Interpretations of Experiences Related to Sexuality in the Lives of Young Women in a Temporary Home of Families in Budapest

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Abstract

In my thesis, I argue for the constitutive role of class difference in the way people interpret their own sexual and romantic experiences, an aspect that I see as missing from "mainstream" psychological accounts of sexuality. After introducing a theoretical framework that builds upon the convergences of critical psychology and feminist phenomenology, I use the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to discuss the way two young women living at a Temporary Home of Families in Budapest, Hungary interpret the sexual and romantic aspects of their lives. I argue that the participants' social positions, characterized by poverty and the constant struggle not to live in poverty, add central layers of classed meaning to their accounts. I discuss the six master themes emerging from the IPA case study as a gendered trajectory ranging from the past (characterized by abusive environments and threatening homes which the participants left behind) to the future (that may be "built" at the temporary space of the shelter and that is connected to a hope of social mobility). Romantic relationships and sexual experiences represent a "reciprocal island" for the two women, granting an intertwined sense of bodily, emotional and economic safety from a threatening outside world. I discuss the two women's negotiations of normative womanhood – such as separating themselves from images that represent life in poverty or claiming the normative identity of the good mother (e.g. Csányi and Kerényi, 2018) – as a form of symbolic upward mobility which I connect to Lauren Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism" (Berlant, 2011). My thesis is the first study to use Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in researching the sexual and romantic lives of women living in poverty. Beside responding to a gap in psychological research, it is also a "pilot study" that demonstrates the usefulness of feminist phenomenology, queer phenomenology (Ahmed, 2006), and IPA for critical psychological research.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 21,803 words

Entire manuscript: 25,353 words

Signed _____ (Anna Alexandrov)

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I would like to dedicate this work to the memory of Móni Szabó.

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IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Introduction

What role does class difference play in how people interpret their sexual and romantic lives? Proposing answers to this question is difficult due to the lack of studies on the topic – an absence that became most tangible for me as I started researching my thesis. This absence has been noted by other researchers in the field as well (Loates and Walsh, 2010): on one hand, the psychology of sexuality has developed definitions of sexuality that consider it a complex phenomenon embedded in emotional and social factors – while on the other, research on sexuality usually focuses on the lives of white and middle-class people.

This lack of scholarship signals a wider set of problems within academic psychology: a lack of engagement with questions of social difference and systematic injustice. Leaving the experiences of marginalized groups – such as women living in poverty – out of focus does not only lead to a biased view within academic psychology; it may also be an instrument in legitimizing dominant norms that are more accessible to privileged groups (e.g. Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). From within academic psychology, critiques of these tendencies have often emerged (e.g. Holzkamp, 2013; Máriási and Vida, 2015), offering the approach of "critical psychology" as a possible way to consider class difference in psychological research.

In my thesis, I aim to contribute to psychological literature on the romantic and sexual lives of women living in poverty. In the frames of a case study, I offer an analysis of how two young women living at a Temporary Home of Families in Budapest, Hungary, interpret their own experiences related to sexuality and romantic relationships. Based on the emerging themes, I argue for the constitutive role of the participants' social and economic positions in the way they give meaning to their own sexual and romantic experiences.

A second aim of my case study is to explore the possibilities of a critical psychological research project that builds on the theoretical and methodological contributions of phenomenology. In this sense, the case study discussed in my thesis is a "pilot study" for future critical psychological research on the relationship of class and sexuality. Arguing for the usefulness of a phenomenologically informed approach to discuss the way social class shapes subjectivities, I utilize the vocabulary of feminist (e.g. Fisher, 2000) and queer phenomenology (Ahmed, 2006), as well as the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), as tools available for critical psychological research.

In Chapter 1 of my thesis, ("Theoretical framework"), I shortly introduce the converging strands of scholarship I would like to build upon. Firstly, I draw up a distinction between what I refer to – following Máriási and Vida (2015) – as "mainstream" and "critical" psychology, positioning myself within a critical psychological paradigm. In the following sections, I summarize existing research on the sexual and love lives of homeless women, especially regarding the Hungarian context. Present in this literature are concepts related to normative and stigmatized womanhood (see Ámon, 2013; Gengler, 2011; Williams, 2016), which I connect with the role of normativity in conceptualizations of social class and social mobility, building on Lauren Berlant's (2011) concept of cruel optimism. Finally, I introduce the approach of feminist phenomenology (e.g. Fisher, 2000) as well as relevant concepts of Sara Ahmed's (2006) queer phenomenology.

In Chapter 2 ("Methodology"), I continue the consideration of phenomenology as a useful tool for my research objectives, introducing the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Beside stating my research questions and describing the process of data collection and analysis, this chapter also places the site of my research, the Temporary Home of Families, within the context of the Hungarian social housing system. I

briefly introduce the participants of my case study, Kitti and Lívia, and consider central ethical questions as well as the implications of my social position on the research process.

Due to the methodological requirements of IPA, the findings of the case study are divided into two chapters. In Chapter 3 ("Emerging Themes"), I discuss – without relying on much "external" theory, as advised for IPA studies (e.g. Finlay, 2011) – the six "master themes" emerging from the interview analysis. The themes offer a framework of a gendered life narrative, from leaving behind threatening and abusive past homes to "building the future", a phrase that is connected to the possibility of social mobility. Finally, in Chapter 4 ("Re-orienting Psychological Research on Sexuality"), I take my analysis to a theoretically grounded level, connecting the emerging themes discussed in the previous chapter with concepts drawn from relevant literature and outlined in Chapter 1. Utilizing a framework provided by Sara Ahmed's (2006) concept of orientation and Lauren Berlant's (2011) concept of "cruel optimism", I argue that the themes discussed in Chapter 3 carry meanings related to social status and class mobility.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

1.1. Psychology speaks about sexuality

From the early 2010s, critical voices have intensified within the context of Hungarian academic psychology, raising the question of social responsibility within the psy-sciences. A notable example is a scholarly manifesto written by Dóra Máriási and Katalin Vida (2015).[1] Máriási and Vida argue that in "mainstream" psychology, there is a tendency for individualism, the idea of scientific neutrality, and natural-scientific knowledge production. They argue that mainstream psychology pursued and taught at Hungarian universities tends to see people as separable from their social and historical contexts and prefers research methodologies which emphasize the individual variance of psychological characteristics, therefore producing an essentializing view of people (Máriási and Vida, 2015).

The critique of Máriási and Vida (2015) is situated in the international context of scholarship and is concerned with earlier waves of critique of this mainstream approach, voiced from within various psychological disciplines and practices. A notable example is Klaus Holzkamp (2013), a central figure in the German Critical Psychology movement that flourished from the late 1960s to the 1990s (Teo, 1998). For Holzkamp, knowledge production and social responsibility were inseparable in the project of critical psychology (Osterkamp and Schraube, 2013). In this project, research would approach people's inner lives as embedded within social and economic locations, while also "explicating […] the implicit presumptions in the "self-evident" ways of thinking and acting" (Osterkamp and Schraube, 2013, p. 2).[2]

[1] In their manifesto, Máriási and Vida (2015) draw up similar critiques of psychotherapy and psychological training. In this thesis, however, I will concentrate on psychological scholarship.

[2] This idea is also present in the way I see a phenomenological study and contributes to my own methodological considerations in this thesis. For a wider discussion of my feminist phenomenological approach, see the end of this chapter; for a discussion of my practical methodological decisions, see Chapter 2.

My position is that the critique of Máriási and Vida (2015) may be applied to mainstream psychological approaches to sexuality as well. According to Loates and Walsh (2010), most existing research on sexuality has focused on the sexual lives of white, middle-class people. In addition, there seems to exist a tendency to look for universal, generalizable knowledge on human sexuality within the field of psychology. Psychological textbooks on human sexuality, meant for junior researchers, emphasize the cross-cultural complexity of the field but display a preference for large-sample quantitative research that offers generalizable knowledge on sexuality (e.g. Greenberg, Bruess and Oswalt, 2016; Hock, 2016; Lehmiller, 2017; Rosenthal, 2012). In this thesis, I take the position that in order to respond to the absence of class-related aspects in the psychology of sexuality, a shift from this quantitative research paradigm to an interpretative one is required. Instead of looking for universal developments in some abstract human sexual behavior, sexuality should be understood as a complex and situated field that is embedded within social relations. I will draw on case studies – interviews with two women living at homeless shelters in Hungary – in order to, firstly, explore the meanings that these women living in poverty give to their own sexual and romantic lives. Secondly, I will use these case studies to demonstrate class-related meanings that a "mainstream" psychological approach to the psychology of sexuality does not account for – and argue for a critical psychological paradigm instead. Following Máriási and Vida, I consider that a politically and socially responsible approach to psychological research would not only be useful for the sake of scholarly accuracy, but could also lead to counselling and therapeutic practices that contribute to social change – instead of "adjusting" clients (Máriási and Vida, 2015, p. 4) to fit the standardized system of social "integration".

At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that the class blindness of dominant psychological accounts of sexuality is not incidental. The psy-sciences, as a set of discourses related to the work one performs on one's self – Michel Foucault's "technologies of the self"

(Foucault, 1988) – can never be "innocent" of political interest. Dominant psychological discourses co-evolve with structural conditions, creating narratives of *what people are like* – which, in turn, may be used to place oneself within (power) structures. In this sense, it is not a class-sensitive enhancement of the dominant, individualizing psychological paradigm that I am arguing for, but a critical re-evaluation of this very paradigm – a critical psychology of sexual and romantic life.

1.2. On the Hungarian context

Melinda Kovai (2018), reading the history of Hungarian psychology through Foucault's (1988) concept of "technologies of the self", argues that the psy-sciences have become an internationally acclaimed tool of understanding and improving the self in the 20th century. At the same time, these sciences are also connected to "methods of plugging the individual into the process of production"[3] (Kovai, 2018, p. 465) within various institutions. These methods led to differing processes of forming psychological institutions in different parts of a world, influenced by unequal global relations. Analyzing central actors and movements within the context of Hungarian psychology under state socialism, Kovai tracks the political and social pressures that steered psychologists, as well as re-establishing psy-scientific institutions, towards depoliticization as the transformation of 1989 approached (Kovai, 2018). In contemporary Hungarian psychology, the detachment of psychology from political issues as well as from the interests of marginalized people is heightened by the fact that psychological training (as well as therapy) is a costly endeavor and therefore inaccessible for many (Gergely, 2018).

While there is a lack of attention to class-related aspects of sexuality in Hungarian psychological literature, a few related works may be found in recent Hungarian sociology and

[3] Translation from the original to English is provided by me.

anthropology (e.g. Czibere, 2012; Kovai, 2017). These works point to poverty itself as a possible factor in affecting women's sexual desires and relationship ideals, supporting my claim that a critical psychological study is required on the topic. According to Czibere (2012), for most Hungarian women living in poverty, sexuality is not a source of mutual love or emotional support, but rather a duty to male partners that women do not enjoy. For most of them, abusive relationships, or relationships strained by economic difficulties are a daily reality, making it impossible for them to find emotional safety in their sexual relations. Ideals of mutual sexual relationships that may also serve self-realization, present in the lives of women in higher class positions, are not at all reflected in the lives of women living in poverty, and they do not express a need for attaining these ideals either (Czibere, 2012).

Economic precarity, at the same time, may affect the romantic lives, expectations and values of people in less limiting ways. Anthropologist Cecília Kovai (2017) offers an interesting example in this regard. For members of the Roma community Kovai has worked with, marriages have to last in order to maximize the economic stability of the family. Economic circumstances affect the emotional lives of the community members in that romantic love is seen as everlasting and breaking up attributed to "fading of love" is an unfamiliar phenomenon (Kovai, 2017). In my research, I will explore whether experiences of economic vulnerability shape, in a similar way, the sexual and romantic expectations of two women living at a Temporary Home of Families.

Psychology's claim of being removed from politics exists in parallel and, I would like to contend, interconnectedly with the depoliticization of housing and the marginalization of homeless people within the Hungarian context. The marginalized position of homeless people is closely tied to the neoliberal reasoning that people are, in general, responsible for their own economic situations (e.g. McGuigan, 2014). In Hungary, as in many other contexts, economic vulnerability and the overall precarity of housing conditions – a ratio of housing prices and

minimum wage that makes monthly survival increasingly difficult for many, and real estate property virtually unattainable for most (Ámon and Balogi, 2018) – is coupled with efforts of the state to relegate social support from state responsibility to the family (Ámon, 2016). As a corollary of these state policies, the sight of homeless people itself is increasingly excluded from public spaces due to government measures in the 2010s; homeless people are targeted by criminalizing provisions that exclude them from down town public spaces and thus force them to pull out into outer areas of cities (Ámon, 2013; Bajomi and Szegfalvi, 2018). In the neoconservative discursive space of contemporary Hungary, homelessness is likely to be seen and legitimized as personal failure or undeservingness, resulting in an image of failed citizenship (Ámon, 2013, 2016). In the case of homeless women, this stigmatization is accompanied by the image of "failed womanhood" for not having the private sphere of their home (Ámon, 2013).

1.3. Stigmatized womanhood and the place of sexuality at women's shelters

In addition to the scarcity of existing literature on the sexual and love lives of women experiencing poverty, there is a similar lack of research on the sexual and love lives of women living at homeless shelters (except for Canada and the United States). At the same time, classed expectations of normative womanhood faced by women at homeless shelters, and the ways these expectations are negotiated, are more often discussed in the existing literature. In the following section, I will review the relevant literature on both these subjects, arguing for the need to connect the wider question of navigating normative (particularly classed) womanhood with interpretations of sexuality and romantic relationships in the lives of homeless women. In addition to discussing how homeless women's sexual and love lives are discussed within relevant literature, I will also focus on the lives of homeless mothers and – where such literature exists – on the particularities of the Hungarian context.

