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Hurdles or hope? Underrepresented Hungarian women's views on political solidarity

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Abstract

The presence and strength of women's solidarity greatly influence the unity and cooperation of Hungarian women in their pursuit to recognize their common interests, improve their position in society, and fight for gender equality. This holds particular importance for multiply-marginalised women who are faced with intersectional oppression in their lives. In this thesis, the political nature of women's solidarity, its connection to feminism, and the circumstances of intersectionally oppressed identities and strategies for coping with the patriarchal system are examined. The majority of available and related studies on women's solidarity were carried out in the West, particularly by feminist scholars. Nevertheless, within the Hungarian context, discussions based on these theories often do not include marginalized women, either selectively or entirely. Therefore, within the realm of qualitative research, this thesis initiated a conversation with three groups of Hungarian women: sex workers with a migrant background, rural mothers and grandmothers, and young feminist women in urban settings who remain excluded from the Hungarian feminist movement. The analysis examines the participants' classification on Becker & Wagner's Gender Identity Model (2009), and on Downing & Roush's scale of feminist evolution (1985), and how these qualities relate to the forms of their solidarity and their chosen or subconscious boundaries within the abstract group of women. Taking these factors into account, the research findings provide guidance on the grade of recognition of the patriarchal order and the interviewed groups' attitudes towards it. The results demonstrate that the Hungarian feminist movement has potential for growth in practicing solidarity and in incorporating women of varied identities into the struggle against sexism. These women frequently possess more knowledge regarding the efficacy of women's political solidarity, so attending to their voices can help bolster the political solidarity of Hungarian women.

Abstract (German)

Die Präsenz und Stärke der Solidarität der Frauen beeinflussen maßgeblich die Einheit und Zusammenarbeit ungarischer Frauen in ihrem Bestreben, ihre gemeinsamen Interessen zu anerkennen, ihre gesellschaftliche Position zu verbessern und für die Gleichheit der Geschlechter zu kämpfen. Dies ist besonders wichtig für mehrfach marginalisierte Frauen, die in ihrem Leben intersektioneller Unterdrückung ausgesetzt sind. In dieser Masterarbeit werden die politische Natur der Solidarität der Frauen, ihre Verbindung zum Feminismus sowie die Umstände intersektionell unterdrückter Identitäten und Strategien zum Umgang mit dem patriarchalen System untersucht. Die Mehrheit der verfügbaren und verwandten Studien zur Solidarität von Frauen wurde im Westen durchgeführt, insbesondere von feministischen Wissenschaftler*innen. Dennoch schließen im ungarischen Kontext Diskussionen, die auf diesen Theorien basieren, marginalisierte Frauen weder teilweise noch vollständig ein. Daher leitete diese Arbeit im Bereich der qualitativen Forschung ein Gespräch mit drei Gruppen ungarischer Frauen ein: Sexarbeiterinnen mit Migrationshintergrund, ländlichen Müttern und Großmüttern sowie jungen feministischen Frauen in der Hauptstadt, die weiterhin von der ungarischen feministischen Bewegung ausgeschlossen sind. Die Analyse untersucht die Klassifizierung der Teilnehmerinnen im Gender Identity Model von Becker & Wagner (2009) sowie auf der Skala der feministischen Evolution von Downing & Roush (1985) und wie diese Eigenschaften mit den Formen ihrer Solidarität und ihren gewählten oder unbewussten Grenzen innerhalb der abstrakten Gruppe der Frauen zusammenhängen. Unter Berücksichtigung dieser Faktoren geben die Forschungsergebnisse Hinweise auf den Grad der Anerkennung der patriarchalen Weltordnung und die Einstellungen der Teilnehmerinnen zu ihm. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die ungarische feministische Bewegung Potenzial für Wachstum in praktischer Solidarität und zur Einbindung von Frauen unterschiedlicher Identitäten in den Kampf gegen Sexismus hat. Diese Frauen verfügen häufig über mehr Wissen über die Wirksamkeit der politischen Solidarität von Frauen, sodass das Zuhören ihrer Stimmen die politische Solidarität ungarischer Frauen unterstützen kann.

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1. Introduction

In this thesis, I intend to give an overview of the concept of political solidarity in today's Hungarian society with special regard to women's solidarity, drawing parallels with ambivalent gender identities and the evolution of feminist identification, as well as analyse and clarify systemic obstacles and various intersectional or socially constructed boundaries among women. Featuring discussions on women's political solidarity by groups of Hungarian women whose voices are seldom heard in this discourse, the purpose of this work is to continue the conversation about the political solidarity of women in and outside of academia.

According to sociologist scholar György Csepeli (2010), Hungarian society has developed a socialization that positions people as passive sufferers, while they serve those in power and adhere to hierarchies. Due to the state's historical status as inferior, Hungarian people internalised these views and cultivated an attitude marked by trust issues, negativity, low independence, and (surprisingly) high individualism across generations.

This mentality is also true for the abstract group of women¹, according to studies in the social sciences. While Hungarian women's liberation started similarly to and even cross-referencing and in connection with the feminist movements of Western Europe, the Soviet influence arguably blew Hungarian feminism, and women's identity in the Eastern direction. (Antoni, 2014, p. 20ff) This created a rather ambiguous self-identification of Hungarian women in the 21st century: firstly, as a worker or a working mother, and only secondly as a woman. (Joó, 2011, p. 1ff) And although, since the 1990s, there have been significant feminist notions and actors at play, the Hungarian society, and its women have

¹ To forego the dispute around the categorisation of women, in my thesis, I am referring to women as an abstract, political category – while not denying the aspects of intersectionality. Women as an abstract category means in this case that we admit that women's existence shares an internal coherence without implying that every woman is the same. (Gunnarsson, 2011, p. 32ff) Moreover, although the category of women is not fixed, it is also an undeniable political fact of an identity that is under attack. (Allen, 1999, p. 112) Agreed with the argument that “abstractions are not there in order to cover complexity and variation in life; they are there in order to deal with just that,” (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 22) my goal is also ‘to deal with’ complexity in life, thus this work shall result in a politically comprehensible analysis of the current state of solidarity among Hungarian women.

developed an oppositional view of feminism and thus, developed a lack of political consciousness with regard to gender equality – parallel with the overall distancing from the West. (Szabó, 2015, p. 55f)

In recent years, we have witnessed very few united actions among Hungarian women. We can feel the lack of solidarity on our skin, on micro and macro levels. We often say about our own connections with women in our lives: ‘Women are each other’s wolves.’ or ‘I can’t befriend women; there is always so much drama.’ If women regularly hear these generalisations from men and each other, as they are raised to become natural enemies in pursuit of relationships and bonding with men (hooks, 1986, p. 127), then, from this root, definitive, public, inclusive, mutual, and political solidarity has difficulty to evolve, even in such extreme cases as gender-based violence or rape (Virág, 2019).

In contrast, and interfering with feminist ambitions, we have seen the uprising of machismo and sexism in the higher and lower classes of Hungary and the prohibition, control, and oppression of feminist theory and practice, as well as gender equality in all regards. Just by looking at the amount of space ‘women’s issues’ get in the decision-making, the countless sexist comments by public figures, the number of restrictive policies, the governmental disabling of the civil sphere and the (partial) prohibition of the education of gender theory (Pető, 2018), one can assess the state of restraining forces by the government of Hungarian feminism and women’s liberation.

The above-described historical past and political present have led to the state of solidarity of Hungarian women today: where justifying the system would protect one’s perceived safety and the illusion of predictability. (Fedor et al., 2020, p. 89) If there is neither motivation nor room for questioning the status quo, then there is hardly a basis for building solidarity grounded in gender identity or for identifying patriarchal oppression as a source of that.

Nevertheless, in the political context, solidarity makes a just society. (K. Banting & Kymlicka, 2015, p. 5) Or, applying Young’s provisional definition: solidarity is being ready to act based on given belonging or creating it while aiming at greater social justice (2010 cited in; Joó, 2019, p. 3), and equality. And that is what feminism, a political movement, is fighting for: liberation from sexism and sexist exploitation, justice, and equality. (hooks, 1988, p. 24) Being aware of the feminist determination for women’s solidarity, the

questions arise: are Hungarian women, too, in fact, kept apart by sexism and capitalist neoliberalism so much that solidarity cannot be dependent and built on shared commonalities and experiences based on a common gender identity? (E. Takács, 2018, p. 14ff) Can gender identification even be the solution to the lack of political solidarity among women, or are there other intersectional and societal barriers in play? And how do gender identity and solidarity correlate with the grade of feminist self-identification? In this thesis, I seek answers to these questions.

J. C. Alexander (2014) argues that, despite the centrality of solidarity to the social order and its conflicts, it is still absent from modernist theoretical frameworks. He writes that, despite this absence, modernist thinkers did not want to get rid of solidarity, but rather to make it a goal for the future; however, their sociological contributions were not aimed at maintaining or creating contemporary solidarity formations, but at their dissolution and its reasoning. (Alexander, 2014, p. 180) So this work is not only focused on the barriers to women's solidarity but has aims beyond the mere collection of data and contains hopeful, present- and future-oriented reflections on the current state of Hungarian women's solidarity. It seeks to spark and sustain the conversation around women's solidarity, to bridge the gap between practical contemplations and academic theories, to draw lessons from women who depend on others and provide support to each other in order to survive, and to highlight the shortcomings of current theoretical understandings.

Since 1989, several studies have been conducted observing solidarity in Hungary in different social groups, regarding a time period or around an issue (See State of the Art). Also, there are some (but not at all in an exhausting amount) studies discussing Hungarian women's solidarity at the epicentre of gender-based violence (like rape (Virágh, 2019) or catcalling (Fedor et al., 2020)). However, these studies do not apply an extended intersectional lens to analyse women's solidarity. Often the research methods or the literature is heavily based on Western, liberal values or the subjects of the research are one of the most visible social groups of women: white (as far as Hungarians can be white (Kalmar, 2022)), familiar with a kind of feminism, well-educated, from the capital city, with social and/or financial capital, or middle and high class. What can be unique in this thesis is the intersectional feminist perspective (taking into account the dissecting inequalities in and outside of the category of women (K. Crenshaw, 1989)), as well as the

purposive sampling and a qualitative research method, which, due to its special characteristics, will consider diversity, different backgrounds, and the fact which voices are and are not heard in the academic discourse (Kilomba, 2010). So, the thesis, with the help of the research subjects, can introduce new or unfamiliar voices to the academic discourse about the political solidarity of women.

Hence, the thesis applies an interpretive research approach, which will be based on Charmaz's (2007) research concept: Grounded Theory. In this, knowledge gained 'from the inside' will be used as the theoretical framework, as the information provided by the participants of the empirical research is connected with several theoretical contemplations regarding the formation of solidarity: System Justification Theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994), Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius et al., 1994), social and symbolic boundaries (Lamont & Molnár, 2002), a gender identity model (Becker & Wagner, 2009), and the stages of feminist evolution (Downing & Roush, 1985). The selected groups are seldom interviewed; they are rather considered 'apolitical' groups, such as multi-marginalized women (sex workers with a migration background), semi-marginalised women (rural mothers and grandmothers in Hungary), and politically active women who are still excluded from the discourse (young women identifying with feminist ideologies). What they have in common is that they can potentially give nuance to our current knowledge about how women's solidarity formations develop alongside undiscovered approaches.

Nonetheless, to find our answers, we must take our glances away from primarily Western concepts and start looking into the historical background of a post-Soviet, Eastern European country such as Hungary to understand what its women's movement, experience, and solidarity look like today. Only from this tipping point are we able to view the whole picture and conduct meaningful research regarding women's solidarity in Hungary.

But before moving on to the theoretical framework, the structure of the thesis will be presented.

Firstly, I will introduce the theoretical concept of solidarity in general, and then explore disparities within the feminist theoretical framework, as well as the role of women's solidarity in the fight against sexism. I will examine the concept of sisterhood and whether

this description of women's solidarity remains relevant. Additionally, the importance of personal relationships in this context will be addressed. Afterwards, several intersectional and symbolic or social boundary-based divisions among women will be listed: first in general feminist theory and later contextualized in relation to the Hungarian milieu. To review women's situation further, a summary of the historical and political background of Hungarian women will frame this chapter with topics that are relevant for the research goals.

Then, I will turn to the research questions, the current state of the art in relation to Hungarian women's solidarity, including the research gaps that this thesis aims to, at least partially, fill.

The following chapter presents the research methodology, which was applied in focus group discussions, and explains the considerations that feminist research should include, especially with a reflection that also places the position of the author of the thesis in context. Here, I also address the questions asked in the empirical research and the details of the sampling.

Next, I present the different stages of the analysis used in the work and the scientific models, based on which I conducted the analysis of all three groups at three levels: firstly, I present the solidarity-forming ways of the different groups, addressing intersections, and the different social and symbolic boundaries that were formulated during the discussions. Then, I outline, based on Becker & Wagner's (2009) gender identity model, which gender identity of women was typical among the participants. The third level of the analysis will be Downing & Roush's (1985) scale of becoming a feminist by classifying participants on the different stages towards feminist identification. Then, in the Results chapter, I discuss the obtained analysis results across the groups, drawing conclusions from them, based on theories, models, or other factors presented in the theoretical part of this thesis.

The thesis concludes with four further aspects. I review the discussions and limitations, including questions that the research could not answer, besides factors whose future application could bring about essential completion to the findings of this work. And finally, to complement the summary of the final conclusions of the analysis, I also supplement the work with future-oriented considerations.

After I introduced the thesis's purpose, summarised the theoretical framework and methodological approaches, and explained how the thesis is structured, I am moving on to the theoretical background.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Introduction and exploration of the basic concepts of women's solidarity

2.1.1. Solidarity as a political act

The word solidarity stems from the Roman law as *solidarité*, meaning the shared responsibility for debt. However, it later came to European languages from French, where it was already imported as a meaning of mutual responsibility between individuals, and from the 1840s, in its translations into German and English, it already had a politicized, labour movement-oriented meaning of '*one for all, all for one.*' Only after these events was it first used in the social sciences. (E. Takács, 2018, p. 12)

There are several research, academic, or other texts on the topic of solidarity, but as J. C. Alexander (2014) states, influential modern and postmodern thinkers had been not focusing on maintaining or creating solidarity, but studying the origins of its absence, of its dissolution "[b]ecause of commodification and capitalist hierarchy (Marx), because of bureaucracy and individualistic asceticism (Weber), because of the growing abstraction and impersonality of the collective consciousness that allows egoism and anomie (Durkheim). Postmodernity is typically seen as liquefying social ties and intensifying narcissistic individualism (Bauman); or as creating new forms of verticality, for example the disciplinary cage (Foucault)." (Alexander, 2014, p. 180)

In the existing scientific works, though, numerous different adjectives are used in front of the word solidarity: *mutual*, *inclusive*, *extended*, *unconditional*, *systemic*, and *political*. These adjectives were originally included in the research questions as well but as my thesis progressed, I decided to discard them because the concept and definition of solidarity would have to include these meanings automatically.

Solidarity should be *mutual*, motivating us to build acceptance, support in times of need, and cooperation. (K. G. Banting & Kymlicka, 2015, p. 2)

Solidarity should be *unconditional* if we respect ethically that we, as human beings, in our interconnectedness, relate to and owe each other. (Fraser, 1985, p. 428)

Due to the ethical approach, it should be *inclusive* and *extended*, as the here and the there (the close and the far) are the same and not distinguishable morally, whose suffering we should care for and about. (Butler, 2012, pp. 4–5)

Solidarity should be *systemic* too because it embodies the willingness to act based on an established connection or to create that, with the goal of contributing to social justice. (Young, 2010 cited in; Joó, 2019, p. 3)

And solidarity should also be political. In today's world, where people are systematically isolated, exploited, and divided by class, ethnicity, gender, and other factors, those who can demonstrate empathy and helpfulness without regard for personal interests and actively oppose the system's rewarding incentives are practicing political solidarity. Therefore, as several other feminist scholars agreed, the goal is a solidarity that is political. (Fraser, 1985; hooks, 1986; Scholz, 2009)

Solidarity can be categorised on three levels according to Banting & Kymlicka: structurally, throughout institutions (like redistributive measures), individually, like interpersonal altruism, and as a political action (such as applying pressure on the institutions). (K. G. Banting & Kymlicka, 2015, pp. 2–3)

Kymlicka (2015) differentiated between types of solidarities in contemporary societies by the axis of inclusivity/exclusivity and the presence/absence of solidarity. He wrote, there are two ways of solidarity in the current political climate: inclusion without solidarity (in neoliberal multiculturalism²) or solidarity without inclusion (in welfare chauvinism³). He opted for a third option, which is a solidarity that is inclusive through a multicultural welfare state. (Kymlicka, 2015, p. 8) However, Kriesi (2015, pp. 3–4) completed the scale with a fourth option: neoliberal nationalism, which is an exclusive non-solidary state of things, popularised among the radical populist right wing, (like Hungary's Fidesz government).

² In Kymlicka's definition: neoliberal multiculturalism means the equal right for everyone to promote themselves and their culture, as well as to safely partake in the cultural offerings of others, regardless of concerns about disadvantage, all integrated in the global market. (Kymlicka, 2015, pp. 6–7)

³ Welfare chauvinism is a reactionary process to neoliberal multiculturalism, encouraged by right-wing political actors, to protect the welfare state and national solidarity, drawing a line between the deserving (e.g., often white, national citizens) and the undeserving (e.g., people with migration backgrounds). (Kymlicka, 2015, pp. 7–8)

In an ideal world, we would feel solidarity everywhere, for everyone, but this idealistic approach is quite paradoxical since, in an ideal world, we would not need such strong solidarity to oppose oppressive forces. So to develop a theory that reflects the experiences of women and others who encounter systemic injustice, we need a non-idealized theory in a more robust sense: one that focuses on the realities of individuals whose lives are separated from an ideal. (Tessman, 2009, p. xviii) Hence, pragmatically, societies, groups, and communities are forming solidarity *against* something, against a threat directed “towards a piece of their identities” (Arendt, 1968, p. 18). For these reasons, in today’s climate, solidarity shall be strategic and political, based on and fighting common struggles using the “power of reciprocal commitments”, like a social contract (Allen, 1999, p. 113). But do women identify the threat against which they should unite, and if not, how do they oppose something they have not yet recognised?

2.1.2. Sisterhood: female friendships or political solidarity?

In Western feminism during the second wave, women’s solidarity was described with one word: sisterhood. This was and is criticised from various perspectives, for instance by bell hooks (1986), who argued that women based on race and class were still excluded from the perceived sisterhood. Both she and Sally Scholz (2009) expressed the significance of the differentiation between sisterhood and political solidarity, and Fraser concluded that political solidarity is more appropriate for social movements than, for example, the solidarity based on care (Fraser, 1985, pp. 428–429).

Still, feminists today identify ambivalently with this sentiment too. For many, the word sisterhood seems to be a bioessentialist⁴ approach, especially if we observe how the meaning of gender has progressed over time. So, the wider acknowledgment of intersectionality voiced the need for another expression because sisterhood can feel exclusionary, only including white women from higher classes. However, other feminists in the third wave admitted the importance of collective action to eradicate sexism and have no issues with the term. (Evans, 2015, pp. 111–113)

Where feminist theorists, philosophers, and activists agree is that the feminist cause, the fight against sexism and sexist exploitation, necessitates a kind of solidarity among

⁴ Biological essentialism/gender essentialism (abbr. bioessentialism): “This view of gender holds that the categories “man” and “woman” are natural, self-evident and unequivocal. It regards sex-linked behaviours and traits as fixed and stable properties of separate and autonomous individuals.” (Marecek, 1995, p. 162)

women. (Allen, 1999, pp. 111–113) The disagreement prevails where it starts and ends, and on what basis it would be founded. Hooks (1986) and Scholtz (2009) preferred political solidarity, which communicates that the actors see each other as political allies.

However, female or women's friendships are often the basis of solidarity, empathy, and a safety net that women can provide each other in a sexist world. Historical research on feminist movements has shown that not only political alliance, but personal and supportive relations were of high significance, contributing to the successes of major international women's organizations (like the *International Woman Suffrage Alliance*, or the *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom*), supplying the consolidation of the emotional community and the idea of a worldwide sisterhood. (Bosch & Kloosterman, 1990 cited in; F. Takács, 2021, p. 81)

To conclude, as feminist theory evolved, theorists arrived at the conclusion that being the same gender does not indicate solidarity, but political commitment does. Although friendships and good connections contributed to the success of past feminist activities, it is questionable who that approach included and excluded. As of today, the word sisterhood appears to be outdated as we explore new intersections in women's lives or attracts rather neutral attitudes because of the re-definition of the gender of women and omitting its negative associations from the second wave.

