and cafés (Alterego, Tape, Garcons, Szkafander, Why Not), but I managed to conduct my research at homes, and at a doctor's office.

During my field research I observed interactions that occurred not only between/among the observed people, but they got into conversations and other social acts with other people. I observed the same interviewees several times during the research period, while in the meantime I conducted personal, semi-structured interviews (in Hungarian language) with these 12 straight women and 13 gay men in order to get a more detailed picture on how they perceive their friendships and interactions. Many of my interviewees have more than one gay male/straight female friends, but in only Zsuzsi, Márton, and András' case were more than two people willing to be interviewed. The pairs are Kati-Gábor, Anna-Bálint, Lilla-Péter, Gréta-Dávid, Évi-Zsolt, Betti-József, Szilvi-Attila, Móni-Sándor, Bea-Kornél, Edit-László, Mariann-Dániel. People other than these 25 did not know about my research when I was doing my field research, but I provide them anonymity in my analysis. The observed people I encountered in private places were informed about my project, they did not have any objection to be observed.

Since people knew each other in private places, I got to know the sexual orientation and gender identity of the participants other than the pairs I was observing in more details. On the other hand,

in public spaces, where strangers were interacting with my observed people, I made only assumptions about the sexual orientation and gender identity (whether trans* or cis) of those, who approached my observed people, however, based on their interests and motivations (e.g. “hooking up with men).

In this research I am interested in analyzing how straight women’s presence in the gay community affects group dynamics. However, partly because of my female identity, I could not research how the “wider” gay community perceive women’s presence in the gay community. Therefore my research does not focus on why other gay men do not have (straight) female friends. Furthermore, I did not deal with gay men’s possible friendships with lesbians and transgender people, because now I was interested whether or how the heterosexual world is affected by these relationships. Although I was s trying to recruit interviewees from diverse backgrounds (age, class, ethnicity) in order to get a more intersectional picture, I could find mainly white middle-class and young people with a few exceptions.

All of my respondents are white, cis-gender, and are from Hungary. Nine of the straight women are middle-class; they are university students and office workers; one is an upper-class company manager; and two are under-class, unemployed and public worker. Nineteen of these women are aged 20-35, the rest are in their 40’s and 50’s. As for the men, eight are middle-class, university students and office worker; three are upper-class, a company CEO and NGO workers; two are white under-class and unemployed. Twelve of them are aged 20-35, the one is in his 50’s. I do not use their real name in my analysis. Eight of all these observed men and women are my personal acquaintances whom I got to know before my research, though none of them are close to me.

The research took place in Budapest, Hungary from January to May, 2014.

3.1 IDENTITY GAMES

In this section I will analyze how women participating in straight female–gay male interactions make sense of their identity and relation to gay men. I make a distinction between straight women’s sexual and non-sexual interactions or motivations in the first and the second sections. I found these two kind of interactions happen most of the time, while in several different ways in each two cases. I will also discuss whether these interactions constitute a “way of life” that Foucault (1997) idealized.

During my research I found 3 types of Budapest straight women who like to spend their time with gay male friends. (1) Those, who have a fluid identity by feeling not part of the heterosexual world anymore yet acknowledging they are neither gay (5 women), (2) those, who only occasionally “let themselves free”. I have separated this latter category into two types: (2a) they are transgressing heterosexual norms even if it is temporal (5 women) or (2b) they do not consider any change in their relation to their “straight womanness” (2 women).

3.1.1 *Playing Sexy*

In my sample of 12 straight women, 10 (type 1 and 2a) women reported one of their most important motivation to have gay male friends was that they can transgress norms related to sexual interaction with men. Indeed, I came across with direct sexual attitudes in almost every cases I observed in bars and parties.

“I feel free with Gábor... We are somewhat similar, he likes men too. Uhm, yet there is a vibration between us. You know, he is still a man. It is good that I have a friend,

whom we can touch each other like the two of us were women, yet there is something better in that he is actually a man... You know, I kind of interested in touching his chest, his arms, and I like it when he does to same to me. I think we both know we *can* do these things.” (Kati, 23, student)

“I am sooo myself when I am with Sanyi and Ádám... I don’t have to be afraid of being seen as a slut, yet we can play with each other... I don’t have to be afraid of any negative comments, my friend surely won’t gossip about my being easy with guys. He is my best ‘man girl friend’. We just celebrate we are both sexy! We are having fun.” (Móni, 25, self-employed)

These women imply that their sexual closeness to their gay male friends is liberating for them in a way that they can freely express attraction towards men without being stigmatized as overly sexual women. As Sedgwick (1985) argued, the heterosexual female in the gender triangle is always considered to be ambiguous and suspicious, because men cannot know for sure if she is cheating on them or she is sexually attracted to other men. If so, the man she chooses over the other will gain masculine identity, while the other loses it along with the control over his woman. However, I argue, in these two cited cases the heterosexual women see gay men as men who have feminine sides as well (“like the two of us were women”, “man girl friend”), therefore gay men’s lost masculinity can make the women feel they are not being controlled by these men, rather their shared symbolic femininity creates a similar social status for them in the gender triangle.

Examining the following fieldnotes that I took at a Tape party, I discuss that these women transgress heterosexual gender norms not only with their gay friends, but with others, stranger gay men as well in gay in (male dominated) public places:

“It is late at night at the open roof bar; several men are standing and chatting with other men at the bar counter. In the meantime, Anna (31) and his friend, Bálint (28) are

dancing in the crowd in a group of 4 other men. Bálint does know all of them, Anna is familiar with only 2 of the other men. While they are dancing, one of these men whom Anna does not know is making moves towards her, he is getting closer and closer. Firstly, he throws a kiss on her forehead, then when he sees Anna is smiling at him, he grabs her hip, twist his arms around it, and starts dancing with her in a very intimate proximity. They continue to do so for about 5 minutes, then the guy turns away from her and starts dancing with an man.”

“When I’m out in a [straight] place, I usually do not hook up with some [heterosexual] guys. I’m not that kind of girl. Uhm, I’m not a girl who is popular with men. I may be too old for them, I may be too fat for them, or maybe they just don’t like something other in me. But here [at the gay party] I feel I am getting some attention. You know, I’m not perfect...” (Anna, 31, accountant)

“It was so good to feel his [her gay male friend’s] support [clapped his hands and initiated erotic movements] while we were dancing... I’m usually shy at places like this, but I feel I don’t have to be ashamed of him or anybody else, you can be anyone here. I feel like I were watched by others at straight parties. You know, if you are dancing stupidly, you are a loser. Here you cannot be a loser, because no one expects you to be the best, the nicest. You never disappoint in your gay friends, they accept, moreover, even like you all the time.” (Szilvi, 24, student)

Based on the fieldnotes and Anna’s and Szilvi’s words, I suggest that women like Anna and Szilvi mentally construct a life-world in which they have the possibility for enjoy the acts that are not likely to happen in heterosexual spaces because of these women’s bodily appearances. A life-world (Fee 1996, Gonzalez 2009) is an understanding of the symbols that certain people and communities are surrounded with, and what is constructed individually yet based on mutual, perceived social interactions. I argue that these women make sense of the gay community as it was a counter-culture to the heterosexual world, where sexist, male hegemonic exclusions disappear. They enjoy interactions that hare believed and perhaps perceived to happen with only

“perfect women”, not with them. Therefore they feel they regain the recognition they have lost in the heterosexual world by not being attractive enough to heterosexual men – even to strangers whom she never saw before. Moreover, as Szilvi’s case shows, she feels right when she does not have to comply with perfectionist norms of dancing properly. However, despite they acknowledge that gay men have men as sexual partners, these women do not tend to be disappointed; rather they perceive their interactions as they were encouraging or as they were providing hope for meeting straight men, who are similarly attracted to them just as much as gay men imitate it.

“I feel happy about hanging out with my gay friends. I feel if this is happening to me [sexual contact], it can happen to me anytime, anywhere else”. (Anna)

“It happened to me once that I fall in love one of my gay friends. I was in love with him for four years, yet he didn’t know about it. I think he didn’t even had a clue about my feelings for him. I always wanted to go out with him, I wanted him to be around me. We did similar things [sexual bodily contacts], but of course, he never really meant that. But it was OK, I learned I can be loved by men.” (Gréta, 28, librarian)

These excerpts indicate that straight female-gay male interactions can have positive effects on straight women’s self-esteem and they may use these experiences in encountering potential heterosexual male partners. However, there are several women who do not intend to “extend” their experiences to the heterosexual world, but rather they want to remain in the gay community, where they do not have to face heterosexuality.