The way specific shelters are organized, the services they offer, as well as the attitudes of shelter staff – including assumptions about what "good clients" should be like – often reflect the dominant interpretation of why women become homeless, and what they need to solve their housing problems (Williams, 2016). According to Haldane (2011), in shelter systems which constantly lack resources, shelter staff may be inadvertently looking for clients whose "successes" will optimize the performance measures of the shelter, or who will give a sense of professional usefulness to staff members working on their cases. Although both Williams (2016) and Haldane (2011) base their research on US samples, Ámon (2013) has found similar mechanisms at play at a Hungarian women's shelter, where being visibly motivated to "move forward" to a higher social position – despite the unattainability of this goal – was expected of shelter residents.

Feminist authors offer critiques of the construction of homeless women as either individuals responsible for their fates or, if they seem to fit the label of battered woman, as passive victims who have to be taught agency (Williams, 2016)[4]. Several accounts emphasize personal strategies women use to negotiate their positions within the gendered, hierarchical spaces of shelters. Collective strategies, however, are difficult to attain by homeless women, as they often cannot recognize common strands in their life stories due to the individualization and depoliticization of housing problems (Ámon, 2016) as well as to the lack of trust among shelter residents (Williams, 2016). As a result, women tend to see structural reasons of homelessness within their own lives but adopt stigmatizing discourses about deviant, undeserving homeless "lifestyles" when talking about others (Ámon, 2013; Williams, 2016). They often see

[4] Williams (2016) performed a study at US shelters for homeless women and battered women and found that women living in these two types of institutions come from rather similar backgrounds, as most of them are women fleeing domestic violence who lack adequate housing and economic resources. At the same time, the public images of women using the two types of shelters – shared by the institutions themselves, as made visible by the services they offered – differed significantly. Homeless women were often seen as deviant people who first and foremost should be taught to become self-sufficient, while battered women may have been perceived as "pure victims" who primarily need emotional support (Williams, 1998, 2016).

themselves as different from a "typical homeless person", emphasizing less stigmatized identities such as "good motherhood" about themselves (Williams, 2016)[5]. Some of this identification may be intentional, as homeless women realize that there are categories of women who "deserve" help within systems of social care and so they strive to emphasize characteristics that may make them fit these images (Williams, 2016).

When we turn to questions of sexual and love lives, however, a lack in scholarship becomes visible. Most research on the sexual and romantic lives of homeless women concerns sexual abuse and risks to sexual health such as sexually transmitted diseases (Rayburn and Corzine, 2010). Such a strong focus on the "dangers" of sexuality may, on one hand, reflect the reality of how often these events occur. On the other hand, it also fits the prevailing discourse of "sexual deviancy" among homeless women, portraying them as either helpless victims or people committed to dangerous lifestyles (Rayburn and Corzine, 2010). These generalizations are troublesome as they interfere with listening to what homeless people really have to say about their lives, relationships, desires and needs (Loates and Walsh, 2010; Rayburn and Corzine, 2010). A form of this, for instance, is the apparent heteronormativity of these accounts.

Turning a blind eye to the emotional significance of romantic and sexual relationships in the lives of homeless women poses a difficulty in, firstly, understanding existing feelings and practices, and secondly, in placing lived experiences within a framework that pays attention to gendered, classed and sexualized patterns. I am not arguing for an interpretation of sexuality as a road to personal liberation. Sexuality may be, more often than not, a tool of violence and exploitation in the lives of homeless women, who constantly have to strive for a normative citizenship within a shelter's "economy of intimacy" (Ámon, 2013). Following in the steps of Loates and Walsh (2010), however, I would like to bring attention to the dangers of pathologizing a wide range of lived experiences altogether, many of which carry favorable

[5] Motherhood as an accessible identity related to normative womanhood, as well as an identity carrying classed meaning, will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

meanings for the women living through them. To be able to see the relationship between class positions and sexual or romantic experiences, I consider it necessary to evade the pitfalls of both uncritically romanticizing the sexual and romantic experiences of women living in poverty and that of interpreting these experiences as fundamentally unhealthy or dangerous. The latter approach would risk idealizing a middle-class experience of sexuality and relationships as a yardstick for a well-functioning love life. What seems to be missing from existing scholarship is the connection between how women interpret their lived experiences related to class position on one hand, and to sexuality and relationships on the other.

Regarding the Hungarian context, the studies relevant for my purposes are a feminist ethnography by Kata Ámon (2013, 2016) who researched the lives of homeless women living at a shelter in Hungary. Ámon argues against a "culture of poverty" approach to homeless people's lives, arguing that homeless women often identify with the dominant norms by which they are stigmatized, and "see themselves as citizens belonging to the community of citizens" even though they are stigmatized by "political actors […] as non-citizens" (Ámon, 2013, p. 52). Sexuality and intimacy play a role in Ámon's work as possible elements of privacy, and therefore, a "legitimate citizenship" (p. 41), in the eyes of both homeless women and shelter workers. It is the legitimacy of this citizenship that is denied when homeless women's privacy is made transparent at the shelter and within society in general. As sexuality and romantic relationships are not a main focus of Ámon's studies, there seems to be a need for further scholarly attention to this latter topic. My study aims to take this step, connecting – in a critical psychological framework – interpretations of sexual and romantic experiences with economic vulnerability and the classed norms of womanhood that Ámon (2013) highlights.

1.4. Classed meanings of womanhood

In this study, I draw on the model that takes issue with seemingly "universal" and "timeless" cultural ideals – such as romantic love or good motherhood – and argues for a historically and socially particular meanings of the given concepts. Here, I share the position of Justyna Szachowicz-Sempruch, who argues for studying love, emotional bonds and families as influenced by "outer sociability (institutions, community, nation)"[6] (Szachowicz-Sempruch, 2015, p. 75). An example of such social embeddedness is the co-evolution of ideas of love with economic-political systems. According to Giddens (2012), romantic love – which he differentiates from a more universal idea of passionate love – is a phenomenon which emerges with the dawn of European modernity. He interprets the rise of romance as connected to the rise of a social class, the bourgeoisie: the ideal of romance may be placed in contrast to marriage within the aristocracy, which usually did not (and was not expected to) overlap with passionate love. This shift in understandings of love happens alongside other cultural changes: the bourgeoisie develops the new meaning and significance of home and domestic life, as well as the related image of the "good mother" (e.g. Ariès, 1962, cited in Csányi and Kerényi, 2018). The "domestic" sphere becomes understood as the domain of women, while the "social world" as that of men. Therefore, the interconnected ideals of caring mother and loving wife – romantic love and love towards children – both turn into the "characteristics" (and tasks) of women (Giddens, 2012). This shift, however, happens in the framework of a newly delineated elite (bourgeois) lifestyle, creating a classed ideal of womanhood that exists to this day – albeit under constant change, as Giddens suggests.

I use the term "classed ideal" to describe a notion – in this case, a *gendered* notion as well – that is presented as a universal value, despite being only (or more) attainable for members of privileged social classes. At the same time, members of underprivileged social classes may face

[6] Translation from Hungarian to English is provided by me.

these same norms and expectations (e.g. Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), or even adopt such norms to perform upward mobility, either symbolic or socio-economic. Scholarship on the lives of homeless mothers in contemporary times points to practices of motherhood as a notable terrain of such normative expectations. Dominant norms of parenting tailored around the lives of white, middle-class families and shared by shelter workers may clash with parenting strategies pursued by working-class and poor parents at homeless shelters (Gengler, 2011). Within the frames of shelter life, the ideology of good motherhood – already carrying the historical meaning of bourgeois womanhood – may gain an even sharper importance, as "good motherhood" is one of the few resources homeless women may use to develop self-definitions that differ from the image of the undeserving (Ámon, 2013; Williams, 2016), "failed" homeless woman (Ámon, 2013; 2016). At the same time, as Gengler (2011) demonstrates, this ideal of the "good mother" may be defined by shelter workers as a specific ("intensive") parenting strategy – thereby adding a second layer of class-related normative meaning to the concept of motherhood.

To work with the affective component of such normativity, I will build upon the work of Lauren Berlant (2011). Berlant's term "cruel optimism" refers to an attachment that is harmful to the subject. Cruel optimism emerges when the subject who has been promised a "good life" – a version of normative citizenship – remains connected to this sustaining fantasy despite the unattainability of the promise and the harm that this investment brings to them. Berlant argues that crisis is increasingly part of the everyday in contemporary capitalism, this is what she calls "crisis ordinary" (Berlant, 2011, p. 9). Therefore, according to Berlant, attachment to normativity among people living precarious lives may be understood as a form of – ultimately harmful, but much-needed – affective self-preservation. In my thesis, I will use the concept of "cruel optimism" to discuss such sustaining normativity in the lives of the two homeless women I have interviewed.

1.5. Feminist phenomenology and the bodies of homeless people

I chose to approach this project from a phenomenological point of view due to phenomenology's relationship with lived experience. Phenomenology, as Linda Martín Alcoff (2000) puts it, is "theory as embodied experience" and relies on descriptive strategies to explore subjectivity as always embedded in and inseparable from its context, and places bodies in the center of inquiry. Although traditional phenomenological accounts tend to overlook specific viewpoints in favor of "generalized" experiences and thus contribute to essentializing thinking, Linda Fisher (2000) argues that seeming contradictions between phenomenology and feminism may be resolved, and phenomenology can be "appropriated" for feminist purposes. A feminist phenomenology is aware of social difference and the difficulty of generalizing but is also attentive to patterns that overarch and connect individual lived experiences. Phenomenology therefore may also be characterized by the "tension of generality and specificity" (Fisher, 2000, p. 28) which makes it especially suitable to analyze "contact zones" of the psychological and the social – or rather, to point to the inseparability of these two domains, as my research aims to.

In my study, I am working with a phenomenologically grounded understanding of the term "experience". In the wake of Joan W. Scott's (1991) feminist critique of experience, Alcoff (2000) argues for an understanding of experience that is not unshaped by ideology, but neither is it reducible to discursive framing alone. Instead, in this interpretation, experience and discourse are understood as co-constructive of each other. Feminist phenomenological research aims to describe participants' subjective experiences through "bracketing" dominant, normative understandings and interpretations (Levesque-Lopman, 2000).[7] The feminist

[7] Bracketing (also known as epoché, or phenomenological reduction) is a fundamental Husserlian step in approaching the world through phenomenological lense; it involves suspending all that is supposed to be known for the perceiving subject at the moment of observation (Cogan, n.d).

phenomenological commitment to "bracketing" allows a research design where researcher and participant strive together to get closer to a subjective phenomenon and further from what already seems to be "known" about it (Levesque-Lopman, 2000). An aim of my study, in accord with this commitment of feminist phenomenology, is to give primacy to how participants themselves create an account of their lived experiences. At the same time, I wish to remain reflexive about inevitable layers of interpretation: on one hand, the interpretative work performed by participants, and on the other, by myself, the researcher (cf. Smith, 2011). Therefore, while I see my work as a feminist phenomenological study, I pursued the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which includes hermeneutical elements beside the more descriptive phenomenological ones.[8]

In order to look at sexuality and romantic relationships with an approach that is also interested in the wider social context, I will build upon a work of theory which utilizes phenomenology to discuss questions of social inequality. In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed (2006) builds upon the foundational phenomenological claim that subjectivity always involves intention and is therefore "always directed "toward" an object" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 2). This idea as well as the many meanings of "orientation" lead Ahmed to a discussion of *social* space and time as accessible through the concept of orientation. Although Ahmed mainly focuses on questions of sexual orientation and race, her work also allows her to discuss class and the notion of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, cited in Ahmed, 2006, p. 51) from a phenomenological point of view. The range of available options is changing as a body is moving through time and space, and bodies arrive at their forms through objects they encounter and turns they take. People, however, are orienting themselves towards objects in a hierarchical and normative social world. Tools are "made for some kinds of bodies more than others" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 51), certain paths are more easily accessible for certain people than others. Some

[8] For a further discussion of methodology and my intersecting considerations of feminist phenomenology and critical psychology, see Chapter 2.

directions may feel as though one is following "a path well trodden" (p. 16) while some bring people "out of line" (p. 10) with others. Additionally, people are familiar and comfortable with some environments while experience "disorientation" within other places. Ahmed offers the idea of a "migrant orientation" to describe a feeling of being "out of place, out of line" because one is "facing at least two directions" (p. 10), the directions of their past and their future homes. In Chapter 4, I will use Ahmed's concepts of directionality to discuss the way homeless women are not only expected, but also hope to "move forward" within society (Ámon, 2013). I will argue by connecting the works of Sara Ahmed (2006) and Lauren Berlant (2011) that to discuss the orientation displayed by the two women, a concept of "homeless orientation", parallel to that of a "migrant orientation" (Ahmed, 2006), is required. I will present the way this orientation, closely connected to a version of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011), emerges from the case study.

For Ahmed, "disorientation" is a term connected to living a queer life. On one hand, it represents an inability to conform, to "repay the debt of one's life" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 21) through reaching normative checkpoints of life history. One the other hand, there is a potential for resistance in "staying" with an experience of disorientation (p. 4). The concept of "failed orientation" (Ahmed, 2006) may be placed in conversation with Ámon's term of "failed womanhood" in the case of homeless women (Ámon, 2013). Homelessness, in a dominant discourse, may represent disorientation or failed orientation. People who have no homes of their own, especially if they are women and thus traditionally linked with the domestic sphere, appear within the dominant imagery as individuals who are "going nowhere", people with no direction and purpose to their life.