2.2. Women's solidarity and its multi-level barriers

2.2.1. Systemic obstacles

Feminist philosophers (Fraser, 1985; hooks, 1986; Scholz, 2009) name the solidarity of women and uniting for collective action⁵ as one of the most powerful tools to fight sexism, sexist oppression, and exploitation, which are the main goals of the feminist movement (hooks, 1988, p. 24). That means it is impossible to discuss women's solidarity without taking into account the place of feminism in society.

There were several approaches to tackle patriarchal forces in society on local, national, and international levels. Silvia Federici (2018) argues that, when the capitalist patriarchy's foundation was laid in the Middle Ages, one of the main acts that ensured capitalist accumulation was the oppression, eradication, and genocide of women through

⁵ Collective action means, in this context, all activities that someone does either for their own group or an external one to progress the group's social position. (Wright et al., 1990, p. 5)

witch-hunting. Not only were those women who attempted to stay independent and keep their goods murdered, but any trace of women's solidarity was nipped in the bud. An illustration of this is the ongoing demonization of the term *gossip*, even though its etymological roots refer to a strong friendship among women. (2018, pp. 37–42)

According to our historical knowledge, argues Federici (2018), it becomes clear whose interest lies in stopping women from uniting: the capitalist-patriarchal world order, which aims to ensure capitalist accumulation by upholding women's inferior position in society. This is achieved by making them remain in their traditional roles, where they fulfil their assigned tasks: doing the reproductive and invisible, unpaid care and domestic work, which creates and maintains the labour force for the present and the future, as Marxist feminists declare as well. (Beechey, 1977; Molyneux, 1979 cited in; Anthias, 2001, p. 372) This is also evident in current times, due to neoliberal labour policies, where women are still more likely to be viewed as carers than workers. (Kussy & Moll, 2023, p. 5)

The most generic explanation of how women's solidarity is hindered is sexism. Sexism has many forms and manifestations; thus, listing those would surpass the framework of this thesis. Now, I will only describe its most present tools that hinder women's solidarity which will be apparent in the empirical part of my research. Having applied the recommendations of Grounded Theory in my thesis, I established the foundation for the theoretical research using an interpretative approach. This involved acquiring knowledge from the participants of the empirical study and summarizing the theoretical reflections that underpin the findings, thus providing a framework for this thesis. (Charmaz, 2007)

2.2.1.1. System Justification Theory (SJT) and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO)

Sexism is an ideology that supports a hierarchical system based on gender inequality, and it is recognized as an 'ism' alongside other ideologies that rationalize social advantages and disadvantages based on the categorization of individuals into groups. Sexism is linked to various ideologies and psychological factors that justify hierarchy and predict the appeal of group-based hierarchy, including system justification on a systemic level and social dominance orientation on an intergroup level. And sexism can only remain untouched if there are people who justify the said system with their behaviour and adapt to the dominant intergroup hierarchies. (Kovács & Szabó, 2017)

The System Justification Theory (SJT) defines a “process by which existing social arrangements are legitimized, even at the expense of personal and group interest”. (Jost & Banaji, 1994, p. 2) According to this perspective, members of disadvantaged groups often confront potential conflicts among their ego, group, and system justification needs—conflicts that are not faced by members of privileged groups (Jost et al., 2001). As an example, women who have a strong commitment to the belief in the legitimacy of the status quo are more prone to demonstrate internalised sexist behavioural patterns towards other women. (Glick & Fiske, 1996 cited in; Jost et al., 2004, p. 906) When this happens, it is anticipated that members of disadvantaged groups will not significantly engage in strategies for social change. (Jost et al., 2004)

In accordance with that, individuals feel the need to maintain the status quo, and even though they might notice differences in status, they legitimize the existing social order despite their own or the group interests through Social Dominance Orientation (SDO). Scholars of Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius et al., 1994) presented a scale to assess how much individuals uphold anti-egalitarian values and back and maintain hierarchical systems of inequality based on group membership. The SDO scale includes items that assess beliefs about the inherent superiority or inferiority of certain groups compared to others, as well as the endorsement of inequality in group relationships. (Wilson & Liu, 2003, p. 188) This helps to preserve the perception of the personal sense of control, along with the illusion of predictability and justice. (Fedor et al., 2020, p. 89)

Gender ideologies function based on the system justification principle, thereby perpetuating unequal gender relations. (Kovács & Szabó, 2017). This can manifest on multiple levels: social (system justification), intergroup (social dominance orientation), and individual levels. The individual levels interact with one another: ideologies related to gender not only mirror the social system but are also found at the individual level, where each person interprets and incorporates them into their own thought processes. (Fedor et al., 2020, p. 89) Radke et al. (2018, p. 160) argue that women with a relatively high SDO experience an internal inconsistency between their support for the social hierarchy and their awareness of being in a lower-status position in society. This difference could drive women to adopt worldviews that (1) align with the current gender hierarchy and (2) emphasize the significance of women’s societal status.

According to Wilson & Liu (2003), different forms of gender identification might play a role in SDO, but its effect is contextual. This supports the typology of women's gender identity by Becker & Wagner (2009), which I will utilize for the analysis: women can identify with the gender of women traditionally and progressively, or not identify at all (see Data Analysis). The traditional identifier accepts the current social order and embraces the assigned, traditional role of being a woman (like mother, housewife, etc.), acting along with SDO, and seeks coping mechanisms to sustain a perceived control. Progressive identifiers, even though they identify with their gender, wish to change the patriarchal hierarchy. Whereas non-identifiers can either strive for the status of men in society (progressively non-identified) or reject femininity as a whole and regard themselves by the men in their lives (traditionally non-identified). Consequently, only the progressive identifiers, recognising patriarchy as the current social order, are motivated to redefine their gender roles by declining SDO, and see the means of collective action as a way to do so. The authors assigned this category to feminists (Becker & Wagner, 2009, p. 490). Hence, identification and collective identity, both essential for joint social action, are connected to a sense of solidarity. This solidarity encompasses mutual support among movement members and a commitment to a shared fate with all women in society, including those from diverse social groups, as they are united by the experience of being regarded as second-class citizens in social and political contexts, as Acsády & Mészáros also stated. (2018, p. 81)

2.2.1.2. The recognition of the patriarchy

As I mentioned above, progressive identifiers were classified as feminist women by this categorisation; however, identifying with the gender of women, even if it happens progressively, is not enough. There are several models trying to depict feminist classification and identities, but in this thesis, I will use Downing & Roush's (1985) theory in the analysis, which, instead of strict categories, portrays becoming a committed feminist as an evolution. This approach can show that the development of feminist identities is fluid, providing researchers with a more optimistic perspective while realistically illustrating the nuances and often imbalanced, non-gradual development of the feminist identity. For these reasons, I utilised this theory in the analytical part of my research as well (see Data analysis).

The scale of Downing & Roush consists of five stages before someone becomes committed to the feminist ideology, as follows. The zeroth stage is passively accepting and justifying the current system and developing coping strategies. At the first stage, the revelation takes place by noticing oppressive patterns of the patriarchy, attaching intense emotions to this recognition, like rage, guilt, and responsibility. At the second stage, called embedding, there is a withdrawal from the wider society, seeking women's spaces, subcultures. At the third stage, individuals recognise how far their latitude reaches, that "the error is in the system," as a kind of synthesis. At the last, or fourth stage, they commit actively by participating in feminist movements, building alliances (even with men). (Downing & Roush, 1985 cited in Szabó, 2015, pp. 61–62).

Feminists, according to Downing & Roush's stages to become a feminist (1985), have at least reached the first stage of that model: revelation. This means they recognised that society works on the basis of sexist oppression, which affects women's position, opportunities, and freedom harmfully.

Feminist consciousness, combined with gender identification, can provide women with a cognitive framework for understanding their world, while having the tools to frame sexist discrimination they may experience as structurally unjust. (Landrine & Klonoff, 1997 cited in; Fischer & Good, 2004, p. 437) This framework also gives an extensive vocabulary to name sources of discrimination and oppression, with which they can find common ground with other women. (Klonis et al., 1997) As a consequence, without acknowledging the existence of the patriarchy, seeing the formation of solidary connections among women as an essential means to advance women's societal position is challenging, if not impossible.

2.2.2. Intersectional approach

Intersectional feminism, as a form of feminism, originated with Kimberlé Crenshaw's work, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color* (1991), among other black feminists and collectives (Hull, 1992). In this work, Crenshaw writes primarily about the intersections of blackness and womanhood, how ignorance of each factor, on one hand, by black male activists and on the other hand, by white feminists, can be misleading and less effective in combating social inequalities while directly harming black female bodies. (K. W. Crenshaw, 2006, p. 11) Her ideas were applied to feminist thinking and activism at various and diverse intersections, mostly at the main

‘crossroads’ (K. Crenshaw, 1991), intersection is intended to tackle: race, gender, and class. (Davis, 2008)

While Judith Butler (1990, p. 15 cited in; Allen, 1999, p. 101), in her earlier works, stated that solidarity is inherently an exclusionary form, for example, excluding non-women from women’s solidarity, they later revised those thoughts by declining the dichotomy of ‘far’ and ‘close’ suffering, and claiming that empathising with our close environment and the *Other* cannot be divided. (Butler et al., 2016 cited in; Joó, 2019, p. 6)

Bell hooks (1986), too, argued that solidarity requires difference, committing to addressing the conflicts and offering space for inner criticism. Ciccio et al. (2021, p. 176) agreed with Crenshaw (1991) that for feminist alliances, feminists need to build cooperation across movements to alter “power asymmetries at intersections” of sexuality, able-bodiedness, and geography, in addition to class, race, and gender.

As described in the previous chapter, theorists often problematized the word sisterhood, reinforcing a bioessentialist, exclusive trend in political solidarity. Intersectional feminist philosophers depicted this kind of women’s solidarity, especially during the second wave, as the tool of white, cis women from the upper classes.

Already, the diverse women’s identity suffered from this notion. For example, black female bodies were, for a long time, not seen as women (Fouche, 1994, pp. 79–80); lesbians, trans women were notoriously excluded from an extensive solidarity of women (Heyes, 2003, p. 1113ff). In and outside of the feminist movement, women who were not conforming to traditional gender roles were excluded, too: single or widowed women, childless women, promiscuous women, etc, failing to perform the contemporarily accepted traditional femininity, labelled as deviant, are ostracised from the abstract group of women. (Beauvoir et al., 2011; Butler, 1990) Feminists, too, are regularly described as ‘masculine’ women who reject or fight their feminine sides, wanting to be male. (Kovács & Hevesi, 2015, p. 78)

The third and fourth waves of the feminist movement are not different in this regard: some directions, like neoliberal feminism, are still focusing on the well-being of white, middle-, and upper-class cis women, as ‘capitalism’s snake ate up’ this liberation movement, as many others, while elevating individual successes of privileged women. (Rottenberg, 2014; Fraser, 2023) But not only ‘girlboss’ or neoliberal feminism work exclusively in

solidarity, but radical feminism as well. In today's form, some directions of radical feminism analyse the world through man-hate, thus excluding trans women and sex workers from their activism. (Morgenroth et al., 2024, pp. 678–680)

To conclude, as Anthias claimed, the similarity in life conditions, as well as life chances, influences the degree of solidarity formations within a social group, which is, in her argument, present throughout the factors of class, gender, and ethnicity alike. (Anthias, 2001, pp. 384–385) Black feminist scholars argued that the level of oppression directly correlates with the degree of political solidarity and strive for collective action: the greater and more diverse the oppression a group faces, the greater the importance they place on political solidarity and the development of a collective consciousness as a group. This supports Arendt's idea that solidarity is best developed against a threat that threatens part of our identity. (Hill Collins, 2000, pp. 273–290; hooks, 1988, pp. 1–15) This is not only manifested regarding race, but also class consciousness, as working-class and poor women presented a higher drive for political unity. (hooks, 1988, pp. 95–107) I argue that this recognition can be impeded by constructed but existing social and symbolic boundaries in addition to the main factors of intersectional inequalities, and these I unpack in the next subchapter.

2.2.3. Sociopsychological hurdles: social and symbolic boundaries

Lamont & Molnár (2002, pp. 168–169) distinguished symbolic and social boundaries while presenting their interconnectedness at the same time. Symbolic boundaries are human-made distinctions to categorise objects or people. Symbolic boundaries also create feelings of similarities and, therefore, group membership. (Epstein, 1992, p. 232 cited in; Lamont & Molnár, 2002, p. 168) Whereas “social boundaries are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities.” (Lamont & Molnár, 2002, p. 168) In her later work, Lamont supplemented her argument with the assertion that not only material differences, but also cultural recognition gaps and thus, stigmatisation play a role in inequality. (2018, pp. 420–422) Hence, symbolic boundaries can turn into social boundaries when they are mutually recognised and therefore influence social interactions. (Lamont & Molnár, 2002, pp. 168–169) Symbolic and social boundaries mark the borders of intersecting identities further, as they are established within a social class

(Anthias, 2001, p. 376), like inside the group of women, but their presence is in all cases contextual (Lamont & Molnár, 2002, p. 186)

Additionally, I will list related social boundaries that might be contributing to the barriers to women's solidarity, based on the findings of this thesis.

Appearance

In Naomi Wolf's revolutionary book, *The beauty myth*, (2002, pp. 75–76), she demonstrated how beauty simultaneously divides and connects women. On the one hand, beauty creates commonality among all women: a common cultural framework we understand the world and each other by. On the other hand, it creates an inherent suspicion and mistrust, and thus, distance, as women rank themselves in comparison with *Other Women* according to the unachievable beauty standard. Hence, the beauty myth serves as a social boundary and a constant hurdle towards unconditional women's solidarity. This results in the emotion of envy in connection with the appearance, which women are more vulnerable to because of the continuous focus on women's looks, not only in intrapersonal relations, but on a wider level (e.g., media, politics). (Arnocky et al., 2016, pp. 72–73; Wolf, 2002) Thus, women are not only preoccupied with beauty treatments and their looks, but they are also separated from other women during this ongoing competition.

Motherhood

Fouche (1994, pp. 80–83) has found that motherhood does not result in unconditional solidarity; what is more, it creates a divide between groups of women: women in different races and classes have different concepts of motherhood, varying between oppression and the inevitable part of the evolution of womanhood.

Victims of sexist violence

As summarised previously, the affirmation of gender ideologies, on a societal level, can result in SDO. Furthermore, SDO can also appear on an individual level regarding sexist violence and victim-blaming.

When individuals justify a system of their oppression, but they encounter oppressive acts on a daily basis (even if just subtly), their self-esteem suffers: victims resort to blaming themselves. That tendency is supported by the neoliberal belief that the world is a just

place and bad things happen to bad people. (Z. Papp, 2017, pp. 83–84) Another significant problem is the societal under-definition of being a victim, resulting in a state in which the victim is unaware that the violent act committed against them is considered morally reprehensible by the broader society. This issue is most common among members of groups that are cumulatively disadvantaged, excluded, marginalized, or pushed to the periphery of society, and who have internalized feelings of subordination (F. Takács, 2021, pp. 178–179), like women.

Additionally, rape myths⁶ contribute to sexist violence by providing justification for, downplaying the severity of, or denying the occurrence of sexual violence. Such statements are generally aimed at the victim of the act rather than at the perpetrator, suggesting that the act is mainly the victim's problem, not the perpetrator's. (Burt, 1980 cited in; Parti et al., 2016, pp. 9–10)

To summarise, women, who are (momentarily) not victims of sexist violence, distance themselves from victims for self-defence reasons, under the false pretence that this will save them from future violence.

Sex workers

Sex workers are intersectionally discriminated against in all societies. Their gender, race, sexuality, migration status, or disabilities intensify the social stigma originally attributed to sex workers, which then results in institutionalised abandonment, lacking workers' rights, and a social safety net. According to Fraser's (2007 cited in; Dziuban et al., 2021, p. 374) concept of recognition, norms surrounding (the absence of) recognition create an image of sex workers as invisible regarding their involvement in social life and wealth redistribution. However, these norms regarding (lack of) recognition render sex workers particularly visible—especially to law enforcement and the criminal justice system. They are seen as 'undesirable' bodies in public spaces, but also as an opportunity for the state to exploit their presence. (Dziuban et al., 2021, pp. 373–375)

⁶ Burt (1980) has classified rape myths about women into four categories. The first category denies the occurrence of rape and claims that false accusations are common. The second category negates the harmful, traumatizing effect of sexual violence. The third type argues that the sex acts of rape are consensual, and women secretly desire sexual violence. The fourth myth is depicting the attitudes of victim-blaming.

Sex workers' movements often showed solidarity with other oppressed groups, like migrants, queer people⁷, or the working class⁸, besides demonstrating for their own worker rights. However, they rarely received recognition; their community action had been forgotten (Stern, 2019), and no reciprocity was in sight.

In this section, I focused on discussing social and symbolic boundaries that emerge in women's groups, which could interfere with women's political solidarity. This completes an analysis of the main intersectional factors and how they can shape women's solidarity, creating exclusionary tendencies.

2.3. The Hungarian context

In this chapter, I am going to reiterate relevant factors contributing to the current state of Hungarian women's solidarity, naming examples of existing solidarity from the past and present, depicting historical and contemporary political processes that interpret the framework within which Hungarian women operate regarding political solidarity.

Hungarian sociologist György Csepeli's (2010) summary of the state of general solidarity in Hungary conveys a rather pessimistic point of view: in Hungary, just like in other Eastern European countries, the level of trust measured in 2008 was below average; Hungarian people's cooperation can be described as *szalmaláng* (straw flame), as a momentary unity that burns down fast. That corroborates with Erzsébet Takács's (2018, p. 40) description of reflexive solidarity in Hungary: she claims that reflexive solidarity is optional and revocable – the 'I' is in the centre, not the *Other*. Csepeli said, Hungarian people live beside each other; there is neither collaboration nor competition⁹. He assigns the causes for the lack of solidarity to the general role of a servile, passive person, mostly stemming from the historical past. Flóra Takács (2021, p. 163) also expressed in her work that populist ideologies in the public sphere amplify exclusive solidarity, differentiating between the deserving and the undeserving.

⁷ Especially, trans sex workers played a significant role during the protests for queer rights in the US. (Stern, 2019)

⁸ Postrevolutionary pioneer: Anarchist María Luisa Marín and the Veracruz renters' movement (Wood, 2012)

⁹ However, in the case of women, there is competition for male validation regardless of their national identities. (hooks, 1986, p. 127)

The scholars I cited all connect the current state of solidarity among Hungarian people to the historical past and political present. In these works, they examine the general solidarity in wider society. But what about the solidarity of Hungarian women?

In this chapter, I aim to give a historical overview of Hungarian women's solidarity, with regard to the feminist movement's attempts to create collaboration among Hungarian women.

2.3.1. Traces of women's solidarity throughout Hungarian history

The historical overview that follows shows that the emergence of solidarity among Hungarian women is inseparable from feminist progress.

Women's education

The public correspondence feminist researchers had analysed shows that during the 19th century, the restricted access to education and voting rights bore significant importance. Hence, Blanka Teleki, Teréz Karacs, and others united to found schools for (mostly upper-class) women, and in collaboration with the pupils, they published a document entitled "Manifesto of Blanka Teleki's Students on the Equality of Women," emphasising the value of women's education and laying the groundwork of women's access to education for the future. (Antoni, 2014, p. 20)

Unity during and after the suffragette movement

In the suffragette movement, one of the most prominent examples of the success of women's extended political solidarity is the case of one of the branches of the Hungarian *Feminists' Association* and the *Free Women's Organization of Balmazújváros*¹⁰. Between 1908 and 1920, a mutual, open, and solidarity-oriented alliance was established between the two organizations. Both supported each other according to their own capabilities and showed openness to work together. Moreover, the existing involvement of the Feminists' Association in the transnational feminist alliance also facilitated the opportunity for the women of Balmazújváros to join the international feminist movement. This solidarity, which crossed class and rural-urban divides, benefited rural working women and provided a wider social base for feminists from the capital. This provides a good practice example for women uniting for the same political goal. (Acsády & Mészáros, 2018)

¹⁰ Balmazújváros is a small town in Eastern Hungary.