“I hate men... I used to have two husbands; one of them cheated on me and robbed me, the other one hit me. All [straight men] are pigs. I don’t expect from my gay friends to be like this. They are the ones [men] who should not hurt me. They are normal [meaning they act as they are supposed to]. Though I am not a normal woman. Yet a curious one.” (Évi, 52, unemployed)

Based on this statement, I argue that the homosexual male culture provide a “shelter” for Évi to be away from the dominant and aggressive male culture, moreover, her word “normal” indicates that the masculinity heterosexual men perform is against her identity. With this she refuses to accept the traditional gender roles that are too violent for her. Therefore, using Butler’s (2004) concept of undoing gender and identity, I assume by having gay friends, Évi tries to reconcile her femininity with men, however, since she does know gay men cannot love her sexually, she believes her being a woman has failed. While Gréta and Anna are rejected from the heterosexual culture (they are “not nice enough”), Évi voluntarily escapes from it (she could have decided not to escape it, thus accepted her failed femininity). On the other hand, I argue that they are not free from the heterosexual social discourse (Foucault 1988), rather they position themselves in the gay male community by being in constant dialogue with the heterosexual culture: they want to use their experiences to live a “counter-life” (Évi), or they want to gain self-consciousness that they could otherwise not receive thus not live up in the heterosexual society (Anna, Gréta, Szilvi).

Bodily interactions that can be interpreted as sexual acts happen not only in the public sphere, but in places and at times when straight women and gay men are at home in the company of other gay men they know well. Moreover, in one case, the straight woman and the gay man, who participated in the interaction, were not only reinforcing intimacy between each other, but were imitating lesbian sexual moves in order to alienate themselves from them. They draw a line between their friendship and “others”.

It is a Friday night, Lilla (26) and Péter (29) are visiting a private party where seven other gay men were invited. Lilla is the only female in the big and dark room which is decorated with candles. There is a wide bed in the half-lighted. While people are chatting in the other side of the room, Lilla and Péter sit down on the bad. They start

talking to each other (I cannot hear about what), then Péter starts to give a massage to Lilla. Lilla is sitting on the edge of the bed, Péter is sitting behind her; his legs are twisted around Lilla's hips. While Péter is massaging Lilla, his hands occasionally move towards Lilla thighs. When he is 'working on' her shoulders, Péter's hands slip to Lilla's breasts. They do not say a word; Lilla seems to be concentrating on the moment with closed eyes.

"Sometimes I am wondering if he is really gay... I admit he gets me turned on [sexually] when he does things like this. Maybe he is bi? But in the next moment he starts flirting with guys. Anyway, he has an impact on me. On my body (*laughs*)."

(Lilla, 26, IT manager)

"I felt I was a bit horny when I was massaging her, but I am a gay men. I like men. I just like that she likes what I do to her." (Péter, 29, journalist)

I am invited to Edit and László's apartment on a Thursday night; they two share a flat together in downtown Budapest. When I ask them what they do together in their free time, László bursts out in laughter and grabs Edit's arm pulling her to the sofa. "You want to do it again?", asks Edit cheerfully. Then they two take the "scissoring" position of lesbian sex (positioning their legs in V-shape in order to be to rub their reproductive organs against each other), then they start imitating it with clothes on while screaming and laughing. They stops after a minute and László says "we do this like lesbians". "Yeah, and sometimes I even leave off", Edit adds winking her eye. "It is just for fun, we don't have real sex. Just like butch lesbians. But it feels good. We can get closer to each other emotionally this way; I bet she [Lilla] could have no such experience with others]", László goes on saying laughing out loud.

These examples reflect on that gay male-straight female friendships rely on intimacy – intimacy, which can be achieved by imitating sex or engaging in bodily activities that are considered to be sexual, at least by the women. I sense a little disappointment in Lilla's word that her friend is gay, but her meta-communication (she laughs) suggests that she overcomes this feeling.

This kind of intimacy comes hand in hand with the sense of “being bad”, as Lilla reported later; she said she felt she could never engage in such sexually charged activities as the massage I described, because she thought a heterosexual man would immediately take advantage of the situation and would rape her. However, despite she was “turned on”, she did feel safe knowing her friend is gay, thus he is unlikely to want to have sex with her. On the other hand, she questiones her friend’s sexuality (although she did not mention this to Péter). These suggest an ambiguity in the gay male friend’s masculinity and femininity: gay men are considered as feminine therefore “safe”, while considered as attractive thus masculine at the same time. However, as Péter’s words show, not only Lilla experience ambiguity in their gay male friend’s sexuality, but Péter may do so, too. His words “I am a gay man” seems to me serving a self-convincing function: Péter may have expressed his wish to be seen as gay, he did not want his identity to be compromised.

The second case, when László and Edit are “scissoring”, clearly shows again that there are sexual acts between straight women and gay men, however, these are considered to be playful imitations which are not real (even if Edit claimed she actually had orgasms at other times). Similarly to Pacziga’s (2007) findings on the Hungarian gay and straight identities in gay bars, László’s statement “it is just for fun” implies that their act – whether really sexual or not – is a temporal transgression of gay identity in a way that he is imitating sex with a woman instead of a man, yet he acknowledges that it is not real. However, I argue, for the duration of the act gay male identity is not being copied according to Butler’s theory (2004), but when it is over, the gay male identity “comes back”. As the gay man refers to lesbian sex as it is – according to him – not real, he implies that sex is sex only when it involves penetration and a phallus. The act of not engaging in penetrative sex desexualizes the women in front of the gay man (he is considered not

to be attractive to her), while at the same time, she is sexualized in her heterosexuality as their act indicates that she is capable of penetrative, heterosexual sex. Since both straight women and gay men “have access” to penile penetrative thus “real” sex, they are somewhat similar, and this mutual access to penises (other than his in the case of the gay man) – his being gay and her being straight – constitutes mutuality in their relationship.

Therefore, I argue, gay men’s gay identity is being transgressed temporarily and straight women’s heterosexuality is being emphasized in a way that is unusual in a heterosexual environment. Their relationship can be seen as egalitarian, but straight men and lesbian women are excluded from this equality. In Sedgwick’s gender triangle, only straight women can be equal to straight women, but I argue that as gay men’s masculinity is lost symbolically, they can share a similar (maybe not the same) position. Straight women and gay men, who like each other’s company, live in horizontal homosociality (Hammarén and Johansson 2014), which implies that despite their relative freedom to act “unaccordingly”, their acts are embedded in the heterosexual, oppressive social system that Foucault also talks about (1988).

3.1.2 Sexual Harassment

Even if sexual playfulness between straight women and gay men are regarded as a positive act that (seemingly) liberates women in most cases from the heterosexual male gaze and heterosexual norms, I witnessed several interactions in gay bars where women were sexually abused by gay men – either by their friends or other gay men. While these acts are still considered to be “cool” even by the harassed heterosexual women, several of them claimed later gay men crossed a line as they perceived these acts offensive.

On a Saturday night at a Garçons party, which is mostly visited by middle-class gay men aged 18-30, Bea (33) and Kornél (29) are dancing in the crowd. The dance floor is very crowded, it is hard to move. Due to the noise and the light effect, it is hard to hear and see. All of a sudden, Bea realizes that someone deliberately have touched and almost pushed her breasts out of her bra. When she recognizes who did it, after her initial shock, she starts smiling on a young gay men, who is weaving back to her while he is moving towards in the crowd, leaving Bea and Kornél behind. Later she told me she had never seen this man before but she found him “cute”, therefore she did not mind what he did.

One night at a Szakfander party, which is popular among middle-class gay men aged 18-30, Kati and Gábor are dancing near the stage. They are not alone, the guy standing next to them starts to flirt with Gábor by making eye contact with him. Then he approaches Gábor. In the next moment, Kati realizes a thigh between her legs, slipping up to her miniskirt: it is the man’s who was flirting with Gábor. She seems to be surprised and angry, then Gábor bursts out in laughter and says: “Come on, you know he is a faggot [*buzi*]...”.