Home has also been implied as an instrument in self-construction by Daya and Wilkins (2013), who write about strategies pursued by homeless men in Cape Town to create feelings of belonging for themselves. In the case of these men, homelessness means specific

relationships to their bodies (including a heightened sense of vulnerability due to illness and injuries brought about by their living conditions). The study points to how economic, bodily and emotional vulnerability may be intertwined in one's affective relationship to homelessness. For participants in the study of Daya and Wilkins (2013), bodily feelings of vulnerability and pain are also tied to drinking – on one hand, addiction strengthens these feelings, while on the other, vulnerability, both bodily and social, reinforces habits of drinking in the lives of the participants. Homeless bodies, beside their heightened vulnerability, are also "bodies that are stopped" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 137) – bodies that become, over and over, sites of social stress through policing (e.g. Ámon, 2013; Gengler, 2011). As subjects of research, sexuality and homelessness seem to share the centrality of embodied experience; this convergence, once again, points to the usefulness of a phenomenological perspective.

My thesis approaches psychology of sexuality from a point of view which uses phenomenology (namely, the methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis or IPA) in order to create a critical psychological analysis of meanings related to sexual experiences and romantic relationships in the lives of two (heterosexual) homeless women. Limitations of my study include that the analysis offers little insight on the position of race within this discussion, and that – as both participants have only discussed sexual and romantic relationships with men – my analysis is focusing on conceptualizations of heterosexual relationships. I see my thesis as a "pilot study" that aims to explore the usefulness of a phenomenological research approach, and IPA, by contemplating sexual and romantic experiences as embedded within class relations.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1. Research objectives

The following chapters of my thesis consist of a case study whose purpose is threefold. Firstly, I will use the case study to explore the way young homeless women give meaning to their own desires and experiences in terms of sexuality and romantic relationships. Secondly, I would like to explore their accounts in a critical psychological framework, focusing on classed meaning. Finally, the further goal of my analysis is to propose and test the usefulness of a phenomenological approach for critical psychological research of sexuality.

Based on relevant literature, motherhood may be identified – beside sexuality and romantic love – as a third concept closely connected to expectations and negotiations of classed gender norms. Therefore, I decided to focus my research on women living at a "Temporary Home of Families" ("Családok Átmeneti Otthona" or CSÁO in Hungarian). Within the Hungarian system of social services, there are two types of shelters where women may receive emergency or temporary housing alongside their family members, including their children. In "mothers' homes" ("anyotthon" in Hungarian), women and their children are offered temporary shelter together, but male partners may not accompany them. This type of institutions is primarily meant for mothers fleeing abusive relationships (e.g. A Város Mindenkié [The City is for All], 2019). In Temporary Homes of Families, one-parent families, two-parent families or multiple generations of a family may be allowed, without gender restrictions. I have chosen a Temporary Home of Families, and not a mothers' home, in order to reduce the likelihood that participants have experienced sexual abuse and will be re-traumatized (or simply feel uncomfortable) during interviews. At the same time, given the findings of Czibere (2012), women housed at Temporary Homes of Families – similarly to other women living in poverty in Hungary – are also very likely to have experienced abuse or to currently live within abusive

relationships. My ethical considerations following from this knowledge will be discussed in a later section of this chapter ("On the process of data collection and analysis").

In my case study, I am using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a highly data-driven research methodology that aims to capture personal meaning-making processes. For IPA studies, open and exploratory research questions are employed, and theoretically grounded research questions are typically avoided, at least for the main research question (Rácz, Pintér and Kassai, 2017). The purpose of this guideline is so that participants' perspectives may structure the analysis as much as possible. There may be, however, a secondary research question that is grounded in existing theory (Rácz, Pintér and Kassai, 2017). As at the beginning of my research I already had information on the absence of class-related discussion in the psychology of sexuality, I decided to pay special attention to classed meaning in my analysis, and therefore to set up a theoretically grounded secondary research question.

- Main research question: *How do young women living in temporary family shelters in Budapest interpret their own sexual and romantic experiences?*
- Secondary research question: *How do class-related meanings emerge in the way young women living in temporary family shelters in Budapest interpret their own sexual and romantic experiences?*

The further contribution of my case study is that it employs phenomenological theory and methodology (IPA) for class-sensitive research of sexuality and romantic experiences, as a research tool of a critical psychological perspective on women's sexual and love lives.

2.2. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a method increasingly used for psychological research to explore how people make sense of experiences that carry personal importance for them. It is most widespread in health-related psychological research, as it is

suitable to grasp questions of subjectivity, bodily sensations, changes in identity, and emotionally meaningful topics (Rácz, Pintér and Kassai, 2017). For the same reasons, IPA has also been suggested as appropriate for research on sexuality-related questions (O'Mullan, Doherty, Coates and Tilley, 2017; Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

IPA is sometimes emphasized to be an approach to research rather than a methodology (Rácz, Pintér and Kassai, 2017). At the same time, it may also be described as the most structured of available phenomenological research approaches (Finlay, 2011). This trait of IPA is exemplified by the fact that, contrary to most phenomenologically oriented research approaches, IPA studies have unified prescriptions on data analysis (as elaborated later in this chapter).

The approach of IPA rests on three theoretical pillars: phenomenology, idiography, and hermeneutics (e.g. Kassai, 2015). When performing IPA, researchers focus on personal meanings of phenomena as described by participants. IPA is phenomenological in the sense that it involves a descriptive focus, where the researcher strives to "bracket" existing terms, descriptions, and interpretations – including her knowledge of theory – as she attempts to grasp how the participants themselves see and interpret phenomena. Therefore, IPA is highly compatible with feminist phenomenology (e.g. Levesque-Lopman, 2000) as well as with critical psychology (e.g. Osterkamp and Schraube, 2013). Both theoretical frameworks imply that actively questioning and denaturalizing seeming consensuses – scientific or popular – may serve the production of knowledge that is based on marginalized voices and that is critical of systemic injustice.

Phenomenology, according to Fisher (2000), is characterized by the tension of "general" and "specific". In IPA, this tension is approached through working with careful, data-driven abstractions ("emerging themes" distilled from interviews and ordered under "master themes"; see Rácz, Pintér and Kassai, 2017) while also exploring all interviews in their specificity due

to the idiographic focus. Master themes in IPA studies are often presented in a table as well as described one by one (see Chapter 3). As IPA is an idiographic method, instead of looking for knowledge that is generalizable with respect to a specific population, it aims to explore one perspective in depth. This means that the recommended number of interviews for an IPA study is usually not more than six (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), and participants are invited based on presumably occupying a similar position or viewpoint related to the question investigated. IPA is also highly recommended for case studies, which is why I saw IPA as suitable for the pilot study I wished to conduct.

The third theoretical pillar, hermeneutics, places an additional emphasis on the element of interpretation, somewhat distinctly from what is implied by the descriptive focus of phenomenology (Finlay, 2011). This is connected to an idea of "double hermeneutics" (Smith, 2011), through which IPA acknowledges that access to uninterpreted experiences is not possible within a research process. Instead, lived experience emerges in research data via double interpretation: the researcher interprets the way participants interpret their own lives. I see "double hermeneutics" as an instrument of scholarly reflexivity as well, in the sense that it prompts researchers to distinguish between various layers of interpretation, to understand the final study as woven together from the voices of participants and researchers, as well as to reflect on which strand is which. At the same time, such reflexivity grasps meaning-making as an intersubjective process, thus bringing the researcher's attention to her own role in the participants' meaning-making work.

2.3. Research participants and interview situations

Kitti and Lívia (both names are pseudonyms) are women who, at the time of the interviews, were living at a Temporary Home of Families in Budapest. After I contacted the institution, a shelter worker told some of the residents – basing her description on the call for participants I

have sent her – about the study and asked whether they would like to participate. Kitti and Lívia decided to do so.[9] In the table below (*Table 1*), some basic data of the two participants are summarized.

Table 1: Basic data of research participants

	KITTI	**LÍVIA**
Age	20	23
Relationship status	in a relationship with a man	single (in a relationship with a man, but does not feel that the relationship is serious)
Children (all of them living with their mothers at the shelter)	one girl (1,5 years old)	two boys, pregnant with a third boy
Other family members living with them at the shelter	her male partner	her mother (her brother, now 18, used to live at the shelter as well for a while)
Ethnicity / race	white	Roma
Sexuality (presumed)[10]	heterosexual	heterosexual
Highest education	some high school (specializing in applied arts), unfinished, no school-leaving exam	some high school, unfinished, no school-leaving exam
Previous or current paid jobs	paid jobs while in high school	manual labor for a gardening company, used to work in cleaning
Job plans	currently thinks about possible jobs after the childcare period; cashier / grocery shop employee is a possible option	dreams of becoming a police officer

[9] A third participant volunteered as well, but she postponed the interview several times; finally, I decided not to pursue this third interview any further.

[10] During the interviews, I have not asked the women about their sexual orientations explicitly in order to avoid placing my own emphasis on any aspect or conceptualization of sexuality (cf. Finlay, 2011). At the same, both women only discussed sexual and romantic experiences with men, which influenced the focus of my case study.

2.3.1. Kitti

Kitti is a white woman with a plus size body build. At the time of the interview, she is 20 years old and has one daughter of 1,5 years. Kitti is living at the shelter with her daughter and her male partner (22). Kitti, who did not finish high school. In general, Kitti seems thankful for the shelter and the opportunities it provides her. During the interview, she often brings up her questions of parenting as well as her relationship to her body and to feminine ideals – and the way the two are interrelated, as she only will be able to become a good example to her daughter if she herself knows how to live a fulfilling life.

Our interview is long (ca. two hours) and is interrupted several times, mostly because of Kitti's daughter needing her mother's attention. During a short section of the interview, before the child is put to bed, we are talking while she sits in Kitti's lap, reaching for objects on the table – my pen and the recorder. We also have a coffee break. The fact that I accept a coffee from Kitti seems to make both of us more comfortable around each other. As we are standing in the kitchen, Kitti's daughter holds her hands out toward me, asking me to lift her into my hands, even though this is the first time I have met her or her mother. In sum, I spend around three hours at the shelter on this occasion.

2.3.2. Lívia

Lívia is a Roma woman with two sons (5 and 6 years of age, born from her first partner), currently pregnant with her third boy (from her second partner). She lives at the shelter with her sons and her mother.

Although she is friendly with me and the interview does not seem to be uncomfortable, her answers are somewhat shorter than Kitti's. This may be connected to difference in how the two women maintain their boundaries. As I am trying to understand Lívia, I sometimes offer tentative interpretations of what she just said; while Kitti tended to agree with me in such

situations, Lívia calmly corrects me most of the time. She laughs often. She gave Italian-sounding, long names to her boys – the type of names people make fun of as they are stereotypically Roma ones. She clearly likes the names, but still laughs when telling me how most people say the names are stupid.

Lívia describes herself as a streetsmart, independent and pragmatic person, someone outspoken enough to protect herself and fight anyone for her children, as well as a flexible problem-solver. She gives the impression of someone able to represent her interests. In connection with her Roma identity, she uses the language of anti-discrimination politics, telling me about a situation where she was put in a disadvantageous position during her studies because she was the only Roma student in her high school class. Lívia also did not finish her high school studies. She tells me that in her previous jobs, she tended to assume team leading roles where she did not have to work that much. She generally thinks that her outspokenness makes her a difficult woman to live with, but that it is also one of her main assets. She tells me of several occasions where she found herself in conflicts with authorities (including shelter staff at another place) because they questioned her capabilities or the validity of her ambitions. I use the word "ambition" here because Lívia brings up social mobility often. She talks about how she is capable of fighting her way, and her children's way, out of the poverty she was born into.

2.4. On the process of data collection and analysis

Discussed in the following case studies are two semi-structured interviews. I used an interview guide centering on romantic and sexual experiences; not all questions were used, however, and the sequence of the main topics was also flexible. I allowed the participants to lead the interview the way they wanted to, telling them that I was interested in whatever came to their minds, including personal stories. Both interviews have been conducted in person at the shelter, in separate, closed rooms, with only me and the given participant present – although both

interviews were interrupted as children or shelter workers knocked on the door. The purpose of the research has been explained to the participants and informed consent forms were filled by both of them. Participation in the interviews was voluntary and unpaid.[11]

Here, I would like to dedicate some thoughts to the ethical questions inherent to working with people who may have experienced sexual or domestic abuse. As discussed by Williams (2016), although experiences of abuse are not dependent on socioeconomic status, homeless women at temporary shelters are often women who are fleeing from abusive relationships and, due to a lack of economic resources, have nowhere else to go. In order to avoid situations of re-traumatization, or participants simply having to talk about painful topics they were not prepared for, the topics of my research have been described to the participants in the call for interviews as well as at the beginning of the interviews. The fact that participants can choose not to answer questions or to retrieve their answers at any point was also emphasized. When creating the interview guide and conducting the interviews, I have relied upon a structure where potentially upsetting questions were placed in the middle of the interview, while lighter questions were posited at the beginning and at the end of the interview.[12] (For a discussion on interviewing people about sensitive topics, see Elmir, Schmied, Jackson and Wilkes, 2011.) During the interviews, I continuously monitored how the participants may feel, and asked them about their feelings and opinions regarding the interview afterwards, striving to resolve possible tension that the interviews might have left behind.

[11] My original research plans included conducting more (five or six) interviews. When accommodating to the situation of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2019-2020, I came to the conclusion that telephone or Skype interviews were not appropriate for my research, as the sensitive topic of my research required the constant monitoring of participants' metacommunication, and this would have been impossible without personal contact. Therefore, I chose to carry out my work as a case study and called both earlier participants, explaining the situation and asking for their verbal permission to continue using the material with this approach. Both participants extended their permission to a case study.

[12] An exception from this sequence was made in a specific situation where I felt that during the interview, I have glided over a difficult topic that the participant may have wished to talk more about. Here, after careful consideration, I decided to return to this topic after the interview ended and the recorder was turned off.

