Doing Internet Dating

In the Search for the Future Someone

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Abstract

In this explorative study internet dating is studied as shared commitment to a common collective activity. Focus is on social formative emotions and internet dating in the rhythm of everyday life. The study is based on an interactionist theory/method package related to grounded theory and situational analysis. Sixty-eight participants of a Swedish internet dating site have been interviewed by e-mail. Fifteen of these interviews were followed up by a second one. Internet dating mainly occurs during evenings at home. It is kept separate from other commitments in daily life, such as work, as collisions of activities might lead to emotional and tension-ridden situations. The essential social process involved in internet dating is searching for a future someone/something. This process is given strength by the future- and action-oriented emotion of hope of happiness. The future is represented in imagination by talk about sought for emotions. The internet daters want to end their commitment to internet dating, while the internet dating company, for economic reasons, wants them to continue with the activity. The internet daters learn to manage their spontaneous emotions; they learn not to show “too much” future-oriented emotions. Instead a “relaxed” attitude, based on the present, is encouraged among participants. The act of imagining and searching for a future someone/something is formalized and organized by means of internet dating sites. Emotions are thus being commercialized in the interest of the internet dating company.

Keywords
Internet dating, emotion, social organization, identity, social world/arena, everyday-life, grounded theory, situational analysis, symbolic interactionism, pragmatism, adult education, sociology.
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Introduction

And it was not only she that had become a creature of the imagination that is to say desirable, life with her had become an imaginary life, that is to a life set free from all difficulties, so that I said to myself: “How happy we are going to be!” (Marcel Proust, 1930, p. 50)

In the novel “Sweet cheat gone” (originally Albertine disparu, 1925), written by the eminent French novelist Marcel Proust1, the protagonist negotiates his relationship with the absent Albertine. She is, interestingly enough, not in physically proximity to the narrator, which does not hinder the imaginary presence of her in his imagination. The expectation of the future gets re-negotiated within the present. What has happened before and what is yet to come is continually given new meaning. George Herbert Mead would here perhaps assert that the undifferentiated now is the blending of past and future (Hans Joas, 1996, p. 190).2 The light of the anticipated future is bright, desired and free from constraint, yet it appears only as light shining dimly in the present moment. The expectancy of a future emotion of happiness is brought to life through reflection and emotionality. The expectancy of happiness indicates a shift in life situation, from a current state of an implicated unhappiness, towards something “set free from all difficulties”. In other words, the expected future is happening in, and has consequences for, the present given moment. It is real in its consequences even though it is something that has not (yet) happened outside of imagination.3 Furthermore, what the passage seems to suggest is that we live with others in our imagination, in our mind, and that the social relationship and feelings for other persons and situations change as our mental representation of the person changes. The concept of this punctual, mentalistic and subjectivistic view of imagination4 is however a problematic one (see Moira

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1 It is not my main ambition to fully represent Marcel Proust’s own view on, for instance, temporality. Rather, I use the quote as a departure for further reflection on the topics of this thesis. For example, I explicate the thoughts immanent in this quote and relate them to the thoughts of Charles Horton Cooley on self-formation. This is done in order to demarcate my own standpoint early on. The idea is that the contours of society may be revealed by the study of literature (see Johan Svedjedal, 1996). Throughout this thesis I will continually shift the frame of thought and in that manner develop my own sociological (and pedagogical) imagination (see Charles Wright Mills, 1959; see also Susan Leigh Star, 1996).

2 Karin Hagren Idevall (2009) conducted an experimental study that showed that the participating university students almost exclusively attributed male gender to a person with the seemingly gender neutral Swedish last name “Björk”. This becomes problematic since it means that the contributions of female scholars may be wrongfully marginalized and unacknowledged. I agree with Hagren Idevall that mentioning both the first and last name of the author is a small step towards acknowledging the contributions of women. However it is not always the case that the first name of a person reveals the gender. Throughout this thesis I will present both first and last name of the authors referred. I will only mention first names when the authors are first mentioned in the text, this because of stylistic reasons. I will not give the first name in the list of references. It should be added that this measure is not a fully satisfying solution to a problem inherent in academic practice.

3 By this line of thought I mean that “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (William I. Thomas & Dorothy Thomas, 1928, pp. 571-572), a process which I would argue also may occur in a situation where an absent other is involved. The quotation outlines what has been termed “the definition of the situation” and is a fundamental thought in many of the perspectives inspired by symbolic interactionism. Mead would argue that our shared symbols (meaning), derive from the social interaction with others, and that it is this interaction which thus gives a sense of “objectivity” to reality (Mead, 1934). We come to share the same definition, or at least believe that we share the same definition, of the situation with others, just as the protagonist of the novel do.

4 This view becomes even more evident in this passage: “The bonds that unite another person to ourselves exist only in our mind. Memory as it grows fainter relaxes them, and notwithstanding the illusion by which we would fain be cheated and with which, out of love, friendship, politeness, deference, duty, we cheat other people, we exist alone. Man is the creature that cannot emerge from himself, that knows his fellows only in himself: when he asserts the contrary, he is lying.” (Proust, 1930, p. 48). This subjectivist and mentalistic view of the essentially non-social human being is much in line with the Cooley’s thoughts about the self (see also Henrik
von Wright, 2000). Imagination does not rise out of a mental vacuum from within an isolated individual. Imagination, as well as emotions and self, is relational or intersubjective and has both a social origin and nature. Later on I will outline these thoughts more thoroughly.

The quotation from Proust ended my bachelor thesis, a study of how a group of adolescents handled their social life both “online” and “offline”, as well as of how they “oscillated” or moved between this bisection in their everyday life (Henrik Fürst, 2007). I have tried to interpret this quote during the work with the present thesis, since the quote was consciously chosen to bridge the earlier thesis with what I already then perceived could be the theme of my next project, i.e. internet dating. The quote captured my so called sociological imagination; it is an instance of private though that could be seen in the light of general public concerns, and it also touches on the themes of personal biography and its place in the contemporary historical situation (see Charles Wright Mills, 1959). Reading the quote from the perspective of my own personal biography, I have been in a similar position as the protagonist, longing for someone that has left me and making out an “imaginary” life with this person. I have also tried out internet dating. What came to my mind when using internet technology was that its mediation of social co-presence may be related to this longing for someone that is nearly present. But what is then presence? Where can the distinction between “real” and “imaginary” life be drawn? Is it even possible to draw such a distinction? These and similar questions has been asked as initial entry points into the research field. The questions evolved into a focus on the activity of doing internet dating in everyday life and the narratives of the participants. In general I have tried to have an open ended and sensitive approach to data, method and theory. I have, as much as possible, tried to reflectively outline my own involvement and position within and in relation to the material (see Martyn Hammersley & Paul Atkinson, 2007).6

In a survey study done by TNS SIFO7 in December 2009, sponsored by the internet dating site Match.com8, a total of 1 111 men and women in Sweden were asked: “Where did you meet your partner?” (Forsking & Framsteg, 2010-07-07). The participants were between 25 to 60 years old and had all entered into at least one relationship with a partner over the past four years. Out of these 1 111 participants, 23 percent answered that they had hooked up with their partner “online” (through the

Fürst, 2007). “The immediate social reality is the personal idea; nothing, it would seem, could be much more obvious than this. ... Society, then, in its immediate aspect, is a relation among personal ideas. In order to have a society it is evidently necessary that persons should get together somewhere; and they get together only as personal ideas in the mind. Where else? What other possible locus can be assigned for the real contacts of persons, or in what other form can they come in contact except as impressions or ideas formed in this common locus? Society exists in my mind as the contact and reciprocal influence of certain ideas named ’I’... Thomas, Henry, Susan, Bridge, and so on. It exists in your mind as a similar group, and so in every mind” (Cooley, 1922, p. 119).