“I remember once I was dancing with one of my gay friends in Alter [Club Alterego]. I’d been knowing him for more than a year then. Everything was alright, but suddenly, out of the blue, he grabbed me, pulled me to his chest. He lifted up his T-shirt and strongly held my head underneath it, pushing my head against his chest so strongly that I hardly could breath. I wanted to pull my head out of his shirt immediately, but he kept holding me. It was quite creepy... When I finally managed to escape, he was just laughing at me and he licked my neck. I was disgusted. It was way much more that he could have done to me!” (Mariann, 48, unemployed)

These examples illustrate that several gay men tend to regard straight women in gay spaces as women, whom they can touch anywhere and anyhow. I believe it is due to their perception of and experience with straight women, as most straight women do not mind or even feel positively about gay men’s touching them at their intimate body parts. Gábor’s statement “you know he is a faggot” tries to make these happenings less tense by desexualizing gay men’s sexual abuse of

women. When I told these stories to Gréta (28), she told me she frequently experienced similar interactions in gay clubs and parties, but she was not bothered by them, rather she found them fascinating as she could never know “what surprises the night have” for her. She went on to say she found the gay space as an adventure, where she could never know for sure “who is male and who is female, which man is gay, which man is bi [bisexual]”. Since different women might react to these acts differently, I argue that the perception then the reaction to these sudden, unexpected, yet sometimes anticipated acts depends on how particular straight women imagine the gay community, therefore what kind of life-worlds they create mentally. This also depends on the space – these acts are not likely to occur in public places which are less crowded thus bodies cannot confront each other so easily. As I have pointed out in discussing theories, Betsky (1997) argues that a queer space is a closed public space which is free from heterosexual norms. Are these women really free from them or do they have to experience the same or occasionally even more vivid male violence as in the heterosexual world?

I argue that the answer lies in the “gay imagination” Weston (1998) and Gonzalez (2009) argue about, however, I propose, there are different “straight imaginations” of the same gay community as these straight women conceptualize it differently (e.g. one wants not be straight men’s pray, one wants to be in an intimate friendship she could not experience with straight men). These different imaginations bound these different people to the same community, therefore I argue the life-world that different straight women and gay men share, cannot be perceived in the same way by these people either. In other words, a life-world is a socially constructed understanding of the symbolic social reality a group shares, but in this case there are different imaginations, different “sense-makings” of the same group. I believe that is why several

women would consider these sexual acts playful, while others consider them as sexual harassment.

This phenomenon raises the question of whether it is possible to really escape male hegemony. Using the Foucaudian view of power (1988) I argue that it is not possible anyway to be free from the heterosexual social order, although it can be transgressed in the hope the system will shift its power so that these women could feel freer. Even if the acts itself gay men do (touching women on their private body parts) is the very same act as heterosexual men harassing women, the different conceptualization of the act makes a way to transgress the very same oppressing phenomenon. Women, who like this kind of transgressions, choose their friends according to their imagination of encountering the ideal men. According to Evan's (2010) concept of social situatedness of friendships, in each situation individuals choose their companions and social groups based on what or who is available for them in that particular situation – since the gay community offers the possibility for transgression, they live with the opportunity.

3.1.3 Nonsexual Intimacy

Almost every straight women in my sample reported they experienced identity games that occur do to sexual interactions that are perceived as being playful. However, straight women and gay men alike reported that they had another reason to form friendships with each other: they want to experience intimacy, which, they claim, could not get from any other people. These intimacies can be constructed only through close relationships, which my respondents identified as friendships.

As I have found, nonsexual contacts between straight women and gay men are based on emotional intimacy and non-competitiveness. Similarity to the case of sexually charged interactions, intimacy is being used to transgress heterosexual norms.

Except for one straight woman, all of the women and gay men I observed and interviewed reported they spend time together with their friends outside of the gay bars. These activities are connected to mutual interest; these activities would not be the same if these people were not hanging out with their straight female/gay male friends, thus their identity is constitutive of their friendship.

“I go out with him [József] to the city every day or in every two days at least. We start our mornings with running on Margaret Island. During that we always discuss the big questions of life, we give advice to each other on love problems. We are always kidding each other while we are running; if there is a good-looking man nearby, I tell him [Józsi] he should show his muscles or his chest under his V-neck T-shirt. Many time he gives me very useful advice on what and how is good for men in bed. You know, you could not discuss these neither with straight men nor with women; the latter would not have a first-hand experience” (Betti, 42, psychologist)

“I love her, she is my best friend. I came out only because of her, at the age of 41. My life was a suck before that; I was terrified of myself. I got to know her at a training my company held for the employees, where she with her “gay radar” realized who I really am.” (József, 54, company CEO)

“I have talked about with Zsuzsi what our friendship means to us. I think straight women like gay men, because they do not feel any urge for competition, as they do in the presence of other women. Moreover, I have to compete with straight women either, because she likes straight men and gay men like me.” (laughs) I believe we, gay men, provide safety for straight women; they don’t have to be afraid of us. And I won’t be teased by straight women either.” (Márton, 32, teacher)

I am following András (35) and Zsuzsi (29) to a shopping mall on a Saturday afternoon. According to them, they do their shopping together in every two weeks. They help each other picking up clothes, they tell each other which color fit the best to them. They try clothes on together as well, András even follows Zsuzsi to the fitting room when Zsuzsi is trying on bras. “Since he is gay – quiet a feminine one – I feel OK if we see each other naked. I think we can comment on each other even negatively without thinking ‘she is a bitch’ or ‘he is a pussy’” says Zsuzsi.

Lilla (26) and Péter (29) are waiting in the hall of Lilla’s gynecologist’s waiting hall. Lilla invites Péter to the (unisex) bathroom to have the clasp of her bra checked; later she said she would had not let even her male brother do it.

Based on these interviews and fieldnotes, I argue that these straight women and gay men are friends because of their different gender identity yet same sexual orientation. It is notable that some of these respondents refer to their non-competitive, non-sexual interactions, despite the fact these very same people played sexual games I discussed in the former section. I assume it is due to the different social places these interactions take place; in heterosexual public spaces there is no space for direct sexuality, and these spaces per se have not function to serve sexual interest unlike in gay bars, where gay men look for sexual partners. As the fieldnotes show, these people’s intimacy is being achieved through mutual activities in heterosexual public spaces as well, by emphasizing gay men’s and straight women’s shared interests. Using Evan’s (2010) theory on situated friendships, according to which in each temporal and spatial situation “an economy of value is being constituted through particular kinds of exchange and physical competencies in relation to which each person must make sense of their position vis-à-vis others”(p. 188), I argue that these people make a value of their friendships by vis-à-vis acknowledging the benefits of their relationship that are being constituted though their gender

difference and same sexuality. The benefits are sharing information about men with women, and being safe.

These excerpts also tell about identity formations: both the straight female and the gay male identity are being reinforced here as these women and men, while support each other in everyday life issues, emphasize their similar sexuality and different gender identity. However, I argue using Gatens's (1996 [1983]) theory, that their shared symbolic femininity, which is being perceived due to the "male thus masculine", "female thus feminine", "gay male thus feminine" (even if he is actually masculine) logic, gay men and straight women are sharing a similar position within the heterosexual matrix.

I further argue that this implies horizontal homosociality (Hammarén and Johansson 2014), because as these people are *symbolically* regarded by the heterosexual social discourse as the same or almost the same gender, they have no hierarchies in these relationships and in these particular situations. Since, according to Sedgwick (1985), gay men have "failed" their symbolic masculinity by being homosexual, these individuals do not feel tensions between themselves. Their friendship can be seen as "pure" (Giddens 1999) in a way that they are equal to each other and there is reciprocity in their relationships, but due to the gender asymmetry, their position in the triangle of homosociality is situating them this way.