The interview texts were analyzed along the guidelines of IPA (e.g. Rácz, Pintér and Kassai, 2017). My initial close notes were followed by conceptual notes approaching general patterns in the interviews, and these were then organized around "emerging themes". Through further steps of interpretation, I created master themes, linking emerging themes in a cohesive narrative (Rácz, Pintér and Kassai, 2017). Chapter 3 of my thesis will discuss these emerging themes. This chapter, in compliance with the expectations of an IPA analysis, will focus on interpreting interview material "by itself" (as much as this is possible), without the guidance of "outside" theory. At the same time, as my secondary research question requires engagement with relevant theory. Therefore, in Chapter 4, I will discuss class-related themes emerging from the case studies from a theoretically informed perspective. I will also argue for the usefulness of feminist phenomenology for connecting psychological accounts of sexuality with the lived realities of homeless women in contemporary Hungary.

2.5. Positionality

My choice of topic and methodology was shaped by my former studies in psychology; my decision to work with homeless women living at Temporary Homes of Families was, at the same time, shaped by my experiences of housing activism. Therefore, I started my research project under the influence of encounters and conversations with women facing homelessness or precarious housing situations.

As a bisexual white woman with a middle-class background, I clearly brought my own (raced and classed) ideals about sexual and romantic relationships into the interview situations. In addition, these ideals, formed by my access to dominant (middle-class) norms, were likely to be shared by shelter staff (see Gengler, 2011). Therefore, I appeared in the role of middle-class, white psychologist and scholar, a possible representative of authority and dominant norms. At the same time, however, I was a student and a young woman of similar age as the

two participants. I also did not hide the fact that I do not have children – therefore, that I lacked a significant experience which influenced the life of Lívia and Kitti, and which (as we will see in the next chapters) was described as a route to adulthood by both of them. These characteristics of my background have probably detracted from a possible position of authority.

As a central aim of this study is to create knowledge on marginalized women's interpretations of sexuality, the results will be shared with both participants (I would like to meet both of them separately and present the results in a non-academic retelling). Their feedback on the results will possibly be used to determine further directions for research.

Chapter 3: Emerging Themes

In this chapter, I will introduce themes emerging from the interviews through the process of my analysis (summarized in *Tables 2-3* below). I will move from one master theme to the other, summarizing a theme in the beginning of each section, then describing the meaning of the theme and providing illustrations in the form of interview segments. In accord with the guidelines of IPA (see e.g. Finlay, 2011), I will follow in this chapter an interpretative process that builds "from below", driven by the participant's own meaning-making processes and only occasionally calling upon relevant theory. A more theoretically grounded level of interpretation – one that aims to answer my secondary research question – will follow in Chapter 4.

The master themes discussed in Chapter 3 combine into a gendered narrative of growing up, a roadmap of how Lívia and Kitti see their own paths from the past towards the future – in which paths sexuality, romantic relationships, and motherhood play a central role. In Chapter 4, however, I will argue that this trajectory and its interpretations are also defined by the two women's class position.

Table 2: Emerging themes I.

		KITTI	LÍVIA
1. Away from places	***1.1. Leaving the mother's place for the partner's***	Growing up in a family headed by an abusive single mother; "eloping" with her boyfriend	Growing up in a family headed by a single mother; leaving them and getting into public care, then running away and moving to her partner's rural family home
	1.2. Getting out of an abusive environment	Leaving her abusive mother's home to be with her partner	Leaving her abusive partner to be with her mother
1. Away from places	***1.3. Extended family as unhelpful***	Relatives (e.g. mother-in-law) bully her and take advantage of her housing situation; attempts to break her relationship up after Kitti became pregnant; nobody lends them money for deposit	Mother-in-law as a member of an abusive household with whom she had a bad relationship from the start; distant relationship with her older siblings
2. Under stress: the pregnant body of the homeless woman		Looking for housing during pregnancy; inadequate housing, stress and illness	Heavy work during her current pregnancy
3. "Building the future" at the shelter		Most people at the shelter are dependent on welfare, Kitti and her partner are currently in a better position; they are also saving up, while many are not this responsible	She and her mother are saving up; "*departing in some direction*" from the shelter; social mobility for the sake of her children

Table 3: Emerging themes II.

		KITTI	LÍVIA
4. Negotiating normative womanhood	***4.1. From girls to pragmatic women: motherhood as rite of passage***	Motherhood as growing up; motherhood as a divide between her past and present selves	Motherhood as growing up; motherhood as a divide between her and her current partner
	4.2. Examples to give and to follow	Her mother as a positive image of (single) motherhood; struggle to achieve "normalcy"	Her mother as a positive image of (single) motherhood; struggle to avoid "primitivity"
5. A reciprocal island: feeling safe in a relationship	***5.1. Sacrifice and love***	"Finding your other half" requires sacrifice	When she was in love with her first partner, she wanted to make sacrifices for him
	5.2. Acts prove love	The fact that her partner stayed and works this much for his family proves his love; Kitti's first time may also be interpreted as a way of proving her love	She would feel more certain in her current relationship if her partner prioritized her and her children to his birth family's interest
	5.3. Safety does not necessarily mean economic support	Emphasizes that she is not dependent on her partner, she has also worked for their money	Emphasizes that money does not matter in a well-functioning relationship
	5.4. Sex in long-term relationships; familiarity	Sex is better usually in a long-term, loving relationship; knowing each other's desires also leads to more pleasure	Sex is better, for her, in a loving relationship; knowing each other's desires also leads to more pleasure
	5.5. Sex as calming and emotionally safe	Make-up sex: the certainty of the relationship as the source of pleasure	The ideal sexuality and relationship is calm

3.1. Away from places

At the time of the interviews, Kitti and Lívia are both located at a place and time which they see as temporary. The first cluster of themes focuses on stories from the two women's pasts, often narrated as movement from one place to the other.

3.1.1. Leaving the mother's place for the partner's

In both interviews, the theme of leaving birth homes for the partner's home emerges. Both Kitti and Lívia have been raised by their mothers (Lívia's father was in jail during her childhood, while Kitti does not mention a second parent and talks about her mother as continuously single). For their first love, while still in high school, both women left their mother's homes to live with their partners. Leaving the parental home and moving in with a partner, possibly also with his family, seems to be "the woman's lot" for them; Kitti even notes that *"someday someone will take her [daughter] away"*[13]. At the same time, it is important to note that neither of them left their parental home because this was "the order of things".

> *"We moved out when Mom was not at home […H]e, like, helped me elope. [smiles] So I liked this already, all of it."* (Kitti)
>
> *"I, when I first fell in love, I threw away my family. I disavowed my mother […]. I even got into public care because of him. I ran away from there too, because of him."* (Lívia)

There are differences between how the two women look at their initial decision of leaving the parental home. For Kitti, moving in with her partner was an escape from an abusive home into a loving one. For Lívia, however, this decision was exactly the opposite. Leaving her birth family (which she still regrets) finally led her into the rural home of her first partner's family. Lívia's childhood experience of moving to the capital city as a small child and growing up there with her mother who *"gave [Lívia and her siblings] everything she could"* stands in stark

[13] All quotes typed with bold are direct quotes from interviews. Translation from the original to English is provided by me.

contrast with the abuse she encountered from her partner while living with him. Lívia was, however, able to recover the ties with her mother and get out of the abusive home: she is currently living at the temporary shelter with her mother. While for Kitti, the "escape" from her mother was a movement from a threatening home towards a safer one, for Lívia, the movement from threat to safety has happened later and more gradually, as she was leaving her first partner.

3.1.2. Getting out of an abusive environment

Beside her current partner, whom she has been dating for two years now, Lívia had one other romantic relationship, also with a man, by whom she was abused both physically and emotionally. This first relationship, which started when she was in her early teens, made her leave her mother and her siblings, eventually going on to live with her partner and his family. Her partner has been violent before, but after the birth of her first son, he started beating her regularly. After seven years and several attempts to break up, Lívia left him for good. The breakup was followed by court trials that continued up to the time of our interview.

When talking about this relationship, Lívia emphasizes its never-ending sensation, a specific temporality:

> *"For seven years, we have drawn it out for so long that… I thought it would never end. That always, forever […] I will have to live in this."* (Lívia)

In Lívia's story, the experience of battering is bound together with experiencing a type of hopeless poverty she was not familiar with up to that point. In her account, there are at least two possible ways to live as a Roma person facing poverty, one of which is exemplified by her abusive partner and his family, and the other by herself and her mother. The first way of life happens in extended rural families and is characterized by the resignation that once you are born poor, you will die poor. This life, for Lívia, is "primitive", a word which seems to connect her experience of being a woman subordinated to her abusive male partner with the acceptance

of an inescapable poverty that she observed in their surroundings. The other way of living becomes possible in the capital city, towards which she moved when leaving her abusive relationship.

For Kitti, abuse also plays a central role in leaving one home and arriving at another, more loving one, although in her case, it was her mother who abused her.

> *"She destroyed my body and my spirit as well. Well, she abused me in all ways. She trampled my self-confidence […W]hen I meet her, the memories come up again, and then I get depressed, and I feel that nobody loves me, and that I am useless, and that I am a fat fuck."* (Kitti)

In contrast, her current, more sustaining relationships with her partner and child have given her the experiences of feeling loved. A clear example of this is that her mother has always called her fat and berated her for her figure, while her partner gave her loving nicknames when she gained weight during her pregnancy and assured her that the changes do not matter for him.

3.1.3. Extended family as unhelpful

It is important to note that extended family members often play antagonistic or simply unsupportive roles in both women's stories. Lívia mentions that she does not have a meaningful relationship with her older siblings. Kitti and her partner could not get a loan from any of their relatives, not even for a few days, when they needed it for an apartment deposit. Until the birth of her daughter, Kitti did not know where she will go with the child; finally, her relatives helped her out, but scolded her for her breast-feeding practices and did not let her eat enough during her stay.

Both Kitti and Lívia talk about the antagonistic roles their mother-in-laws played in their lives. In Lívia's case, the mother-in-law was a member of an abusive partner's household, with whom Lívia had a bad relationship from early on.

"He abused me, and we lived at their place […] and I did not get along with his mom, I had a very bad relationship with his mother… afterwards, with him as well." (Lívia)

Kitti's mother-in-law was one of the several figures who tried to benefit from her lack of adequate housing. Despite Kitti and her partner asking her to let them stay in her spare room after the birth of their daughter, Kitti's mother-in-law only took Kitti into her home weeks after her child was born, for a price well above the market rate.[14] Additionally, Kitti's mother-in-law tried to control the finances of Kitti and her partner while they were living with her:

"…[the conditions were that] we have to do everything like she says; in the beginning, she was going to be managing our money completely, giving us pocket money and all…" (Kitti)

In both women's stories, there are only a few select members of one's family who may be completely trusted and counted on. For Kitti, this is her partner and child; for Lívia, her mother, younger brother and children. These are the people with whom one may embark upon the project of "building one's future" (see theme 3). Lívia's current (second) partner, while described as someone who loves her, may not fit this latter category just yet – therefore, when Lívia thinks of her future home, it is her mother she would like to "*take with [her]self*".

3.2. Under stress: the pregnant body of the homeless woman

For both women, pregnancy is a time where the body's vulnerability to stress and exhaustion seems to heighten. In Lívia's case, this theme emerges as she mentions how difficult her work is for her. Although pregnant, Lívia still has to perform heavy manual labor (such as shoveling and working at construction sites) for a gardening company. In the case of Kitti, bodily suffering is intimately connected to the story of her pregnancy and the loss of housing that followed from it.

[14] Such an arrangement can happen because it is usually the one-time sum of the deposit that is the biggest difficulty for people living among precarious economic conditions.

When Kitti became pregnant, the owner of the flat she and her partner rented at the time told them to either get an abortion or to leave, as they cannot live at the flat with a child. The couple asked an received for an extension to their stay. After two months, when they were finally ready to move to another apartment, the owner did not meet them to return the deposit, but also did not pay the bills for water and electricity. Kitti spent the final, summer months of her pregnancy in this basement apartment, now without tap water or electricity. She connects the poor living conditions with a feeling of near homelessness when she notes that the apartment has become "*like a hobo cave*", and proceeds to describe her life at the time in contrast to a middle-class ideal of approaching motherhood:

> *"When others are planning parties in expectation of their babies, looking at decorations, 'what should the baby's room look like?' – and I didn't even know what place I am going to give birth into."* (Kitti)

These circumstances led to her being constantly on the move during this summer, while her partner was constantly working. Even to bathe, eat or charge her phone, Kitti had to visit other locations.

Under the contemporary Hungarian regulations, when giving birth, mothers have to indicate in the hospital the location into which they will take the child. The suitability of the apartment to raise a child may also be checked. Although pulling out children from families due to purely economic reasons is prohibited, raising a child in homelessness or under insufficient housing conditions qualifies as endangering the child. Therefore, in practice, the children of homeless mothers are routinely taken away and put into public care (Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, 2017). While she does not explicitly mention this during her account of this summer, it is clear that these regulations turned the end of Kitti's pregnancy into a deadline for the couple's apartment search. During the initial months of this search, Kitti and her partner had enough money to rent a place, but nobody wanted to let out a

flat to a pregnant woman, worrying that a small child will damage the apartment. Near the end of Kitti's pregnancy, the couple finally found an apartment that they managed to book, but missed a part of the deposit sum, and none of their acquaintances gave them a loan for the few days. In the end, they had to give up the booking.