Cooley asserts that the self arises through introspection, i.e. from a punctual standpoint, and not in intersubjective relation, or from a relational standpoint, as Mead argues (see Mead’s introduction in Cooley, 1922 xxi-xxxviii; see also von Wright, 2000; Engdahl, 2005). We cannot be known to our selves if we are socially alone, we must relate to other persons even to be aware of that we are alone. So, to be alone in this fundamental sense means not to have a sense of self, as in not being aware of whom one is; we need others, and we need love, friendship and so forth to accomplish this.

5 By using the word “doing” I indicate the pragmatist roots of in this thesis, and also that dating is something that is carried out as an activity by people actively doing things together.

6 I should not conceal here the discussions I had with Karin Hagren Idevall, Emma Wedebrand, as well as with my supervisor Agnieszka Bron.

7 TNS SIFO is a Swedish company working in the area of opinion polls and social research.

8 The reason for sponsoring this research was probably in order to use it in advertisements for the internet dating site. The result was presented on the internet dating site as a way of giving legitimacy to it. It should be noted however that the result did not state that consulted the couples had met through internet dating sites. It only stated that the persons have met each other online.
internet). This was also the most common way to meet a partner amongst the participants. The second most common way, scoring 21 percent of the sample, was meeting partners through friends or acquaintances. The other places/methods for hooking up with long-term partners were, in order of their frequency: work, pub or night club, at a dinner or party, other, school/university, through hobby/interest, on a trip or holiday, in a public space and last newspaper or contact advertisement. A conclusion that could be drawn from this survey is that using the internet is becoming a common method for finding a partner in Sweden, though one should note that the survey employs a rather broad definition of “internet dating”. In this thesis internet dating is approached by focusing on a specific internet dating site. The participants in the study often refer to this particular internet dating site when talking about their experiences of internet dating. The focus is not, as in the TNS SIFO survey, on the effectiveness and/or prevalence of internet dating in society. Rather, the focus is on the process of doing things together and thus doing internet dating together as a collective phenomenon.

**Research focus**

In this explorative study I have mainly been following the research approach suggested by Adele Clarke⁹ (2005). Her approach takes basic grounded theory associated with Anselm Strauss and elaborates and regenerates it, taking it “around the postmodern turn”. Clarke finds the impetus to her project within pragmatism and symbolic interactionism, which are also at the roots of this thesis. I have adopted a social world perspective that has worked as a “theory/method package” – theory and method cannot be separated in practical research (Clarke & Susan Leigh Star, 2007). Furthermore, such an approach creates “do-able” problems, i.e. problems that are possible to do social scientific research about (Clarke & Star, 2007). From a social world perspective or framework, it is of interest to look at “collective human social entities and their associated actions, discourses, and related nonhuman elements in the situation of concern” (Clarke, 2005, p. 51).

My initial considerations about internet dating orbited around the question how people lived with and managed internet dating in everyday life. This research focus evolved out of my readings in social theory and from my empirical material, and was then gradually adjusted to suit conceptions of the formation and reproduction of internet dating as a common collective activity. This led me to focus on the essential “emotional sides” of actually doing internet dating. Doing internet dating was associated with individual and collective identity formation and certain formative and regulative social and relational emotions related to these activities. So my research focus was readjusted to take into account the role of emotions in social interaction as well as the organization of emotions in doing internet dating activities.

⁹ Adele Clarke is a former student of Anselm Strauss. Anselm Strauss took his PhD at the University of Chicago. He was highly inspired by the pragmatism of John Dewey and the symbolic interactionism of Mead. At the University of Chicago he studied under Herbert Blumer and was influenced by Everett Hughes. Later on he established Chicago school interactionism at the University of California, San Francisco, and during his academic career he took a great interest in a wide range of sociological concerns. Among other things, he was originator, together with Barney Glaser, of the influential grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; see Strauss, 1993, pp. 1-16; for a lengthier autobiographical note and see also Star, 1997). Adele Clarke took over Strauss’ professor chair in sociology at the University of California, San Francisco, when he retired at the age of 70 (Clarke, 2005, p. xviii). Clarke has contributed to various academic fields such as qualitative research, science and technology studies, history of life science and feminism. She has a profound academic interest in biomedical sciences and technologies, development of qualitative research methodologies and women’s health. I will strongly rely on her regeneration of grounded theory as well as her theorizing on social world(s)/arena(s)/discourse(s)/negotiation(s) framework (see especially Clarke, 1991, 2005).
However, I will not represent all of the complexities and various sites for dating available on the internet (and other avenues). As mentioned, my study is limited to one particular internet dating site. Further studies, as implicated below, will probably show differences in between different internet dating sites and their associated activities.

**Social pragmatism and social (inter-)action**

… [S]ocial life – or, more specifically, group life – is symbolic life (Lee Braude, 1974, p. 13)

The word symbolic interactionism, denoting a specific conceptual framework, was initially coined by Herbert Blumer to refer to his interpretation and use of Mead’s thoughts (see for example Blumer, 1969). Blumer was one of Mead’s students. Mead then, did not use the term symbolic interactionism to frame his work in sociology and social psychology and the term thus implies a unified perspective that may or may not have been present in the texts that are usually referred to under that title. Von Wright (2000, pp. 60-62) emphasizes that there are various interpretation of Mead, and that it is therefore misleading to see symbolic interactionism as a unified perspective, particularly when applied to several authors. Jack Barbalet (2009), however, sees symbolic interactionism as an array of theoretical positions that share certain characteristics. For example, emphasis is given to the study of social processes, as opposed to social structures. According to Barbalet, pragmatism is a position that commonly views social processes as based on contingency, social agency as prior to structural determination, and the self and society as intertwined entities. At the core of pragmatist theory lies a strong focus on human action. Other scholars than Mead, such as Jane Addams, Charles Horton Cooley and John Dewey, are often bundled together under the symbolic interactionism label. In this thesis I will mainly focus on the work of Mead. This is done through my own interpretations of his works as well as the presentation of others’ interpretations and use of his thoughts.10

I will introduce Blumer’s definition of symbolic interactionism as a basis for further reflection and then go on to state my own viewpoints in this thesis. Blumer (1969, p. 2) states that symbolic interactionism has three principles. “The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them”. The focus lies here on the actions of humans and that we are continually making meaning about the world around us the basis for our actions. To understand this process is it essential to understand human action and sense-making. “The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows”. Social interaction is meaningful action that is acted out “in-between” persons and Joas (1996) as well as von Wright (2000) would argue that this intersubjective or social dimension cannot be reduced to the actions of isolated individuals. “The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters”. Strauss (1993) would suggest here that interpretations are based on conflicts and that the conflicts are handled by negotiation between viewpoints.

In general, some scholars of symbolic interactionism, such as Mead and Blumer, are considered to be overemphasizing cognition and neglecting the formative role of emotions in everyday life and in

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10 The thoughts of Mead are not an outcome of one person. These thoughts were given rise to in a particular social and historical situation and they are also dependent on Mead’s personal biography (see Joas, 1996; Wright Mills, 1959). Also, these thoughts have been (re-)interpreted in a certain social and historical situation.
society (Barbalet, 2009, pp. 205). However, Cooley (1922, p. 183) gave some insight into the role of emotion for self-formation. However, this was neglected for a long time within sociology and social psychology (see Thomas Scheff, 1990). Barbalet (2009, p. 207) argues that emotions are a basis for action, and its possible link to social processes should be emphasized. In this thesis I will follow this advice. Later on I will briefly outline Emma Engdahl’s (2005) reconstruction of Mead’s thoughts about emotion. By doing this I want to present my own view of emotions that has slowly evolved out of the research presented here. In short, emotion is an early predisposition to act that is linked to the rise of problematic situations and has relevance for self-formation and learning.