"When we have the money, we (Lilla, 26 and Péter, 29) often go to heterosexual swinger clubs... Where, you know, everybody with everybody... Lilla and I both like challenges. I always go there [swinger club] to see around and check if there is anyone among the men who is at least bi... Well, we always find somebody who claims to be straight, but then turns out he is not against gay sex. Lilla and I ended up at home with guys several times, who had sex with both of us. Once it happened that a 'very straight'

guy we picked up at the club wanted to have sex with me; we did, indeed, while she was watching us. When I and the guy finished, he went to her room...” (Péter, 29)

This interview excerpt shows the same mutuality gay men and straight women share – even sexually, due to their sexual preference. While their gender and sexual identity is being reinforced here as well, they, as members of the same friendship, do challenge heterosexual men. “We don’t have any secrets from each other, he [Péter] is the only person in the world who can even watch me having sex”, Lilla said. “Eventually, we have an agreement, according to which if we are still single by the age of 40, we will get married. Because I wouldn’t have anybody else so close to me like him”, she added. In their case, Lilla and Péter are challenging other people’s heterosexuality and they may challenge the heterosexual institution of marriage in the future, as they would actually be “only” friends who yet have a shared sex life. Therefore their gay and straight identity that is being shared with each other is what is challenging heteronormativity. They both “do” their gender and sexual identity, while at the same time they “undo” heterosexual relations by disguising in, copying the identity of the “heterosexual”, which turns out to be unique, as their companionship still contains heterosexuality (Lilla), but along with some homosexuality (Péter). Unlike the other cases I have discussed in this chapter earlier, they are challenging the gender triangle; Péter uses both his “failed” position and Lilla to “fail” heterosexual men. I assume that Sedgwick’s theory on homosociality supposes that a failed man cannot fail another man, only a woman and a not-yet-failed man can fail a man.

3.1.4 Friendship as a way of life?

According to Anglo-Saxon academic literature (Holt and Griffin 2003, Moon 1995, Nardi 1995), there is a widely used term, “fag-hag”, which names those straight women, who like to socialize

with gay men. This word is mostly used in a negative connotation by those gay men, who do not like straight women's company, rather they fear their gay male identity is being compromised by these women's presence in gay communities. Neither "fag-hag" nor any other word is used in Hungary to name these women, they do not identify themselves as fag-hags, nor are they being identified by it. (Nonetheless, there is no similar term for gay men who socialize with straight women, neither in the U.S. nor in Hungary.)

However, I argue, five of the observed twelve women have a "way of life" living in the gay male community and being straight women. They reject the heterosexual culture so much that they claim they have almost exclusively gay male friends, they live together in their apartments, they know everything about the gay community. Évi (52), Zsuzsi (29), Kati (23), Móni (25), and Szilvi (24) have different reasons for choosing this life:

"I've always been bullied by people since my early childhood. I have a quite ugly face with a lot of spots, I'm too fat, I may be too short as well. I got to know a gay guy in my school when I was 19, we really liked each other. He invited me to gay parties then later to his friends' places, and I started to realize I can feel safe being among them; they won't tease me because of my body. Then with time I also realized that I have almost only gay friends". (Szilvi, 24, student)

"I divorced twice in my life and I have had several boyfriends since then. But they were all shitty... One of them was an alcoholic, the other one robbed me, I got hit several times... I don't need this. Even if I found a man now, I think I wouldn't start a new relationship with him. I don't trust them, unlike my gay friends. They are cute, they are nice to me. I can be their friend who supports them, cooks for them sometimes, things like this." (Évi, 52, unemployed)

Zsuzsi, Móni, and Kati had very similar reasoning to Szilvi's. All of the five women claimed that their life had been completely changed since they started having gay friends. Besides the change

in their friends and the places they go out in their free time, they all reported they had a preference for masculinities that were not available in the contemporary Hungarian society.

“I kind of feel alone [in the heterosexual society], because I feel I won’t, I can’t meet men who are right for me. I like men who are somewhat sensitive, who are not afraid to show their emotions. Yet when you go out to the street, you see only dumbasses.” (Kati, 23, student)

“My man [*pasi*] is bisexual. I cannot imagine myself with a straight guy, they are not so fun. They are way too predictable in terms of their reactions and activities. They don’t care about my feelings, they are a different world to me.” (Gréta, 28, librarian)

These excerpts show that these women have been rejected or deliberately “left” the heterosexual culture, and their concept of an ideal masculinity has changed as well; they like men who are challenge the symbolical masculine normalcy.

Furthermore, I shall argue, these women are challenging their “proper straightness” as well, because they often claim they “are neither straight nor gay”.

“When somebody asks me if I am straight, I always hesitate to answer, because I don’t know. I mean yes, I am straight [*hetero*], because I like men. But at the same time I feel bad when someone says I am straight, because I feel part of the gay community. It hurts me when somebody denies it.” (Zsuzsi, 29, accountant)

“People keep asking if I am a lesbian, because they say I have too many gay [male] friends. I am offended by this, because hell, I am not! But my life is around gay men.” (Évi, 29)

These statements tell about these women’s self-identification: these women have an ambiguous identities, which is based on not their gender and sexuality, rather on their belonging to a community. However, since the gay community is being organized around non-normative sexuality, Zsuzsi’s straight identity is often being negotiated by others (not by herself). This

leads us to my argument that friendship as a social construction can create identities (just as Evans argues (2010)), and friendships are social processes, which are defined and redefined by social norms – the heterosexual culture and straight women’s responses to it. In the case of these five women, their identity is ambiguous both for themselves and others. Their gender identity (woman) is not being challenged, however, due to their group identity that they gain through their friendships with gay men, their identity cannot be defined as they are neither “straight nor gay”, yet “both straight and gay” at the same time. To use Butler’s (2004) terms, they do not have an “original” identity to reiterate.

As I have discussed Foucault’s theory of the “friendship as a way of life” (1997) in *Chapter 2.1.1*, the gay identity always requires group consciousness, and the people in a particular gay community have the potential to construct a way of living, which transgress heterosexual norms. According to him, gay people have the potential to form relationships, friendships that are unique and never before seen, because homosexuals do not have rules for or models of living. He argues these relationships are creatively formed, as age, class, sex, race do not constitute disadvantages in the friendships, rather offer new forms of relationships (e.g. it would be OK if old and young gay men would freely form partnerships without being stigmatized; or if a partnership could consist of as many people as the members would like to). He further suggests that these relationships would be equal, because their members freely created them. Based on his argument I will briefly discuss if type (1) straight women – those, who are neither part of the heterosexual culture nor gay, yet they are both heterosexual and part of the community – do form this kind of friendships Foucault suggest.

I argue that these five women, by their membership in gay friendships, do create a way of life which is freer from social boundaries, however, the heterosexual boundaries are only hidden in

these friendships, because these women are being relegated to the gay community by the heterosexual, patriarchal social discourse as they cannot or do not want to comply with heterosexual norms. The same power that makes society patriarchal makes it possible for them turn to men, who have failed their symbolical heterosexual masculinity.

On the other hand, based on my previous argument I assume that the members of these friendships are equal to each other. Moreover, these people have interactions that were never before seen in Hungary, because LGBT sexualities had to be kept in secret until just recently. Moreover, cross-age and cross-class friendships can occur as well: Évi's (51, under-class unemployed) best friend is Zsolt (26, middle-class accountant). They claim they hang out together because they have very similar interests as they like the same movies, actors, etc. Moreover, they both like to "play with each other" sexually, therefore Évi's age does not stand in the way of her expressing sexuality, even if Évi and Attila do not actually have sex.

I identified two other types of straight women who seek gay men's company, though they do not have a "way of life" with gay men: (2a) women who are transgressing heterosexual norms even if it is temporal (5 women), or (2b) they do not consider any change in their relation to their "straight womanness" (2 women).

"I regularly hang out with my gay friends, because I can be myself with them. I love it when we are going crazy [*ökörködünk*]; when we play with each other sexually, when I don't have to be annoyed with being stared at by straight men." (Edit, 32, office worker)

"I feel support when I'm with them [gay men]. They encourage me to accept myself, because they like me. I am much more confident with straight men because of our friendships. Moreover, I feel like I was a bad girl in their companion, which feels good. I don't have to prove I am the most beautiful woman in the world and that I am the most decent one." (Gréta, 28, librarian).

Lilla (26), Bea (33), and Anna (31) also reported they don't feel part of the gay community, but often "visit" it to be able to be not a "proper" woman. They transgress gender norms with their gay friends, although their relation to the straight world does not change, because when they "return" to the straight world, they act as "proper women" again. I also argue that these women leave their "proper woman" identity behind during their social interactions with gay men, but unlike Warnke's (2007) theory of situational identities, when these women leave their properness behind, a new identity does not emerge, only new attitudes.