Following the feminist uprising in the first quarter of the 20th century, the movement suffered a major backlash throughout Eastern Europe, in Hungary alike. The Feminists' Association, and any other women's alliance (like the rural-urban cooperation introduced above), either dissolved or remained underground, in illegality, undocumented, up until the end of the Second World War. (Antoni, 2014, p. 23)

The state-socialist period

Regarding the Soviet era, there is an apparent clash between the perspectives on women's situation during that time. Feminist scholars, almost in absolute consensus, agree that between 1945 and 1989, women's identity was overridden by working-class identity (Joó, 2011, pp. 1–3) and that the State controlled any feminist or women's organisations. Thus, the progress made regarding gender equality (like the access to abortion, which was, at the time, surpassing the Western hemisphere) is being entirely attributed to the State controlled by the Soviet Union. (Antoni, 2014, pp. 23–25; Funk, 2014; Pető, 2001, pp. 155–156) However, it is questionable whether this approach is based on a Western-centred perspective and liberal feminist contemplations. According to Ghodsee (2015; 2019), scholars would have to tackle this topic from a more nuanced perspective, but I could not find any attempt to do that in the Hungarian context.¹¹

After 1989

In the 1990s, after the change from state-socialism to capitalism, there was a boom in feminist organising in Hungary: women united against the increasingly restricted access to abortion and demonstrated against raising the retirement age, as well as in support of the victims of domestic violence. (Fábián, 2014, p. 4),

With respect to the mobilisation against a new restrictive abortion bill in the 1990s, various women's groups united temporarily under the name *Szabad Döntés Jogáért* (For the Right of Free Choice), which achieved the defeat of the introduction of the bill. During the mobilisation, the participants kept the issue within a national framework (instead of

¹¹ Ghodsee (2019), in her work, focuses on Bulgaria and Zambia and mentions Hungary only in passing. She made the argument that during the Soviet era, women still bore agency and political activity in the interest of women's liberation, and not (only) of the Communist Party. There is a citation in Barna's (2018) work of Raluca Maria Popa, who thematised the case of Romania and Hungary, but I could not access this literature.

building transnational alliances), and after the success, the cooperation dissolved. (Fábián, 2014, pp. 5–6)

Almost parallel with this, women in trade unions (inherited from the state-socialist era) led persistent mobilisation for years concerning legislation on women's retirement. From 1992 to 1996, the efforts of women's groups (including applying pressure on representatives in the Parliament) postponed the increase in the retirement age. The conclusion of women's mobilization around the retirement age marked the close of the first phase of women's social movements in post-Soviet Hungary. As trade unions lost members and political influence domestically, this social movement mobilization ceased in Hungary. (Fábián, 2014, pp. 6–9)

When the first initiatives for the founding of Gender studies had been started, a community was created among people interested in feminist issues. (Cerwonka, 2008, p. 86) This catalysed the founding of *Nők a Nőkért Együtt az Erőszak Ellen Egyesület* (NANE; Women Together for Women Against Violence), supporting victims of domestic violence (with a free hotline and counselling, as well as advocating for legal justice) until today. Fábián describes their success as due to their international recognition and embeddedness. (Fábián, 2014, pp. 8–10)

However, feminist organisations that persisted after this period have been adapted to the political climate: they either enjoyed the support of the current political parties in power, or reduced their political messaging in the spirit of NGOisation¹² and neoliberalism, dependent on the funds streaming from the West. The internal structure and epistemological framework of Eastern European and Hungarian feminism were shaped by dependence on the centrum (the West) in terms of resources, as well as this symbolic subordination. (Barna et al., 2018, pp. 252–254; Pető, 2001, pp. 156–157)

Current times

Nowadays, there is also a necessity and motivation to build political solidarity between women in Hungarian society, even if not widely recognized. In addition to NGOs, civil actions and cooperations are being launched, mostly as part of a specific, problem-

¹² According to Bagić's (2004) definition, NGOisation means a tendency of founding Non-Governmental Organisations on 'single-issues', which then are meant to subsidize overarching movements and activism for social change. This trend is apparent in Latin America, Western Europe, in the former Yugoslavia as well as in Eastern Europe.

oriented helping activity. Without claiming to be exhaustive, it is worth mentioning the movement of the mothers of Mikepércs¹³ against the installation of a battery factory in Eastern Hungary, which also arose in the empirical research (see Analysis, Group 2). In addition, one of the civil actions that is relevant at the national level is the annual charity donation called *#nemluxustáska*¹⁴ (not a luxury bag), which mainly offers, if not a solution, at least a relief in the lives of the women concerned with period poverty and the harmful effects of the pink tax¹⁵. Numerous women participate in the campaign across generations. (Erdey & Várnagy, 2022)

After presenting existing forms of Hungarian women's solidarity from the historical past and present, I will complement the overall picture with the anti-gender rhetoric of the current political regime and its specific manifestations.

2.3.2. Today's political climate and Fidesz's anti-gender rhetoric

Since 2010, Fidesz's populist-nationalistic politics have been directed toward constructing a traditional, heterosexual, family-centric nation in both rhetoric and action. From the outset of its governance, the Fidesz initiative to construct a Christian, white, European yet distinctive Hungary has hinged on positioning heterosexual nuclear families as the foundational elements of the nation. This is well illustrated by the vigorous rhetoric concerning family and familial values. Moreover, one of the first actions taken by Fidesz's government was to eliminate any references to the term gender and substitute it with strong family language in kindergarten and school curricula. (Fodor, 2022 cited in; Kereszty, 2007; Rekhviashvili, 2022, pp. 69–70)

Women have been blamed globally for the crisis of masculinity. What may seem different in Hungary is that this hatred and anger do not differentiate according to class: the upper class, the elite, are just as frustrated and fearful of losing their privileges as the working class. (Barát, 2018, pp. 33–34) Furthermore, encouraging reproduction is also a neoliberal method of providing 'national' labour for the labour market. (Szikra, 2018)

¹³ (See Kovács & Szajki, 2024)

¹⁴ As part of the campaign, women in numerous parts of the country annually donate hygiene products in unused purses to those in need. (O. Tóth, 2023)

¹⁵ The pink tax refers to the additional costs that women incur in their daily lives as a result of consuming products deemed "necessary" by societal standards for those who are seen as attractive and feminine, as well as products that are marketed for women at a higher price than the same product for men. The name stems from the colour of these products, which are often pink. (Lafferty, 2019, p. 57)

To assist the influence or manipulation of Hungarian women to make children, various instruments are being deployed precisely against those women who do not subordinate their will to the will of those in power: childless women. By demonizing them and financially encouraging family formation (Geva, 2021, p. 84ff), as well as by introducing restrictive abortion policies (Zakariás, 2024, p. 355), Fidesz is aiming to achieve an increase in the number of Hungarian citizens and maintain the toxic-masculine global order. Moreover, since 2017-2018, the government complemented those policies with anti-gender rhetoric, not only demonising feminists discussing gender and sexuality, but also prohibiting Gender studies at Hungarian universities. (Pető, 2018)

In this subchapter, I briefly summarised the current government's attempts to divide women and ensure their inferior position in society through the encouragement of reproduction and anti-gender rhetoric. Next, further barriers to women's solidarity in the Hungarian context will be explored.

2.3.3. Social boundaries along intersections: the case of Hungarian women

In this subchapter, I am going to explore the symbolic and social boundaries apparent within the abstract group of Hungarian women, which develop partly along different intersections of class, race, and gender, as well as along other factors like appearance, motherhood, victimisation, and feminism that are often interconnected in this context – and which were the main aspects that appeared in the empirical research.

Motherhood

Under Hungarian state-socialism, motherhood and family were seen as the foundation of society, causing women to almost completely fade into their roles as mothers and wives. In post-Soviet Hungary, particularly following the second conservative turn in 1998, a woman's acceptance as a “real woman” (*igazi nő*) is still contingent upon motherhood, even if she has a career and is married. (Joó, 2011, pp. 7–8) According to Györke's (2024, p. 29) summary of various studies, in the 21st century, conscious childlessness has become increasingly accepted in Hungary, especially among the younger generation, single people, those with at least secondary education, and those holding liberal views. However, there is an urban-rural divide: people living in urban areas are more accepting of those who voluntarily choose to be childless than those living in villages. Besides, people with more conservative thinking typically adapt to the traditional value system, including traditional

gender roles. To conclude, rural people with more conservative views, being of older generations, or having religious beliefs are less likely to accept childless adults and thus, childless women.

Romani women/mothers

People at the intersection of motherhood and Romani womanhood face a social boundary in contrast to white Hungarian mothers: in their case, reproduction is not encouraged, and they are often sterilised without their consent, while also experiencing public racism, accusations of them only having babies to receive social benefits, and ‘to oppress white Hungarians.’ (Balogh & Gellér, 2019) This could lead to a different social boundary when researching the inclusion or exclusion of Romani women within the social group of women.

Victims of sexist violence

According to the research of Fedor et al. (2020), Hungarian women who regarded the act of catcalling positively through SDO would blame themselves and credit the harasser with goodwill. Parti et al.’s (2016) study showed that the responsibility of the rape victim is overemphasised in Hungary, in comparison to other crimes.

The wider society only recently took issue with victim-blaming sentiments, after a (brief) #metoo wave¹⁶. One such national case is the highly negative reaction to a series of educational videos produced by the Baranya County Police Department, which was intended to help prevent sexual violence with the famous campaign slogan “*Tehetsz róla, tehetsz ellene.*” (“You are the cause, you can solve it.”)¹⁷ Several civil society organizations protested against the campaign for the victim-blaming nature of the videos. (Parti et al., 2016; Z. Papp, 2017)

However, regardless of the relatively wider discourse of victim-blaming and its dangers, women blaming each other and themselves for sexist violence is still prevalent in Hungarian society. SDO, the faith in justice, personal sense of control, societal discourse,

¹⁶ It is hard to talk about a #metoo wave in Hungary, since none of the most visible perpetrators faced long-term consequences or societal denunciation for what they have done (A. Tóth, 2021); moreover, they appeared in the role of the victim (Schleicher, 2022).

¹⁷ Translated by the author

and the lack of legal consequence all play a role in this social boundary ascending between victims and non-victims. (Fedor et al., 2020; Virág, 2019)

Appearance

Numerous studies have focused on the existence of the female beauty ideal throughout Hungarian history (Szentesi, 2017; Van Nieuwenhuysen et al., 2025; Vasvári, 2019), and its effects, such as its source of severely low confidence levels and the spread of eating disorders (Czeplédi & Szabó, 2016), but studies on its effects on Hungarian women's cooperation are still awaited.

LGBTQI

The marginalisation of lesbian, bisexual, or trans individuals has been omnipresent in Hungarian society before 2010 (J. Takács et al., 2008), but in recent years, during Fidesz's governance, this has intensified by implementing oppressive policies regarding the queer community, such as preventing transitions legally. What is more, a conscious discursive connection has been created between child abuse and LGBTQI identities. This approach serves to bolster societal biases and validate political actions against sexual and gender minorities. (Linnamäki, 2022, pp. 18–21) This might create trenches among heterosexual, cis women and queer women who, evidently, cannot comply with traditional gender norms.

Sex workers

Sex worker women are often excluded from the community of women as those who do not conform to the social roles prescribed for women (e.g., engaging in extramarital sexual relations). (Papp, 2017, pp. 102–105) Although sex workers in Hungary may not only be women, current research suggests that they are predominantly poor and/or Roma and trans women¹⁸. (Finger, 2013, p. 117) Thus, they are a cumulatively and intersectionally subordinated group, not only because of stigmatisation but also because of their eventual identities as Romani or transgender women, in addition.

In Hungarian literature, sex work is often defined by mixing definitions of forced prostitution and even human trafficking, differing from the international scientific works cited in this thesis. Agreeing with Finger (2013), when we connect prostitution with

¹⁸ To my knowledge, there is no research focusing on Hungarian transgender sex workers' lived experience.

human trafficking, often without justification, we overlook the diverse underlying factors that can clarify why and how women engage in sex work. Human rights organizations, police, lawyers, and scientists often concentrate on identifying those who manage and exploit prostitutes (sic!). Simultaneously, they aim to protect these individuals, but this approach can inadvertently reduce sex workers to the status of incapable minors. A differentiated approach is required that focuses the investigation on the actors, their backgrounds, and their environments. (Finger, 2013, p. 117) Apart from Finger's study, I have only found in Réka Kinga Papp's (2017) work a motivation to depict sex workers' lives realistically, so I am reluctant to use other Hungarian sources to look for ways sex workers are excluded from the group of Hungarian women.

Feminists

Szabó & Pál (2016) state that the attitude towards feminism in Hungary depends significantly on the current political and social landscape. Today's (Hungarian) feminism demarcates borderlines – or even frontlines and trenches – not just according to age groups. Alongside generational experiences, different indicators of views, attitudes, and identities also indicate the "right" direction for those looking for their own position.

In their study, the authors exhibited that the proportion of feminists is in all generations except for the Z (baby boomers, X, Y) is similarly high.¹⁹ Szabó, in her other work (2015, p. 56), argues that for the past many years, there has been a commonplace hostile attitude towards feminism, although its basic principles are actually agreed upon by many more. Harmful stereotypes that portray feminism as a radical, offensive, and misandrist ideology and feminists as unlovable, arrogant, and aggressive can result in the disengagement of women in the feminist movement. (Kovács & Hevesi, 2015) This can manifest in such phrases like, *"I know feminists say things like that, and I'm saying it now, but I'm not saying it like that"*. (Szabó, 2015, p. 56)

Additionally, there is an in-group boundary in the Hungarian feminist movement, strongly affected by the reaction to Fidesz's antifeminist governance: anti-gender feminism. Lately, as evidenced by the feminist ethnography by Rekhviashvili (2022), many feminist scholars and activists have turned to a rhetoric that is critical of intersectionality, transgenderism, and sex work. This argument suggests that liberal politics imposed by the West, such as

¹⁹ Although their sample included disproportionately urban women with at least one academic degree.

advocating for sex workers' rights, embracing trans identities, or promoting intersectional approaches, were not pertinent to the daily concerns of Hungarian women. In their view, adequate and pertinent feminist politics would concentrate more on women's labour rights, domestic work, and matters associated with reproductive labour. However, this type of feminist politics and its aspiration to resonate with the concerns of 'average women' necessitated the ostracism and condemnation of efforts focused on the rights of sex workers or trans individuals, as well as the calls for intersectional justice. It instead prioritizes the needs of Hungarian women who are white, cisgender, and heterosexual. Hence, not only sex workers and trans women suffer from this exclusion, but poor and Romani women as well. (Rekhviashvili, 2022, pp. 80; 164; 178) And since these voices represent a hegemony in the feminist movement, the division then results in further trenches and exclusion of feminist groups and individuals that advocate for trans, sex workers'²⁰, or Romani people's rights.

To summarise, there is a social boundary not only between feminists and non-feminists, but within the feminist movement as well. These boundaries can actively affect unity, cooperation, and collective action since only a few common goals can be defined along these trenches – if at all.

After different intersectional factors and social and symbolic boundaries were explored within the Hungarian context, let's move on to the research question.

²⁰ As the author of this thesis experienced as well.

3. Research questions

- ♥ How do women strategise to build solidarity in their environment?
- ♥ What is Hungarian women's understanding of women's solidarity in underrepresented circles?
- ♥ How do women choose their social boundaries with other women?
- ♥ How can feminist evolution, gender identity, and solidarity formation relate to each other?

3.1. State of the Art

After introducing my research goal, let me reiterate what has been researched on the topic of women's (political) solidarity in and outside of the Hungarian context so far.

First of all, there are diverging perspectives and debates around solidarity in the feminist literature and gender studies discipline: some claim that it suppresses individuality and strives for homogeneity (Butler, 1990, p. 14 as cited in Allen, 1999, p. 101), others argue that solidarity arises as resistance with identifying individuals whose "identity is under attack." (Arendt, 1968, p. 18 as cited in Allen, 1999, p. 108) However, in her later works according to some interpretations, Arendt signifies that solidarity cannot only mean sympathy, it should appear as rational action (Joó, 2019, p. 3), which supports the need to research specifically political solidarity, as various other scholars stated after the second wave of feminism in the West (Fraser, 2007; hooks, 1986; Scholz, 2009)

Secondly, I gathered valuable knowledge of historical facts about Hungarian women's solidarity in the 18th century (Viskolcz, 2023) and between women and suffragette organisations at the beginning of the 20th century as a good example of bridging solidarity between urban and rural women's organisations and how to follow a common value system, show up for each other in difficult times and keep in contact. (Acsády & Mészáros, 2018) Given that during the period of state-socialism of the Soviet Union, feminism as a movement was repressed and the emancipation movements focused on 'human rights' in general, women's solidarity had not really appeared during this period, and thus had not been researched in depth. (Brier, 2019, p. 105ff) Furthermore, there are studies investigating existing women's solidary actions after 1989, such as the one by Fábrián

(2014), as well as depicting a historical overview of feminist unities, from the 19th century until today, by Antoni (2014).

As for contemporary studies of Hungarian solidarity, there are several devoted to diving into the types and views of solidarity in Hungary in times of crisis e. g. throughout the ‘migrant crisis’ in 2015 (Grajczjár et al., 2019; E. Takács, 2018, p. 131ff), or regarding a topic that is closer to the one in this thesis, the role of solidarity in relation to rape and the reactions to it in the media (a case study), (Virágh, 2019) or the reception of catcalling (Fedor et al., 2020).

However, there has not been a contemporary general research project around women’s political solidarity in Hungary.

3.2. Research gaps

For this thesis, I utilised an interpretative approach which is focused on gathering knowledge from the ‘inside’, portraying participants’ voices. (Charmaz, 2007)

Hungarian women’s solidarity was not extensively researched in the past. Overall, there is not much research focusing on women’s solidarity today, or if there is (like the listed studies above), the research was conducted quantitatively. Although that ensures a wide data range regarding solidarity, most of the studies use the snowball sampling method, whose limitations lie in the diversity of the participants reached. That can reconstruct similar voices, not allowing the involvement of non-white, lower-class, apolitical women outside of the canon in the discourse.

After I have presented my research questions, the compilation of scientific texts regarding Hungarian political solidarity, and the exploration of research gaps, I should proceed to the methodology.

4. Methodology

After providing an overview of the current state of the art when it comes to solidarity research among women with regard to feminist movements and summarising the research questions and my position in the research, I will continue by describing the empirical method I intend to use.

I am going to take a specific country for this research, Hungary. Hungary, its government, and wider society have a rather significant attitude towards women. While referencing feminist and sociological theory and studies, my research goal is to involve persons outside of academia and the urban intelligentsia to contribute to the discourse.

Following the theoretical depiction of the past, concerning the empirical part of the research, I will direct my glance to the present. Thus, my empirical research will focus on the current state of solidarity among Hungarian women based on their identities as women and their perception of the obstacles towards political solidarity. Furthermore, I will compare answers by people who are familiar with feminist theory with those who are not. I aim to diversify the inputs by conducting three focus groups: one with multiply marginalised women (Hungarian sex workers based in Austria, Group 1) and one with semi-marginalised and rather apolitical women (white Hungarian mothers and grandmothers in the countryside, from now on Group 2). Afterwards, I would compare the results with the takeaways from a group of politically active and self-acclaimed feminist persons, Group 3.

4.1. Method of choice and its reasoning: focus groups/group interview

Firstly, let me lay out my reasons for my research method of choice, which is a mix of characteristics of focus group discussion and group interview.

From the feminist perspective, focus group discussions or group interviews are considered valuable methods for reducing the power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee, gaining understanding of an in-group dialogue, and creating a space for interactive negotiation about ideas and topics. (Ducet & Mauthner, 2008, p. 326)

According to Smithson (2008), focus groups combine elements of a moderated discussion and an interview that provides the data while making it possible to observe patterns of

behaviour among women. There are several definitions of focus groups depending on how the researcher intends to use it, in which field, and for what purpose. I prefer the one by Beck et al.: that it is “an informal discussion among selected individuals about specific topics.” (1986) This definition summarises the non-plannable characteristic of this method (“informal discussion”) and the goal of the research: that the discussion is moving around a specific topic. Additionally, what really speaks for this method of choice are the two aspects described by Smithson (2008, p. 358) and Du Bois (1983): that there is space to brainstorm ideas in a collaborative manner, and that this brainstorming process is based on actual experiences and the language of the group.

However, since the groups consisted of 3-5 participants (instead of the recommended 6-12 (Smithson, 2008, p. 358)), and on one occasion, only one person was interviewed, besides, I prepared questions along which the discussion flew, the empirical research went down showing mixed characteristics between a focus group and a (group) interview.

The focus group discussions were recorded by a voice recording device and transcribed manually before the analysis.

4.2. Guidelines for conducting a focus group/group interview

For a more practical approach to my empirical research, I am actively taking feminist recommendations for conducting focus groups into consideration. This means that I am actively reflecting on possible power dynamics among participants and myself, besides preferring to use gender-sensitive language and behaviour throughout my research. (Aanand, 2013, p. 357) Furthermore, there were specific measures regarding the preparation and framework, and the outcome of the focus group.