After these events, sensations of stress flooded Kitti's body, melting into somatic symptoms that she could not completely identify at that point:

> *"The last chance was gone, and then I felt that I have become very nervous. […] my throat was like, thumping, as if my heart was trying to come out of my throat. My head was like, burning, and everything got quiet. I remember that we were at KFC at Móricz. Because they had power sockets, you know. [she starts crying, but also laughs at the fact that they went there for the power socket]"* (Kitti)

The symptoms continued with losing her voice and with nausea, among others. Two weeks later, when Kitti and her partner went to the gynecologist to get a document, their initial plan to make the visit a quick one was interrupted by the gynecologists' realization that Kitti had toxemia (preeclampsia), a condition that develops during some pregnancies, which already reached a life-threatening stage as it was discovered in Kitti. The doctor told her that "*it is a miracle [she] is still alive"* and called an ambulance. Finally, an emergency C-section had to be performed on Kitti, who therefore found herself in a hospital with her daughter, who she had no place to take to. As her mother-in-law had a spare room in her municipal rental apartment, Kitti told the mother-in-law's address to hospital workers. In reality, her mother-in-law did not yet allow Kitti and the child to live at her place – in fact, she was trying to convince her son to leave Kitti and the baby.

> *"And I gave birth, and I had nowhere to bring the child, and nobody knew that in there […] And in addition, they put a woman beside me […] whose child they wanted to take*

away because she had nowhere to take it. And I am sitting there in the same position, it's just that they didn't notice mine yet." (Kitti)

In the end, Kitti went to live with her relatives living in a rural area of Hungary, while her partner continued working in the city.[15] After three weeks, and for a sum well above market prices, her mother-in-law allowed Kitti to move in with her, where Kitti – now reunited with her partner – stayed for about a year.

3.3. "Building the future" at the shelter

Kitti and Lívia both see the shelter as a temporary solution.[16] Both women emphasize that they would like to "*depart in some direction"* (Lívia) from their current position and *"build a future*" (Kitti) for themselves. Therefore, they are saving up while residing at the shelter. In relation to saving up, Kitti describes herself and her partner as doing everything in their powers to achieve social mobility, while many other people in their positions would not do the same:

"We save up in panic while we are here… […] the time you can spend here [at the shelter] goes by fast, and then everybody is just staring, like, what now? While if one is just somewhat responsible, they know that this [place] is good because one can gather oneself here. […] Of course you need to move. Forward, forward." (Kitti)

Both women emphasize that they are now building their new lives not primarily for their own sake, but for the sake of their children.

"But I am not the main point here anymore, I'm not doing it for myself, but for my children. So that when they will have grown up, they will not live like I did." (Lívia)

[15] These periods of living with extended family members is, however, are also characterized by fear, stress and hunger in Kitti's story. Relatives who, on the surface, helped her out, have also contributed to her feelings of vulnerability and unsafety, either through bullying and emotional pressure, through financial control, or simply through not providing her with enough food. In these cases, beside exhaustion and fright, bodily suffering appears in the face of nutrition, related to both her and her baby: Kitti does not receive enough food to feel safe, and is bullied for the way she would like to continue breastfeeding her child.

[16] Temporary, in this case, does not necessarily mean short-term; Kitti would like to stay at the shelter for more than a year.

"… my child, my partner, they are on the same level. And I would die for them anytime, if they asked, you know." (Kitti)

3.4. Negotiating normative womanhood

Under this theme, the role of motherhood-related identities will be explored in negotiating the two women's positions in relation to normative understandings of womanhood.

3.4.1. From girls to pragmatic women: motherhood as rite of passage

For both women, motherhood is a rite of passage, a possible route of growing up, one that may lead to divides between different people and between versions of one's self. When Lívia is talking about her current partner, it seems that in her interpretation, her experience and her priorities as a mother set them apart. Although she speaks about this relationship in generally positive terms, and although her third child will be born from her current partner, she does not feel that the relationship is "serious" enough. (When I ask about her relationship status, she first describes herself as single, and then proceeds to tell me about this "unserious" relationship.)

"I already have two kids, you see, I understand what he doesn't. It doesn't matter that he's older, he's not aware of this thing. Of what it means to start with a mother of children." (Lívia)

For Kitti, motherhood represents a divide between her former and current selves, especially in her relationship to her own body and to dominant ideals of beauty and femininity. Kitti describes herself as a woman who is moving towards a "normal" self-image. Throughout her life, Kitti was bullied for her body by various people, of whom the most influential in her life was her mother. These experiences have led to feelings of unworthiness and depression. Kitti partner's love for her, and later her daughter's love, however, have created a shift in her relationship to herself and her body. Although she has gained weight due to her pregnancy and

says that she would prefer the figure she had before the pregnancy to her current one, Kitti's experiences of motherhood have also supplied her with tools to negotiate beauty ideals. She emphasizes, for instance, the pragmatic and functional aspects of her body, noting that pregnancy and breastfeeding naturally change a woman's figure, and all of their effects – such as craving food and gaining weight to the back and thighs – are natural, biological processes that are needed for the child's development. Thus, an ideal of being a "good mother" serves as a legitimizing factor for looking at one's body with less worries and more enjoyment:

> *"You can't even enjoy your pregnancy, because "ooh, you have turned so curvy, you have put on so much weight!" – but fuck, what am I supposed to do if I'm pregnant? Turn* angular*?"* (Kitti)

Further strategies of negotiating norms of beauty include emphasizing some of her bodily characteristics that conform to dominant ideals of femininity, such as the flexibility of her body, and noting the diversity of people's personal beauty ideals. Finally, Kitti can also look at her body as a "beloved" body when she notes how her partner and her daughter relate to her body:

> *"I had it easier because my partner always called me "my little panda". You know, I was becoming curvier, like a panda. And [he was saying] that I am his little, cute panda. And that I am beautiful this way. And that if [the extra weight] will bother me so much, it will go away anyway."* (Kitti)

It may be said that the womanhood Kitti is now interested in is a *pragmatic* one, as opposed to how she sees the female ideal she pursued in her youth. Kitti sees her past self as an immature, somewhat superficial girl who confused *"attractive"* with *"slutty"* and paid too much attention to her appearance (she *"did not even go out to a shop this scruffily").* In contrast, her current self thinks about beauty in a more complex way, and prefers natural, low-key looks to perfect or provocative ones.

[on who counts as an attractive woman] "Before I was a mother, clearly I would have started enumerating the ideas… This is varying, really. It is independent from age and weight. And it also depends on […] who you would like to be attractive for?" (Kitti)

This shift is a process of growing up for Kitti, but she also notes that not all women grow up from a superficial approach to their bodies. Although Kitti thinks that her current approach to femininity and beauty is closer to "normal" than her earlier one, she empathizes with women in this other position as well, and notes that if she did not have her harmonious relationship and her role as mother, she would be in a similar place.

For Kitti, many of what she sees as mistakes made by women – such as paying too much attention to appearance or entering one-night stands – signal that a woman is looking for love in the wrong places. Kitti maintains, however, that *everyone* is looking for love, and that most people are lonely. She describes women who enter one-night stands as doing this for *"the momentary sensation of being loved"* and having to find out later that their male sexual partners only need them for the sexual act itself. Kitti puts these women in parallel and in contrast with herself at the same time: she is in a different place now, but she could have easily become like them. In this sense, Kitti sees her relationship and her child as saving factors.[17]

[17] Kitti has also experienced another shift due to her motherhood: a shift in the dynamics of her relationship due to the economic difficulties parenthood and housing problems have brought to the couple. Kitti uses the metaphor of "*burning*" to describe the first period, when *"for a short time, everything was perfect"*. Perfection did include notes of uncertainty: Kitti's partner was often jealous, and she recalls questioning her decision to be with him in the first place. At the same time, conflicts are a part of their relationship for Kitti; she describes her relationship as one where *"there's drama all the time but [they] never break up".*

This period of "burning" was followed by her pregnancy, by economic, family and housing problems, and by her partners complete dedication to work. After the period of living at her relatives, Kitti found herself in a completely changed relationship with a somewhat changed man. She interprets the change in her partner as him being shaken by the difficult position they got into and deciding that such a situation should not happen anymore. Therefore, her partner now spends most of his time with work, and Kitti noticed a shift in the atmosphere of their relationship. Her partner is now her *"other half",* someone she builds a future with; despite the end to "*burning*", however, this is not the end of their love, neither is it the end of their passionate desire for each other.

"There doesn't have to be passion constantly! It's enough if it's there right then. Like, you are swept away, the child is sleeping… [laughs]" (Kitti)

While Kitti misses being in the constant state of passionate love, she notes that it was not their fault this period ended. Additionally, she suggests that the "peaks" of their love might also have been consequences of the sacrifices they had to make for each other and their child. This suggestion means that people who are constantly safe – in an economic and emotional sense – may not be able to live through the high points (alongside the low ones) that Kitti experienced.

For both women, motherhood seems to carry a meaning related to authority. By facing specific problems and having specific priorities (prioritizing the protection of their children before everything else), mothers may claim specific competencies as well. It is also this motherly competence that was questioned by the director of the other shelter who tried to police Lívia's finances. In response, Lívia recalls telling the director*: "If you have a child, present what it is you can offer your children!"* The conflict and the threat in this situation emerge, in part, through the question of whether Lívia is a "good mother" (see e.g. Csányi and Kerényi, 2018). In Kitti's story, the relatives who bullied her for breastfeeding played a similar role of questioning her competence as mother.

At one point in the interview, Kitti uses the phrase *"wiser women"* to describe a specific version of pragmatic womanhood – *"this is usually said by the wiser women to the bigger girls, that 'anything can be said, look at the deeds!'"* (meaning that it is a partner's deeds that really prove their feelings). It seems that motherhood brings about a similar identity of "wise womanhood" for the two women: it serves as the foundation of a pragmatic, grown-up, smart version of socially accepted womanhood (defined in contrast to a girlish, desperate, unreflective womanhood).

3.4.2. Examples to give and to follow

In both interviews, motherhood is connected to the task of role modeling. In Lívia's case, what has to be transferred to one's children is the mindset that social mobility is possible (the antithesis of which appears in the idea of "primitivity"), while in Kitti's case, it is the understanding of what "normal" womanhood and relationships look like. At the same time, both women imply that (good) motherhood *itself* requires role models. In Lívia's case, the image of the single mother – represented by her own mother – is one such model, while Kitti

sees herself as lacking guidance and having to find out practices of "good motherhood" on her own.

Becoming a good mother is a project Kitti is currently working on. One of her main questions is *"how one raises a normal person"* in a social world where most women are taught to channel their search for love into superficial and possibly harmful practices, and most men are taught not to value women. With her image of the "good mother", she contrasts the example of her own mother. Kitti's description of her mother carries ambivalent meanings: her mother, on one hand, raised her children in the face of adversity by any means possible[18], while on the other hand, is an abusive parent. Therefore, in her quest towards good motherhood, Kitti cannot use examples learnt from her own mother.

Lívia, in contrast, inherited an image of motherhood that she has a positive view of and can see herself following. Her own mother raised her and her siblings alone, faithfully waiting for her partner to return from jail for fifteen years, getting so used to being alone in the process that when he did return, *"bearing a man beside her was hard for her".* Lívia bases her idea of single women sustaining their children on her mother, who *"gave [them] everything she could",* and with whom she now lives together at the shelter. Currently, the two women work in shifts to save money.

Lívia's relationship with her mother seems to be cooperative and reliable in ways her romantic relationships never were.[19] She speaks of a period of truly single motherhood as a very fulfilling time; back then, with a relatively good salary, she could afford to go to parties while her children were watched over. *"I broke out into blossom, like a rose."* She felt attractive and

[18] Kitti mentions that there was a time when her mother was also in a temporary shelter, which suggests that in the family of Kitti (as well as in the family of Lívia), living in poverty is a multigenerational experience. The implications of this detail will be discussed in Chapter 4.

[19] Lívia notes at one point of the interview that when she was single for a longer time between her two relationships, she would have liked having someone who loves her. At the same time, she says that out of her two relationships so far, neither has been a good one. This indicates, firstly, that she sees single motherhood as a possible route, and secondly, her mixed feelings about her current relationship: she acknowledges that her partner loves her, but – as outlined above – she cannot really trust that they have a future together.

had several "*suitors*", men who were interested in her while she was not interested in them and *"took them for stupid".* She laughs as she tells me how she would hide from them when they tried to visit her at the shelter.

After this period, Lívia's second partner (with whom she was out of contact for a few months, following a breakup) tracked her down and contacted her, and Lívia agreed to see him again. After a while, she decided to get back together with him, and *"to take [him] seriously this time".* Her decision to do so is a tentative answer to her question of "*which life is better".* Should she choose the life of the single mother, or should she enter a relationship she is not certain about for the sake of "*building that normal family life for [her] children"*? At the time of the interview, this is a question that has not yet been completely resolved.

a. "Normalcy" in Kitti's interview

Kitti refers to her relationship and her partner as helpful and lucky factors in her work as parent. She now has good examples before her – images of what a "normal" relationship and a "normal" man are like – that she can use not only to strengthen her own self-image, but also to pass the example down to her daughter. According to Kitti, her experiences of love set her apart from many other women:

> *"…these are all women who lack confidence and have body image issues. I am also that, it's just that luckily, I started moving towards normalcy."* (Kitti)

The counterpoint to "normalcy" in the interview of Kitti seems to be the image of *"broken women":* female figures with whom, according to Kitti, she has a lot in common, but from whose fate she was rescued by the experiences of love in her romantic relationship and motherhood. The other factor that steered Kitti away from this image of womanhood was the fact that she *"missed out on adolescence";* while many of her friends were going to parties and

looking for men to get acquainted with (looking for love), Kitti had to stay at home with her siblings.