Finally, there were two women in my sample (2b), who do not feel they transgress any social norms in the company of gay men. Betti (42) and Mariann (48) both claim they have gay friends because they can discuss things with them that they otherwise could not with others. They also claimed they hanged out with gay men because Betti and Mariann were women, therefore gay men – being similar to them in their sexual identity –, were a perfect match for them as friends.

3.2 STRAIGHT WOMEN AND GAY COMMUNITY DYNAMICS

In this chapter I will analyze the role of women within the Budapest gay male community. In the previous chapter I focused on how straight women conceptualized and perceived the gay male identity and the gay male community, and how their interactions and friendships affected homosociality, the heterosexual world. Now I will discuss how straight women are perceived by gay men. I will argue that straight women do contribute to gay community dynamics. I will analyze my fieldnotes I took in gay spaces, as I am interested in examining how gay-gay relations are shaped in the presence of straight women. I will also show how the triangle of homosociality is being altered in gay spaces. Therefore I focus on gay men interacting with both straight women and gay men in my observations. I divided this chapter into three sections as I have found three major phenomena that can provide a framework for my discussion on women's role: gay men's sexual hunting, straight women against tensions, and the introduction of new members to the community.

3.2.1 *Sexual Hunting*

Betsky's (1997) ideology of or recommendation for the queer space still seems to be a utopia. According to his theory, a queer space is where very different, non-heteronormative bodies and sexualities meet each other. However, in fact the gay male community is considered to be very hierarchical as gay men reinforce inequalities and exclusions among themselves by making preferences on which bodies are proper (Bersani 1987, Durgadas 1998). Moreover, as Nardi (1999) also has pointed out, the gay male community suffers from tensions that occur due to gay men's sexual interests or disinterests in each other.

I observed 12 straight women and 13 gay men's interactions with each other and with other gay men they encountered at gay spaces. I have found that straight women are very often used by gay men in order for them to get closer to a potential male lover. They do it in two ways: they either imitate sexual attraction towards the man's female company he is attracted to, or gay men use women as information resources about other gay males.

We are at a Garçons party; Márton (32), András (35) and Zsuzsi (29) are dancing together in a circle on the dance floor. Other young guys are getting closer to their small group and start touching the men's bottoms from behind. Then these new men join Márton, András, and Zsuzsi while forming a circle together. One of these "newcomers" is topless. They are unfamiliar with the two men and the woman I am observing. The new guys are fooling around with Zsuzsi: sometimes they kiss her on her cheek, they are dancing so closely to her that they are touching her arms, back, and she is even touching one of the men's chest. When one of the men stops dealing with Zsuzsi, the man starts to court Márton.

In another case at a Tape party, Péter (29) keeps buying alcohol to his straight female friend, Lilla (26). They do not care about other men dancing around them. When a man approaches them on the dance floor, Péter seems to be reluctant to communicate with the man, he wants him to leave according to his meta-communication. However, the man realizes this situation and he starts hugging Lilla. He keeps dancing with her. She does not refuse his company, rather they two start acting like they were a (straight) couple: they are hugging, the man is caressing the woman's back from the top of her head down to her bottom. In the meantime the man keeps staring at Péter, who still seems to be hostile to him. After a while, suddenly, the man just leave.

At a Tape party, Szilvi (24) is dancing with Attila (25). Attila leans on Szilvi's neck and starts kissing it when a love song is being played.

These examples points out to the phenomena that straight women are not being desexualized in gay spaces, rather both gay men and straight women like to pretend sexual affection to each

other. However, the gay men I observed in these examples make use of these women. Those gay men, who sexually approached straight women, wanted to achieve a goal with their interactions. In the first case, the stranger man actually wanted to get closer to Péter, but seeing he is hostile to him, he tried to use Péter's female friend to be able to approach Péter. In the first case, courtesy started with getting closer to the woman sexually. As Márton said later, he found the man "creepy", because he felt he did not have the courage to start flirting with Márton. Péter said he thought about the man as desperate guy, who was so hungry sexually, that he would had done everything to get Márton laid.

Besides there are numerous situations (e.g. Szilvi's) when gay men do not mean to flirt with men by actually flirting with women, I argue, gay men consider these flirting tactics as acts that are against the flirting men's masculinity. I believe not the possibility of getting in sexual contact with a woman is what jeopardizes these gay men's masculinity, rather the indirectness of their act. "He was a stupid pussy [*punci*]", Péter commented on the man's acts. Bersani (1987) rightly points out to the phenomenon that gay men prefer masculine attitudes, moreover, I argue, Péter even made a sexist remark on the man who approached him. Based on this comments I assume that being a gay man means not being feminine to Péter, despite he reported he had numerous straight female friends, therefore he is not likely to have objections against interacting with women – the man's masculinity, not his female companion that accounts in making judgments about other gay men.

I see a very different kind of "triangle" in these fieldnotes. According to Sedgwick (1985), a heterosexual man loses his masculinity when a woman he fights for with another man choses the other male over him. A heterosexual man's masculinity depends on the success of the fight against the other man, as well as depends on the success of controlling the woman, who poses

threat to his masculinity by threatening him with adultery. However, in these particular gay situations, the woman was a possible “door” to his friend: the gay man, who wanted to court the other man, became feminized, because he tried to court (and not fight, as it would be between two straight males) the woman first, not the man. It is important to note that these “door” women were supporting both men (they enjoyed “playing” around with the strangers, too), instead of negotiating them. Moreover, it was not her who decided on whether her friend wanted to communicate with the other man; she let her friend make a decision, she did not intend to manipulate the two men’s relation to each other. Hence, I argue there is a non-hierarchical, non-asymmetric connection with her and her gay male friend, but as I will show soon, not with the stranger man. The straight women and their gay male friends’ relationship could be considered as pure (Giddens 1999) in regard of the equality between the straight woman and the gay men, but as I have argued in Chapter 3.1, they are not free from the social system, because both people are relegated into a minority community by the heterosexual system.

Using Hammarén and Johansson’s (2014) distinction between horizontal and vertical homosociality, I further argue there is horizontality between the straight woman and her gay male friend in this triangle. According to the authors, there is horizontal homosociality between any women, because women do not have to compete with each other, while all men “above” them in the hierarchy of the gender asymmetry do have to fight each other for the woman’s sympathy. Women do not have any power that would be worth to be fought for. I think that since gay men are considered as passive and feminine in the heterosexual matrix, gay men and straight women can constitute horizontal homosocialites, which are actually “heterosocialites” as the gender identity of the participants is different.

“The man who was dancing was not only touching and kissing me, but asked questions from me, including if I have a boyfriend and what kind of men I like. I thought for several minutes that he is heterosexual [*heteró*] or at least bi. I enjoyed how he cared about me, even though I did not like him as a man. I wanted to flirt with him. ... Then I realized he only wanted to be closer to my friend. I felt it was embarrassing to me, because despite I liked he was touching me – I like when I guy likes me, you know –, it was all fake. I feel I was being used”, Lilla said after the interaction.

Based on Lilla’s words, I argue that she felt sexual attraction to the man who approached her, however, despite she enjoyed herself, she somewhat became an unreal sexual target, with which the gay man tried to channel his actual sexual interest into the man she was dancing with. Since straight women are often regarded by gay men as tools to get into other gay men’s pants, I argue, gay men try to control mastery over straight women by thinking that straight women are the key to other men, thus they have to gain their sympathy. However, as the following case shows, women are not passive constitutive elements of this special gay triangle, rather they can have agency with actual effects on gay male-gay male relationships.

On a Friday night in Alterego, Kati (23) is sitting on the couches with Gábor (23), talking about university issues. A random man in his 30’s approaches them. It turns out he is a British BBC correspondent, who visited Budapest only for the weekend. When Gábor leaves for a drink, the guy starts asking Kati whether Gábor was gay. Then he explicitly says to her he wanted to “fuck” her friend. When Gábor comes back, the guy, who has been misled by Kati, “knowing” her friend is not gay, stands up and leaves.

I assume that if Kati would have told the truth to the BBC guy, he would have started to flirt with Gábor. It did not turn out whether Gábor would have been interested in the British BBC guy, thus there is a possibility he would have liked to engage in flirt with the man. However, the woman prevented the two men from getting in interaction with each other. In this case, being the

gatekeeper in the gay triangle, this woman could have been suspected by the BBC guy to be ambiguous. But unlike in the model of homosociality, it was not about jeopardizing a men's masculinity or any other identity, rather it was about making a possible future sexual act impossible.