According to Barbalet (2009) symbolic interactionism is one of several expressions of (sociological) pragmatism. In pragmatism people are both considered social and communicative. Meaning arises through people’s (inter-)action with real or imagined others and is accomplished through the communication of shared (meaningful) symbols (von Wright, 2000, p. 49; see Mead, 1934). From the viewpoint of pragmatism, learning occurs as a result of this sense-making, linked to the formation and re-formation of the self, where new meaning is constructed through taking the perspective of the other (von Wright, 2000, p. 49). As the self arise through the attitude taking of the other the self is a social accomplishment. Learning is also something that happens in a situation and involves the environment (von Wright, 2000, p. 49). Knowledge is an intersubjective matter; it is relational, something occurring in between persons rather than being punctually limited to one individual (von Wright, 2000, p. 49). Furthermore, as post-structuralism claims, knowledge is to be understood as situated in practice and therefore the situation of knowledge-making should be studied (Clarke, 2005). Clarke (2005) takes this epistemological claim, together with a symbolic interactionist and poststructuralist-inspired framework, into her version of doing grounded theory, which includes situational analysis.

**Problematic situations and emotions**

Orderly and meaningful interaction will, at any moment, carry the seeds of its own destruction since it is creative, emergent. However long enduring any interaction may be, it is inherently unstable because of this evanescence. (Braude, 1970, pp. 4-5)

The word emotion comes from the Latin word “emovere”, having to do with what “move us”. Emotions, as being relational and social, are also what bind us together with things, other persons and also ourselves (Jonathan Turner and Jan Stets, 2005). Turner and Stets (2005, p. 1) states that “emotions pervade virtually every aspect of human experience and all social relations”. In fact, every sociological study could make advances and more in-depth analysis of social life by taking into account the social and relational perspective of emotions. Furthermore, “emotions are the ‘glue’ binding people together and generating commitments to large-scale social and cultural structures; in fact, emotions are what make social structures and systems of cultural symbols viable” (Turner & Stets, 2005, p. 1). As emotions are relational they also create solidarity and a sense of belonging together. This intersubjective “belongingness”, I would like to argue, creates commitment to shared action by structuring social life. Also, emotions are “what can drive people apart and push them to tear down social structures and to challenge cultural traditions” (Turner & Stets, 2005, p. 1). If emotions are to be understood as movements and are happening over time they are thus to be considered in processual terms.

Using Cooley’s theory about the looking-glass self as a starting point, Turner (2009, p. 344) sketches an exposition of how emotion and self-formation have been handled within various approaches in
symbolic interactionism (although Turner neglects the contributions of Mead in the field). In his the
tory about the looking-glass self, Cooley (1922, p. 183) argues that the self, as it were, arises out of
the minds of others, that we make a judgment of our selves from the standpoint of the others, and that
this gives rise to a either a positive self-feeling of pride or a negative self-feeling of
shame/mortification. What seems to be relevant for the self-formation process is to have a consistent
self, which is accomplished by getting one’s self in line with the feedback from others. Turner
associates this idea of consistency with Gestalt theory where consistency is thought to be a central
element of cognition. The self thus becomes a cognitive construct. Turner reinterprets these theories of
the self as a cybernetic control system: “(1) emit gestures consistent with self, (2) role-take and
interpret the response of others to these gestures, and (3) make adjustments if the feedback provided
by others’ responses is inconsistent with conceptions of self”. I would like to point out Turner’s
inability to perceive of the self as anything but a cognitive construct, which means that emotions are
excluded from his theory of the self-formation process. Therefore Mead should be reconsidered. In the
following passages I will emphasize the pragmatic point that people’s acknowledgement of
inconsistency arises out of problems in situations. I will also argue that emotions arise out of
experiences of social acts (see Denzin, 1984; Engdahl, 2005).

Mead (1982, p. 43) sees emotion as the inhibition of an act. He writes that “[t]he clenching of the fist
does not cause the emotion, but the inhibition of the act of striking does produce the emotion”. The act
of carrying out an action has been interrupted, which produces an emotional state. An action that is
carried out without interruption is habitual. Engdahl (2005) develops Meads immanent theory on
emotions and its relation to problematic situations. Engdahl reconstructs Mead’s ideas about emotions
and states that an emotions are “corporeal evaluative inhibition of the act, initially, experienced from
the perspective of the other, on the basis of a functional identification with her or him” (2005, p. 17,
emphasis in original). The feeling of an emotion occurs through taking the perspective of the other
person when one’s habitual action is interrupted. Given rise to in this process is an awareness of one’s
action and self. Emotions are not reduced to biological sensation; it also involves the process of
initially taking the attitude of the other towards one’s action. The habitual action can become inhibited
through this process. The evaluation of the inhibition, that produce self-feeling and self-reflection, is
made through the bodily synchronization, in functional identification, by performing similar actions as
the other person (Engdahl, 2005, p. 113). Emotions come to be layered as predispositions to act. As
another is involved in this process emotions are something that rises through social interaction. 
Norman Denzin (1984, p. 423) writes that Mead understands emotions as “self-feelings grounded in
the social acts that join the subject with others”. Emotions arise in the intersubjective relationship
between persons. I argue that the study and analysis of emotions must focus primarily on the
problematic situation or the disruption of the social act.

Mary Jo Deegan (p. xii-xiii in Mead, 2001) states that because of the lack of an explicit theory of
emotions in Mead some of the possibilities hinted to by him were realized first with the sociology of
Arlie Russell Hochschild (1983). Deegan (pp. xii-xiii, in Mead, 2001) states that Hochschild’s
interpretation of Charles Darwin parallels the ones made by Mead and further states that there are

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11 Engdahl (2005, p. 63) writes about the crucial importance of the inhibition of the act as something that goes beyond our habits:
Without an inhibition of the act of our symbiotic unity with the other, we would be forever doomed to live in a world of exteriors
– a world without insides and meanings. Only through social interaction, which implies inhibitions of our interchanges with the
outer world, especially, the other is it possible for us to add those qualities to the world that is already there.”

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remarkable continuity in [Mead’s and Hochschild’s] sociology of human emotions, as well as differences, suggesting a new area of research and theory building” (Deegan, p. xiii in Mead, 2001).

Hochschild (1983) combines psychoanalytical insights from Sigmund Freud as well as biological claims from Darwin together with a (dramaturgical) symbolic interactionist understanding of emotion. Furthermore, she is inspired by the works of Erving Goffman on impression-management, i.e. on how we manage our self-presentation in front of others, as well as by Wright Mills work on the self as a commodity and the estrangement from one’s “actual self”. Hochschild (1983) outlines a theory about how the workers needs to manage their emotions in order to be in line with the expectations of the other and how capitalism and corporations have made this skill into a commodity. Emotion work, or emotion management, is about changing, or suppressing, one’s actual emotions and to display expected emotions which fit the situation (Hochschild, 1983, pp. 8, 17-18). This is done by adapting to the feeling rules of a situation. Feeling rules guides actions and determine what is to be felt, for how long, when we are to be feeling and with what intensity emotions should be felt (Hochschild, 1983, pp. 56). Emotions are seen as part of a “gift exchange” in between the actors where the interactants owe each other particular emotions of various degrees (Hochschild, 1983, pp. 18, 78). Emotional labor is the work of emotion management where the management is something that has become organized and possible to profit from (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7). Emotional labor leads to estrangement from one’s “actual self” and leads to acting out social role predefined by the demands of the corporation to meet organizational goals (Hochschild, 1983). As I interpret Hochschild, she argues that emotion management happens when problematic situations, that are the basis for emotional experience and emotional display, are managed. The person does not act upon the problematic situation with a spontaneous attitude, but instead one that has been learned through organizational demands on behavior. However, Hochschild’s (1983) focus is on the emotions that are allowed to be displayed but not on the emotions that are managed and thus not expressed.

Hochschild does not focus on the actual social act and do not explicitly discuss the problematic situation as the basis for emotion. However, it should be mentioned that Hochschild (1983, p. 28) does argue that an “emotion is a bodily orientation to an imaginary act”. Imagination, thus, plays a crucial role in emotion management, since one is acting on the basis of a constructed and non-spontaneous situation. In uncovering temporality, emotions could then be seen as constitutive of imagined futures the future and give bodily orientation towards the completion of an act in the present (see also von Wright, 2000, p. 98). In this thesis, I will give attention to both the management of emotions, as well as the problematic situation as the basis for emotional experience and display. In that way, it is the social formative aspects of emotions that are stressed.