Kitti often contrasts her "normal", loving, safe relationship with many other women's less lucky lives. These women are depicted as lost, lonely and unloved. Another group of women, however, is painted in an even more negative way, described as irresponsible or cowardly. A discourse centering around deservingness may also be noted here: Kitti's movement towards a "normal" life is a consequence of her choosing to stay with her partner and her child, despite all difficulties. In contrast, Kitti remarks that many women get abortions instead of paying attention to birth control, are unwilling to make sacrifices for the sake of raising a child or are dishonest to their partner. The presence of these "problematic" female figures in Kitti's interview – some of whom she depicts as similar to herself and empathizes with, while others are depicted as undeserving – mark out a place of tension around markers of normative womanhood. The ambivalence of boundaries between Kitti's own life and the life of these other women, however, point to the struggle involved in sustaining these boundaries.

b. "Primitivity" in Lívia's interview

In Lívia's interview, her discussion of social mobility is tied to the concept of "primitivity"; this word embodies the life she is trying to get further away from. When using this term, Lívia connects her experience of abuse (and a more traditional, hierarchical relationship between men and women) with her experience of others' belief in the inescapability of poverty. For her, both are characteristics of rural Roma people living in poverty. Beside the spatial division it performs between poverty in urban and rural settings, the term also has a temporal dimension to it. "Primitive" people are conceptualized as living on the other side of a temporal divide, they are "lagging behind" social progress. This includes their closer relationship to traditional gender norms, which may lead to abusive relationships.

"he was, like, a primitive… primitive Gypsy…[Gypsie]s, they did not think like me. You know, my mother raised me alone, and I did not grow up like them. I never saw that they… you know, it is customary for the Roma that if the wife does not do what the man says, she will be beaten, and stuff like that. And, you know, he was bringing forward this primitive style of his ever more often…" (Lívia)

On another point of the interview, Lívia talks about her own experiences with racism and discrimination; at the same time, her term "primitivity" seems to carry a note of internalized racism, transferred from the terrain of racial difference to the terrain of socialization.[20] She clearly does not mean that all Roma people are primitive – instead, she connects her mother and herself with the experience of another lifestyle, characterized by city life, social mobility, and less oppressive gender relations. Growing up primitive is a question of socialization, influenced by race (being Roma) and class (belonging to the rural "underclass" that lives from one day to the other), but people who fall outside of these limitations are also sometimes presented as primitive. Lívia describes an "official person" – possibly a police officer or social worker – serving at the same rural area where she used to live with her first partner as "primitive". This person told Lívia that she will not be able to sustain her children on her own if she leaves for the city. In the interview, Lívia implies that her plan of working while her children are in day care was not something this "official person" could have thought of, despite being a learned person who probably needed to have a college degree for the job. What may have actually been a racist assumption from the part of the "official person" (the assumption that a Roma woman will not leave her children in day care and sustain them by herself, or that she will do better in an abusive relationship than alone) is interpreted by Lívia as ignorance about the wide array of opportunities in the city and as a lack of ambition. When Lívia attributes these characteristics to the "official person" who was born and raised not in the capital, but a

[20] It may also be noted here that while Lívia usually uses the term "Roma" to talk about issues of race, she uses the more derogatory word "Gypsy" when she is talking about people she considers primitive.

smaller (and poorer) city in Hungary, she uses her notion of "primitivity" to invoke her own childhood and youth Budapest as social capital in the face of racism she presumably encounters on a daily basis.

Lívia, as a Roma woman who has grown up in the capital with a single mother taking care of her, believes that as long as she is young and able to work, not only survival, but also social mobility is achievable for her and her children. *"Positivity and forcefulness"* are key for her, and this is what she would like to foster in her children as well. One of the difficulties of being at the shelter is that she does not see this approach reflected in other people's parenting, whose undisciplined children may have a bad influence on her sons. She tells me about an occasion she got into a physical fight with a mother whose child repeatedly swore at her.

3.5. A reciprocal island[21]: feeling safe in a relationship

Both women mention relationship ideals and needs that are connected to feeling safe. Against the background of vulnerability that comes from the outside world, their ideal images of a romantic – and sexual – relationship seem to take the form of a *reciprocal island,* a sanctuary in which mutuality, familiarity and love create an atmosphere of safety.

3.5.1. Sacrifice and love

Both women talk about situations where feeling in love, for them, included being ready to sacrifice their own interests, or even themselves, for the sake of the other. Lívia recalls that when she fell in love with her first partner, she was ready to do anything to make sure that he was "*as good and beautiful and happy as possible beside [her]".* She now regrets several things she had done in this period, such as leaving her birth family behind. But at that point, she wanted

[21] I would like to convey my thanks to my supervisor, Eszter Timár, for suggesting this term.

him "*to feel better, to know that [she] really do[es] love him and that [she] would do anything for him".*

Kitti mentions that for a good relationship, it is crucial to love in a way that *"the other is more important than yourself".* She asserts that for the sake of her child and partner, she would give up her life. She also notes that *"finding your other half"* in a romantic relationship necessarily involves sacrifice:

> *"it's possible that I will have to give up my career, or if the child comes, give up the daily hairdresser, […] manicure, my me-time…"* (Kitti)

As discussed earlier, living with their first partners meant leaving their birth family behind for both Kitti and Lívia. This "choice" between people – or prioritizing one's partner to others in order to mark the exclusivity of romantic love –, may also be connected to motifs of sacrifice and certainty in romantic relationships and sex. Theme 6 may therefore be understood as presenting the emotional components to participating in romantic relationships as sites of building the future together. The idea of "choosing each other", however, does not only appear in romantic relationships, but in other interpersonal relationships as well. Lívia "chooses" to live with her mother instead of her current partner in a similar vein, while for Kitti, choosing to keep her child and become a mother is a similar step of commitment, and a decision she is proud of, as staying with her partner.

3.5.2. Acts prove love

The theme of love and sacrifice is connected to a similar one, the theme of "proving one's love". This is the urge that drove Lívia to leave her family behind; she notes in the interview, however, that the feeling was not mutual. For Kitti, the fact that her partner stayed with her, and was visibly shaken by worries when economic difficulties reached them, proved to her that he truly loves her and the child. During these times, his relatives have urged him to leave Kitti, and

Kitti's own relatives tried to convince her that her partner is not *actually* looking for apartments and is unfaithful to her. Despite these machinations, as well as Kitti's bodily changes, her personal faults, and conflicts between her and her partner, he still loves her, and they enjoy sex just the same. In his case, it is his acts that ultimately prove his faithfulness and his love:

> *"Yep, and how much he drudges for the family. […] Even though he could go and live his life, like the other boys. He could party, pick up girls, have fun… and no. No, he suffers with me, with us, for the common goal."* (Kitti)

Lívia knows that her partner loves her; at the same time, although she would like to move in with her partner on the long run, this is not among her short-term plans. She explains that her status as single Roma mother adds a layer of meaning to this situation, since being a single mother, with children from another relationship, and joining another Roma family is a vulnerable position for her. Her partner feels ashamed of Lívia's children before his birth family, and the birth family of her partner could voice hostile opinions about her sons, in which case she would certainly stand up to them. To keep up the good relations, she avoids spending too much time with them. In order to feel that the relationship is getting serious, and that living together with her partner would be a good decision, Lívia would like to feel that her partner is firstly committed towards her and her children, and not towards his family of birth. This does not necessarily mean leaving his birth family behind, explains Lívia, only that she and her sons come first:

> *"If he already has a family, and a child, and really a woman who loves him, let them be the first for him."* (Lívia)

A possible interpretation of Kitti and her partner's first time is also connected to proving Kitti's love towards her partner or sealing their relationship. In this early period, Kitti's partner was very jealous of her. She notes that she saw this as troubling; at the time of the interview, however, she tells me that her partner's jealousy was motivated by the passion of their love,

and – in retrospect – she sees his melodramatically jealous reactions (including even his threats of suicide) as funny rather than scary.

One evening, as they went home from a party, Kitti's partner got jealous and kept telling her that "*she will leave him, he can feel it".* The conflict ended, in Kitti's interpretation, by a somewhat *"motherly"* realization: she understood that her partner feels insecure about their relationship because he has not been loved enough by his mother. This gesture of interpreting his partners psychological needs was followed by Kitti telling him that she was ready for their first time – that is, by offering her partner the bodily certainty and safety of being loved. In her narration, however, the sexual encounter does not appear as a one-sided gift. Kitti emphasizes that she truly *did* feel ready that night, describing their first time as characterized by complete and mutual consent. An important factor in this story, for her, is that neither of them had sex before. For Kitti, their mutual virginity seems to underlie the equality of their relationship, as well as the emotional importance of their sexual experience together.

3.5.3. Safety does not necessarily mean economic support

Although commitment and sacrifice are a part of romantic relationships for both women, and although they are living within difficult economic circumstances, they both make it explicit that what they need is not necessarily economic support. Instead, their vision of an ideal romantic relationship could be described as a two-person team which solves problems – economic and otherwise – together.

> *"This does not mean that everything depends on him, or on the man himself, but that he, personally is my other half, and so I do everything together with him. Now many [think] that I depend on him, that he* supports *me. But this is actually a completely different thing. […] That is* our *money, we have worked for it together. And whatever I need, he will buy it. It's just that I don't abuse that."* (Kitti)

Similarly, Lívia emphasizes that when she wishes for partner whose love may not be doubted, she does not mean immediate material safety, but emotional support:

> *"I think that if relations are very good between two people, it's not money that counts there. But that they are there for each other, and whatever problems come up, they will solve them anyway."* (Lívia)

It is important to note how both women seem to be prepared to be judged for possible signs of (wishing for) economic dependence.

3.5.4. Sex in long-term relationships; familiarity

Both women prefer having sex with people who are also emotionally significant for them to casual sex. In addition, they also emphasize that if sexual partners are familiar with each other's desires, they will enjoy sex more.

For Kitti, it is a long-lasting, loving relationship that produces an enjoyable sexual life. In her experience, beside the trust and love involved, getting to know the other's habits and desires is connected to not having to worry about keeping up a perfect appearance – which leads to being less ashamed about your body and more relaxed instead. Kitti explains that for her, the Hungarian word "párom" ("my partner", in a more literal translation: "my pair") conveys exactly this feeling of familiarity: the partner becomes the primary point of reference and a natural companion in all situations of life, one's *"other half".* Regarding the possible loss of passion in a long-term relationship, Kitti adds that for a relationship to work well, *"there doesn't have to be passion constantly, it's enough if it's there right then".* This preference of familiarity and long-term relationships in Kitti's interview is tied to her ideal of staying with your first partner despite all problems and personal shortcomings.

While Lívia has some experience with casual sexual relationships and Kitti does not, they both agree that having sex with strangers is less meaningful than having sex with someone you

love. In Kitti's description, the normative element is more pronounced. For her, there is a difference between *"making love"* and *"fucking"* or simply just *"having sex".* The first is characterized by familiarity, the *quality* of a sexual act, complexity, and happens in a loving long-term relationship. The second is what most people of her age know better; it only includes the sexual act itself, without emotions, and it is connected to an emphasis is performance *("how often"* and *"for how long"* can the partners have sex?). The underlying motives for the two types of sexual relationships, are, however, the same: in Kitti's interpretation, everyone is looking for love, and most women expect to receive love when they enter one-night stands. The contradiction of looking for love and entering sexual relationships with strangers is why one-night stands are doomed to fail.

Kitti connects the image of having sex in a public bathroom stall to this type of sexual relationships. The image of losing one's virginity in a bathroom stall is characterized by pain, danger and ignorance; the woman is bleeding because the man does not care about her, but she thinks that every woman is bleeding during her first time. In contrast, making love in a long-term romantic relationship – and when both partners are ready – is connected to bodily and emotional safety for Kitti. Kitti thinks about her own first sexual experience (being with a man who is a virgin, who loves her, and who does not expect of her anything she is not prepared for) as such an experience.

According to Lívia, casual sex with a stranger is something one may desire in order to reduce tension, but while it is easier than having sex with a person you know, it also feels worse afterwards. This, however, is not a universal feeling, and may also change with time:

> *"There are people who do not… live through this like that. Most simply do not deal with it, they don't connect this sexual part to emotion anymore."* (Lívia)

Lívia herself realized, after having casual sex, that she prefers having sex with people she loves.

Interestingly, both women discussed how communication about sex with their partners, and thus, becoming familiar with each other's desires, enhances the pleasure of sexual encounters. One of the advantages of communicating about sex is, somewhat paradoxically, that if one's partner knows what one desires, talking about sex later (during sex, for instance) thus becomes needless – a scene that, once again, emphasizes the intimacy that may be found through familiarity.

> *"In my opinion, [sex] is always a lot crappier with a total stranger, because you don't know each other's rhythm, and how each of you usually does it […] And how can you, so to say, relax with that one? […] It can't be the same as with someone you trust, before whom you don't have anything to be ashamed of, with whom you love each other…"* (Kitti)

> *"And this was also better because I could open up more. I knew that he knows – since I have told him – what I like, and how […] and so it felt good. That I did not have to tell him. But that he knew by himself and he was doing it."* (Lívia)

Lívia contrasts the seven years of her first, abusive relationship, where she did not have any experience of talking about sex, with her current relationship. She tells me how in the beginning, she was bothered by her current partner's insistence that they discuss their sexual desires, and started answering him out of spite, but then found that it was a pleasant practice. Since then, they started speaking about sex often and under various circumstances, even on public transport. In drawing up a contrast between her two relationships, Lívia connects the open discussion of sexuality once more to the experience of intimacy and love.

3.5.5. Sex as calming and emotionally safe

For both Lívia and Kitti, not only romantic relationships, but sex itself is also connected to ideals of emotional safety and calmness.

Both women see "early" or "young" love as passionate, *"dominated by desire"* (as phrased by Lívia). While the two women relate differently to passion in their relationships – Kitti misses it while Lívia asserts that she is primarily looking for calmness in a romantic relationship –, both of them see safety and certainty in being loved as something they currently need. When asked about what she wishes for in her romantic and sexual life now, Lívia says that she would like to have a partner beside her who, and whose love towards her children and herself, cannot be doubted. To the same question, Kitti answers that she would prefer if her partner told her that he loves her and displayed his feelings with embraces and similar gestures more often, as these have also become rarer since her partner has to work more.