Since one of the interviewed groups will include sex workers, I used Dewey & Zheng’s (2013) guidelines to conduct the interview with them – which was proven to be useful for the other groups and their treatment during the research. Furthermore, according to them, it is essential to have the participants’ informed consent for a voluntary and participatory way of research, as well as confidentiality and privacy, which is why I use pseudonyms for all participants in the research. For sex workers, especially, it is important to exclude judgmental hints and acknowledge their personal agency and regard them as active contributors instead of passive objects – which is a core principle even if the research is not specifically about sex work.

Space: As Aanand outlines in their example research, choosing a place where the research subjects feel familiar is crucial. (2013, p. 358) So, for Group 1 (sex workers), I chose my former workplace's (a counselling centre for sex workers) community room, which provided a natural setting (Dewey & Zheng, 2013, p. 32) and a safe environment. For Group 2, I conducted the focus group discussion in a quiet local library in a village of North-Western Hungary. And for Group 3, I booked a room in Auróra Community Space in Budapest, where several feminist events have been organised (see My position and Sampling).

Time: When choosing the time frame, the availability of my research participants was considered; for Group 1, late afternoon because of their night shifts, for Groups 2 and 3, after office hours, and with direct arrangement according to the profession of the participants.

Circumstances: The well-being of the participants and the tranquillity of the research were ensured through refreshments – childcare was not needed.

Language: *Szolidaritás* (solidarity) as a word is an imported expression²¹ when talking about cooperation, collaboration, altruism, empathy, or unity. The word is more commonly used among social scientists, politicians, or political groups than among common people. Hence, for less politically active groups (like Group 1 or 2), I used various synonyms instead of or beside the word: *összefogás* and *összetartás* (both mean verbatim holding together) or *segítés* (helping). I re-formulated the questions for the focus groups before each occasion to adapt the vocabulary to the local and socio-cultural context, according to my experience.

The role of the moderator: Because of the nature of a master's thesis, I found it sensible of taking over the role of mediation for all 3 instances. The reasons for this are the lack of funds to pay a professional moderator, but more importantly, for Group 1, I possess the combination of skills that will make the session meaningful: my knowledge of the Hungarian language and familiarity with the subjects' reality (see Sampling), which creates a sense of community while reducing the power imbalances. For Groups 2 and 3,

²¹ *Szolidaritás* stems etymologically from the late Latin *solidarius* which then evolved in French-speaking areas to *solidarité*. According to an online dictionary, it flew into Hungary through Italian merchants. ('Szolidáris', n.d.; 'Szolidaritás', n.d.)

knowing the local or cultural context by being part of those communities in the past or present helped me meaningfully moderate the discussions.

Remuneration: Because I received a moderate amount of funds, I gave Group 1 20 euros each; Group 2 did not accept remuneration, so Group 3 received the 4000 Forints (~10 euros each) I originally planned to give Group 2.

Afterlife: as the Charter of Decolonial Research Ethics (n.d.) explains, the researcher always possesses the privilege of the last word. Thus, I intend to translate my thesis into Hungarian and send a copy to the participants, giving them the possibility of veto in the long term and before eventually publishing it outside of the university walls and/or in their native language.

4.2.1. Questions

The full list of questions can be found in Appendix 1.

At the beginning of the focus group discussion, I started with citations regarding women's solidarity that appeared in Hungarian newspapers, stating that women's solidarity is impossible *by nature*, to get the first impression of the participants to those statements:

- "Woman is a wolf to another woman." / "Women are always cruel to each other." (Szalai, 2020)
- "Jealousy and envy play a role in the woman-woman relationship – that's how we women are, it's instinctive." (Pupli, 2025)

Then I asked them about their personal experiences concerning altruism and empathy among women, whether they received or provided help to another woman recently, or what they think of the frequency of that happening in general, and if not, what could be the obstacles to that. In connection, they answered questions about gender identity: whether they identify with the category of women, or whether they see commonalities solely based on their gender. The participants also shared their views on feminism, the feminist movement, and women's most pressing issues in society to my questions.

4.2.2. Sampling

Convenience & purposive sampling

The method I used for sampling is based on the goals of this thesis, which, in addition to finding answers to the research questions, aim to listen to and include women who are seldom interviewed on political topics. For this reason, I turned to the different parts of my life where I can get access to conversing with these women: my workplace, my hometown, and my subculture. The aim of this sampling strategy was not an empirical study that is representative, but one that involves unheard voices, acquiring knowledge 'from the inside' while facilitating a confident environment to gain rich data. (Charmaz, 2007; Kilomba, 2010)

4.2.2.1. Group 1:

For Group 1, I gathered clients from my workplace, which was, at the time, a counselling centre for sex workers in Vienna. At that time, I had already worked there for two years as a counsellor in social work, building trust-based connections with some of our clients. Since my native language is Hungarian, most of my clients were native Hungarian speakers. I asked several of them because I wanted to speak with those who had already perceived my former workplace as a safe space, as the venue for the group interview was there. Moreover, I asked clients who knew me or worked with me, so they would trustfully share valuable details and information around the topic of solidarity. This is important because, according to my experience and ethical research recommendations (Dewey & Zheng, 2013, pp. 23–38), sex workers or people who have participated in the sex industry tend to be secretive or withdrawn with people who are not connected to 'this world' or even with other sex workers, as one of the participants, Bea, shared in the group discussion. One of the reasons for that is that sex work and sex workers are heavily stigmatised in society, shamed, excluded, and in extreme (but frequent) cases, bullied. I saw it as an advantage that they knew me, so they would more probably open up and discuss pieces of their reality regarding solidarity, also considering their workplaces, because in this environment (in the counselling centre and with me), that is no taboo and it is not catastrophised or scandalised. That is the purposive part of my sampling. The reason why my sampling was partly of convenience is that many of our clients have different schedules and daily routines, have fewer resources for public transport or travelling in the city in general, sometimes work in other industries, or have a difficult

boss²². So, I ended up inviting most of our Hungarian-speaking clients who were available at the time to get a proper number of participants. Finally, it took two attempts to have a group discussion with three people who had time and did not cancel: with Bea, in her 50s, who was my client for more than a year, living in Vienna, with Aletta, who also visited a couple of appointments with me in my former workplace, and we met during Streetwork²³ and Aletta who is based in Hungary and works occasionally in Austria as a sex worker. For the first attempt, I conducted an interview with the only person who attended, Fanni, who was a client of my former colleague and visited the counselling centre regularly.

4.2.2.2. Group 2

For Group 2, I utilised my connections in my hometown, which is a small village in North-Western Hungary. I visited the local library to find space for the discussion and invited the pensioner woman, Margit, who has led that institution for decades. In exchange, she invited me to a presentation about women's self-discovery that she organised for the local women, thematising female archetypes (which proved to be a central theme for her during the discussion and indicated an openness to discuss the gender identity of women). I also asked my acquaintances in the village and beyond: relatives, former classmates, and friends also helped me to find interested women for the research. I invited my former German teacher, Edit, a kindergarten teacher, Zsanett, who my childhood friend connected me with, the librarian lady, Margit, who knows my older family members, and two women attended, whom my parents-in-law invited, Katalin and Hedvig. I intentionally did not invite such people who could know me closely at this moment, but the participants could have an impression of me from earlier life, or a second-hand opinion could be shared with them through my connections.

What likely benefited the group interview is that I knew a lot of the local context, common acquaintances that they mentioned during the discussion, and also the available language in this context. This knowledge helped me state my question, create an understanding and a confident environment, and reduce my possible superiority as a researcher and as someone who chose the topic of the discussion.

²² Since sex workers in Austria are legally self-employed, they have no bosses per definition, but in reality if they work in a studio or bar, there is a manager who is responsible for the work schedules and other things.

²³ Streetwork means in this context the outreach work that this organisation's workers do, visiting sex workers in their workplaces, such as studios, Laufhauses, or on the street.

4.2.2.3. Group 3

When sampling the participants of Group 3, I reached out to the possible participants via social media such as Facebook and Instagram. Since I am an online feminist activist, I gained a follower base that is interested in such topics and more or less shares my views on feminism. Since 2022, I have been organising a community on Facebook where we can discuss feminist topics. From this group, Diána, Annamari, and Klaudia joined. With Annamari and Klaudia, I had previously conversed about feminism in direct messages from time to time. Similarly to Bettina, whom I originally invited to Group 2, because I knew she is from the same county as me, but she informed me of her current base, which is Budapest. I also asked around in other underground channels, like Discord, utilising my connections. That is where Lili came from, but I have been in contact with her in an informal group of leftist content creators as well. Except for one participant, the majority of them are either from rural areas, recently moved to Budapest, from a historical part of Hungary (Transylvania), or live abroad at the moment.

In this case, it is essential to mention my possible influence on the participants during the discussion. Since they mostly know my attitudes around feminism and activism, as well as certain topics, such as sex work, they could have felt the need to express sentiments with which I would agree. At the same time, I emphasised that the condition to join the discussion is only to be a woman and a feminist, regardless of which stream of the movement. Nevertheless, that context might have added to my superior position not only as a researcher, but as a kind of influential feminist figure too.

4.3. My position

I, the author of this Master's thesis, am also connected to the topic on several levels and from several directions, and share commonalities with the research subjects of the thesis. I find it important to state these before I start unfolding the analysis of this thesis, considering it a feminist principle when the author's position is just as important as the subjects they are writing about.

Starting with the commonalities, I am a Hungarian woman having grown up in the countryside (as Group 2), having moved to Vienna, Austria for better luck in my future (as Group 1), and lastly, having discovered feminist theory and dived into a deeper

understanding of Gender (as Group 3) being a student of this discipline and a feminist activist in Hungary.

Regarding my access to these groups, I was employed for two years at a Vienna-based counselling centre for sex workers, where I was in contact with Hungarian migrant sex workers based in Austria (Group 1). Because of my professional and life experiences, it is important to note that I do not have an 'objective' stance towards sex work, but I have represented in my work and in this thesis a position that approaches sex work from a decriminalising perspective. Dewey & Zheng (2013) state that the three main approaches to sex work and its subjects in research: abolitionism, empowerment, and decriminalisation²⁴ – in this thesis, the latter is represented. This view acknowledges sex work as work and, respectively, sex workers as workers in an industry that is feminised and therefore makes workers more vulnerable to patriarchal oppression. Despite that, decriminalisation politically would lead to the lessening of that oppression and stigmatization, and an elevated self-definition of the workers, as every sex workers' union and organisations supporting sex workers confirm. (e.g., Human Rights Watch, 2019; NSWP, 2013) This point of view could have influenced the depiction of sex workers in this thesis.

Furthermore, since I am visible on social media, sharing my knowledge and my opinions on feminist and political matters, this can affect the participants if they are aware of my activities and attitudes towards some of the research topics. I acknowledge the influential factors I might have; however, I cannot exactly know how the participants felt about this while sharing their views.

²⁴ In sex work's context, abolitionism advocates for the prohibition of sex work, claiming that it is hurting women who are solely victims; empowerment glamorises sex work, claiming it empowers women to capitalise on their inherent sexualisation; decriminalisation advocates for the recognition of sex work as work, thus fighting for workers' rights is in focus. (Dewey & Zheng, 2013, pp. 39–41)

5. Data analysis

5.1. Analysis of choice and its reasoning: multi-level analysis

For the analysis, after manually transcribing the recorded conversations to 'immerse' in and enrich the data, besides noting nuances and details that AI technologies could have ignored, I used the software MAXQDA 24 for coding. I applied codes mainly according to the three levels of analysis (see below) and subcategories instinctively and line-by-line, as I progressed with the research, following the recommendations of Charmaz (2007). The original transcripts in Hungarian are in Appendix 2, and their translated version in English is in Appendix 3.

As I mentioned earlier, the majority of the existing research is mostly based on Western (and often liberal) tools, ideas, ideologies, and canon. Thus, the method of analysis deviates from the current state or is reformed to fulfil the goals of this thesis. I have decided to analyse the transcriptions by the method of 'multi-level analysis' on three different levels.

5.1.1. First level

First, the focus will be solely on the topic of solidarity, measuring the grade the participants are at through qualitative questions that were inspired by the book of Takács (2018), and were formed in collaboration with my supervisor. Furthermore, apparent social and symbolic boundaries were identified with the help of scientific literature (See in Theoretical framework). (Anthias, 2001; Lamont, 2018; Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Sutterlüty et al., 2008)

5.1.2. Second level

Secondly, the participants, based on the transcriptions, are categorised with the Gender Identity Model of Becker and Wagner (2009) into the four different gender identities:

- progressively identified [with the gender identity of women]: women who recognise unequal gender norms and wish for a change, and are often feminists,
- traditionally identified: women who embrace traditional roles like wife, mother, daughter, and justify differences between men and women, and thus the current patriarchal order,

- progressively non-identified: women who differentiate themselves from other women, are sexist, and take on masculine traits, like ‘girlbosses’,
- and traditionally non-identified: women who regard themselves in relation to men and do not think of themselves as feminine or masculine people. (Becker & Wagner, 2009, pp. 489–490)

5.1.3. Third level

And thirdly, it will be assessed, based on the transcriptions, where the participants can be found on Downing & Roush’s stages (1985) towards becoming a feminist. There are five stages:

0. Passive acceptance: justifying the current system and developing coping strategies,
1. Revelation: noticing oppressive patterns of the patriarchy, attaching intense emotions to this recognition, like rage, guilt, and responsibility,
2. Embedding: withdrawal from the wider society, seeking women’s spaces, subcultures,
3. Synthesis: recognising how far an individual’s latitude reaches, that “the error is in the system”,
4. Active commitment: participating in feminist movements, building alliances (even with men). (Downing & Roush, 1985 cited in Szabó, 2015, pp. 61–62)

5.2. Analysis

5.2.1. Group 1

Although I emphasized at the beginning of both the interview and the group discussion that I am not only interested in their work experiences, every participant shared examples and stories mostly within their professional lives (especially those who still work in the field). This may indicate that work occupies their lives to such an extent that it has a central position in their community interactions, or that they are accustomed to how people aware of their profession are only interested in details about that.²⁵

²⁵ The organisation, also frequently received inquiries from journalists and researchers about different aspects of sex work as I have worked there.

5.2.1.1. First level: solidarity formations

Regarding solidarity, the participants recognised clearly that the situation is not ideal in their environment. They repeatedly expressed how envy and jealousy play a role in the lack of cooperation and altruism, and they agreed with the initial quotes I presented at the beginning of the discussion, as Fanni, the ex-sex worker, summarised:

F: "That there is no solidarity, and yes, jealousy also plays a role in this, and ENVY, if someone is a little better off, their life is going better, whatever, financially, or (...) they have a boyfriend or a husband, or whatever (...) so, no, they trample each other like that. So no, they can't help each other, so it's very rare when women stick together like that." (Interview with Fanni, Pos. 9)

Aletta, Bea, and Luca frequently brought up examples of women's solidarity in their professional lives when having difficulties or conflicts at work. However, trust, and the lack of it, was also central to the three sex workers' lives.²⁶ They admitted to being extremely cautious about whom they trust in their professional lives, recalling bad experiences from the past. Especially for Bea, the oldest and most experienced, 'the lesson she learned' is to be less friendly, open, and honest in their professional relationships to keep a distance. This dialogue depicts the contrast between them regarding trust when I asked them about feeling compassion for other women:

A: "[If there is a problem] with a guest or something, or a [...] girl fighting(?) with the other [...]."

L: "For me too. (.) Because this is a place where a lot of things happen [over time[.]"

A: "Because we are women]"

L: "Yes. That's why we can empathise with each other in bad times."

B: "((shakes her head)) (No.) [...] This [...] developed in me]. (.) Before, yes, [now (..) NO." (Focus group discussion with Bea, Aletta, and Luca, Pos. 104-111)

²⁶ Two of them even introduced themselves with different nicknames than their own (I changed their fake names as well) contributing to the theory that sex workers manufacture a different identity during work. (Sanders, 2005, pp. 328–331)

They highlighted the importance of cooperation in their work (e.g., when dealing with challenging clients), and they tend to exclude those who do not act as 'team players'.

B: "We have such a collaboration, [...] if a colleague comes, for example, (..) and starts acting strange, or thinks she is better than others, or (..) behaves in a way that (...) they fuck with her until-"

A: "...she leaves."

B: "Because if there is a rotten one in a bag of potatoes, it will infect you, so we are of the opinion that the rotten one should go somewhere else."

[...]

I: "How do you decide who doesn't belong (...) there?"

[...]

B: "Well, if there is such a person, her career won't last long in a cohesive collective. (..) Yes."

[...]

I: "Uh-huh. And is this based on behaviour, or something else...? Appearances too?"

A: "Of course, behaviour."

[...]

B: "Well, it's not about that, but she thinks she's [better than others]. [...] [L]ike, like let's say, even though she does the same job, [she is] someone who imagines herself to be a princess, gets in, (..) she won't drink with us. (..) [But she's [so] into herself, and we're having a good time."

A: "Well, after a while, people leave on their own - we don't know what to do with people like that]"

B: "She is ostracised." (Focus group discussion with Bea, Aletta and Luca, Pos. 398-422)

The most recurring themes regarding solidarity in both the interview and the focus group were material differences and altruism (and the lack of it). The participants identified material differences as the origin of envy and jealousy among people (and not exclusively women). The participants who are currently active in the sex industry expressed how their colleagues try to prevent each other from earning money and act enviously if the other person has more income than they do, instead of cooperating, which they preferred. And although they exclusively attributed this behaviour to others, they showed neoliberal and individualistic values, as in how they also 'made it individually'. What is more, Bea, a sex worker in her 50s, sees envy coming from others as something positive:

B: "There is a saying. When I was 18 years old, my father told me, (.) "My little daughter, I wish that as many people as possible envy you. Not feel sorry for you. If they feel sorry for you, then you have nothing, if they envy you, then you HAVE something to talk about." [...] And I have taken that advice ever since (..)"
(Focus group discussion with Bea, Aletta, and Luca, Pos. 37-39)

Another theme that emerged during both interviews, specifically regarding women's solidarity, was beauty. In both cases, it got thematised only towards the end of the conversation. The participants described the origins of the lack of cooperation and good connections as whether and in what amount others and themselves are perceived as someone who meets the current beauty standards – obviously assigning themselves below or above those standards, comparing themselves to other women:

F: "These women who are so prettier, with fake nails, going to the solarium, with nice hair, they look down on these women, if they're a little plus size, or if they don't look like that, they're not as pretty [...]. So there's this rivalry between women, unfortunately." (Interview with Fanni, Pos. 81)

L: "(...) at this level, a woman is jealous of a woman in everything- [...] Clothes, looks."

A: "If someone is prettier than her, or something." (Focus group discussion with Bea, Aletta, and Luca, Pos. 384-388)

Aletta attributed the desire to conform to beauty standards to social media:

A: "This is what [...] these social media [sites] also create [...], especially for women, how they should look, they tell you how to look, on Facebook, on

TikTok, you know, I don't watch those things, but regardless, I see this in my colleagues, that they really want to comply. [...]" (Focus group discussion with Bea, Aletta, and Luca, Pos. 396)

Furthermore, there was one surprising theme that appeared during my research process, which I had not considered beforehand: how mothers feel about solidarity with other women.²⁷ The moment I realised that this topic is central to women's solidarity was when Fanni, the ex-sex worker I interviewed first, connected her sense of solidarity strongly with motherhood:

F: "Every woman changes when she becomes a mother (...) and then they join forces- then MOTHERS can join forces. [...] Mothers. (..) So there is cooperation here and there, so for example, women who don't have children (..) and are in the world like that, they don't." (Interview with Fanni, Pos. 25)

F: "(..) I have received support and help from a lot of er, (..) women here- I live out in Vienna, so (.) thank God, I knock ((knock)), [...] here I was not disappointed. [...] [T]hank God I have a lot of mother friends with whom I need any social assistance, or they help my daughter, they are there by my side 100% on top (.) so..." (Interview with Fanni, Pos. 29)

During the analysis, I discovered several other social boundaries shared by the participants. Although when I asked them about their solidarity with other women, they expressed inclusive solidarity in theory, in their other answers, not only appearance and material differences, but other social boundaries became visible too.

Typically, Bea was the most outspoken one with respect to the social boundaries regarding different intersections, but the other two participants seldom voiced their possible disagreement. Bea was also considered the eldest in the conversation, with the most experience, for which she received respect from Aletta and Luca. Bea separated herself from the victims of sexist violence or discrimination twice during the conversation, and Aletta and Luca acted agreeably, or at least they did not communicate if they had a different view – which can be traced back to the normalisation of victim-blaming (Burt,

²⁷ Already, as I handed in my proposal, the professor of the proposal workshop, also a mother, left a comment asking whether I would include the topic of motherhood. Since I have no children, that aspect of womanhood was left out of my consideration when forming the interview questions and the structure of my research, but it got integrated as the research progressed.