I see emotions as based on people’s intersubjective relationships and emotions as based on disrupted habitual actions that give new direction for imagined future action. In other words, the absolute basis of emotion is the problematic situation, the disrupted habitual action; furthermore, emotions are predispositions for new actions. An example of a problematic situation is the transgression of social guidelines for action in a situation. However, this example may give the impression that emotions are associated only with transgressions; people most often however are able to reflectively control their emotions, thus behaving within the limits of appropriateness set in the specific situation, and this process gives rise to yet other emotional states, as it also means disruption of action. This implicate that there are structural constrains associated with certain emotional states in a situation. Furthermore,
emotional gain labels and come to be something that can be sought for in a future situation and thus not felt but narrated.

**Situated knowledge**

Knowledge is both situated and embodied (Donna Haraway, 1988; Clarke, 2005, p. 22). I am, as a social being, situated in my biography, my experiences as well as contemporary discourses. In relation to my current research topic for example, I have prior knowledge and perspectives about internet dating activities and internet dating sites and I have, discussed such activities with others as well listened to their stories. I should not neglect my own role in the knowledge production, since I am the person who interpret and presents the data, which makes it relevant to reveal as much as possible of my own part in the production of this thesis. Throughout the research process I have tried to be as reflexive as possible about my prior knowledge (see Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 14).

I believe in openness and that the researcher(s) should use his/her prior knowledge and be creative and open to what the data tells her or him (see Patrik Aspers, 2007; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). As pointed out by Clarke (2005, p. 184), the researcher is no “tabula rasa” and the researcher should be familiar with the field of research as well as having reviewed the relevant literature.

As this study has taken an interactionist grounded theory approach, the situatedness of knowledge is acknowledged. Clarke (2005, p. xxvii) writes: “Through Mead, an interactionist grounded theory has always had the capacity to be distinctly perspectival in ways fully compatible with what are now understood as situated knowledges”. Both the researcher and what is researched are situated. Different positions and perspectives have been taken by the participants in the interview study, where they speak from a position given to and taken by them in the situation at hand. What they narrate is embedded in the situation where their narratives are constructed.

**From the viewpoint of a social worlds perspective**

The concept “social world” was first used by Tamotsu Shibutani (1955). But the concept originally derives from Mead’s notion of the “universe of discourse”. A universe of discourse is “a system of common social meaning” that is shared in a group carrying out and participating in activities of that group (Mead, 1934, pp. 89-90).

The universe of discourse which deals simply with the highest abstractions opens the door for the interrelationship of the different groups in their different characters. The universe of discourse within which people can express themselves makes possible the bringing-together of those organized attitudes which represent the life of these different communities into such relationship that they can lead to a higher organization. The very universality of the processes which belong to human society, whether looked at from the point of view of religion or trading or logical thinking, at least opens the door to a universal society; and, in fact, these tendencies all express themselves where the social development has gone far enough to make it possible. (Mead, 1934, p. 284)

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12 From Meads’ pragmatist perspective discourse is understood as what happens in interaction (Clarke, 2005, p. 55). However, the situational analysis is informed by the work of Michel Foucault and the European phenomenological concept of discourse. Discourses are seen as “ordering the chaos of the world” and some discourses come to be dominating as being about, and disciplining, certain ways of being in the world through power (Clarke, 2005, p. 54). A social world is a universe of discourses and as such the discourses produced by social worlds are those which should be studied.
A universe of discourse is an abstract organization of attitudes that has been generalized and thus makes meaningful communication between actors possible. The universe of discourse would not be possible without individuals taking the generalized attitude of all other persons belonging to the same organized social group towards themselves and others (Mead, 1934, pp. 155-156). The persons belonging to this group are all involved in this joint co-operative social activity and they come to share the same generalized attitude. This generalized attitude brings expectations of how persons should act (Mead, 1934, pp. 154-155). Social problems that the social group is confronted with are then met by this shared generalized attitude (Mead, 1934, p. 156).

Simply put, we commonly, in our daily life, talk about belonging to the world of art, the world of the military, the world of tennis professionals and so forth. As stated by Benita Luckmann (1978), we are continually involved in part-time involvements throughout our daily lives (see also Masataka Katagiri, 1992). I would argue that we both actively take part in these involvements, but also acknowledge their existence without performing the activities associated with them. The social worlds perspective is about the collective action of people that are committed to the same type of activities, of the military and art, and the end result is the formation, and thus continual re-formation, of a social world (see Clarke, 1991). Social worlds are about shared understanding of things and are thus not set by physical boundaries, but by the effectiveness of communication (Shibutani, 1955). Thus, emphasis on the boundaries of physical space is not a prerequisite to having a working social world (Shibutani, 1955; Strauss, unpublished). I would argue that this framework is therefore suitable for going beyond media-centric boundaries to do research on activities that are only seemingly belonging to a singular media (such as the internet). To study social worlds means to focus on the effectiveness of communication; its boundaries are set by the limits of shared discourses (since a social world is a universe of discourse). However, there are limitations and possibilities associated with carrying out the activities of certain social worlds, which should be considered.

Shibutani (1955) states that a social world is like a reference-group for the individual. A social world can be for example: the family or the church. Such worlds are composed of more or less stable values and norms that are held together by effective communication and not formal membership. The individual person is therefore in the center of the analysis and the social world is, in Shibutani’s version, more of an institution than an informal social organization. Strauss (1978) and Howard Becker (1984) sees the social worlds as social organizations of associated activities that is held together by a primary activity and is associated with particular sites and technologies for carrying out these activities. The social worlds are linked to various social processes, such as segmentation (Strauss, 1982) and legitimating processes (Strauss, 1984).

In the following passage I will mainly be concerned with Strauss’, Becker’s and Clarke’s somewhat overlapping version of social worlds. The social worlds perspective should be understood as covering those aspects of society that involves “groups with shared commitments to certain activities, sharing resources of many kinds to achieve their goals, and building shared ideologies [and discourses] about how to go about their business” (Clarke, 1991, p. 131). This results in a commitment to a collectively

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13 Katagiri (1992) discusses the relationship between the phenomenological account of the life-world and the symbolic interactionist understanding of the social world concept.

14 By “social worlds perspective” I mean the study of social world(s), social arena(s), negotiation(s) and the discourse(s) from the perspective outlined in this section. (see Clarke, 2005).
shared primary activity that works as the defining characteristic of that social world (Strauss, 1978). The collective activity is more of a “common” reoccurring activity, since activities always are carried out differently in different situations but, however, they still share some similar characteristics which keeps them together and thus can analytically be distinguished as collective actions. The social world is a “network of people cooperating”, or social organization, that is coordinated by shared conventions of how activities of the social world should be carried out, which distinguishes it from other social worlds (Becker, 1982, pp. 34-36).

For the people of a social world the common commitment is to a certain primary activity essential for the formation and reproduction of that social world. However, commitment is a slippery concept (see Becker, 1960). Bente Elkjaer and Marleen Huysman (2008, p. 117) discusses the use of the concept in relation to social worlds. Commitment is seen as something that has to be done and is thus an obligation, but it also is something that people want to do and it therefore also has the character of a wished-for event. But Elkjaer and Huysman seem to forget the limits that tell people what they are actually “allowed” to do or what is “possible” for them to do under the given circumstances, in other words the structural constraints associated with the social worlds and its implications for the commitment to its activities.