Lívia also uses the word "calm" to describe an ideal relationship; in an ideal relationship, tensions are discussed without quarrels, they are not *"covered up […] until [they] suddenly erupt".* On a similar note, when asked to describe an orgasm, she emphasizes its calming effects on her body:

> *"Well, you are shaking, and you feel good, you feel that all that stress, and those passions… like when you take a sedative, and you just notice that you are falling asleep… […] I was relieved, I was not tense or worried, I was calm afterwards. […] I could feel that I am connected to my partner more. But he [was more connected to me] as well! And that was a very good feeling."* (Lívia)

It is also the certainty of being loved that manifests itself in Kitti's discussion of make-up lovemaking. To my question of whether she could recount a sexual situation which she enjoyed, Kitti talks about an occasion when she and her partner had huge a fight. As they were laying their bed, her partner finally said: *"That's how you are, that's it, I won't leave you anyway."* This declaration was followed by a strong current of positive emotions on Kitti's part. Her partner continued telling her that he will never leave her, Kitti cried, and they started kissing, which turned into lovemaking. The certainty of being loved *despite* conflicts and personal

shortcomings is not just a necessary element of a satisfying romantic relationship; "enacting" this certainty also leads to additional sexual intimacy and pleasure for Kitti.

Finally, the motif of performing sexually meaningful acts on public transport, emerging in both interviews, may also be discussed as a symbol of this intimacy.

> *"But now, we speak so directly about sex, that… on the tram, on the bus, anywhere!"* (Lívia)
>
> *"...for example, on the suburban train, I am sitting in his lap, and we are kissing for hours, it doesn't matter who sees us… And we didn't stop kissing, and my mouth was hurting already!"* (Kitti on the early days of her relationship)

In these scenes, playing out the bond and the eroticism of a starting relationship among other people allowed the construction of a reciprocal island of privacy and intimacy in a public space. The fact that both women talked about such a story indicates, once again, that for them, romantic-sexual relationships seem to represent "reciprocal islands" within a threatening world.

Chapter 4: Re-orienting Psychological Research on Sexuality

How may personal interpretations of sexuality be connected to the fabric of society that surrounds them? In this chapter, I argue – taking the interpretation of emerging themes discussed in the previous chapter further – that class difference is constitutive of how sexuality and romantic relationships are lived and experienced in the case study of Lívia and Kitti. I discuss the findings of my IPA case study through a theoretical framework created by combining Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) and Lauren Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (2011). I draw upon Ahmed for a phenomenologically informed discussion of moving in social spaces, while Berlant allows me to analyze the affective dimensions of class difference. I will also discuss convergences with existing analyses of homelessness, gender, motherhood and class (e.g. Ámon, 2013, 2016; Gengler, 2011; Williams, 2016), which support my claim for a critical psychology for gender and class.

In the previous chapter, I claimed that Kitti and Lívia narrate their lives in a gendered trajectory of "growing up". In this chapter, I will argue that this trajectory is not just gendered but classed as well. Tensions related to class mobility may be spotted in the accounts of the two women. Such meanings may be found, for instance, in Kitti's description of "others" who get to think of baby room decorations instead of looking for a place to sleep, as well as in the way she contrasts herself with her mother, implying that her own stable heterosexual relationship and motherhood may pave her (and her daughter's) way to a less precarious economic position than the one her mother inhibits. Similar notes emerge in Lívia's account with the term "primitivity": her socialization in the city, supporting her hopes of social mobility, sets her apart from Roma people living in rural poverty. "Primitivity", for her, connects traditional (and possibly abusive) relationships between men and women with meanings that negate social mobility, and it is both these elements that she is able to leave behind by identifying with life

in the city. For both women, I argue in this chapter, their relationship to sexuality and gender is connected to narratives of upward social mobility.

Sara Ahmed's (2006) concepts of directionality offer a useful vocabulary to discuss the way Kitti and Lívia move from harmful homes to other, safer ones, as well as their movement "forward" and "upward" from the shelter and within society. As gender certainly guides what people are oriented towards, the idea of home plays a particularly important role in conceptualizing possible female orientations (Ahmed, 2006). Ámon (2013) terms the dominant image of homeless women "failed womanhood", a womanhood that is conceptualized through the absence of a domestic or private sphere of their own. Since most "traditional markers of femininity" (Williams, 2016, p. 198) or normative womanhood as well as the actual spaces of home are inaccessible to homeless women, these dominant discourses often conceptualize their experiences – in Ahmed's term – as a constant state of disorientation.

At the same time, it is not disorientation that is reflected in the interviews with Lívia and Kitti. Disorientation is a state of stress and pressure, connected to a nauseous feeling of "being out of place" (Ahmed, 2006, p.10). This is not a situation in which one can bear to remain for too long, as living in a constant state of disorientation would take a toll on one's emotions and body – which is why Ahmed's call to "stay with such moments" (p. 4) is such a queer thing to offer. Lívia and Kitti are not disoriented – on the contrary, they are oriented towards "normalcy" (Kitti) or away from "primitivity" (Lívia), terms that carry normative meanings and delineate the normative (middle-class) womanhoods they are moving towards. It is not a prolonged experience of disorientation itself, but *the threat of being identified as disoriented,* that plays a central role in their meaning-making.

Lívia and Kitti are living under the constant threat of becoming the homeless woman who, according to a classed and gendered rhetoric of dehumanization, is pictured as lost, weak and immature; as a person who has *no idea where to go.* While their experiences may contain

moments of disorientation, Kitti and Lívia do not intend to "stay" and "get lost" (p. 21) in the way that Ahmed's queer phenomenology proposes. Instead, they are often looking for "the good life", a life that returns its debt by arriving at all the proper checkpoints (p. 21). They accept the "lifeline" of motherhood, for instance, with all its normative as well as its life-saving meanings (p. 17).

In their efforts to protect themselves in social spaces that threaten them with the feeling and judgment of disorientation, Kitti and Lívia need to mark the space they are moving towards. They perform this work under circumstances where past homes and families have often proved to be abusive, requiring them to redefine "family" and "home". In parallel to Sara Ahmed's concept of a "migrant orientation" (Ahmed, 2006), which is described as being oriented towards two homes at the same time, I would like to introduce the idea of a "homeless orientation" to describe the position inhibited by Kitti and Lívia. I use this term to denote an orientation which offers a chance to disavow the threatening image of "failed womanhood" (Ámon, 2013), that of the irresponsible homeless woman. At the same time, it involves an orientation towards *one* home, the future home in which each participant will live with their family of choice – which stands in stark contrast with threatening past homes and familial arrangements.

In the following sections, I will discuss several sexual and romantic elements that are employed in what I term a "homeless orientation". As the future homes Lívia and Kitti are oriented towards are closely connected to the people they would like to "bring along" to these homes (as phrased by Lívia), their ideal sexual and romantic relationships come to represent a safe, "reciprocal island" against the background of structural vulnerability. At the same time, one's relationship to sexuality may be an instrument of symbolic social mobility, as exemplified by the question of discussing sexual matters openly. Symbolic upward mobility is also offered by motherhood – a normative female identity that becomes accessible through the bourgeois ideal of the "good mother" (e.g. Csányi and Kerényi, 2018).

4.1. "Building the future" and social mobility

In both interviews, discussions of romantic relationships are intertwined with discussions of social mobility and homes. This interconnected relationship indicates that the separation of questions related to sex or romantic relationships on one hand, and the social positions people speak from on the other, deprives the former from many of their central meanings. Kitti and Lívia both relate to the notion of "building one's future", of putting effort into achieving social mobility, an idea that is prevalent in the expectations of social workers and institutional narratives of shelters in Hungary (Ámon, 2013). The two women's investment in the idea of achieving social mobility through individual efforts is sustained despite the fact that upward mobility from this most vulnerable segment of housing is relatively rare within the contemporary Hungarian context. As a result of low incomes and high prices at the housing market, most people who live at homeless shelters will continue to alternate between shelters, residing with relatives and acquaintances, and renting unsafe apartments with risky contracts below market prices (Ámon and Balogi, 2018). In the words of Lauren Berlant, Kitti and Lívia seem to display cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011), a fantasy of arriving to a safe home and a version of the "good life". Cruel optimism is characterized by a fantasy that is necessary for survival under certain conditions, but which also generates an affective investment in the very system that creates the (emotional, economic, and bodily) vulnerability of the subject. "Building the future", however, makes it necessary that one leaves the past, and everything associated with the past, behind. Social mobility is not only a matter of space, but a matter of *time* as well; a matter of progress. In this sense, a *temporary* shelter is coded as a place inbetween past and present, where one may gather the resources needed to move on – upward, forward, into the future – as soon as possible.

Temporal meanings related to social mobility may also be noted in Lívia's term "primitivity". Primitivity, for Lívia, connects her experience of being abused by her first partner with the belief that social mobility is impossible – an attitude she observed when living with her first partner's rural, hopelessly poor Roma family. The term of primitivity, for Lívia, places the subordinated status of rural Roma wives on one hand, and a lack of ambition on the other, within the same framework of limited possibilities. This situation was, for her, *"like prison",* as opposed to the opportunities (access to jobs and day care) available for even a single Roma mother in the capital. The word "primitive" places the two sides of this opposition – beside the spatial divide of rural and urban Hungary – along a temporal divide as well, connecting a life built in the city with progress, and bare survival amidst rural poverty with lagging behind in time.

The way Kitti and Lívia relate to speaking about sex provides a clear example of this temporal aspect to social mobility. For both women, discussing sexuality with a partner is a pleasurable experience. In the case of Kitti, educating herself about sexuality, and answering her daughter's sexuality-related questions openly, is also explicitly valued and linked to an idea of cultural advancement. When discussing love and sexuality in the interview, she often uses metaphors borrowed from natural sciences and psychological discourses. For Lívia, discussing the details of one's sexual life is a decidedly masculine attribute. Her good experiences with talking about sex with her current partner, however, as well as her participation in the interview with me (a female researcher) suggest an ongoing negotiation of this gender division. As a psychologist and researcher representing the geo-temporal pole of the city, I may have created a situation where discussing sexual matters became fitting of a woman who now participates in this more "progressive" city life, as opposed to a "primitive" one (where couples do not speak about sex and women have to obey their husbands).[22] In this way, for both Lívia and Kitti,

[22] I am thankful to my supervisor, Eszter Timár, for bringing my attention to this point.

discussing sexuality openly, both in a romantic partnership and within a (psy-)scientific discourse, may take up positive meanings exactly because of its connection to social mobility and the future life they would like to build.

4.2. The image of the "good mother" as symbolic upward mobility

As both participants are young mothers who are allowed to live at the shelter due to this fact, motherhood occupied a central place in both interviews. While not directly a theme of sexuality or romantic relationships, motherhood offers routes to normative womanhoods for Kitti and Lívia. As such, is an essential factor in the same work of – gendered and classed – self-orientation in which sexuality and relationships participate.

Motherhood marks a rite of passage into adulthood in the two interviews. Once they became mothers, Lívia and Kitti have gained access to a point of view that is not accessible to Lívia's current partner (who is not a parent yet). This motherly point of view involves a prioritizing of their children's needs: the project of social mobility, for instance, serves their children first of all. "Building the future" is conceptualized by Lívia and Kitti as creating economic certainty for their children. This gesture of orientation may be thought of as providing "a line" to follow (Ahmed, 2006, p. 17). The "lifeline" they are creating for their children is not just economic safety itself, but also a model of how one should strive for social mobility – and, in Kitti's case, possible models of womanhood.

At the same time, motherhood can also be the "line" Kitti and Lívia *themselves* decide to follow. Their commitment to their identity as mothers provides them not only with people they may be oriented towards, but, as "women are women insofar as they are oriented towards men and children" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 29), also with an access to a marker of normative, heterosexual femininity (Williams, 2016) despite their vulnerability to the "failed womanhood" represented by homeless women (Ámon, 2013).

Motherhood allows Kitti to look at her own body in a new way. She negotiates dominant beauty ideals by emphasizing a pragmatic view of her body (this is how a body should look like during pregnancy) and by relating to her own body through the love she receives from her children and partner. Additionally, as a mother, Kitti can claim an admission into the circle of "wise women" and pursue a female self-image she considers more pragmatic and authentic than the one she was pursuing in her youth. For Kitti, after her experiences of parental abuse and struggles with body image, it was her romantic relationship and motherhood that helped her build a model of womanhood which allows for a balanced emotional life. This model also belongs to the – normative yet sustaining – "lifeline" (Ahmed, 2006) or homely identity that Kitti would like to pass on to her daughter. In a similar fashion, Lívia is looking at the example of her mother – a woman who was able to raise her children without the support of a man – as a valuable resource, a possible "line" for herself to follow.

The ideal of the "good mother" is a classed marker of normative womanhood; as such, it evokes an air of competence and authority that is otherwise inaccessible for Lívia and Kitti. It is not incidental that when Kitti and Lívia talk about striving for a "normal" life or struggling to escape "primitivity" – when they describe themselves as women who adhere to social norms –, the idea of motherhood plays a central role in these negotiations. In fact, both women also refer to versions of motherhood with which they do *not* want to identify. For Kitti, this image is personified by her own mother, while for Lívia, raising one's children to be "primitive" plays a similar role. These images of bad parenting and domestic abuse are, at the same time, both also connected to poverty. "Primitivity" is an attribute of rural Roma poverty for Lívia, while Kitti describes her mother as someone who (like Kitti) at one point was also living at a temporary shelter but (unlike Kitti) was "*always unable to get a guy*". Thus, Kitti describes herself as having access to something her mother does not have access to: a (hetero)normative family background. What growing up in the city allows Lívia, her relationship allows Kitti – a

possibility to interpret her motherhood in terms of providing social mobility for herself and for her daughter. What is actually at stake in the image of the "good mother" are its class-related (bourgeois, but in this case also middle-class) implications.