1980, p. 217 cited in; Virág, 2019, p. 116). On the other hand, Fanni, as someone who herself experienced and recognised domestic violence, misogynistic discrimination, and bad experiences in sex work, included other victims in her sense of solidarity in theory. But in practice, she also named an example where she might have let a connection go because of an abusive relationship, as well as having felt left alone when she had been in such a relationship.

Furthermore, Bea shared some racist views on Asian sex workers, as the ones who have recently taken some of the clients in the industry, and once she hinted at a queerphobic perspective, expressing how she was sad when women on the streets looked 'less feminine' in recent years and is now happy that 'women find their way back to femininity'. So she did draw harder lines regarding her solidarity along intersectional factors like race or gender expression.

Nonetheless, the sex workers clearly sense another social boundary that is directed at them from other women. When I mentioned to them that I am going to interview women from other backgrounds and I will also tell them that I spoke to sex workers, they expressed their curiosity about how they will react to this fact, because, in their reality, they often feel excluded by non sex workers:

L: "[...] I think that many women who are not in this job are judgmental, even though they don't know us. And no matter how normal and accepting we are, it is not reciprocal." (Focus group discussion with Bea, Aletta, and Luca, Pos. 294)

As I have mentioned above, in theory, all of the participants identified with solidarity among women, even when I asked about women from different backgrounds. They formed friendly connections in their workplaces and had many positive experiences with other women. They also expressed how women can be compassionate to each other in hard times. Aletta said that she, with her colleagues, often joined forces when they were confronted with a 'difficult client', and Fanni confessed to focusing solely on her connections with women or often helping other mothers. At the end of the group discussion, the three participants, of their own accord, proposed to cooperate to achieve more visibility for material support to the sex workers²⁸ who decide to leave the industry,

²⁸ Unfortunately, they did not keep in touch afterwards.

and voiced their delight to be in such an understanding environment where they could share their experiences without judgment.

5.2.1.2. Second level: gender identity

Female sex workers, or sex workers who are women, are already categorised differently from non-sex workers concerning gender norms. Since their lifestyle does not conform to traditional gender roles (sexual activity outside of marriage) (Papp, 2017, pp. 102–105), those who work in the industry often deny those roles and are also perceived as outsiders in the gender hierarchy.

Nonetheless, according to Becker & Wagner's (2009) Gender Identity Model, Group 1 showed mixed characteristics. However, in both conversations, they had a hard time answering my questions about women's identities and finding common attributes of being a woman, except for physical characteristics.

Fanni, the ex-sex worker, often voiced her dissatisfaction with household chores, and that her male partner in the past expected her not only to do those and child raising, but also sexual labour. Despite her critique of invisible labour, when I directed a question about reducing those chores, she said it was fine that women do this work; nonetheless, she would like to see changes in men's behaviour. Fanni can be placed at the identifier end of the spectrum, and she exhibited predominantly traditional traits—likely a result of her exiting the sex industry, which may have facilitated adaptation to a more classical gender normativity for her, but at the same time, she hopes for a change, even if she is unable to describe clearly in what regard and how (sign of the progressive identifier).

Similarly, among the participants in the group interview, I sensed some ambivalence concerning the placement in the model. To my questions about disparities between the genders, they all expressed that women and men are the same, except for their biological differences (progressive non-identifier). There was a dispute about sensitivity and emotional tenderness: while Luca, the youngest among the three, said that women are more sensitive, Bea and Aletta strongly disagreed. Although Bea exclusively regarded herself in relation to men (which is an attribute of the traditional non-identifier), she felt herself to be the dominant one in those connections, in her work, and in her private life as well. (which is rather the progressive non-identifier). Later on, they shared their

experiences with men in the sex industry, which possibly clash with the traditional gender norms:

B: "I've seen a lot of men cry.[...] And many men with families, ((quietly)) will spend thousands of euros just to hug you. [...] He wants company], sex is not the point, [just understanding, company. That's all!"

A: "That's right, for the conversation, understanding, company] they pay many hours for that, yeah." (Focus group discussion with Bea, Aletta, and Luca, Pos. 194-210)

This could be traced back to the fact that men, when visiting a sex worker, do not feel the need to perform masculinity, as they do in other settings, making it possible for sex workers to experience their emotional sides.

However, masculinity is not the only aspect they experience differently than other women do: Although their job is about adapting to the expectations of (mostly) male clients from an outside perspective, they seem to have a strong self-definition as women, but their gender identification deviates from both the traditional and the progressive identifiers. Luca even said directly that sex work as a job made her more indifferent to male validation.

L: "Well, it used to matter to me [whether I am sympathetic to men]. And I think this job (.) changed my opinion about it, that I don't necessarily need to conform now, I am HOW I AM, and if he accepts it like that, then (.), that's the point, I won't change, because of that. I can't change to conform to him." (Focus group discussion with Bea, Aletta, and Luca, Pos. 149)

Seeing these ambivalences, I questioned the effectiveness of this model for this group. They like being a woman, appreciate feminine performativity (like makeup, clothes), and do not want to be men instead (sign of the identifier):

B: "I'll be honest, yeah, and I work with men and I hear their stories, that now I'm not sure that they think-, they rather don't feel comfortable in their skin, for example, I feel that for work, or basically(?), I like being a woman."

L: "Me too."

A: "I like to do my hair, little nails, or whatever, and anything feminine, I really like it. I wouldn't trade places with a man, I'll tell you honestly. But for real."
(Focus group discussion with Bettina, Aletta, and Luca, Pos. 160-162)

They neither conform fully to traditional gender norms, such as being a housewife (like the traditional identifier), nor do they want to change gender hierarchies (like the progressive identifier), which they even experience antithetically compared to traditional gender norms. Even though they showed mild SDO when talking about victims of sexist violence or beauty, there were no significant and clear attributes in categorising their gender identity.

Perhaps the characteristics that Becker & Wagner described can be measured more effectively with a quantitative research method, or they are not fit for sex workers who are found in an alternative position regarding their external perception and internal gender identity.

5.1.1.3. Third level: feminist evolution

Analysing the interviews according to Downing & Roush's (1985) description of the evolution of becoming a feminist, my initial impression was that they can mostly be assigned to the zeroth stage: the positive acceptance of the patriarchal social order. They showed signs of SDO; only Fanni tended to reach the first stage, where she recognised and named sources of oppression, problematising patriarchal domestic violence and discrimination against mothers on the labour market several times, and wanted to change the current order:

"I've been unemployed here for a year and a half, I'm having a hard time finding work, just because I'M A WOMAN, [...] and I have a child. A minor child. (.) And I don't think it's fair that someone who already has a child can't work properly, so that it suits them in their schedule and for the child, too. And not like a robot, like an animal, working from morning to night. And then you're not with your child. You're not with your family." (Interview with Fanni, Pos. 97)

Although Fanni also mentioned how women are capable of the same things as men, Aletta, Bea, and Luca were more outspoken about women's competence when it comes to male-dominated fields. Furthermore, as I have mentioned above, in their discussion, Bea conveyed justification of sexist violence. Later, Aletta only mentioned in passing how

victims deserve sympathy while not contradicting Bea's views. When asking about issues regarding women's rights, Luca remarked on one dispute she encountered recently: breastfeeding babies in public. This one singular issue made her think about the lack of women's solidarity and not standing up for breastfeeding mothers when harassed in public. So, there were signs that Aletta and Luca might have occasionally sensed a definitive form of patriarchal violence, but they might have suppressed those contemplations in the conversation out of respect for Bea.

Another surprising element during the discussions with the sex workers and the ex-sex worker is that they did not reject feminism as an ideology. As for 'women's issues', they were advocating for a better social safety net for sex workers. They named stigmatization as one of the main sources of their oppression.

A: "[...] [W]e're slowly getting old, so I've been doing it for 20-20 years] with small interruptions, so that's why you have to [quit], and I said that they should help pay for insurance for ourselves until we find a normal [sic!] job, or an employee job, or whatever, that kind of help could come [it would be good. At least once or twice a year."

L: "Yes.]"

B: "Yes, [a colleague((?)) really scolded me] [...], [when] I said that I'd go to work in a normal [job.]"

A: "That's not how it works."

B: "No, she said, don't say that again, ours is the hardest profession. (..) Don't say that the normal is the other one."

L: "(...) Well, yes, but I agree with that, that it's not just aging, but that if someone wants to get out, some little help is needed. [...] It's a hard thing to get out of this."

A: "I think there are a lot of girls who come [to Austria] who can't get a job later in life. It's hard, after this job, to get employment."

[...]

B: "And then how do you create a relationship when - even if someone loves you this way and that, well [that's why it's really hard (...) I think." (Focus group discussion with Bea, Aletta, and Luca, Pos. 268-280)

When I asked them about their thoughts on feminism, women's rights, and so on, at first, they did not entirely understand what I meant. I tried to draw a parallel with my former workplace's activity, explaining how feminists have similar goals as the social counsellors there: to help other women, advocate for women's rights, or reduce oppression. After this example, every participant in both interviews strongly agreed with those goals and activities, and when I asked them, they said they would happily join such movements. Fanni claimed that the most pressing issue where women's solidarity could improve the situation is domestic violence. Bea, who was a long-term client of mine, recognised me as a feminist²⁹ earlier, so it is questionable whether she, Aletta, and Luca honestly thought what they said, or they wanted to comply with me because of my perceived superiority as an interviewer and as a social worker with their clients. All in all, there was no trace of dismissing feminism as a tool of the elite or alienation from it, as is a common (mis)conception of women from lower classes (Kovács & Hevesi, 2015).

So in my final analysis, I argue that the three sex workers could be considered feminists by the model; we just have to look for other attributes and linguistic framework than those referenced in the literature.³⁰ Even though in some aspects they show SDO of the zeroth stage, in other ways they are progressing towards the further stages of becoming a feminist. They are aware of their structural inequality and the ways it manifests: stigmatisation, sexism, material differences, and institutional discrimination (first stage). They often seek women's subcultures, such as their work colleagues' companionship, or safe spaces, such as my former workplace (second stage). They see the limitations of their individual choices and the wider context, how they often have to be self-reliant because no one is helping them (third stage). And lastly, even if to my knowledge only theoretically, they are committed to the idea of uniting for a common political goal; in Fanni's case, the support of victims of sexist violence, in the sex workers' case, petitioning for a better

²⁹ She also watched some of my videos on TikTok about feminism when she accidentally found me on the platform.

³⁰ I only realised this after re-reading the transcripts. My feminist knowledge, being born partly from the theoretical canon (white, Western, higher class), has limited my imagination of how sex workers can be feminists, showing different characteristics than those we are used to seeing.

financial safety net for sex workers (fourth stage) which they talked about after the group interview.

5.2.2. Group 2

5.2.2.1. First level: solidarity formations

With regard to solidarity, Group 2 acknowledged that women's solidarity is weak, if non-existent. When I asked them about a possible cooperation of Hungarian women, they responded, talking in absolutes:

E: “((snorted)) (...) There are two obstacles to this: womanhood and Hungarianness.”

H: “((laughter)) I don't know which one is stronger!”

Zs: “I don't think so.” (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 601-604)

Some of them are actively organising women's groups (like Margit with the local pensioners and Hedvig with careerist women), some experience the benefits of women's circles (Zsanett and Hedvig), others, like Edit or Katalin, admittedly have not yet had such experiences and while earlier in the discussion are dismissive of its importance, later they became rather envious.

E: “I told [name of the researcher] that I don't believe in solidarity that is organized on a women's basis. If I help, I help, it doesn't matter if you're a man or a woman. [...] I expect to be helped too, but not because I'm a woman- so this saying that 'we women among ourselves' or 'let's talk to each other as women'- can be used to drive [me crazy], this- this has NOTHING to do with anything like that. What does being a woman have to do with solidarity? Nothing. [...] Well, maybe I haven't experienced something like this, but I don't- I wouldn't think that solidarity depends on the gender of the other person.”

K: “I can absolutely relate to this idea, I was just trying to turn back the (..) wheel of time, [whether] I could reach back to [a memory], that [helping others] was simply because [of their gender], but (..) I can't find such a thing, like this.” (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 89-92)

H: “[...] For example, no matter how open my husband is to many things, and I am not spiritually inclined, but I can talk better with my girlfriend about topics that he or the other male members of the group would probably react to differently. And let's say, not necessarily positively, or more like, certainly not positively. So there are topics that I think should be discussed in a girls' circle, or can be discussed well.” (x10)

E: “I don't have much experience. (...) Our circle of friends is always mixed. Married couples. (...) I have several girlfriends, but they are always (..) with their partners. I envy that kind of thing. One of my colleagues said how different it was when she went on holiday with girls when she was young. [...] I say hmm ((shrugs)), I have no experience. But yeah, she said it was completely different; she didn't say it was better, just that it was a different quality of experience.” (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 272-274)

They found, in general, that girls, already at a young age, are not capable of solidarity. The two teachers, Edit and Zsanett, one of them also having a daughter, shared their experiences with girls always fighting with each other:

E: “It is certainly much more difficult to keep order among children if they are only girls. There is much more conflict, rivalry, gossip, (.) and evil.” (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 33)

Zs: “My daughter's class has (..) 20 girls, and let's say 5-6 boys [...], they've had a stress manager since the third grade. A lady.”

I: “Do they say why is that?”

Zs: “Well, because there is an awful lot of conflict between them.”

E: “Conflict, cliques. [...] They [form] cliques against each other.” (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 54-75)

The participants attributed the high number of conflicts among women to their sensitivity, in contrast with men. They identified several origins of conflicts and rivalry, including the double burden women face because of beauty standards and the pursuit of male acceptance. Prejudice was a recurring theme during the discussion about women who ‘try

too hard to be in the centre of attention' and who are focused on their looks. Some of the participants positioned themselves below the standards:

E: "I like to dress sporty, and I don't pay too much attention to manicures and such feminine things, but if I meet a woman and there are TOO MANY fake [things] on them, well, that, I notice, or rather, if I meet a new, new lady, girlfriend, or just a woman, then I know [...] we won't be friends." (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 306)

K: "[...] there are those types of women who always need to be paid attention to, [...], because of their behaviour, but no matter how I think about it, there are such emblematic and women everywhere, especially.

Zs: "Centres [of (male) attention]."

K: "Those who are in the centre just to be paid attention to."

E: "And then we are not in solidarity with them [...]."

K: "Or rather, precisely, not just not in solidarity ((laughs)), but rather the opposite." (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 430-434)

This internalised sexism connecting beauty standards, male attention, and a perceived superficiality also resulted in homophobia in some of the participants. They problematised overly feminine attributes and behaviours in both sexes (calling 'feminine' men 'princesses' as a derogatory term), some of them emphasizing how irritating this is for them, actively hindering their sense of solidarity, or even any kind of human relations with them. They showed explicit signs of exclusive in-group solidarity toward women who failed to conform to the traditional roles they prescribed: being single or divorced, excessively seeking male acceptance (for their taste), failing as a mother, and so on, could result in exclusion. Since the participants were above a certain age, all of them living in heteronormative, nuclear families, they normalised the roles they are in. However, sometimes they reflected on their prejudices and attributed them to their own lack of confidence or questioned the reasons that could lie behind their views.

Their exclusionary tendency of solidarity was contradicted by how they reacted to me when I told them I interviewed sex workers. They were not explicitly avoidant; what is

more, they agreed to cooperate with the two other groups in a hypothetical situation. This shows how subconsciously social boundaries are working in women. Moreover, Edit stated that solidarity should be stronger among sex workers because of their situation and the challenges of their work, while not showing prejudice towards them.

Furthermore, some in Group 2 showed extended solidarity with regard to motherhood, not distinguishing between women with and without children. Zsanett defined her strong solidarity with another mom, whom and whose child she had been helping for a long time before she gave up.

Zs: "There is a lady who I have been helping since May, (...) a million times a day, but there comes a time when (...) you can't help her anymore. [...]"

E: "But because she's a woman? [Is it related?]"

Zs: "Because she's a woman, [because she's a mother. Yes, yes. But she doesn't want to do anything to make their fate better, or (...) and now we're getting to the point where they're taking the child away from her. I told my husband I wish I could bring [the child] home. But. [Obviously not. [...]] But (.) I can't, I CAN'T help her."

H: "If she doesn't let it, you can't. [...]"

Zs: "I can't take on work for her, I can't take her into my house, even though I would. But- but others help too, but (.) she doesn't [accept] it, or doesn't want to, or I don't know how- ((claps his palms together))" (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 369-375)

Later in the conversation, the participants concluded that women can only unite for the well-being of their children, which they noted as more important than the cooperation of women 'for women's issues.'

H: "[...] I don't know how much of a women's issue this is, so that now women can join forces, because [of] being a woman, [...], oh my God how important family protection, child protection (.) I think [child protection] is a hundred times more important [...]."

[...]

E: “There was that demonstration, the mothers of Mikepércs³¹, when the battery factory [...] went to Debrecen, and Mikepércs is right next to Debrecen, and it will have all sorts of harmful effects, right, they’ve already assessed these kinds of materials in Göd, and the mothers of Mikepércs marched to Debrecen, only women. (.) For their children. But it wasn’t because of women’s solidarity either, it was for the children.” (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 609-616)

Non-mothers also received empathy from Group 2 when Edit mentioned a former colleague who was negatively discriminated against because she did not conform to the traditional gender roles of being a wife and a mother. She described her current compassion as a process that she reflected on since their professional relationship:

E: “[One of my former female colleagues] always said that she had no one to support her, that she had to take care of herself, I always took offense at her because I work [too], and then I realized that on the salary she earns from school, she can’t [...] very easily manage on her own. IT’S easier for SOMEONE who has a husband, because a teacher’s salary cannot be enough. [...]. And she didn’t have any children, (.) so [...] she always felt that she was behind-, she always complained that of course because I didn’t give birth, I don’t have this, that [...] and there were all kinds of subsidies [from the government she did not receive], and now [there is] even more. And she thought that was very unfair. [...]”

K: “And this is no longer the female-male] discrimination, this [discrimination between women]!” (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 109-110)

At the same time, they often represented neoliberal values, highlighting individual approaches and situations. In the first part of the discussion, they regularly voiced how they do not differentiate between women and men when helping others. They chose to be in solidarity with people who are ‘sympathetic’ to them, with whom they already have a connection and common ground, such as their workplaces. Their solidarity seems to be working on the ground of what Takács (2018, p. 40) calls reflective solidarity (see

³¹ See (Kovács & Szajki, 2024) See (Kovács & Szajki, 2024)

Theoretical framework). However, subconsciously, they do differentiate between choosing to give empathy to others or not. Especially, as described above, when it comes to household chores. Some of them shared their delight that more and more men take part in that labour, and it has really changed over the last decades. However, if they knew about men who were not doing that, they would blame the mother or wife, claiming she had not taught them to do so.

Implicit victim-blaming was also a recurring theme. When talking about gender-based violence (e. g. domestic violence), they expressed that the organisations helping victims need to be supported, and educating young girls about the signs of abuse would be essential. But when it came to their own responsibilities, they rather distanced themselves from the situation.

E: "I can't imagine that women would protest [in Hungary], for example, because of domestic violence."

[...]

Zs: "Of course not."

I: "Why not?"

Zs: "Because I think that those who live in it tend to suppress it or don't want to [talk about it]."

E: "And those who don't? They're glad that they don't."

K: "They keep their distance from it.]" (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 618-624)

In less extreme cases, they mentioned a rather pop-cultural phenomenon in connection with a recent political event, trad-wives³², or, specifically, one trad wife, the deceased Charlie Kirk's³³ wife, saying, women who accept toxic, abusive, and oppressive treatment from men, 'deserve it':

³² Trad wives: a popcultural and sociological abbreviation for traditional housewives who submit to traditional gender roles such as homemaking and child-raising while only their husbands are in wage labour. (Norris, 2023)

³³ Charlie Kirk was killed on September 10th, 2025, 15 days before the focus group discussion. (*Assassination of Charlie Kirk*, 2025)

E: "His wife had no say at home. So she couldn't have a say in anything, the man decided everything, 'because I earn the money, I tell you what to spend it on, your job is to- [do the domestic labour]' and the woman said, yes, you're absolutely right, a woman's place is in the kitchen, and she [was] satisfied with this position[.]"

[...]

H: "Then she deserves this, sorry."

[...]