During my research one of my interviewees told me about a case when a straight women actively contributed to finding sexual partners for him. Her being a straight woman, thus a person, who likes men sexually, gave her competence to decide on which men are “good” for her friends.

“A couple of weeks ago I called one of my straight woman friends to come with me to a gay party. She was almost alone as a straight women in on the dance floor, the party was filled with gay men. I looked at her and saw that she would had liked to hook up with some of the men, but all of them were straight. Then she told me she would choose a guy for me. When I asked, whom, she just told me she would know who was the best... Well, she has a very good taste, too. So she has picked the nicest guy. She went to him and told him a surprise was waiting for him.. Then she pointed at me, and the guy knew what to do further...” (József, 54, company manager)

This example tell about that the man's trust on the woman's gender identity and sexual orientation, thus her capability to decide which man he would like, contributed to a sexual intercourse between two gay men. Her identity per se is not being transgressed here, rather the opposite, she was trying to reiterate her female identity in order to use it in favor of his gay male friend and perhaps that of the other man. In this particular case her identity was being applied so that József could reiterate his gay male identity as he had sex with a guy.

On the other hand, in these triangles the stranger gay men's symbolic masculine identity was jeopardized, but not by the woman or the other gay men, but by his own act. Therefore these triangles too function as identity makers.

After having seen many cases when gay men and straight women had sexual bodily contacts, I asked gay men what they think of it:

"I often touch women when we are hanging out. I touch them on their breasts, hips, it is no problem. Neither for me nor for her. However, I would touch only those women whom I know. I believe they like it, they feel to be attractive. If it makes her happy, why not to do that?" (Kornél, 29, office worker)

"I engaged in some sort of sexual acts with women in the past. At the first time, I was dancing with one of my best female friends in Alterego. Since we were at a gay place, I felt it was OK to caress her between her legs. It was just for fun. We didn't take it seriously anyway. She was surprised, but then we didn't take it seriously. And you know, I have never really touched a woman that way, so it was worth the experience. On the other hand, I heard about many guys who like touching stranger women in order to give a sign women are 'only' women here [in the gay bar]." (Sándor, 23, driver)

These excerpts show that gay men – at least those who responded – do not mean harm to these straight women by sexually approaching them. Kornél wants to appreciate them, while Sándor was experiencing bodily contacts that would not had been accessible to him otherwise, due to his gayness. Kornél's words simply show a harmonic relation to his female friend, and I assume, he did not think of his act as sexual, unlike the woman. Sándor's words are about reaching over his gay identity but not leaving that. Like in the case of women who only temporarily transgress gender norms (2a), he is leaving behind his identity only for some moments, yet not gaining a new identity for the time of transgression or "reaching over". Thus Warnke's (2007) concept of situationally emerging different identities are not exactly at stake at here. At the same time,

Sándor's mentioning about gay men who look over straight women, tells about the possibility that several gay men are indeed sexist, moreover, they feel the right to touch women without their authorization or cooperation. Therefore they express their mere superiority over straight women. However, those men are not likely to be friends with the women they harass sexually.

This somewhat corresponds with Moon's (1995) finding. According to his argument, many American gay men are sexist, but that those gay men who fully accept straight women in their company "reject not only the gay/straight dichotomy, but also refus[e] to participate in a sexist rejection of women" (p. 500). Analyzing the Budapest cases, I agree with Moon that gay men with straight female friends reject the gay/straight dichotomy, but only in certain situations and certain temporalities – when they "overcome" their gayness for the moment of transgression. But when it is over, their gay identity "comes back" (although this not necessarily means these gay men are sexists).

3.2.2 Gay Men Escaping Community Tensions

According to my findings, the second most significant "function" of straight women in the Budapest gay male community is the straight women's conflict easing role. However, these women do not actually reconcile these conflicts, but rather provide gay men with a safe environment where they can escape from gay male community tensions. As I will show through my fieldnotes and interview excerpts, there are tensions in the gay community based on sexual interests or disinterest, and bodily differences (Durgadas 1998). I will argue that straight women can actively contribute to the gay male community's group cohesion by emotionally supporting gay men. Therefore they are constitutive forces of the gay community

and the gay identity per se, via the imagination or the perception of the Budapest gay male community.

“Nowadays I am thinking about not going out to gay bars or cafés anymore. They are like hunting fields. When you cross anybody in the bar, everybody is looking at you from the corner of his eye. They are assessing me and everybody else, they are measuring how big muscles I have, how much my Armani watch costs, stuff like that. Sometimes it is just better to have a cup of coffee or tea with Évi. I don’t have to feel tense in her company. Never.” (Zsolt, 26, accountant)

“It is good to hang out with girls, you can tell them things you cannot tell to [gay] guys. You can speak about everyday issues – what happened at university, who did cheat on whom – but you can discuss intimate stuff as well... Which are related to [gay] guys... I can trust my female friends more they are kind of objective. They are not [gay] guys ... Most of the guys hate each other, they look down on each other, they are very conflicted... You can never know when someone of the men shares a secret about you.” (Dániel, 35, tailor)

During my visit at Café Why Not, a gay café, Anna (31) and Bálint (28) are sitting at a table, having a cocktail. One of the men sitting at the next table looks at Bálint with very hostile eyes and disgust in them. Bálint tells me and Anna he had sex with that other man a few weeks ago. Since Bálint had a scar on his chest he gained in a car accident, the other man left his apartment without saying goodbye to him. He just told him he wanted six packs, not a mark. As the man keeps making faces, Anna stands up and says to him “Shut up! This is the message that my friend sends to you.”

These interview excerpts and the fieldnote tell about that straight women are being considered as objective persons within the community due to their different gender identity. Despite these women are not gay men, they are yet considered to be full members of the gay community, as they know secrets and they know many other gay men, just as gay men know many other gay men. Moreover, Dániel’s words imply that despite he shares his secret with his female friend, he

does not think that the woman would betray him, unlike gay men. In the last case, Anna protects her gay friend from another gay man's negative judgment looking down on Bálint due to his bodily appearance. All these presuppose sense of emotional mutuality, that can occur due to gay men's and straight women's difference in identity. In addition to gay men's trust in their straight female friends, Zsolt's words tell about that gay men tend to look for sexual partners in a way that they scrutinize their possible partners' material goods; therefore their partners' class do matter very much, at least in several cases.

Tape party: Zsolt (26) is sitting at a table with Évi (51) and with another man. The other guy tries to court Zsolt in a way that he keeps expressing his admiration towards Zsolt by making complements about his iPhone and watch, as well as Zsolt's muscles. Zsolt seems not to be interested in that man. When the guy asks him to take a photo of themselves with his phone to upload it to Facebook, Zsolt hands his phone over to Évi and says to him he hates his iPhone, Évi can keep it [actually meaning Zsolt disliked the guy, as I interpret it]. Later I asked Évi if she felt offended by Zsolt's act, because I knew she was living in very poor conditions and have been looking for a job for years. She told me Zsolt did not hurt her at all, because she knew he did not mean to offend Évi, rather the other guy. "I have seen a lot of gay guys who are very narcissistic and snob. I completely understood him [Zsolt] that he wanted to get rid of him. Zsolt is not like these men... Though he indeed has some more money than me, he treats me as if we were siblings. I can sleep in his apartment when I cannot pay my bills, stuff like that. He is a nice guy."

This fieldnote tells about class differences and class "preferences". While the man was interested in Zsolt because of his money, Zsolt refused his approach. When I asked him later why he did not like the guy, he told me not because he probably had less money than Zsolt, but because his behavior was too creepy [*gáz*] for Zsolt. "If we would had started a relationship he would have wanted me to support him financially. I'm an independent type", says Zsolt. When I asked about

why he helps Évi, he told me because Évi surely did not want any romantic relationship from him, she was a friend of his. Moreover, he added that he would never help a man financially, because he thought they would "suck my blood out". I assume these sentences imply that in Zsolt and Évi's case friendship between a straight woman and a man is about considering each other as "siblings", like they were kin, while potential romantic partners' class differences could cause tensions in their relationship. Nardi (1999), examining San Francisco gay male communities, have argued that gay men many times consider each other as kin, because they are usually thrown out from their families, they are rejected by the friends they used to have before their coming out. However, it seems in Évi and Zsolt's case that straight women can also constitute as kin for gay men. (I have not encountered any examples during my research when a gay men implied he regards his friends as kin).