Another basis of social worlds is the relationship between actor and structure as being based on interaction. Mead (1934) proposes that the individual and society mutually constitute each other and that it is action that gives rise to structure. Strauss (1992, p. 7) develops this Meadian thought and at the same time explicate the role of social worlds, as well as individual and collective identity, in this process:

This linking of individual (also aggregate) and collective identities, as well as their respective temporal choreographies - each affecting the other over time - leads to an explicit linking also of structure and interaction. Interactions can take place between individuals, but the individuals also represent - sociologically speaking - different and often multiple collectivities who are expressing themselves through the interactions […]. Thus, social structure and interaction are intimately linked; and also reciprocally affect each other (again) over time. This is a temporal view not merely of interaction but of structure itself, the latter shaped by actors through interaction. (Strauss, 1992, p. 4)

Again, the collectivities mentioned in this quote are similar to what Strauss (1978, 1982, 1984, 1993, unpublished) calls “social worlds”. Individuals act as the representatives of these collectives, or social worlds, and what is also brought to light is the individual as representing multiple social worlds (in various situations). Perhaps it is possible to think of the individual as having a set of varying collective identities that emerge, disappear and merge in the course of action. As individuals are being representatives of collectivities, social worlds are brought into the interaction. Also, as individuals represent multiple and sometimes different social worlds simultaneously, there is a certain complexity to the social interaction between individuals. Social processes are created by the mutual effect of structure and interaction. Structure may be seen as social processes that have been frozen temporally and spatially (see Clarke, 2005, p. 298). In other words, it has a “temporal choreography”. Clarke (2005, pp. 57, 298) emphasizes the importance of the conditions for actions, or action possibilities in the situation, which are made out of discursive-laden elements. The microscopic and the macroscopic events cannot be separated from each other in analysis (Strauss, 1992, p. 4).
As is evident in the quote above, Clarke (1991, p. 130) emphasizes that Strauss sees commitment to collective action, or social worlds, as a primary factor in the structuring of social life. In the words of Clarke (1991, p. 131) the social worlds are “the principal affiliative mechanisms through which people organize social life”. The social worlds perspective then, emphasizes flexibility, multiplicity and dynamic nature of social life and thus tries to retain its complexity. Furthermore, social worlds are actor-defined and constitute both identities and perspectives. These worlds are also, as seen above, fluid, multiple, temporal, processual and dialectical (Joan Fujimura, 1991, pp. 230-231). They are, in other words, in a constant change and are negotiated between individuals. “The postmodern turn” here means a further focus on instability and the notion that “it could have been different” (Clarke, 2005).

In my interpretation of this perspective, subjects’ (individual and collective) identities are seen as fragmented and multiple, as belonging to various social worlds. This is then also is in line with postmodern thoughts and the social psychology of Mead (1934). The multiplicity could then give rise to identity conflicts, since a person is always belonging to multiple social worlds and sometimes inhabit them simultaneously (see David Unruh, 1980).

The perspective, and its focus on collective action, is relativistic and social interactionistic (Clarke, 1991, pp. 128-129). The perspective also emphasizes conflict, thus “the generic social process is assumed to be intergroup conflict unless and until the data proves otherwise” (Clarke, 1991, p. 129). The social worlds perspective is therefore a conflict perspective. Negotiation both between (inter-group) and within (intra-group) social worlds occurs. Related social worlds, which strive for similar ends and compete for similar resources, belong to the same social arena. Social arenas are “not an aggregate level of individuals, but where individuals become social beings again and again through their actions of commitment to social worlds and their participation in those worlds’ activities, simultaneously creating and being constituted through discourses” (Clarke, 2005, p. 110).

Social processes become relevant to study because of the fluidity and constant change of society (Shibutani, 1986, p. 25; Strauss, 1993). A social process is understood as “a pattern of joint activity that occurs regularly over time [… ]” (Shibutani, 1986, p. 25). Regularized patterns of activities are also (of course) at the core of everyday life (Piotr Sztompka, 2008). The everyday life is then understood as something “habitual” and “orderly” that is continually reconstituted in action.

The idea of social existence focuses on what really occurs in human society, at the level between structures and actions, where the constraints of structures and the dynamics of actions produce the real, experienced and observable social events, the social-individual praxis making up everyday life, in fact the only life that people have, which is neither completely determined nor completely free. In the notion of social event the agential (personal) input of acting individuals and the structural (situational) context within which they act are brought together in one, undivided phenomenon. (Sztompka, 2008, p. 25; compare Strauss 1992, p. 4)

What Sztompka (2008, p. 25) calls “the level between structures and actions” is, in my interpretation of Strauss, not actually a “level” but is the interweaving and mutual constitution of structure and

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15 Clarke (2005, p. 154) states “To me there is no such thing as ‘society,’ (sic) but rather mosaics of social worlds, arenas, and discourses – some at quite large scales with vast audience – but never everyone. Even the largest arenas do not extend everywhere.”

16 See also the discussion about problematic situations and emotions above.
action (it is an undivided phenomenon). In other words, there is in fact no differentiation between (inter)action and structure. It happens in social processes and constitutes social worlds as common joint action towards similar ends and it is the basis of social existence in everyday life.

**Adult education and sociology**

This thesis combines impulses from both sociology and adult education. Adult education uses theories formulated in other disciplines (Agnieszka Bron, 2005, p. 28). Throughout this thesis I use mainly sociological theories; however, I also give emphasis to educational aspects of social life, such as socialization, identity formation and conditions for learning (Bron, 2005, p. 26), which on the other hand does not translate into an interest in formal educational systems, for example schools and universities.

Learning occurs regularly, it is continual, and the adult is actively learning in everyday life (Bron, 2006, p. 67). Since 1980s the field of adult education has focused on social interaction to understand learning, socialization, sense-making and development of adults (Bron, 2005, p. 26). These concepts strongly relate to identity formation. Thus, identity formation is of relevance for adult education research. Learning is understood as a process of changes “in cognition and emotions” (Bron, 2005, p. 24). The focus is on people’s social situation and the possibilities and conditions for learning (Bron, 2005, p. 24). In this thesis the focus is instead put on the social significance of emotions. Focus is as well on the broader situation and its conditions for learning.

Ulrich Beck, Boris Holzer and Andre Kieserling (2001, p. 63) describe the task of sociology as threefold. The first task of sociology is to elaborate the core concepts of the discipline. The second task is to do empirical research, which methodically control theories. The third task, and the most intellectually demanding one, is to present a credible diagnosis of our time (Zeitdiagnose). I would argue that the same three characteristics are also applicable to the research field of adult education (compare Bron, 2005). In this thesis I elaborate what I regard as the core concepts of adult education: learning, socialization and identity formation amongst adults. This is done by using and reformulating these concepts in relation to empirical research, as well as taking a sociological angle on these matters. I have also done an empirical interpretative study, which in a limited form contribute to a Zeitdiagnose. By doing empirical research I have opened up the possibility of making small and provisional claims about internet dating in the current era.

**Previous studies about internet dating**

Kristian Daneback, Sven-Axel Månsson and Michael Ross (2007) conducted a survey study. Their study suggests that internet dating in Sweden to no small degree involves using it for sexual purposes. Their study shows that 55 percent of the men and 45 percent of the women use internet dating for this kind of activity. Out of these persons 35 percent of the men and 40 percent of the women have made a contact that led to a sexual encounter offline. The intention of the study was not to focus on the actual uses and meaning of internet dating but on the prevalence of sexual encounters initiated through internet dating.

Helene M. Lawson and Kira Leck (2006) conducted in-depth interviews and participant observations of people involved in internet dating. According to their study the internet daters look for
companionship and comfort after a life crisis. One of the main tasks when doing internet dating seems to be control of one’s self presentation and building trust. Meeting offline could involve abrupt rejection and loss of face, but also eventual marriage.