E: "Yes. Yes, and I say] that no amount of cooperation will change this, if not the women themselves [change]. [..] No amount of [solidarity] will change this, only education."

K: "And I think that, uh, so we are fundamentally different, so it [depends on personality] [...] for some it means security to be taken care of, and I accept that, and here comes what you said, that then (.) it is GOOD for her. [...]"

E: "[Otherwise s]he [wouldn't] stay, huh?"

K: "[I think if a woman who wants self-realisation] does so because she won't stay with a man like that who says that you have no say [at home]. It is out of the question[.] [...]" (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 693-703)

This contradiction was prevalent during the discussion and can be traced back to the neoliberal ideologies and sexist approaches. They attributed a high amount of responsibility to *other* women, but they distanced themselves from women or acted cautiously and withdrawn with them if they needed help and support to fight patriarchal oppression in their lives. Although they themselves occasionally showed solidarity to other women and agreed that being compassionate with them is easier (than to men) because of their own identities, they alternatively chose who deserved it and who did not on the basis of their compliance with traditional norms that define women in their environment: being a good mother and wife. They extended their solidarity in only one case unconditionally, when it comes to the boundary between mother and non-mothers;

however, non-mothers had to comply with certain gender norms and behavioural patterns (like being hard-working).

Nonetheless, the participants showed signs of reflecting on their experiences regarding women's solidarity, often asking each other which act or behavioural pattern could stem from women's solidarity, from the lack of it, and to what extent they are responsible for their reactions or lack of solidarity. So, taking the whole discussion into consideration, the participants were motivated to look for answers to my questions and to investigate their role in women's solidarity.

5.2.2.2. Second level: gender identity

With respect to the participants' gender identity, there is ambivalence in their answers between the identifier and non-identifier. In some cases and topics, it was important for them to adhere to traditional gender norms (like being a good mother), in other cases, as a result of (neo)liberal feminism, they redefined what it means to be a woman. The two participants who are not from the village, but from the town nearby, have achieved a successful career and led comfortable lives, declared that they do not feel oppressed, and were happy that domestic roles are changing (signs of the progressive non-identifier). The teacher, Edit, mostly agreed with that as well, but showed mixed characteristics between the two positions of the traditional identifier and the progressive non-identifier. The three also dominated the discussion; however, for Zsanett, coming from a lower class, and Margit, being of an older generation, these new roles felt farther away. This contrast, probably originating from a class position as well, emerged significantly when I asked them about patriarchal oppression:

Zs: "But I think here in Hungary this especially, [the sentence] 'because you are a woman' (..) from men, I think it is very much there. [...] So in society. And among young people too."

I: "Do you mean in a negative way?"

Zs: "[...] Yes."

E: "Yes, in such a disdainful way"[...]."

Zs: "Yes, yes. I think so. [...] I think it is definitely on stage]. Everywhere."

[...]

K: "By the way, this is so interesting, [...] it comes up very rarely in my everyday experiences, [so I don't usually feel that way at all.]"

H: "I thought about it too, not at all. [...] I wouldn't let it [fly], I might [add. ((laughs))]" (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 633-646)

As I mentioned, they attached some characteristics to being a woman. Some of them were biological features like giving birth and menstruating, and some manifested in the socialisation of women, such as caring for others. However, they connected those also to biology (sign of the traditional identifier):

E: "I think women [...] are more sensitive and therefore I think it is easier for them to HELP anyone, not just women, but [men.]"

K: "Yes, I think it is a biological thing somewhere [maybe, right?]"

E: "YES, that is what I wanted to say, or in helping professions, and I would include teachers, kindergarten teachers, doctors, is it not a coincidence that women are in the majority [in those] [...]? [...] I think they help more easily, [...] but it doesn't matter WHO, the relationship, whether it is a woman or a man, but simply helping is more in our (.) genes."

K & H & Zs: "Yes." (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 395-401)

When asking about womanhood, the participants very quickly ended up talking about men, establishing their gender identity on the basis of their relationship with men (a sign of the traditional non-identifier). On the subject of gender differences, I saw an obvious contrast between the perception of the sexes: the participants attributed to men a lot less responsibility for their actions than they did to women. Group 2 did not even empathize with one of the participants when she shared an explicit, overtly sexist remark her father-in-law made:

Zs: "[...] my father-in-law, when he heard that, because I had surgery and my husband was vacuuming, [he said] that it was SHAMEFUL [that my husband vacuums and not me]. And [...] with my great sense of justice, I jumped out of bed, and then I really fought with my father-in-law. That [...] the shameful was

what he said. And then [...] now the poor thing got into the situation that my mother-in-law died. [...] I was really scared about what would happen, because my mother-in-law even cut my father-in-law's nails. [...] And what would happen to him, [now] that [my] mother-in-law wouldn't be there. And now he comes with a mop. And now I would ask him ((knocks on the table)) what the situation is."

H: "Oh, but you don't ask. [You are compassionate."

Zs: "I'm not asking, God forbid, I'm not asking, I'm not asking ((apologetically)).]"

E: "You're not looking for conflict.] [...]"

Zs: "But- ((they stifled the word))" (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 651-661)

Other times, they made women responsible for men's behaviour. The participants talked extensively about men changing, mostly in their close environment: that they take part in domestic labour and child-raising, and they drew a parallel with women's evolution as well. They expressed that women nowadays get to choose a career and have a supportive husband, compared to the past (these are characteristics of the progressive non-identifier). However, Zsanett felt the opposite of that stronger when she moved to the village from the capital town in the county, mentioning her husband's lack of involvement in household chores. The other participants reacted to that by blaming the mother or her, the wife, claiming one of them had not taught him to do so.

In summary, for women in higher-class positions, characteristics of the progressive non-identifier occurred. They sometimes, admittedly, appropriated attributes that are perceived as masculine, or they strove to reach gender equality by attaining privileges men have in society (higher pay grades, respectability, equally shared domestic work, and insensitivity). For women from lower classes and older generations, those seemed to be more out of reach – but no less desired. However, in their verbal expressions, they identified with the gender of women, and every participant valued traditional gender norms to a certain extent, mirroring only those changes that are accepted in the wider society and are feminist achievements of the past (like sharing household chores).

5.2.2.3. Third level: feminist evolution

In Group 2, the scale's zeroth stage of becoming a feminist was the most empathic. Since some of the participants achieved successes in male-dominated fields (such as in leadership positions in the competitive sector), they showed clear signs of SDO. They recognised some areas where sexism appears in the ways they themselves could be affected: the gender wage gap and the disadvantages of having children in their professional lives:

E: "[...] [S]upposedly men in the same job get more money."

H: "Yes, yes, this is statistically proven."

[...]

K: "They usually say it very firmly, and HR people have a special training and task, that (.) what you can't ask about, but in a job interview it's a disadvantage if I'm a mother returning from a maternity leave, because it inevitably comes up whether there is someone to look after the child or not. [...]"

K: "Anyway] THIS, that's exactly what I wanted to say, that either she's at a slight disadvantage because she's about to give birth, or she's at a disadvantage because she [...] has a small child, and then maybe she's no longer at a disadvantage if, say, the child is in high school, because then there aren't as many [problems] in this matter. Well, I think (...) there is a difference in entering the labour market and existing there, and it's also in the salary[...] [W]ith women, these other hindering factors are that we drop out, even if for a short time. Some for a shorter time, some for a longer time, but if you drop out, you've already lost so much (.) TIME, the opportunity to gain experience, that you can't get back. No matter how special and super good your skills are." (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 565-570)

Edit, the teacher is admittedly politically informed and connected sexism with today's political climate in Hungary, and the other participants agreed as well. They problematised unjust policies of the government, creating a divide between mothers and non-mothers:

E: “[...] [N]ow we have stepped back a bit in terms of women's roles, I think, at least at the level of public discourse, or rather at the level of [...] government-supported activities, right, family, childbirth, etc. And they don't really care about what women want. Then they tell us, the smart men, what's good for us. Luckily- I feel like this hasn't seeped into everyday life yet, so no one has said that I shouldn't go here or there, don't do this or that, because I belong in the kitchen- and among the children- but (...) ((sigh)) um this (...) has some kind of support for [...] women [with one child], women with two children, women with three children.”

K: “The personal income tax exemption, yes.” (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 105-106)

When Edit mentioned a former colleague who had no children, as a reaction to that, the other participants named the problem of the lack of political representation:

H: “Isn't [this a deeper underlying issue], because why don't they take the situation of women into account more in politics, are there any female politicians, why aren't there any female politicians, because she's at home raising a family, [...] running a household and working and doesn't have time to [achieve a higher career in politics.]”

E: “Yes, yes. Politics] requires a whole person. [...]”

K: “But I think this is not only true for politics, so this - if we look at the gender ratio above middle management level, it doesn't matter whether it's politics or [the competitive sector.]” (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 116-118)

Despite the fact that they could regularly name personal examples of how sexist politics can influence their lives, they often insisted that it does not. They were aware of a lot of ways sexism affects them and other women, but they chose to focus on their close environment, highlighting the positivist views they had on their roles and their agency over their gender identity. As I described above, they also recognised sexist oppression manifesting in the high rates of domestic violence or the double burden in household chores and child-raising. What is more, they underlined the importance of the education of girls and boys on those issues. Nonetheless, they did not see how women's political

solidarity could solve those issues, mostly based on the fact that they had never experienced that collectively standing up against sexism would work (apart from the suffragettes' successes, which they hardly had knowledge of – as a result of the lacking feminist education in schools (Kereszty, 2007)). Moreover, they blamed feminists for being rather destructive regarding women's issues:

E: “[...] Because feminists sometimes over[-]emphasize the importance of gender, and here, I think [our behaviour], so it's a more natural behaviour, but a feminist doesn't always behave naturally.”

[...]

H: “So it's true for every such trend, or for every person who is excessively interested in some topic, or who is so committed to it, they are always (.) a little more arrogant, or they say more [vehemently] that they are right[.]”

E: “[...] [T]he topic of women's solidarity, I think feminist behaviour distorts it.”
(Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 533-538)

Although they could not name any feminist demonstration or issue from current times, they were determined not to participate in any possible stance feminists would take. They expressed that women's issues are not vital: neither to them, nor to society. So, they rejected any cooperation with the feminist movement.

In spite of these sentiments, Hedvig, who is working in the for-profit sector, is already in a cooperative group that could be considered feminist. It is a women's alliance supporting each other in their careers, and still, she dismissed any accusation of that being a feminist group. This clear contradiction could stem from the fact that the whole group condemned feminism as a whole, and that her environment is also dismissive of feminism, probably because of the apparent demonising stereotypes (Kovács & Hevesi, 2015):

H: “When we started this [...] girl group after all, this small group of [over 20 women], I had concerns that, oh my God, that might be [a] too feminist story, and I have a 21-year-old daughter who told me afterwards that ‘mom, I was really afraid that this would be some kind of feminist blah blah blah’, [...], but

feminism and extremism in general are not good.” (Focus group discussion with Edit, Hedvig, Katalin, Margit, and Zsanett, Pos. 545)

To summarise, this group showed clear signs of SDO (zeroth stage), but they recognised structural sexism, which causes women’s inferiority in society (first stage), although they focused more on individual solutions or coping mechanisms (again, zeroth stage) rather than wider actions of resistance. Some of them embraced women’s subcultures, and even if they formed alliances to achieve a better condition for women as a social group (like in Hedvig’s case), they denied these being feminist organisations (but that does not mean they are not, rather depicted that the harmful stereotypes of feminists are working to alienate women from the movement). Because of their individually formed ‘resistance’ and disbelief in feminist actions, the third and fourth stages seem to be out of reach for now; however, after the group discussion, some of them continued the conversation about the existence of contemporary feminism, while admitting they do not know enough about it.

5.2.3. Group 3

5.2.3.1 First level: solidarity formations

The participants of Group 3 agreed that solidarity is missing from women’s connections. They named competition among women for male validation and thus conflicts as one of the sources of the lack of solidarity. What is more, they brought up a perspective differentiating between the genders when it comes to competition: that they perceive a woman’s whole life is a big competition, while men get to have a break from it, or it serves their development.

K: “[...] as if as a woman you can't even take a break from this competitive role. Because boys compete within a sport, but afterwards they are allowed to (.) calm down and talk to each other [...] [as if] that they should only compete with each other within certain roles, but it's like as if a woman's whole life, and every aspect of her life is built on one competition. To be the most beautiful, to be the best MOTHER, to be the best partner, best friend, but at the same time to be much better than yourself, and- and there is no rest [from it].”

[...]

B: "Well, I think that competition and opposition have (.) such levels, that there is that which is playful competition, which also builds community, and there is that which even breaks up the community, and I also feel that the difference between men and women is that among men, as if competition were more community-building and more playful, than among women, its purpose is rather to break up the community even more." (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 26-28)

However, some participants admittedly do not pay attention to someone's gender, or more generally speaking, the social context, when helping each other. Others act more consciously, for instance, when they experience something unpleasant from another woman, they try to be aware of the difficulties of being a woman. For example, they remind their environment that a possibly bad female boss's behaviour might stem from her female identity, but it is wrong to blame the gender for their mistakes and decisions. One participant, Annamari, having experience in various feminist projects and organisations, expressed how she regularly reacts the opposite way if she gets to know a woman, than the patriarchy teaches women:

A: "I approach people in a way that - if I get to know a man, until he proves that he's a good guy, I think he's not, and when I get to know a woman, until she proves that she's not, she's a good person. So basically, for me, this is what women's solidarity is, [...] I prefer to give my trust in advance. To a woman. While to a man, I prefer to wait for him to prove to me that I can trust him, (.) I'm not sure that's good, but that's how it is - for me, it's like that." (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 52)

As I mentioned before, some participants do not feel the need to focus their energies on women's solidarity, but they said they show solidarity regardless of gender in their private lives, while on a theoretical level, they agreed that women's solidarity is a positive thing that they cherish. But when it comes to women outside of their close environment, they disclosed that they are often selective with their attitude, and try to investigate what the said woman's values, ideologies, or their relationship with men are. They often showed signs of reflexive solidarity, again, with neoliberal and individualistic characteristics, as a defence mechanism from a possible conflict or discomfort. Nonetheless, in their answers, it could be observed that they are

trying to act more consciously in this regard. For example, Annamari expressed her curiosity and attempts to understand how a woman with a different value system (like voting right-wing) sees the world, and does not want to end a relationship only for that. Bettina explained how she helped one of her girlfriends with concerns about the hardships of being a new mother, even though she has no experience in motherhood. Lili, a trans woman, concluded this discussion with the following thoughts, seeking reasons why women may show exclusive solidarity towards each other, in agreement with Bettina, who said women are being “divided and conquered”:

L: “[If] a white cis-hetero man (.) decides to start to [...] connect different communities, then he threatens his own privileged position within society less than a woman would threaten her current position. AND [...] the PART of (..) maintaining that (.) NOT GOOD, but not so bad position is that [as a woman,] I then withdraw my empathy, my solidarity from others. AND then I say that I don't empathize with that gypsy [sic!] woman because she's a gypsy, I don't empathize with that [...] refugee woman because she comes from another country, [...] [with] who[m] is affected by menstrual poverty, (.) I don't empathize with her because she's so far below me in society [...] that [by doing that] I would sink into an EVEN worse position than where I am now, so I think this is another dimension of that.” (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 132)

In their other answers, they even problematised the individualistic behaviour of others while connecting it with the obstacles that capitalist-patriarchal society enforces on communities:

K: “I think there is a phenomenon like this now, or how should I call it, that people have become a little more selfish, and there is more of this (...) this toxic self-care, that we are NOT there for each other! And I think this is also evident in women's communities, as well as (.) probably in all kinds of communities. [...] [T]here is the lack of third places, that everything is socially structured in such a way that if you want to find security and certainty, it really pushes you out of communities, and it really pushes you in such directions, (.) to be in the heteronormative position, because that's SECURE. Then you will have a roof

over your head, then you will have money, then you will have, so to speak (.) your FAMILY and- and it is harder to break away from this[.]”

[...]

D: “In the meantime, I also see a part of this, just from selfishness, [...] that somehow others would experience that as self-care, that not caring, not putting energy into the other, not empathizing, and that sometimes it's not just [they are] not putting the energy into empathizing (.) with someone who- I don't know, let's say women living in extreme poverty in general. That [the person] doesn't put the minimum energy into it, [...] let's say participating in one or two [charity donation] a year, when they buy hygiene products and so on, [neither] empathize with those [outside of their] immediate environment [...]” (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 128-130)

Concerning social boundaries, they commented on the mother-non-mother axis, emphasizing how mothers can stay alone with their struggles because non-mothers cannot empathise with their problems. Although the participants have no children, they regularly showed support and sympathy for women with children, so this boundary apparently was not present in their lives.

When I mentioned the other two groups, in theory, they were also ready to cooperate with sex workers, as well as rural mothers and grandmothers. Nevertheless, they somewhat recognised likely difficulties in a hypothetical situation where they would have to show unity with women from those groups; specifically, language. They shared personal hardships when thematising social issues, as they feel the vocabulary they learned during their education, institutional or voluntary, is a high threshold for women from other backgrounds. But in conclusion, they felt that the common life experiences, oppression, and the often universal commonalities among women can make the connection easier.

L: “[...] [P]erhaps the establishment of a common, [...] effective communication would be the most (.) complex, most complicated part of this thing. But I think that otherwise, it is relatively easy to find common, lived experiences [...]”

B: “And I think that no matter what type of woman we are, in any stage of life, in any role, or in any (.) other experience, there will always be something that

will always draw a line between all of us, that there are experiences that are completely universal for everyone. As a woman. And when you talk to, say, older people [about] sexual harassment, for example, in such stories, they casually tell what happened to them, or what experiences they had in connection with this, and you sit there [baffled]. So [...] there will always be a topic along which, as women, we will always be able to connect with each other, even if we have difficulties. [Even if there are] generational differences and the mentality in which we grew up, and obviously this kind of difference, that connection, like the language, that how we can, uh, understand each other.” (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 151-152)

However, when talking about women’s political solidarity, apparently, only Lili has found it essential for fighting patriarchal oppression. They obviously vouch for sisterhood and connecting with women, but they see women’s solidarity as friendship and a supportive network rather than something political. Annamari and Bettina expect changes in women’s issues coming from the top, from the state, and Diána voiced her fear that in case women unite politically, they would face immediate repercussions from the sexist elite or men in general. But Lili drew attention to why women’s solidarity would be, on the one hand, a powerful tool to fight sexism, and on the other hand, to defend women, as an abstract group, from bad consequences:

L: “ [...] I wouldn’t expect such a helping hand from above, and I don’t think it’s a good idea, because we can’t expect the power system, the power structure that produced these social inequalities, to solve them, [...] that’s why if we want to approach it from this direction, solidarity between communities is very important - solidarity within the community AND across communities, [...], because this is actually how we can (..) put quasi pressure on those people who, for example, are in decision-making positions in this case. Because otherwise, [...] why would men sitting in the parliament care about whether someone has a pad [for menstruation] or not, they don’t need it anyway. Of course, it could be rationally explained to them why this is important anyway, but we know exactly that there is a lot of very strong ideological, emotional-based policymaking going on here, which can be, uh, put in the right direction by, for

example, applying PRESSURE in solidarity between communities. [...] [And] that when men experience a strong female community as a threat. ((sigh)) (...) how to put it, I find it dangerous that if we get scared of this, that (.) they will feel threatened by the fact that we have a strong women's community, they will still be pissed off, even if we don't ((giggle)), the only difference will be that if they come to us as such an atomized, (.) lack-of-solidarity conglomerate, then it will practically result in the fact that it is much easier to curtail rights[.] [...] [N]ow if we take a local example, a woman who is embedded in a strong local community and can ask for help from someone, if she is subjected to abuse within her relationship or within her family, is in a much (...) more protected position, because she has a relative, a friend, to whom she can escape, than if she is left alone.” (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 186)

Although the participants were all self-proclaimed feminists, one very apparent perspective was present regarding other feminists, who often are in connecting fields in their professional lives, such as activists, social workers, and so on. Most of the participants have already pursued that kind of involvement, which is a sign of the fourth stage, commitment, but they faced exclusion from such organisations at some point, which led to disappointments and to their distancing themselves from (classical) feminist activism. They named various problems with feminist activists: exclusion based on intellectual superiority, a homogenised approach to different themes, such as sex, and the lack of empathy towards others outside those circles.