Besides all these, I also found that straight women are often asked by their gay male friends to give them advice mostly on relationship issues, but on topics as well that are unrelated to their homosexual identity or the gay male community.

"Kati is my best friend. I have a lot of other female and gay male friends, but she is the one person I completely share my life with. We met in collage, she was the only person who took my coming out well then. I studied IT engineering, so you can imagine there were not many women next to me. The guys always teased me, but she always listened to me, she encouraged me when I was suffering from deep depression. In the first year of collage I started dating a guy. We were together for almost two years. Then we broke up, because he cheated on me, he had a one-night-stand. Kati was very said about us, so she started meeting with my ex privately to try to figure out how my ex and me could get over this problem. Since I was still in love with that guy, I was appreciated by what she had done to me. When I asked her, she told me what I and what my ex had done wrong. It helped, we got back together again for a while. But then we broke up again for the same reason. I was crying on her shoulders for months, I hated all gay men in the

world, but she always kept on saying we should go to cafés, so that I could meet someone nice again. ” (Gábor, 23, student)

“I used to organize cultural events for gay men in Szimpozion Klub [an NGO for young gay men]. Betti, knowing gay guys very well, used to give advice to me on how we could gain more people’s interest, what topics gay men would like to hear about at our workshops, which celebrity, artist or politician we should invite, etc. She never disappointed me! Sometimes my colleagues at the club did not want to accept my suggestions, but when she personally told them her ideas, they were fine with her because they knew she had experience in PR. After this they started listen to me.” (József, 54, company CEO).

“She often helps me in my everyday life. Last time we went to Ikea together to get some plant in order to decorate my room. But she gives me a lot of support in understanding gay men as well. You know, when you are in a gay party, you meet many people, you see many faces, you receive too much information at a time. Many times I just got fed up with other guy’s pick up lines. So it is good to have Edit there. Too many men, too many idiots. When I speak with her then, it is like I was getting fresh air. (László, 29, shop assistant)

These interview excerpts too tell about that men often seek their straight female friend’s company in order for them to “get out” from the community, at least for a while. However at the same time, these quotes also tell that these women are actively involved in not only providing escape to gay men, but their activities contribute to relationship formations, moreover, to gay community building. Gábor’s case further shows that Kati participated in reconciling Gábor’s gay identity with the heterosexual world. In József and Betti’s case, Betti’s advice helped the political goals of the gay community by assisting some NGO project, and also helped József to gain some respect in the eyes of his colleagues, as they were not listening to him. Turning to Betti for advice contributed to József’s acceptance within the gay community. Edit provides some relief to László in gay spaces, where, I assume based on László’s words, too much

sexuality is included, and knowing Edit is not a potential sexual partner, it gives relief to László when she is around him. I argue that turning or escaping to straight women is not like actually leaving the gay community, because, as these examples show, these women channel these men back to the gay community. Therefore straight women's outsidership, objectivity turns out to be not actually true, because these women are very part of the community: they share the same life-world with men, which they mutually and actively construct and perceive (Fee 1996).

However, I argue that gay men and straight women imagine the very same gay community in different ways. While most straight women they can be liberated in the gay community from heterosexual norms, gay men come out and join the community because they want to live off their true selves, they want to be gay. Although it can be liberating too in a way that they do not have to live in the closet, they gay male identity has several inequalities and tensions within the community. As Weston (1998) has pointed out in her essay "*Get Thee to a Big City*", the gay imagination mentally connects people with each other, however, when these people experience the everyday realities, many become disappointed. I think this is the case with gay men in these examples as they experience the problems of their identity. However, straight women do not report such problems; they indeed live in the gay community as they imagine it.

As I have argued in Chapter 3.1, I identified three types of straight women who hang out with gay men: (1) Those who have a fluid identity by feeling not part of the heterosexual world anymore yet acknowledging they are neither gay, (2a) they are transgressing heterosexual norms even if it is temporal, and (2b) they do not consider any change in their relation to their "straight womanness". I have argued that the first type of women have a "way of life" (Foucault 1997), as they have friendships with gay men that make them possible to leave heterosexual norms behind permanently. They have a fluid identity as they are straight by the definition of their sexual

orientation, but their sense of community bounds them together with homosexual men. However, I argue that gay men do not see their friendships with women as a way of life, because despite their friendships seem to be egalitarian and creative, for the gay men these friendships are based on membership in community that is far from being egalitarian.

“I don’t think my life or my customs have changed because of Évi. I think she is the one who ‘got used to me’. I heard from her other friends that Évi was very different before she started hanging out with faggots [*buzikkal*]. I think she does not really have friends other than us.” (Zsolt, 26, accountant)

“I love to be with Zsuzsi. I believe I can support her emotionally, I can speak about things with her that I could have not discuss with others. She understands me. I am sure my life would be much emptier with her, because, you know, gay guys are gay guys. I’m happy for having met her, because otherwise I would go crazy among men. But whan can I do? This is where I belong to... [gay male community]. (András, 35, office worker)

András’ words show that gay men have straight women friends because they help cope with gay male community tensions. I argue that while type (1) straight women do experience liberation (or at least imagine it), gay men regard their friendships with women as having forces with which they can maintain the gay community; the community, which is full of with inequalities and tensions, unlike in the Foucaudian view. These women certainly does not make gay community tensions disappear, while straight women can feel free from heterosexual norms in gay men’s company.

However, I further argue that only type (1) women can contribute to gay male community dynamics but every others as well, because many times they are used by gay men to achieve different goals within the gay community (see the former section). However, only those women

can be part of the community, who have wide experience with gay men, just like in the case I will discuss in the next chapter.

3.2.3 Welcoming Newcomers

During my field research in gay bars, parties, and in private homes I have observed that those straight women who spend their private time almost exclusively with gay men (type woman 1), are so much familiar with the gay community that they often take up the role of introducing new men to the gay community, who just recently came out. They help men get fit into the gay community. In this sense they are very ambiguous, because being able to introduce new members to the community requires an already existing membership in the gay male community. On the other hand, their being perceived as somewhat outsiders is that make newly gay men trust them, because they perceive them as people who are not so much embedded into the sometimes overly masculinized and violent gay community that Bersani also discusses (1987).

Garçons party, in a dark corner: As Bea (33) is dancing and having fun together with six of her gay male friends, all of the guys are flirting with Ádám (17), yet he is being extremely shy and introverted. Not just the boys from the group, but “outsiders” also come to him and caress his bottom and chest from behind. Sometimes Ádám is enjoying it for some moments, he is laughing, but then he always become sad. As he keeps being unfriendly and confused by these happenings, many guys starts to insult him. “Hey, are you fuckin’ straight, little sissy?”, What are you doing, you bitch? Isn’t your ass wet?”, they ask him. Then Bea suggests him that they go outside the bar. Three men follow them, then all of them sit down on the sidewalk. They continue speaking to Ádám, but he is becoming more and more depressed. Suddenly, a brown-haired men hitches up him, pushes him to the wall of the building, and starts to make sexual moves with his loin. He finished it in approximately ten seconds. The others are laughing at them. Then

they stand up also, and head towards the door of the bar to get in again. *Ádám's* bag is still lying on the sidewalk, *Bea* picks it up and gives it back to him. He looks into her eyes and says: "Only a girl can be kind to me..."

The process of "gaining membership" in the homosexual male world can result in disappointment: a young gay male has to question not only his heterosexuality ("normality"), but his homosexuality as well. However, according to this example, heterosexual women can provide *Ádám* some support with which *Ádám* does not alienates himself from the gay community, but rather feel safer to get involved more and more in it. As Moon (1995) found in the case of American gay male communities, many gay men, who do not like straight women in gay spaces, told Moon that only young gay men had heterosexual female friends, because these youngsters had not really left the heterosexual society and his heterosexual identity. Therefore they are considered not to be fully gay yet.