Historically, motherhood as an occupation that has its own related competences is a product of European modernity and industrial capitalism, originally characteristic of the lifestyle of women within the new rising class, the bourgeoisie (Csányi and Kerényi, 2018). Today, parenting practices are classed in the sense that time- and labor-intensive parenting strategies – which prepare children for typically upper- and middle-class careers – diverge from practices that are more prevalent among the working class and the poor. Unincidentally, the former are often judged as "better" parenting than the latter, and state-funded institutions such as shelters tend to encourage the former (Gengler, 2011). In this sense, identifying with the "good mother" is a tool of symbolic upward mobility for Kitti and Lívia: the identity of the "good mother" may be used to fend off the image of the "undeserving" (Ámon, 2013; Williams, 2016), "failed" (Ámon, 2013) homeless woman. At the same time, Kitti and Lívia maintain that presenting examples of normative lifestyle to their children may lead to the possibility of actual social mobility for the children.

4.3. Relationships as "reciprocal islands"

As Daya and Wilkins (2013) observe, the bodies of homeless people may be particularly vulnerable to pain, injury and illness, and habits or affective relationships to places may take form through this experience of heightened vulnerability and through attempts to gain control over one's body. Accounts of such vulnerability emerged most often in my interviews in relation to pregnancy. Lívia mentions the difficulty of having to perform paid physical labor while pregnant, while for Kitti, pregnancy meant that she and her partner have lost the apartment they rented. This has led to a long sequence of physical and emotional ordeals during their

search for another place, as well as a particularly dangerous result of homeless pregnancy: Kitti's experience of life-threatening toxemia. This process of social pressure turning into bodily pressure and pain in the homeless woman's body may be paralleled to Ahmed's discussion of racialized bodies becoming "the "site" of social stress" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 140) and experiencing disorientation. For Kitti, pregnancy has marked the start of economic struggles, the "troubles" that put her previously passionate relationship to a test. The loss of her apartment, the collapse of her fragile social network, and the illness that has accelerated the birth of her daughter put Kitti into a position of disorientation: at a hospital, with nowhere to go, the possibility of being found out hovering over her head. This latter prospect would have resulted in losing her daughter. The body of the pregnant homeless woman, in this situation, is a clear example of a body that is "not extended by the skin of the social" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 139), a body that finds itself stopped at every turn. This sensation of social abandonment and vulnerability continues during the time spent at Kitti's mother-in-law (a period characterized by hunger, fear and loneliness), and only ends with the "final luck" of getting into the temporary shelter.

Pregnancy is not the only experience of heightened vulnerability discussed in the interviews. When talking about the past that they left behind, both Lívia and Kitti recount escaping an abusive home for the sake of a safer one. For Lívia, this means leaving her abusive husband and currently planning to move in with her mother rather than her new partner. For Kitti, the shift between homes has happened when she left her abusive mother's home and moved in with her partner. Being a woman, for Kitti and Lívia, seems to represent this risky entering of potentially threatening spaces, an inevitable choice between the old family and the new one. The vulnerability of this choice is reflected in their emphasis on commitment – including the expectation of prioritizing one's partner and child to other people – when talking about their romantic relationships. In addition, both Kitti and Lívia have experienced the limits

and fragility of their own social network, in which most acquaintances and extended family members cannot be relied on in times of crisis, and figures of authority may easily turn into agents of threats and policing. The certainty of "choosing each other" in a romantic relationship, even in the face of difficulties, is used to combat vulnerability from the outside, including the intertwined aspects of economic, emotional and bodily vulnerability. As a counterpoint to the social stress that constantly threatens their safety, Lívia and Kitti picture their ideal romantic relationships as safe, "reciprocal islands". The stress and vulnerability of their daily lives is in sharp contrast with the way they talk about their needs in terms of relationships and sexuality. The island-like safety of a romantic and sexual relationship may be best illustrated through the stories in which Lívia and Kitti have enjoyed sexually meaningful acts on public transport, creating a two-person island of intimacy and desire within an otherwise transparent public space.

Emotional, economic, and bodily safety intertwine in the two interviews, emerging as a relationship and sexual ideal. This is represented in the way that for both women, not only an ideal romantic relationship, but also sexual pleasure is connected to feelings of safety and calmness. Lívia talks about the calming and stress-reducing effects of orgasms, while Kitti connects the certainty of being loved with sexual pleasure in her discussion of make-up sex. Through such sexual experiences, the body that became "the "site" of social stress" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 140) is allowed to release some of the accumulated pressure within the emotional and bodily safety represented by a romantic relationship.

The meanings both women attribute to talking about sex within a relationship lends additional layers of meaning to this theme, pointing to how emotional closeness is a condition of a fulfilling sex life for Lívia and Kitti. Their partners' familiarity with their desires (which, somewhat paradoxically, allows the two women to access more pleasure without having to communicate about sex *during* the act itself) is an advantage that both Lívia and Kitti note.

Familiarity with each other's sexual desires is a value connected to a loving long-term relationship – but not, for instance, to Lívia's first, abusive relationship. Familiarity allows the sexual relationship to create an intimate, homely atmosphere that is otherwise not provided by the spaces Kitti and Lívia dwell in: "in being given[, familiarity] "gives" the body the capacity to be orientated" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 7). In the interviews, the feeling of one's sexual preferences being known by the partner is intertwined with the emotional closeness and intimacy that an ideal sexual relationship represents for the two women.

Both Kitti and Lívia talk about acts which prove to romantic partners that they are loved as a central feature of romantic love. When they are in love, they make efforts to prove their love to their partners, and this is what they seem to look for in return. Their conceptualization of love includes sacrifices made for the sake of one's partner – which may be related to their experiences of how one sustains relationships in situations where resources are scarce. Similarly, Kitti's preference of familiarity and long-term relationships, an element of the romantic ideal of staying with your first partner despite all problems and personal shortcomings, may not be separated from the precarious and vulnerable circumstances under which Kitti is forced to live. These circumstances may raise the – economic and emotional – stakes of leaving a partner. In this case, structural vulnerability, similarly to how Cecília Kovai (2017) argues, may influence individual emotional alignment and romantic values. At the same time, it is important to note that while economic struggles are always a shared problem in their romantic relationships, both women emphasize that when they talk about support in their relationships, they do not mean one-sided economic support, but rather emotional support and teamwork.

4.4. Possibilities for a critical psychology of sexual and romantic life

Sexuality and romantic relationships are interpreted by Kitti and Lívia within a framework influenced by their place in the Hungarian – semi-peripheral – network of class relations. As

women constantly balancing on the economically and psychologically threatening boundary of "melting" into the mass of people living in poverty, Kitti and Lívia are in a constant labor of separating themselves and their children from poverty and homelessness, both on a discursive and an economic level. This struggle may be noted in the way they contrast themselves to other residents of the shelter. Despite precarious work and housing conditions that the two women and their partners face and despite their lack of savings, both Kitti and Lívia emphasize that they are not living from one day to the other and that they are saving up. This latter point hints at a discourse of deservingness as well: as opposed to many other people stuck in poverty, Lívia and Kitti talk about themselves as people who are on the move upwards.

It is this project of social mobility, of "building the future" – an unattainable goal for most homeless shelter residents (Ámon and Balogi, 2018), and a superhuman effort at best – that provides the background necessary to understand the meanings Lívia and Kitti associate with romantic and sexual relationships. The idea that a romantic relationship should be a safe, reciprocal island that allows partners to "build their future" together suggests that sexuality as well as romantic relationships are embedded in the social context from which they are interpreted. The social context of poverty and homeless motherhood contributes to several layers of meaning in the way Kitti and Lívia talk about their needs and lived experiences in the field of sexuality and romantic relationships.

The neglect of such social embeddedness within the dominant paradigm of the psy-sciences, as well as in public discussions of psychology and sexuality within the Hungarian context, does not merely point to class bias. Dominant discourses on sexuality and on love relationships are built together with surrounding economic and social structures (Giddens, 1992), while shifts and lineages in the psy-sciences similarly co-evolve with the geopolitical power structures that surround them (Kovai, 2016). Psychology did not "forget" about the love lives of homeless women. Instead, I would argue that there is a necessary political or social

position to any psychological discourse on sexuality. Psychology may become an instrument of normalization or of legitimizing existing power structures, but it may also be used to question the inevitability of these structures. There seems to be a need in a critical psychology of sexuality which aims for the latter.

While this study explored the possibilities of a socially embedded phenomenological analysis in the field of sexuality psychology, many questions are left unanswered. One such question is that of race. While the two women share many elements in their class positions and personal histories, there are notable differences as well. Lívia is Roma and, during her interview, has explored questions of belonging to – or wishing to be separate from – Roma communities she has encountered; Kitti is white and did not mention race in her interview. While Lívia's negative identification with "primitive" communities carries race-related meanings, it is important to note the specific way in which race and class are interrelated in a Hungarian context, where poverty disproportionately affects the Roma (Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2019), and therefore the dominant image of Roma people evokes images of poverty as well. Further research on the interpretations of sexuality in the lives of women living in poverty in Hungary should explore these intertwined factors of race and class in greater detail. The absence of non-heterosexual romantic and sexual experiences from the interviews led to a further limitation of my study, the lack of discussion on interpretations of romantic-sexual lives outside heterosexuality. Finally, while phenomenology has proved a fruitful and suitable feminist research approach, further research should move towards a more participatory phenomenological methodology in order to create more opportunities for homeless women – members of a socially disadvantaged group – to directly affect scholarship on their own lived experiences and meaning-making work.

Conclusion

It has been noted in relevant literature (e.g. Loates and Walsh, 2010) that that the sexual and relationship experiences of women living in poverty are rarely present in psychological research on sexuality. At the same time, "mainstream" psychology in general has been critiqued for a lack of attention towards the way social class shapes subjectivities (e.g. Máriási and Vida, 2015). The objective of my thesis was to respond to these absences while also creating a "pilot study" for future research on the sexual and romantic lives of women living at temporary shelters. I successfully used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and phenomenologically informed theory for the first time in researching the relationship between social class and the personal meanings of sexual-romantic experiences.

I firstly identified emerging themes in the interviews through IPA. Six master themes have emerged from my analysis, which I have used to draw up a gendered trajectory in the participants' account.

The first master theme, which I titled "Away from places", includes the way Lívia and Kitti talk about leaving threatening past homes behind. Both women talk about moving from their birth family's home (led by mothers in both cases) to the home of their partner. At the same time, this movement led Kitti from an abusive home to a safe one, while in Lívia's case, it was her first partner who proved to be abusive. Therefore, for Lívia, getting out of an abusive environment was connected to arriving back to the city where she has grown up, and reuniting with her mother. In both women's stories, however, only a few close people could be trusted, and extended family members often proved to be unhelpful or abusive.

The second master theme is connected to pregnancy as a site of intertwining economic and bodily vulnerability in the lives of the two women, while the third master theme discusses the shelter as a temporary and transitional space where both women plan to "build their future"

– that is, to save up money and strengthen their social status. For both of them, this includes a hope of social mobility, as both women struggle to move themselves and their children out of poverty. I argued that the symbolic counterpart of this struggle is their relationship to normative womanhood, which I discussed in the fourth master theme. Kitti and Lívia both see womanhood as a rite of passage and a source of competence, using the image of the "good mother" (see e.g. Csányi and Kerényi, 2018) to identify with a womanhood that is distinct from the stigmatized image of the homeless woman (see Ámon, 2013; Gengler, 2011; Williams, 2016). The fifth master theme discusses the meanings linked to communicating about sexuality. Here, I argue that the open discussion of sexual matters was placed in both interviews in relation to the spatial and temporal divide of primitive/progressive. Thus, discussing sexuality with others may be interpreted as an instrument of negotiating one's relationship to a normative, "progressive" womanhood – and through this womanhood, to class mobility.

Finally, the sixth master theme describes sexual and romantic relationships as sites of safety and reciprocity, turning them into "reciprocal islands", a protective factor against the threat of economic, bodily, and emotional vulnerability. In this master theme, I discuss the various images of safety, commitment, calmness and familiarity that Kitti and Lívia used to describe their relationship and sexual ideals.

Based on my findings, I argued that the gendered trajectory the two women have discussed carries meanings related to class mobility as well as a symbolic refusal to identify with the stigmatized image of the homeless woman (cf. Ámon, 2013; Williams, 2016). Reading the way Kitti and Lívia identify with normative images of womanhood through Lauren Berlant's (2011) concept of "cruel optimism" and Sara Ahmed's (2006) concept of orientation, I argued that these identifications, in fact, negotiate the gendered class positions of the two women. The image of the "good mother" (see e.g. Csányi and Kerényi, 2018), as well as other normative models emerging in the interviews (such as Lívia's concept of "primitivity" and

Kitti's concept of "normalcy") are needed because they offer symbolic upward mobility, the promise of a "good life" (Berlant, 2011). Thus, in the cases of Lívia and Kitti, their struggle for *not being* women living in poverty shaped the ideas and meanings given to romantic relationships, sexuality, and womanhood.

Although the scope of this project did not allow a longer research process with several steps of working together with participants, future research may involve more participants and turn towards a more participatory methodology (e.g. Hale, 2016). A limitation of my thesis is – due to constraints of the case study form – that questions of race, intertwining with questions of class in a way specific to the Hungarian context, were not explored in depth. Questions related to non-heterosexual experiences, primarily due to the emphases of the participants, have also not been explored in the study, and may inform the objectives of future research on the topic. A contribution of my tthesis, beside demonstrating the usefulness of phenomenological theory and the methodology of IPA in discussing the classed aspects of sexuality and romantic relationships, is that it may serve as a "pilot study" for feminist IPA research on the lived sexual and romantic experiences of women living at homeless shelters.

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