B: “I absolutely feel that in groups that are often dealing with such intentionally feminist discourses, there is always [...] a point of disappointment, and for me too, this is usually [...] this rationalizing, superior [attitude], [the competition of] who is the better feminist, which always comes up, on any topic that is related to women, and if you have an opposing opinion, [...] or you don't generalize the whole topic as much as the other side, [and they are outnumbered], then you don't have a chance to speak up, or- or tell your personal experience.” (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 196)

Lili, in one instance, declared that for the reason she encounters feminism, as a sole ideology of someone, not sufficient for solidarity-building, so she looks to other ideological signs to investigate whether a certain individual is a possible ally:

L: "My goal wasn't specifically to look for or find a feminist company or feminist circles, but (.) I found a more comprehensive, left-wing, mainly anarchist (.) environment [...]. [M]y experience is that, uh (...) if someone calls themselves a feminist, then they have a much smaller chance of being able to work with them more broadly in different areas, on different topics, than if they call themselves, say, a leftist or an anarchist, because that already implies that yes, in order for them to call themselves that, they also have to be a feminist, through an intersectional, feminist lens, it also includes many other value statements (...) WHICH, well, I'm not saying that it predestines it, but at least it increases the chance of successful cooperation. [...]" (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 197)

Furthermore, Annamari and Lili shared their expectation that feminist organizations would demonstrate solidarity from an intersectional perspective. They noted that this is currently lacking, viewing it as a significant obstacle to women's solidarity.

A: "I think it would be an important step to at least start some acceptance in feminist communities, [...] because like this [...] there are quite a few organizations that provide, say, sexual education, I know about three, there aren't many in the country that deal with abused women or actually women's rights, and if at least they could address a wider group, thinking in an intersectional perspective for example, then I don't think that would be such an unrealistic goal, or such an unrealistic idea, and it would be of help to every Hungarian woman, at least indirectly, or even directly." (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 202)

L: "[...] [I]t's unpleasant, [...] [if during the dialogue] the other party, who defines themselves as feminists, their feminism extends to the point where [...] it's not about women of colour, or I don't know, it's not about trans women or ... so-so- so-so (..)[.]" (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 197)

To conclude, Group 3 frequently showed extended solidarity towards other women through empathy, building communities, and altruism. Even though some of the participants admitted to a possible exclusion of other women regarding their differing attitudes in various topics, like homophobia or victim-blaming, they are actively deconstructing these prejudicial thoughts and attempt to look beyond them to include more women in their solidarity. This process of self-reflection and intersectional thinking is expected from classical feminist activists in their view as well, but is not the case at this moment, according to their experiences.

5.2.3.2. Second level: gender identity

Group 3 examines gender as a social phenomenon rather than a biological one. The reason for this can be various: for the cis women in the group, it can be traced back to their feminist knowledge, and for Lili, a trans woman, it can additionally stem from her own experience.

They emphasised inner attributes assigned to the gender of women, sensitivity and emotional expressiveness, while not denying the plurality and often biological processes like childbearing or menstruation. Along with these traits, they often find commonality with other women, cherishing those connections and how they can openly talk about important issues with them. Lili already noticed these trends before her transition, having close relationships with women, but the others also expressed how they prefer their connections with women.

Thus, they approached the difference in emotional expressiveness from societal and not biological directions: they highlighted that women are freer to express their emotions, and men are not allowed to show them. However, for them, it was clear that men have emotions and can feel care and love just like everybody else. They meant, they feel more comfortable in their connections with women because they can experience emotional and physical intimacy that is missing from their relationships with men.

L: “[...] I found myself a circle of male friends, but at the same time I had a circle of girlfriends and the contrast was SO strong, because (..) with girls we could experience such an emotional depth and physical and emotional intimacy that if we saw that the other was in a bad mental state, we hugged each other[.]”

(Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 65)

Hence, they expressed their gender identity mostly in contrast to men. More than once, the discussion went in the direction of and was almost totally dominated by the topic of men: how they are different or similar, how they manage their bonds with men, or the opposite of that, how they avoid those, or how men can feel threatened by strong female or women's groups. They defined their femininity in contrast to men. (Beauvoir et al., 2011)

In conjunction with the inner traits, they often expressed their preference for being a woman and would not change their gender identities despite the structural inequality they experience.

D: " [...] On the one hand, as a woman in the world, I think that I feel much less safe, so that although [...] if someone comes across me on the street at night, it should be a woman, because I feel much less safe with a man, and this is true in many situations. [...] [T]here is always the unknown factor here, so the faceless man is the one who is scary and dangerous. [...] I see, I feel the- the very scary shift to the right in the world, aa, what happened in Afghanistan, aaa- what is happening right now in America and all over the world, in many places, in Hungary unfortunately. [...] [B]ut despite all this, I wouldn't be a man for any [cost]. On the one hand, I couldn't imagine being a man and being so happy, on the other hand, there is such beauty and completeness to me that I am a woman, that I exist as a woman, that I connect to the world and to people as a woman[.]" (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 60)

Additionally, they acknowledged how the patriarchal order, and in that, Hungary, prioritises traditional gender roles from which they rather deviate from. For this group, the signs of the category of progressively identified can clearly be assigned.

5.2.3.3. Third level: feminist evolution

As mentioned, Group 3 was comfortable with the label of being a feminist and named ways they resist traditional gender norms, so they have already overcome the zeroth stage of Downing and Roush's (1985) model.

The participants seemed to have attained the first stage as well, which is revelation. When one of them made comments about their sense of security as a woman at night, they all acted in agreement, but there were not a lot of big emotions, like rage, present. Although Diána sometimes raised her voice when talking about research gaps and the gap of scientific development regarding the genders, or about domestic abuse, when I asked them about current topics concerning gender equality:

D: “[W]hich is the only thing that I think works in the long run, is if we make it part of the social consensus that hitting a woman as a man is not a glory, but a SHAME. Because it is not strength, but weakness, and hurting the weaker ((hitting the table)) is never a sign of strength, but of weakness.” (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 159)

D: “[A]bout what happens to the female body during pregnancy and postpartum ((loudly, angrily)) there have been fewer studies than about MALE BALDNESS! (...) So that it is simply the kind of dichotomy that everything that is related to women or femininity [...] is treated as secondary and devalued to such an extent to this day [...], and what is strange to me is that it is treated this way on an economic basis, as if it were a worthless thing, while MORE THAN HALF of the world's population is WOMEN! (..) WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?” (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 178)

Still, she was telling stories about her background and environment that she perceived as more feminist than in the wider society (e.g. a dad who does household chores, or male friends who condemn rape), so the revelation phase could not have happened recently. Furthermore, she talked about the beauty and importance of women's communities, which was a recurring theme among all participants. The latter is rather a sign of the second stage, that is, the preference of communities and subcultures that are homogeneous with women. This sign was most apparent for Bettina, who oftentimes expressed her indifference towards men, actively looking for hobbies that are predominantly for women, like dancing, but even there, she has difficulties excluding men from conversations.

B: "I don't organize my life around men, but I have met a lot of women, and I think there is a generational difference in that, they spend their whole lives with men, how they do what, where, and [I always fear] when that point comes, apart from dancing, [that] I realize, we can't talk about anything else, except [men]. Which, let's say, doesn't concern me." (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 82)

Although they sometimes named sources of responsibility of individual women, they often used wordings that are directed at the wider context of sexism, such as talking about women as an abstract group, naming differences between women and men, while emphasising the societal context. They often admitted to doing something benefiting sexism unconsciously, but they were actively deconstructing their thoughts and acts with the help of feminist knowledge, which would be a sign of the third stage.

K: "However, I also noticed (.) that I am much more permissive with men, because I have in my head that 'well, he is still learning [what feminism is], ((in an undertone)) then 'I will introduce him, THEN I WILL TEACH HIM' and I hate this. And yet I have the feeling that I expect from women by default that feminism and [the correct] views [should be ticked out], and if the man doesn't know, then [I say] 'I will help YOU, oh I will save you', [...] so I'm working on this too, that I'm not stricter with women than with men, and why, but at least I know that I'm doing this." (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 86-94)

In conclusion, the participants seemed to be found between the third and fourth stages of becoming a feminist, looking for alternative ways to commit to the movement than traditional feminist activism, which they feel to be excluded from.

D: "[...] [S]ince [I stopped being active in traditional feminist activism] it has been much more typical [...] I'm there for programs, demonstrations, donations, actions for something, I try to get involved or be present, uh, and I started, for example, in my own private life, that ((laughs at herself)), slightly dangerous, sometimes fun, sometimes terribly tiring action, that I simply CONTINUOUSLY educate my entire environment." (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 193)

During the discussion, they also conducted several dialogues about reproductive rights and domestic abuse, naming common goals and tools for collective action (like strikes, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention³⁴, non-peaceful demonstrations, mutual aid projects, and so on). They are seemingly aware of the current situation regarding various topics, which they are actively thinking about in their free time alone and collectively. So, interpreting the whole picture, Group 3 shows commitment to the feminist cause, completing every stage of the feminist scale of Downing & Roush.

6. Results

In this chapter, I am going to compare the three analysed groups regarding the given analytical framework I introduced in the previous parts of the thesis. I am going to investigate the grade and form of solidarity among women within their group and whether they appear dissimilar or comparable to the other groups. Besides, I will name apparent and non-apparent social boundaries that the participants touched on during the conversations, in addition to systemic hurdles. Additionally, I am going to highlight similarities and differences regarding the groups' gender identity and feminist evolution. And finally, I am going to depict whether the three factors correlate in the comparison.

6.1. Solidarity formations

All three groups agreed that (Hungarian) women's solidarity is not strong at the moment. Where their opinion differed in this respect is whether women's solidarity is necessary or missing or is something that is nice to have but does not change anything, or eventually not needed at all. Only in the group discussion and interview with women who have experience in the sex industry (Group 1) did the participants clearly state that solidarity is necessary and named several examples where they make use of cooperating with other women. In Group 2, with the women from rural areas, there was no consensus on the necessity of women's solidarity; moreover, they identified only a few instances where they would appreciate it, but overall, they stated that it has no significant importance. Group 3,

³⁴ The Istanbul Convention pinpoints legislative deficiencies, and determines effective practices, and a wide array of actions, including duties that span from promoting awareness and gathering data to implementing legal actions aimed at criminalising various forms of violence. It aimed to address gender-based violence, to mandate the establishment of comprehensive strategies among national and governmental entities engaged in prevention, prosecution, and protection. It is signed by Hungary but not ratified at this moment. (Jurviste & Shreeves, 2018)

although they thought that women's solidarity is crucial in theory, did not see it as a political tool to tackle sexism necessarily. Only Lili unfolded a comprehensive reasoning for what women's solidarity is useful for (e. g. applying pressure on powerholders).

Besides, the three groups showed disparities in practicing solidarity with other women. In Group 1, according to their statements, they practice solidarity in their everyday lives: the sex workers emphasised experiences of being cooperative in their workplaces (e.g., with difficult clients), and they prefer to exclude those who are not 'team players.' Fanni, the ex-sex worker, based on her strong identification with motherhood, is also frequently altruistic with other mothers in her environment, which she perceives as reciprocal.

The participants in Group 2 also confessed to being in solidarity with other women occasionally, although most of them do not differentiate in helping others based on their gender. Zsanett was helping another mother for a long time before she gave up and showed extended solidarity in her answers, going to an extent that the other participants were rather dismissive of (the idea of providing a shelter to a mother with her child). Later in the conversation, the participants concluded that women can only unite for the well-being of their children, which they noted as more important than the cooperation of women. The other participants did not name specific examples of helping other women, and emphasised solidarity acts apart from someone's gender, putting more focus on other commonalities, such as a common workplace.

Group 3 showed mixed characteristics of the two other groups: some do not distinguish by gender when helping others, while others do. But almost every participant could name a specific situation when they supported other women, even outside of their comfort zone, and supported the idea of women's solidarity on a theoretical level; however, there was no consensus on the value of the political nature of it.

In the groups, solidarity, as an act, showed up similarly. The participants attached rather personal acts of kindness, a helping hand, or altruism to the term rather than a political meaning. Except for Lili, none of the participants explicitly stated that women's solidarity should be political. However, the three participants of Group 1, who were active in the sex industry at the moment, arrived at the conclusion that they need to unite forces to achieve a political goal: acquiring material support for sex workers. Group 3 also talked about collective action at the end of the discussion but were hesitant about the outcome and

pessimistic about the reality of that, concerning especially the dangers of women's unity and the patriarchy's reaction to it, considering the political tendencies right now.

6.2. Intersectional and sociopsychological barriers to solidarity

Since the groups were almost homogenous in an intersectional regard, there were just a few intersectional factors (like class, race, or gender), applying Crenshaw's (1991) analytical framework regarding solidarity present in the conversations.

All three groups stated that they would support other women from other backgrounds in a hypothetical situation. Group 1 was aware of their class positions as they indicated the lack of material support from others in both conversations, as well as their stigmatised position as sex workers. However, one participant, Bea, expressed her disapproval of Asian sex workers in the industry in Vienna, which is a race-based boundary. Group 2 did not mention factors like class, race, or gender concerning in-group solidarity. Both in Groups 1 and 2, the exclusion of queer bodies popped up among the participants. In Group 1, Bea also mentioned in passing that she is unhappy when women 'do not dress femininely.' In Group 2, mostly Edit voiced strong emotions against men that are feminine in her view, but Hedvig also called those men derogatory terms, which allows us to conclude their prejudice against non-heterosexual men. Contrary to that, Group 3 approached that topic from another direction: they disclosed disappointment when someone excludes women because of their alternative gender expression or marginalised group membership and acknowledged how marginalised class positions or race can contribute to exclusion, for example, among feminists, the exclusion of trans or Romani women. Apart from that, race was not central in any of the conversations, probably because every participant was perceived as white Hungarian by the rest of the group.

However, it should be noted that women in the research, who represented an intersectionally and multiply marginalised position (like being sex workers or transgender), showed a higher drive for political solidarity and named specific outcomes that collective action could bring about, which, among others, black feminist theory emphasised. (Hill Collins, 2000, pp. 273–290; hooks, 1988, pp. 1–15)

Overarching the basic factors of intersectionality, which were less prevalent due to the relative homogeneity of the groups, other symbolic or social boundaries appeared more significantly in the discussions.

Beauty standards

Beauty standards were a defining theme regarding women's solidarity in the empirical research of this thesis. For Group 1, it was obvious that beauty and appearance separate women: when a woman is more beautiful, she is envied, when she is not beautiful enough, she receives contempt. Group 2 engaged with the topic similarly, but they all talked from the latter perspective, about other women who are more adapted to the beauty standards. They recognised their possible lack of confidence when feeling resentment; nonetheless, they clearly drew a line between themselves and women who are concerned with their appearance, eventually striving for male validation from someone other than a male partner. In opposition to that, Group 3 also problematised appearance, but only briefly when talking about the compulsory sexualisation of women's bodies in society³⁵. The reason why this topic was not that central to them could be either because they already deconstructed the beauty myth (Wolf, 2002) with the help of feminist knowledge, or because in their realities (living in Budapest, having a white-collar/creative/social job, being an intellectual), appearance prevents them from accessing material and other resources less than those from other backgrounds.

Motherhood

In Group 1, motherhood bore high significance only for the person who has a child, Fanni. She defined her solidarity towards mothers the most and expressed that women without children make cooperation difficult. For the other three participants, motherhood was not in focus during the discussion; only Luca presented the case of breastfeeding in public, tending to empathise with mothers who are harassed because of that activity.

In Group 2, every participant had children, some even grandchildren. Despite that, they talked empathetically about women who do not, especially regarding the government's support for mothers. Edit mentioned a former colleague who did not have a husband or a child, and how she received considerably less financial support than she did, and the other participants also found that unjust.

³⁵ The only other occurrence of this topic was when Lili, the trans woman, told a story about a girlfriend of hers who took advice from her regarding facial hair, which she had experience with because of her gender identity.

Group 3 also showed extended solidarity towards mothers, although none of them had children, naming examples of emotionally supporting friends with children, or talking about the solitary experience of having a child as a woman.

This boundary was less prevalent in the three groups, perhaps because in the last years, the government utilised an aggressive campaign against non-mothers as well as increasing support for reproduction (Geva, 2021, p. 84ff), which reached a stage where not having children even causes significant material deprivation for people without property. (Brückner, 2024) Besides, being consciously childless has reached an increasing acceptance in Hungarian society, especially among those with liberal values. (Györke, 2024, p. 29) The ongoing governmental campaigns for encouraging reproduction could have a counterproductive effect on women, increasing a rather opposing reaction, uniting against this “threat towards the piece of their identities” (Arendt, 1968, p. 18), in which, being mothers or not, they reject unequal treatment by the state.

Victimhood

In Group 1, solidarity with victims of sexist violence was ambivalently present. In the group discussion, Bea blamed the victims and separated herself from the issue, while Aletta and Luca seemed more compassionate. For Fanni, having experienced and recognised sexist violence, it appeared to be self-evident to have solidarity towards other victims.

Group 2 was rather similar to Bea regarding victimhood: they voiced the need for education and structural frameworks to prevent domestic violence, but they denied their responsibility in this regard. Perhaps only Zsanett recognised and verbalised the problem of domestic violence or other forms of sexist abuse, but the other participants did not show compassion, even if she was in the role of a victim. They were primarily happy that they were not related to such an issue or that the situation had progressed compared to the past.

Group 3 clearly showed solidarity towards victims and perceived the problem of sexist violence, as well as named preventive measures that could be implemented (like the ratification of the Istanbul Convention).

While all groups were aware of the existence of sexist violence and the feminised victimhood in Hungarian society, there was a divide over whether the participants felt

responsible for helping the victims. Finally, the main difference in their attitudes can be determined as a generational disparity, in addition to their feminist identities. Participants over the age of 40 would typically show less compassion and responsibility than younger women, which can be attributed to the education on victim-blaming in the media by feminist organisations that has been intensified over the last decade (Z. Papp, 2017). However, this does not correlate with the results of a recent study of Parti et al. (2016, pp. 13–14) where older generations were more educated on the matter of rape and victimhood³⁶.

Sex workers

The boundary between sex workers and non-sex workers was only prevalent coming from Group 1, naming other women's prejudice towards them. The other two groups showed willingness to cooperate with sex workers in a hypothetical situation.

Feminists

The word feminism was not known to Group 1, but when I explained feminism, exemplifying it with my former workplace's activities (supporting other women), all of the participants were enthusiastic about their possible involvement in such activities. Thus, there arose no judgment or rejection of feminism as an ideology, even if the recognition of patriarchal oppression was seemingly missing.

Group 2, in contrast, repeated some stereotypical demonising adjectives that antifeminists proclaim: aggressive, radical, extreme, arrogant. Although every participant agreed on feminist goals, applied feminist principles in their lives to an extent, the word 'feminism' or the label 'feminist' functioned as a red flag for them, which they would avoid at any cost – as the literature suggests. (Kovács & Hevesi, 2015)

Since the participants of Group 3 agreed to take part in the research as feminists, they identified with the ideology and did not question its positive effects on society despite the fact that they had bad experiences with feminist activists in the past. Surprisingly, they attributed similar characteristics to those feminists: superior, competing over who is a better feminist, while dismissing plurality in attitudes on feminist topics. Although they

³⁶ The authors declared, though, that in the researched group, victims of crimes, the urban population, and a higher education status were overrepresented.

were themselves feminists, they felt excluded from feminist circles when they tried to be involved in activism.

Commonalities all three groups presented were the appraisal of feminist principles (more on that below regarding the feminist evolution). But none of the group members were part of the classical feminist communities or activist groups, either because they did not know of them (Group 1), or because they saw them as destructive, radical, or excluding (Groups 2 and 3).

After I summarised the present social boundaries the groups have touched upon, I am going to depict how the participants can be classified with respect to their gender identities.

6.3. Gender identity

The Gender Identity Model by Becker & Wagner (2009) worked equivocally in the case of the participants. Perhaps its creation was directed to a target group whose attributes cannot be entirely compared to these groups. This model was born to study in the context of a Western, mostly white, higher education group quantitatively, which is not the case in this thesis. However, I did not find a more adequate model to map different gender identities.

For Group 1, especially for the women who work in sex work, the model was impractical because they can be identified with an alternative gender category than the model would classify. They are mostly on the identifier side, expressing the advantages of the gender identity of women. However, neither traditional attributes were present in their answers: they did not conform to traditional norms as wives or mothers, except for Fanni, who quit the sex industry. Nor did they show signs of the progressive identifier since they did not want to change current gender hierarchies. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that for those who are working in the sex industry at the moment, gender relations might be different too: they experience men's emotional or sensitive sides, which men might hide in their other encounters. In their view, they dominate those connections as women in their professional, as well as in their private lives, which in itself questions the social dominance theory regarding the genders (Sidanius et al., 1994).