As I have argued earlier in this chapter, my observed people perceived straight women's presence in gay spaces and in the community per se as constitutive members of the community, who can contribute to group dynamics therefore supporting, not challenging or threatening the gay male identity. Moreover, as it is obvious from my previous discussion, the age of the gay men engaging in friendships with straight women is varying; most of my gay male respondents were over the age of 25 and all them came out many years before. Therefore I argue it may be not true that only "newly-gays" seek the company of straight women. Rather I think this is only what sexist gay men think about, therefore they reinforce heterosexual structural hierarchies between men and women, and reinforce the straight/gay dichotomy (Moon 1995).

This case also show that gay men can be very brutal with young gay men. The men strongly effeminized Ádám because of his young age and perhaps because of Bea' presence. They may wanted to show their "superiority" over the young, therefore Bersani's (1987) concerns about the gay community's being very inegalitarian due to its self-over-masculinization is at stake at here.

However, I witnessed another case when gay men were not hostile to the newcomer, rather the contrary. In this case the straight woman encouraged the young gay man to be not afraid of engaging in homosexual acts.

Once I overheard this conversation in Club Alterego, which took place between a very young boy and Gréta:

Boy: Hey, did you see that??? Did you see that???!! He, a guy out of nowhere, stroke my ass! Oh my God, my God!! (He laughed and covered his face with his palms like he was ashamed.)

Gréta: Yes, they do that... I've had a lot of parties with gay guys... Are you OK, honey?

B: I'm thrilled.... The first time... He touched me, do you understand this?! Like this... [He grabbed one of the girl's hands and stroke his bottom with it.] Oh my God, I'm scared! Would you come back with me? [To the dance floor.] What does he want from me???!! Does he want THAT?

G: Honey, you'll be fine with them. [She hugged him.]

The boy, instead of an answer, stood up and pulled the girl back to the dance floor.

In this latter case Gréta helped his young gay friend to get rid of his fears about sexuality; therefore she contributed to helping the young men developing his homosexual identity. She was considered as a very outsider of the gay community by the youngster, because she had much

more experience with gay men, she knew how they behaved among themselves. Hence I argue Gréta had an ambiguous identity in the gay men's view, because she both an experienced woman with all the knowledge required to gain membership in the community, and she was also a woman, who, due to her gender identity, was considered to be as an outsider. Because of this, the young gay man did not have to be afraid of her sexuality, but he was afraid of (yet maybe curious about) the gay man's sexual interest in him.

In another case, I witness Móni speaking with a young boy at a Garçons party, where she provided a young gay men with emotional support, that the boy was lacking both in the heterosexual world (in his family) and both in the gay community.

The boy is very young, he is crying on her shoulders. He is very drunk while he keeps complaining to Móni. "I do not want to be like this... I did not want to become gay' Now I can go home to my parents, who cannot even look at me... And here you go, I come to Garçons to meet other gay guys, but all of them are dickhead. They just want me to pay for their drinks or even the opposite, they want to give me a glass of champagne to be able to fuck me in the toilet. I want a nice guy!" he says. Then Móni hugs him and responds: "Don't worry, I'm sure you will find the right man. Maybe he is not here, maybe you have to meet him in another place, but there are many nice guys who are waiting for you!"

Based on this fieldnote I argue that in this case Móni replaced or at least tried to replace the boy's family in a way that she provide safety to the boy who she did not know before. This young boy was not looking for sexual contact with a man, rather emotional intimacy. The woman's straight identity make Móni be an "authentic" manifestation of the straight world within the gay community. Therefore I argue it depends on the actual situation how these women are perceived by the gay men, because they can be considered as either outsiders or insiders of the gay male community, yet they do actually contribute to and form the dynamics of the gay

community. Hence they are constitutive parts of the gay male community, whether they are considered to be insiders or outsiders. Their ambiguity is that make them have effects on the group.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this thesis I have analyzed gay male-straight female interactions in Budapest. I was interested in what the motivations of these straight women to have gay male friends; what their gay friends' motivations are; how these relationships affect the gay male community and/or the heterosexual culture; whether these friendships are challenging heteronormativity, heteronormative identity performances. Finally, I analyzed how these people's identities are perceived through these interactions.

To answer these questions, I conducted an empirical research; I conducted participant observation in Budapest gay bars, parties and other spaces such as homes, where gay men and straight women, who seek each other's company, spend their time regularly. I also interviewed the people I observed.

During my research I found 3 types of Budapest straight women who like to spend their time with gay male friends. (1) Those, who have a fluid identity by feeling not part of the heterosexual world anymore yet acknowledging they are neither gay (5 women), (2) those, who only occasionally "let themselves free". I have separated this latter category into two types: (2a) they are transgressing heterosexual norms even if it is temporal (5 women) or (2b) they do not consider any change in their relation to their "straight womanness" (2 women).

Using the Foucaudian term of "friendship as a way of life", I have argued that type (1) women do have a way of life, as they have friendships with gay men, in which they can transgress traditional gender norms, as well as their identity has become fluid. This occurs because they are rejected

from the heterosexual society due to their bodily qualities, or they voluntarily escape to these friendships. The other women are only temporarily transgressing gender norms.

I have also analyzed how the triangle of homosociality comes about in these gay men's and straight men's relationships. Sedgwick (1985) argues that heterosexual women are being controlled by heterosexual men. When two men compete each other for a woman's sexual attraction, the man she chooses over the other wins the game. He gains masculinity, while the other one loses it. I have argued that in straight female – gay male interactions and friendships gay men are similar to straight women, because they also failed their symbolical masculinity. Therefore there is a horizontal homosociality (Hammaren and Johannson 2014) between them (despite their difference in gender), in which the members of the relationships are equal to each other. Yet their friendships cannot be seen as “pure”, free of social restrictions, because the social discourse, the heterosexual system is in constant dialogue with them, as these people's acts are reflections on the heterosexual matrix.

I have also argued that straight women actively participate in the gay community. They contribute to gay social dynamics, such as gay men use to or they help them find sexual partners. These women provide some possibilities to gay men to escape from the inequalities and tensions of the gay community, however, gay men do not intend to transgress or challenge their gay male identity.

As I have pointed out, the friendship between straight women and gay men does have effects on identities. Therefore friendships are community thus identity making factors, which are not randomly, but systematically occur. They are the products of the social discourse Foucault talks about (1997).

I observed the opposite phenomenon Nardi (1999) found in an U.S. context: according to him, most gay men do not like women's company, because they feel their gay male identity is being compromised. On the contrary, I have shown that in Budapest gay male – straight female interactions, the gay identity is being constructed.

Due to some research limitations I was only able to analyze those gay men, who liked the company of straight women. It would be worth to examine in the future how other men find these women in their community.

In my thesis I discuss the topic of straight women and gay men's friendships in Budapest, Hungary. As Borgos (2007) and Renkin (2007) point out, after the political/economic transition in 1989, Hungarian LGBT identities have emerged from previous silence and secret since, and these identities have become fixed, stabile ones in order to claim political recognition in the postsocialist system. My research show that while gay men, who have straight female friends, consider their relationship as such that reinforces their gay male identity. At the same time, many of the straight women challenge heterosexual norms.

This thesis did not aim to analyze whether or how the former state socialist system have effects on current social life in Hungary. Although I suggest it would be worth to examine whether there are special social impacts, that have effects on these relationships due to Hungary's state-socialist past. During state socialism, the so called secondary economy was very alive (people sold privately manufactured or grown goods to each other, which was against any socialist ideas). Everybody knew yet not talked about it, therefore people resisted the system (Rév 1987).

According to Gal and Kligman (2000), everyone "implicitly knew [that] the 'we' of the 'private' and the 'they' of the public were often the very same individuals ... Instead of any clear-cut 'us' versus 'them' or 'private' versus 'public', there was a ubiquitous self-embedding or interweaving

of these categories” (p. 51), and this distinction was made in everyday interpersonal interactions. In this system, women could occupy some positions in the public sphere as they were supported to take up professional jobs, moreover, due to this interweaving distinction, they had a prominent role in the secondary market as they participated in the production process of goods. However, after the fall of the socialist system, the public and the private sharply have divided; women – unlike men – lost their jobs, therefore they were relegated back to the private sphere. Traditional gender norms were reinforced. It may be possible that straight women looking for gay men’s company try to regain the recognition they by escaping to the homosexual male community, which is more or less different from the heterosexual social order. But before anyone would jump into conclusions on this issue, I would suggest the research of post-socialist Hungarian public/private gender and sexuality identities.

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