Danielle Couch and Pranee Liamputtong (2008) conducted in-depth interviews with 15 participants of internet dating from Australia. The participants said they were using internet dating to find “a soul mate, seeking sex, looking for fun, relaxation, to ease boredom, or because it seemed like an easy way to meet people” (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008, p. 271). For the participants it was the changes in their life situation that had been the basis for doing internet dating. The changes in life situation included “being very busy at work, most friends becoming partnered, having children and not being able to go out as much as previously, separating from a partner, moving to a new city, or a partner becoming sick and unable to be sexually active” (Couch & Liamputtong, 2008, pp. 271-272). In their study the participant emphasized finding a sexual partner as an important part of doing internet dating. Internet dating seemed to open up a wider network of potential sexual partners. In internet dating the participants used filters in the sites in order to find persons with similar sexual preferences.

Jeffery T. Hancock, Catalina Toma and Nicole Ellison (2007) conducted a study on internet dating deception. They conducted a comparative statistical study of height, weight and age as represented on internet daters’ profiles and compared these to their observed characteristics. Nine out of ten persons lied about at least one aspect of the selected variables, but the deviations were usually small (average of 1.1 percent in deviance). Men tended to overestimate their height and women to underestimate their weight while age was not underestimated or overestimated. Statistical correlations suggest that the participants were aware of the discrepancies. In other words, the participant seemed to do a selective self-presentation and use the limits of the internet medium to present themselves as appealingly as possible.

Michael Hardey (2004) suggests, based on an interview study, that there exist interactional rules of engagement in internet dating. These rules are used to facilitate trust among the participants. In internet dating, authenticity seems to be a basis for trust. Thus authenticity is highly valued in the practice of internet dating. Authenticity is put to the test when daters meet “offline”. Trust and authenticity seem to lower the potential risks of embarrassment.

Monica T. Whitty (2007) conducted a telephone interview study of thirty participants of internet dating to investigate their presentations of self in internet dating. Similarly to Hancock, Toma and Ellison’s (2007) study, Whitty’s interviewees seem to be strategic in their self-presentation. A belief prevalent among the participants was how important it was to “present a good physical image of themselves” (Whitty, 2007, p. 1714). The participants also sensed that they had to “sell themselves”, as well as creating an authentic presentation profile in order to attract other persons. The participants confessed to lying about “their current relationships, age, weight, socio-economic status, and interest” (Whitty, 2007, p. 1715). In order to attract other persons, the participants experimented with their self-presentation. Participants were also aware that other members had this experimental attitude.

Adam Arvidsson (2006) conducted a study of user profiles at the internet dating and match-making site Match.com. According to Arvidsson, the participants of the internet dating site performed a sort of immaterial labor by imagining possible social relationships with others. When doing this, they were involved in creating the contents of the internet dating site. Paying members have the possibility to
contact one another, while non-paying members do not have the same possibilities to interact. However, by being there, these non-paying members become objects of fantasy, while they also fantasize about others. Fantasy is employed to fill the blanks in the profiles visited. Revenue is created for the companies behind the sites through this communication and mutual form of imagination. On the internet dating site, an experiential ethic is promoted, which sees true love as based on shared values and inner qualities. A “quality single” ideal is promoted by the internet dating site. This ideal dictates how the internet daters should act. Recommendations are given by the internet dating site, such as not to reach beyond “their value or realistic possibilities” (Arvidsson, 2006, p. 684). The “quality single” ideal gives the internet dating site a good reputation.

What seems to be lacking in the previous studies is a focus on everyday life aspects of doing internet dating. Arvidsson (2006, p. 687) explicitly asks for studies about how internet dating fits into the rhythm of the internet dater’s life. The focus of previous studies is, to a large extent, on the purposes on internet dating, such as finding a sexual partner, and on how profiles are used for self-presentation. However, as argued in the introduction, internet dating is becoming more common in Sweden and one could conjecture that this development means that the use of internet dating is not longer limited to searching for a sexual partner (see also Arvidsson, 2006, p. 678). In this study the participants speak about what internet dating means to them and its limitations and possibilities as well as the associated emotions.

Studying internet dating activities

In this chapter I will outline the practical and analytic choices made in the gathering and analyzing of the empirical material for this essay. I will focus on how access to the research field was obtained, how the e-mail interviews were carried out and how the analysis of the e-mail interview material, as well as the internet dating site, was done. Possibilities and limitations of the research approach will be discussed. Furthermore, ethical considerations made in the research process will also be discussed. The chapter closes with a presentation of the analytic strategy employed, as well as of how the data has been coded and mapped.

Approaching the research field and the e-mail interview process

In order to find persons who were involved in internet dating activities, I turned my attention to various Swedish internet dating sites, since these sites per definition should be full of people involved in such activities. Early on I realized that it would be difficult to do research about internet dating without involving the internet dating company, since the ambition behind the research was to ask questions directly to the people involved in internet dating (henceforth called participants) and not only analyze what they published on the internet dating site. I would be confronted with both ethical and legal challenges if I was to register my own profile and make contact with the participants on the internet dating site with the aim to gather empirical material. In order to adhere to the ethical norms generally accepted in Swedish research, I would then have to clearly state my purpose in the first contact. Legally this behavior would probably break the terms of agreement on most of the internet
dating sites. Furthermore, in retrospect, it would have been hard to make contact with people on the internet dating site, since they expect contact to be established only as a part of internet dating activities; in that context, my research aim could have been construed as suspect or even false.

The role of the internet dating companies therefore became that of a “gatekeeper” between me, as a researcher, and the research field, i.e. the possible participants (see Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, pp. 49; Aspers, 2007, p. 14). Recognizing this, I made contact with the internet dating company that maintains the internet dating site Mötesplatsen (www.motesplatsen.se). As expected, the company did not want me to make contact with the participants on the actual internet dating site. I needed to negotiate with the internet dating company in order to get access to the research field. Nevertheless, we did share a common interest in my study, since the company saw a possibility to learn more about the members of their internet dating site, while I was interested in the research topic. They however asked to read through the questions I intended to ask during the interviews and they did some minor changes. They did not, however, obtain access to the gathered empirical material.

In this study I have not wanted to turn to what I later call the semi-public front of the internet dating site, which is the part of the internet dating site where the registered participants present themselves through profiles and other means. Instead I turned to the private back of doing internet dating by contacting internet daters. I sent out an invitation (including questions, information about the study and informed consent), with the help of the internet dating company (see appendix 1). Approximately 600 registered participants were contacted through their private e-mail addresses and they were asked to reply to my e-mail address. In this way, I was able to have an asynchronous internet-mediated interview with the participants “outside” of the internet dating site. As the internet dating company sent out the request for participation it probably made me a “legitimate researcher”.

The first e-mail to the potential participants was sent out in the beginning of the year 2010 and covered the interview questions, presentation of the research focus and what the material was to be used for. In the e-mail, I discussed participation in research in ways that could work incentivizing, particularly that participants get to know their own uses of internet dating more intimately. I also stressed that any possible relationship between an identifiable person and the material was, if possible, to be concealed. The receivers of the e-mail were all registered members of the internet dating site Mötesplatsen and all of probably geographically situated in Sweden. By contacting participants through e-mail, it was possible to get direct and personal contact with many of them with little effort. The round of first e-mail interviews was finished within two weeks and the round of follow up interviews was finished in the two weeks following that.

I have not had any ambitions to do in-depth statistical analysis or find any statistical correlations in the data. My methodological approach has been to focus on the narratives and doing interpretative and

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17 Asynchronous communication, in contrast to synchronous communication, is communication that happens intermittently over time. Parties of an asynchronous communication do not need to be available and present at the same time.

18 I believe that I, as a researcher, became a “legitimate participant” in the communication when introduced by the internet dating company. Goffman (1967, p. 34) writes “An understanding will prevail as to when and where it will be permissible to initiate talk among whom, and by means of what topics of conversation.” Goffman (1967, p. 34) continues and writes: “When this process of reciprocal ratification occurs, the persons so ratified are in what might be called a state of talk – that is, they have declared themselves officially open to one another for purposes of spoken communication and guarantee together to maintain a flow of words”. Even though Goffman refers to spoken communication this also applies to the situation of mediated asynchronous communication, which is also a symbolic conversation with gestures.
explorative textual analysis of these narratives. Out of the possible 600 people that may have received the e-mail, I did receive an answer from 68 people. Out of these 68 people, around 30 people also volunteered for a follow up interview. Of these, 15 people answered my follow up e-mail based on how they had previously replied.