In Group 2, the progressively non-identifier and traditional identifier categories were more visible among the participants. However, women of the higher class, professionally

successful, identified less with the gender of women than those from the lower class and/or older generations. The former praised traditionally masculine traits (insensitivity, competitiveness) and were attempting to appropriate them. This can be a result of the expansion of neoliberal feminist values. (Rottenberg, 2014)

Group 3 can be classified as a progressive identifier, confirming that the model works well to identify feminists.

In the next subchapter, I will conclude the analysis of the group discussions regarding their scale to become feminists.

6.4. Feminist evolution

As I argued in the Analysis, Group 1 can be considered a progressive stage towards becoming a feminist on Downing & Roush's (1985) scale. If, during the analysis, we seek alternatives to the usual schemes and language, we will find in their attitudes that supporting other women and uniting politically is not far from their imagination, even if they are perceived as apolitical by the general opinion, presenting signs of SDO.

As for Group 2, rural mothers and grandmothers declined to self-identify as feminist. However, in their activities and attitudes towards gender inequality, they showed signs of the second stage of the scale. This proves that feminism as a collection of values is not rejected, but the label, due to the harmful and demonising stereotypes, is. (Szabó, 2015, p. 56) An additional layer is how the participants have admittedly never seen, experienced, or heard of a successful execution of a collective action of women. So, withholding feminist historical examples in public education (Kereszty, 2007, pp. 637–638) and in the media resulted in the limitation of the imagination about women's political solidarity and collective action.

Participants of Group 3 had shown attributes of every stage of the scale, only in the case of the fourth one did doubts arise. Even though they strived to reach that stage and have attempted to join feminist actions and commit themselves to the issue of gender equality, they have receded when facing exclusion and intellectual superiority. Hence, they sought alternative ways to this commitment: education of the self and the environment (like Diána), other subcultures (like in Lili's case, anarchism), and connecting with feminists outside of classic circles.

6.5. The coefficient of gender identity, feminist evolution, and solidarity

In the following section, I will examine the possible correlation between the three analysed factors: gender identity, feminist evolution and solidarity formations in those regards.

The factor of gender identity did not prove to be assessable for Group 1 because of its inefficiency concerning sex workers. For Groups 2 and 3, it can be determined that there is an interaction between the gender identity model by Becker & Wagner and the feminist scale of Downing and Roush, as progressive identifiers in Group 3 proved to be feminists (reached the third or fourth stage on the scale), whereas Group 2, with ambivalent classification between the progressive non-identifier and traditional identifier, did not. These participants are on the initial part of the scale, mildly reaching for revelation (first stage), but mostly insisting on individual solutions to their problems that the patriarchy inflicts on them, justifying the social order. They would also not see political solidarity as a favourable tool for collective action.

Concerning the grade of solidarity with women, in case of participants who showed a progressive state on the feminist scale (like Group 3) would show more signs of (political) solidarity based on gender identity as a desirable goal, however, not coherently. Only one participant, Lili, summarised why political solidarity matters to the liberation of women.

In this case, theoretical knowledge about feminism proved to be almost irrelevant; even though the linguistic framework was not apparent in Group 1, they recognised in their close environment, and within the abstract group of sex worker women, that political solidarity and collective action could shape their position as a multiply marginalised group. Rather, the practical action and positive experience with successful unity defined feminist evolution, and thus, the higher drive for political solidarity. Thus, the understanding of the importance of women's solidarity was arguably higher in Group 1 than in Group 2 and even in Group 3.

This supports Acsády & Mészáros's argument that a sense of solidarity is linked to identification and collective identity, both of which are necessary for cooperative social activity. Women who recognise that they are connected by the experience of being treated as second-class citizens in social and political situations, their solidarity includes mutual support among movement members and a commitment to a shared fate with all women

in society, especially those from varied social groupings. (2018, p. 81) This acknowledgement is coherent with Young's provisional definition of solidarity, that is an act based on belonging and directed at social justice. (Young, 2010; cited in Joó, 2019, p. 3)

Furthermore, the results of this empirical study demonstrate that the Hungarian feminist movement is in crisis. For those who already knew Hungarian feminists, whether through real experiences or harmful stereotypes (Groups 3 and 2), classical feminist activism caused more resentment than motivation to join. Since the practical manifestation of women's solidarity makes feminist activism indispensable, for many participants, this perceived or real negative impression actively hinders them from prioritizing women's solidarity and collective action in their lives. As Rekvhiashvili (2022) has presented, the Hungarian feminist movement, victimized by both government rhetoric and broader international trends, has adapted to this milieu and appropriated an anti-gender set of values in order to survive. However, this further hinders broad, collective actions, as it excludes women from the movement, both intentionally (such as trans women and sex workers) and unintentionally (such as Roma women and lower-class women).

In conclusion, Groups 1 and 3 were more likely to have a political understanding of solidarity, but that, as an objective, remains in theory for now. Nevertheless, both groups could identify forms of collective action. For Group 2, that did not seem realistic; their solidarity stayed rather reflexive, and they do not believe in political solidarity or collective action that women could implement to better their situation, since they have never seen it in action now or in the past. Additionally, it can be concluded that solidarity formations reach a wider extent in less privileged individuals: because they are members of a stigmatised group (Group 1), because they are in a lower-class position (like Group 1 and Zsanett in Group 2), or are marginalised because of their gender expression (like Lili in Group 3). This correlates with Black feminist contemplations about the interaction between the degree of oppression and the strength of (political) solidarity. (Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 1988)

6.6. Overcoming systemic obstacles

Finally, I will return to the theoretical framework and analyse the relationship between the three factors examined and the systemic barriers discussed in Chapter 1. (See Theoretical framework; Systemic obstacles)

System Justification and Social Dominance Orientation

There is a direct coherence between the two analytical tools (the Gender Identity Model of Becker & Wagner and the Feminist Scale of Downing & Roush) and the theoretical frameworks of System Justification and the related Social Dominance Orientation in the participants.

Participants, who are found on the Gender Identity Model in any of the three classifications other than the progressive identifier, showed signs of system justification on a structural level and social dominance orientation on an intergroup level in their answers.

The most definitive example of this coherence is in the answers of the participants in Group 2. None of the participants can be categorised as the progressive identifier but ranked between the progressive non-identifier and the traditional identifier. Hence, they presented justifying arguments concerning women's conflicts (e.g., they are more sensitive), attached less responsibility to men than women (such as regarding the willingness to do household chores), or distanced themselves from victims of sexist violence. Although they notice sexism and sexist oppression, these sentiments reflect on their justification of the current social order (systemically and in-between men and women), without much space for change (Jost et al., 2004) – recreating an internal inconsistency in women. (Radke et al., 2018, p. 160) Women with attributes of the progressive non-identifier, represented an inner distinction from women who in any way submit to the patriarchal social order. These qualities then resulted in a rather dismissive attitude respecting political solidarity and collective action, not claiming it to be important, neither to them, but more importantly, nor to society.

The inverse of this coherence can be depicted when analysing the interactions in Group 3. These participants showed clear signs of the progressive identifier; thus, they rejected the social dominance and gender hierarchies currently present in society and did not justify the system. They were determined that things have to change and committed themselves to achieving that.

Group 1 is again an exception in this regard. Although the participants showed some attributes of the categories on the Gender Identity Model (especially Fanni, who quit the sex industry: traditional identifier; Bea, Luca, and Aletta: progressive non-identifier), they

could not be clearly assigned to any of the categories. Albeit the three sex workers justified the system in some of their answers (when talking about victims of sexist violence), they discern a gender hierarchy that differs from the one most of the scientific work illustrates. Although sex workers are vulnerable to sexist violence and oppression on a systemic, as well as on an individual level (Dziuban et al., 2021), which the participants did not deny, they experience an intra-group dominant position in contrast to men, often seeing their 'softer' sides and controlling the interactions with them, through their work. Therefore, they might orient themselves along with the social order and gender hierarchies, but according to their words, that experience might contradict the available theories in this regard.

The recognition of the patriarchy

Furthermore, without acknowledging the framework of the patriarchy, there are no means to dismantle and deconstruct the system and thus unite for that cause as women. Therefore, the Feminist Scale of Downing & Roush demonstrated coherence with the presence or absence of this obstacle.

Group 2, since, according to my analysis, did not entirely overcome the first stage of the scale, would not name the current social order as inherently oppressive to women. They sensed the problematic of gender inequality, even identified phenomena that mirror its existence (like the Gender Wage Gap, the discrimination of mothers and non-mothers, domestic violence, and subtle ways sexism shows in their lives), especially the ones from higher class positions particularly emphasized that it does not affect them as a structural problem. Additionally, they admitted to not experiencing the strength of women's unity and not knowing historical or current examples of the successes of feminist activism. That again resulted in their rejection of the significance of women's political solidarity and collective action.

Group 3, in comparison, reaching progressive stages of the scale, being aware of contemporary goals of feminist activism, acknowledged the current social order. These participants linked their personal experience of sexist oppression to the wider context as a structural problem. However, they did not see political solidarity as a tool to tackle that, probably stemming from the fact that they also did not experience collective action as a productive tool of the feminist movement and women's unity.

Similarly, Group 1 showed characteristics that confirm their progressive advancement on the scale, although by different attributes and linguistic framework than the theory suggests (see Analysis; Group 1; Third level). They did not name patriarchy as the current social order but commented on ways of systemic oppression of sex workers as a group (like stigmatisation or material deprivation). Deriving from primarily their identities as sex workers, and only secondarily as women, they highlighted the importance of women's unity and expressed their motivation to cooperate as a collective action to attain better conditions in their lives (like starting a petition for material support for sex workers).

In summary, women who recognized (at any level) the oppressive structural systems affecting them and other women were more likely to support the institution of political solidarity, but positive experiences also played a role: the more they had ever seen women unite and act together and achieve success, the more likely they were to support movement operations aimed at this. This supports the theory that by integrating gender identification with feminist consciousness, women can gain a cognitive framework for interpreting their environment and possess the means to contextualize any sexist discrimination they encounter as a structural injustice. (Landrine & Klonoff, 1997 cited in; Fischer & Good, 2004, p. 437)

7. Discussion and limitations

Based on the research, it was not fully proven that sole political solidarity is the solution to uniting women as a social group from the participants' perspective. Although interpersonal solidarity (helping, standing up for other women) was also higher in groups that see an opportunity in political solidarity, good personal relationships are also not insignificant in this respect. This is, of course, stronger in Group 2, who decide for or against solidarity based on an apparent sympathy, mainly along social or symbolic boundaries. So the contrast between sisterhood and political solidarity seems to be dissimilar with feminist theoretical contemplations from the second wave (hooks, 1986; Scholz, 2009), rather reflecting the perspective Evans (2015) mentioned: in the third (and apparently in fourth) waves, it has no significant relevance regarding women's solidarity in the Hungarian context.

Besides, although I researched *Hungarian* women's solidarity, the national identity was not given distinguished attention in the thesis. On the one hand, because the topic of national identity would have surpassed the framework of this thesis, on the other hand, the apparent factors regarding women's solidarity in this thesis are more relevant with regard to the discipline the thesis is written in.

In addition, unfortunately, I was not able to include one of the most oppressed minorities in Hungary, Romani women, in the research (or rather, none of the participants shared that they belonged to this minority, which is also a possible scenario). Research shows (Forray R., 2022) that this group is in a unique situation both culturally and socially, and their experiences could have refined the outcomes of the final analysis with concerns of race-based attitudes. Although I had Romani clients, unfortunately, they either did not have the means or suffered from material deprivation, mental or physical illnesses that would have made a group discussion difficult or impossible for all parties. Perhaps this could be remedied through further in-depth interviews in the future.

And although there were queer participants in Group 3, people with diverse gender identities and sexualities in all three groups could have nuanced the results, similarly to the Romani women I described above.

Originally, I wanted to invite classical feminist activists to Group 3, but I discarded this idea along the way. Firstly, because their perspectives can be heard much more often in the discourse, and I wanted to rely more on the literature in this regard. This way, perhaps my research goal of amplifying unheard voices (Kilomba, 2010) seems more consistent. On the other hand, a fourth group would have gone beyond the scope of the thesis, and I did not want to expose Group 3 to a possible conflict (as far as this could be influenced), as I knew the eventual hostility of the Hungarian feminist milieu as someone who often spoke out about sex work.

8. Conclusion and outlook

As a final chapter, I am going to conclude the findings of the empirical study and the consequences that can be drawn from them, as well as include a future-oriented outlook as an aftermath of this thesis and the topics covered in this thesis.

In the initial process of the thesis, two of the research questions appeared as “What hinders the [...] political solidarity of women in Hungary in the first quarter of the 21st century?” and “Why can it not arise along with the collective experiences of being a woman?”. They clearly constitute negative language and a pessimistic tipping point with regard to the topic of women’s solidarity. This is how the author of this thesis approached women’s solidarity, as a member of the group, experiencing the drawbacks of the lack of unity, and as a feminist, analysing the frontlines along which women are separated in society. However, with the progress of the empirical research and theoretical study, there came a realisation: as Alexander stated, contemporary works in social sciences, and the canonical groundworks they are based on, focus on the absence of solidarity, not on building, creating, or maintaining it (Alexander, 2014, p. 180). Upon acquiring feminist research values, it became clear that quantitative research would not contribute to the maintenance of solidarity, despite its benefits of generating a wide range of data. Even conducting interviews would not have had the effects a group discussion or focus group research had: not the sole production of data and answers, but the space and possibility to collaboratively converse about a phenomenon that can only be born out of the unity and cooperation of individuals. It is not enough to know what the barriers are, but for feminist researchers and activists, the research itself can (and should!) give back and start the work that can contribute to dismantling the patriarchy and to building solidarity among women.

Alexander also wrote that it is wrong to think that solidarity has disappeared completely from society. He argued that solidarity, altruism were always based on an individual’s decision ‘to do the right thing’, to help. (Alexander, 2014, p. 186) So, while re-reading the transcripts and my initial analysis, I attempted to deconstruct my original attitude towards women’s solidarity that was pouring from most of the literature I stumbled upon as well: that it is missing for many reasons. Which is (partly) true, but it is not the whole picture, so I sought to identify existing solidary relations among women from the empirical data, to notice their willingness to reflect on their current behavioural patterns, and their will to change that. Because the participants not only shared how and why they are not solidary, but also examined their current situation, found solidarity and its manifestations to be positive phenomena, and many of their shortcomings (like exclusivity, different boundaries) stemmed from structural, systemic reasons, among

which there is the withholding of feminist knowledge, hiding the successes women's solidarity and collective action acquired in the past as well as in the present.

In conclusion, by examining the different groups of underrepresented women, their forms of solidarity with their gender identity and feminist developmental history, the following key findings can be drawn.

The priority of political solidarity was more pronounced in those participants who occupy a more intersectionally marginalized position in society: either because of their work (Group 1) or because of their gender identity that is different from heteronormativity (Lili in Group 3). In these cases, theoretical knowledge did not necessarily trigger this attitude, but rather, these women came to this realisation because of practical experience. The theory played a significant role primarily in how well they were able to convey to the researcher why they considered it important (as in the case of Lili). This supports theories that the strength of solidarity is manifested by the threat to different identities. (Arendt, 1968; Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 1988)

Regarding the Gender Identity Model of Becker & Wagner, in the case of progressively identified women, there was a greater motivation for interpersonal solidarity on the basis of gender, recognizing the abstract group of women who experience oppression. In the other gender identification categories, participants showed less need for women's solidarity, especially in Group 2. They showed more reflexive solidarity, seemingly based on personal 'sympathy' and, in occasional, situation-dependent cases, but involving different social boundaries in their solidary attitudes. In Group 1, it is difficult to conclude factors related to gender identity, as the model has not proven to be practical.

The feminist evolution scale of Downing & Roush showed direct coherence with the gender identity model, in those groups in which the latter was measurable. Progressive identifiers reached a stage on the scale where they could engage with the feminist movement, and in the other three classifications, they were stuck on the lower stages of the scale.

Furthermore, the evaluation of the interconnectedness of gender identity, feminist evolution, and forms of solidarity suggests that these dimensions were somewhat related. Those who were found in both categories of non-identified or traditionally identified did not show motivation to become feminists, which they considered less important, and

those who progressively identified and committed to the feminist cause were more likely to show solidarity with the group of women.

Moreover, the calling to surmount systemic obstacles exhibited comparable tendencies: individuals who identified as feminists and had a progressive self-identification acknowledged the prevailing social and gender hierarchy and deemed it crucial to transform it. However, in the participants who were placed in a different category, these two systemic barriers remained hidden in the conversation, both at the level of recognition and at the level of willingness to change.

Furthermore, it is also important to mention that some of the participants who recognized these obstacles did not necessarily define solidarity as political, as something that could serve as a tool to overcome them but rather spoke of interpersonal solidarity. On the other hand, participants who had already experienced the results of political solidarity and were in an intersectionally inferior position were more likely to vouch more clearly in favour of political solidarity.

In the following, I would like to summarize future-oriented contemplations derived from the research.

As one of the participants, Annamari, stated, stronger solidarity among feminist activists would be an achievable, realistic goal that would solve the current stopping powers regarding women's solidarity. Currently, many feminists are submitting themselves to the salami tactic by the government (*szalámi taktika* or *szalámi politika*)³⁷, such as excluding trans women, with which actors hope to secure better conditions for themselves, while ignoring and even creating the image of adversaries of minorities (e. g. the sentiment that 'non-biological women' hinder achieving gender equality (Nagy, 2022)). This also alienates other groups (Romani women, sex workers, sex-positive feminists). (Rekhviashvili, 2022)

³⁷ The salami tactic referred to the behaviour and political strategies employed by the Hungarian Communist Party against other parties in an effort to swiftly gain power following the 1945 and 1947 Hungarian elections. The fundamental aim of the procedure was to divide, weaken, and conquer the opponents piece by piece. (Wikipedia contributors, n.d.) Today, it is often used as salami politics, criticising oppositional, leftist actors.

It is clearly visible that feminist activism, its core values, have mutated due to the government's anti-gender rhetoric, but the people shaping the discourse do not reflect on this enough; what is more, they may even reproduce these boundaries. Apart from Rekvhiashvili's (2022) research, there is little scientific work on this.

Furthermore, in Hungary, theoretical feminism is more part of the canon than practical, experience-based, alliance-building approaches. Although there are positive counterexamples to this, their extended localization could bring about a broader solidarity among women. Further research could be devoted to assessing these, their practical use, forward-looking ideas, and their impact.

Moreover, education also lacks positive historical examples of women's solidarity in Hungary (Kereszty, 2007, pp. 637–638), which can be traced back to the limited imagination in this regard, which we could also see in Group 2. Research could be directed at the connection between feminist and gender-related education and the rejection of feminism.

As the aftermath of the empirical research, some events are worth mentioning. I followed up with one of the participants in Group 1 to see whether the three sex workers kept in touch, but that had not happened despite their mutual openness.

One of the participants in Group 2, Edit, a few weeks after the conversation, messaged me about a newly published book (Balázs, Z., & Pető, A.: *Orbán Viktor nőügyei: Az illiberális genderpolitika működése és hatásai* / Viktor Orbán's Women's Affairs: The Operation and Effects of Illiberal Gender Policy), expressing her newly found curiosity in 'women's issues'. Some participants, after the group interview of Group 3, showed elevated interest in participating in feminist collaborations that I, or others, organised. I only state this to emphasise how important it was to step into a conversation regarding the political solidarity of Hungarian women. Every group admitted to never or rarely having thought about these perspectives before, not to mention discussing them in women's circles. Group 1 appreciated the confident environment where they could talk about their realities as sex workers, without stigmatisation and prejudice. Some interviewees in Group 2 attempted to ask questions about what they do not know, have no experience with, or questioned their eventual shortcomings. After the group interview, Diána from Group 3

embraced the opportunity to talk about women's solidarity without ending up complaining about the Fidesz government desperately without real hope on the horizon.

The empirical study itself could have impacted their thought processes around their gender identity, feminism, and (political) solidarity. To assess the eventual impacts, the focus group discussions could be repeated after a certain amount of time to see possible evolution regarding political solidarity, gender identity, and feminist evolution.

I would like to close this thesis with a quote that was said in Group 3 and symbolises the hope that I felt during the research. That even though women are often hindered, discouraged, and punished for being in solidarity with each other, we are nevertheless capable of being so. If more of us recognized this, the feminist movement could move even bigger stones.

K: "I love being a woman because, despite the fact that society has done everything it can to prevent us from loving each other, I still feel most at home in women's communities." (Focus group discussion with Diána, Annamari, Klaudia, Bettina, and Lili, Pos. 61)

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