The interaction and situation in the e-mail interviews

The questions posed in the first e-mail to the potential participants were originally written in Swedish (see appendix 1). The English translation of the questions is the following:

(1) How did you get into dating online?
(2) What kind of relationship are you looking for on this internet site?
(3) When during the day do you visit this internet dating site (and when do you avoid it)?
(4) For you, what is dating online really about?

I sent, through the internet dating company, the same questions to all the potential participants. I tried to make the questions as open-ended as possible, while still having the overarching aim of the study in mind. I wanted to read the participants’ narratives on their internet dating experiences. A main strength of initially letting the respondents answer the same questions is that there is a chance of doing comparisons. However, this level of standardization makes it hard to distinguish the situations in which each of the participants found themselves at the time of their responses, and these situations have of course, to some degree, influenced the participants’ answers. This disadvantage is however already inherent in the e-mail interview method, since the interviews are carried out through text-based asynchronous communication and the participants are thus separated from the researcher both in time and location (see Brian Ogolosky, Sylvia Niehuis & Carl Ridley, 2009, p. 618). Nevertheless, the interview situation is not the only one in which the participants are bound up; another situation of concern here is one that the participants themselves depict in their e-mail responses.

For the participants who did a follow up interview the questions were based on their previous answers. The follow-up interviews were thus more flexible and I got more in-depth answers by the respondents. I interpret the follow-up interviews as based on a stronger connection between me and the other. It was a more intimate and personal communication in difference to the first interview. The person answering the follow-up questions also directed more attention to me than had been the case in the first interviews.

Some possibilities and limitations in gathering material through e-mail interviews

One argument in favor of doing e-mail interviews is the possibility to sample hidden populations (Ogolosky, Niehuis & Ridley, 2009, pp. 616-617; Cheryl Tatano Beck, 2005). This is based on the idea that there is a potential in internet technologies to foster communities for otherwise hidden populations. This theory thus has a normative claim, namely that “traditional” sampling methods risk participating in the hiding of these populations. However, as I discovered through doing situational analysis, there is still hidden populations in the material I gathered for this study. On a more general
note, one may claim that any sampling method will hide certain people or activities. As for example, persons who used the internet dating site to seek affairs while having a partner were included in the narratives of the participants. Another example is those doing “romantic scams”, who use internet dating to get money from other persons. The populations of ‘adulterers’ and ‘con-artists’ were not represented in my sample, but they were mentioned in the stories that I did collect. I argue that one may term their activities “hidden” in the social world of internet dating (see end discussion). If one only focuses the most conspicuous activities on the dating sites, one easily misses these hidden activities. In other words, these hidden activities were done by “implicated actors”. Implicated actors are the actors who are “silenced or only discursively present - constructed by others for their own purposes” (Clarke, 2005, p. 46). Implicated actants are then “implicated nonhuman actors in the situations of concern” (Clarke, 2005, p. 47).

Because of the asynchronous nature of communication the e-mail interviews did reach out to persons that may live far apart in relation to each other as well as to me as a researcher. It was also possible to interview more than one person at a time, as well as being in various stages in the interview process with different people (Lokman Meho, 2006, pp. 1285-1288). Meho (2006, p. 1291) suggests that e-mail interviews, in comparison to face-to-face interviews, gives a more reflectively dense material (see also Beck, 2005, p. 412; Michelle Kazmer & Bo Xie, 2008, p. 265). Furthermore, as the interview is based on textual communication the interview is already transcribed by the participant (Meho, 2006, pp. 1285-1286). However, on the other hand the so-called spontaneous thought processes (as distinct from reflective thought processes) are not visible, as cues such as hesitation and retroactive reparation are absent in the data (Kazmer & Xie, 2008, pp. 269, 274). This reasoning is based on a distinction between reflection and spontaneous acting and as well as the idea that thoughts are represented through repairs and hesitations (compare Emanuel Schegloff, 1992). On the other hand, the participants writing answers by e-mail have the possibility to re-write their story, which could lead to an empowerment of the participants as they are in control of their own narratives (Beck, 2005; compare Meho, 2006, p. 1291). The interviewees can also answer the questions when they “have the time”. This can also bring comfort and lead to more thoughtful and elaborative narratives. The narratives sent to me do however not give reason to stress this argument about the possibility of reflective and thought-through narratives (Kazmer & Xie, 2008, p. 265). In my material I could at some instances see hints of the situation behind the construction of the narrative. However, in future research the actual situation where the narrative is being constructed should be considered, by for example asking questions about that situation.

Kazmer and Xie (2008, p. 274) states that e-mail interviews lack “facial expression, body language and tone of voice”. However, they also state that the narratives represented carries differences in spelling, the use of paralanguage and grammar. I have analyzed these cues in the Swedish version of the material. I have had the ambition to partly portray these variations in the translation of the participants’ narratives. I should also add that the lack of bodily co-presence is not the same as stating that the bodies are not represented. The craft of writing an e-mail is something dependent on a body, it is a bodily experience, and the actual outcome and content can imply a social significance of a body. But then again, actual body gestures are not present.

As any necessary transcription is done by the participant, the material is, initially at least, stored both on the e-mail account of the researcher as well as the e-mail account of the participant (Kazmer & Xie, 2008, p. 265). There are ethical complications involved in e-mail conversations, since there is a potential risk that the material is seen by some third party along the e-mail’s path from sender to the
receiver, as well as where it is stored. Some of the current e-mail protocols do not use encryption. There is also a risk of e-mail and computer accounts being hacked.

The e-mail interview study had the intention to make the participants feel comfortable and give them a sense of anonymity in relation to the finished study. E-mail interviews can foster a sense of privacy, which facilitates talk about personal experiences (Meho, 2006, p. 1289; Beck, 2005). Kazmer and Xie (2008, p. 272) suggest that e-mail interviews foster increased disclosure. In e-mail interviews it is easier to lose ones face and still feel comfort (Beck, 2005, p. 412; see also Fürst, 2007). This could lead to a situation where otherwise shy people feels empowered to participate (Meho, 2006, p. 1289). In general, emotional disclosure seems to be fostered in online environments (John Bargh & Katelyn McKenna, 2004; Daantje Derks, Agneta Fisher & Arjan Bos, 2008). Emotional indicators and expressions of “affective content” is media dependent and disclosure of emotional states is to be interpreted from the data (Kazmer & Xie, 2008, pp. 271-272). In this study emphasis is put on emotions, which are interpreted from cues and indicators in the material (Bengt Starrin, Gerry Larsson, Lars Dahlgren & Sven Styrborn, 1991, pp. 43-44).

Kazmer and Xie (2008, pp. 257-258) suggest that those interviewees who are already comfortable with the medium, will find the e-mail (and internet based) interviews the best setting for passing on their narratives. In this study, the participants were considered accustomed to writing e-mails about themselves, since this is no small part of internet dating activities. This is also an argument more generally for using e-mail interviews in studying internet dating activities.

**Analyzing the internet dating site**

After the e-mail interviews were digested, coded and analyzed I did a “theoretical sampling”. Theoretical sampling is used to explore the depths of emerging categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, pp. 143). Clarke (2005, p. xxxi) writes about theoretical sampling in the following way: ”[...] ‘theoretical sampling’ focuses on finding new data sources (persons or things - and not theories) that can best explicitly address specific theoretically interesting facets of the emergent analysis”. I discovered that I needed to find new data sources for my analysis. I approached the public front of the internet dating site, i.e. its first page, in order to grasp the visual and textual discourses produced by the internet dating site, that were also present in the narratives I had gathered (see Clarke, 2005 on textual and visual discourse). By doing this I have gained a contact with and deeper understanding of the research field and the situation surrounding the participants in the interview (see Aspers, 2007, p. 21). The narratives in the e-mails were relating to this environment and I turned to the internet dating site in order to reveal more of the emerging theoretical concepts.

**Ethical considerations**

In my research I have been informed by specific ethical guidelines for doing scientific research. Two guidelines for preferable procedures have been taken into consideration: “Forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning” (http://www.codex.vr.se/texts/HSFR.pdf, 2009-10-01) and “Ethical decision-making and Internet research: Recommendations from the AoIR ethics working committee” (http://www.aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf, 2009-10-01).
Information about the study and what the material would be used for was presented to the participants in the initial e-mail. The participants were not approached by me, but were collectively approached in a bulk e-mail sent out by an internet dating company. The participants could then decide if they wanted to participate or not. It was stated in the e-mail that the material was to be gathered for a scientific publication (an article).

The study has no intention of sorting through the personal biographies of the participants or making them feel uncomfortable. There is a potential risk that the participants, under the impression that the correspondence with me was of a more private character than it actually was, disclosed more personal details than they would have done in an ‘ordinary’ interview (see Kazmer & Xie, 2008, p. 271). However, as they had my e-mail address they also had the possibility to withdraw their participation in the study up until the point of the publication of this thesis.

Their statements have been translated into English. One positive side of this is that the translation does not give direct hints about the personal writing style of the participant and this makes them more anonymous. On the negative side, the narratives lose the feeling of the actual phrasing. Absolute anonymity is not possible in interview studies; anonymity is rather a question of degree, not absolutes. The participants’ real names were seldom mentioned in the e-mail interviews. In this thesis, the participants are represented by (random) numbers. The internet dating site has several thousands of participants and participants come and go; this makes the participants in my study even more anonymous. Their age has been rounded off.

A sensitizing analytical strategy

In this thesis I have adopted a sensitizing analytical strategy for doing interactionist grounded theory and situational analysis. Clarke (2005) suggests that one should use a social worlds perspective when analyzing collected data, using grounded theory inspired methods. The social worlds perspective works as what Blumer (1969, pp. 24-25) has called a prior picture or scheme that could be set in place before doing empirical research and which gives direction where to look for data. I argue that it can also be called a “sensitizing analytical strategy”, i.e. a way of thinking “interactionally, temporally, processually, and structurally” automatically (Strauss, 1993, pp. 67-68). This strategy is, in other words, in line with the basic assumptions made in this thesis. The social worlds perspective is a “theory/method package” (method and theory cannot be separated, but are intertwined) (Clarke & Star 2008).

The social worlds perspective is associated with some sensitizing concepts, which “give the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. Whereas definite concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look” (Blumer, 1969, pp. 147-148, emphasis in original; see also Starrin, Larsson, Dahlgren & Styrborn, 1991). The social worlds perspective then guides the research questions and decisions and help to make relationships in the data visible. The social worlds perspective does not exclude other theories and concepts, such as for example class and gender (Strauss, 1993, pp. 211). This makes the perspective very useful for doing open-ended and interpretative research, which this study is an example of.
Blumer (1969, pp. 24-25), as mentioned above, suggests that it is possible to study the empirical world by having "a prior picture or scheme of the empirical world under study". This prior picture or scheme, such as for example a root metaphor, directs the attention towards specific research questions and how these questions could be answered. In other words, it is not the same as having a pre-defined theory and deducing hypothetical statements from that theory. Aspers (2007) suggests that a theory should be guiding one’s research and should be set after an initial pilot study. He sees theory as suggesting directions for research questions and sites for data sampling. This is then similar to Blumer’s prior picture or scheme, but the theory Aspers is suggesting is somewhat stricter, while a prior picture could be read as more flexible. During my research, the flexible nature of the perspective, or framework, has been helpful when making provisional theoretical claims about the research object. Far from everything is explained or understood through the social worlds perspective, however. Since it is a perspective, it has the role of merely sorting the data and giving some direction; it cannot explain or define in any definitive way.

**Coding, mapping and theorizing**

The data has been coded with a basic grounded theory approach, as suggested by Clarke (2005, p. 187). This helped me in order to take the next step into doing situational analysis. Grounded theory research is not done inductively; rather grounded theory research is done through abduction, by shuttling back and forth between empirical material and theoretical concepts (Udo Kelle, 2005; Clarke & Star, 2008, p. 117). The approach of abduction is an “innovative process by modifying and combining several elements of previous knowledge” (Kelle, 2005). Furthermore, abduction “refers to the process of studying facts and devising a theory to explain them” (Rudy Richardson & Eric-Hans Kramer, p. 499). The perspective does not, as mentioned, determine the result of the coding process but rather directs attention to where I could look, and from this codes and categories have emerged. I reached a point when I realized that the theoretical insights of “emotion management” (Hochschild, 1983), how people socially organize their emotions, could be of relevance in order to understand and theorize the emerging categories.

As Clarke (2005, p. xxxiv) states, the basic grounded theory approach to coding material is essential for the situational analysis. The data is coded word by word, segment by segment, and the codes are related to form categories, that in turn form a (substantive) theory (Clarke, 2005, p. xxxi). However, the fixed form of substantive theory is not of use in the situational analysis approach, which is inspired by insights from theories on situated knowledge and postmodernism. Rather, what is focused in situational analysis is situated and provisional theories and not substantive and formal theories.

By doing situational analysis the multiple levels of complexity in the data is taken into consideration (Clarke, 2005). Mapping concepts and theories is of core relevance for doing situational analysis. The maps can be redrawn and are used as shortcuts into grounded theorizing. Among other things, they introduce flexibility and creativity into the analysis. In the making of these maps, sensitizing concepts are of interest. Clarke (2005, p. 112) writes that such concepts “may be of help in creating social worlds/arenas map, in locating the stories of particular interest vis-à-vis social worlds in your data, and in analysis”. Some sensitizing concepts that can be creatively adapted are: commitment, authenticity, legitimacy, common activity, intersections of social worlds, segmentation of social worlds, implicated actors, segments of social worlds, social arena(s), discourses, boundary and boundary objects among others. These concepts open doors for studying processes of social organizational matters as well as the social formative role of emotions in doing internet dating.
A basic grounded theory approach to coding the material has been pursued. This involves doing open coding, axial coding and selective coding of data (see Strauss, 1987, pp. 58; Corbin & Strauss, 2008, pp. 195). Open coding involves the selection and naming of categories that emerge in the data. The properties of the emerging phenomena are identified, labeled, categorized and related to each other. The open coding was done two times. Both times word-by-word or segment-by-segment coding was used, and the codes applied were chosen from the everyday vocabulary of the participants. The two different arrays of open codes were then compared and related to each other to form a synthesis.

The axial coding has in this study been used to try to explicate relationships between categories and sub-categories. The aim of this procedure is to reach a greater understanding of the material. It is done by discerning species of codes, toying with the codes in networks, by mapping out social worlds, arenas, discourses and negotiations, and by employing sensitizing concepts to the material in a systematic fashion. New concepts are based on indicators in the material (Starrin, Larsson, Dahlgren & Styrborn, 1991, pp. 43-44).

Selective coding means identifying and selecting a core concept, in my case “managing emotion”, and continually relating it to other concepts in the data. In other words, this is a process of relating all relevant concepts to each other. When the concepts have been related and integrated, a grounded theory has been reached. In my study, I have reached some theoretically relevant conclusions. Before, during and after my research process I have also used techniques described in the literature to elaborate the ideas emerging from the data. After I reached this point, I further elaborated the new concepts and related them to the framework of the social worlds perspective.

Situational analysis mapping, which is involved in basic grounded theory coding, is about making situational maps, social worlds/arenas/discourse maps and positional maps (Clarke, 2005). Situational maps are analytical exercises that focus on the situation of action and lay out the salient and implicated collective actors, which may be human or nonhuman. Situational maps also involve: political/economic elements, organizational/institutional elements, major contested issues, local and global elements, socio-cultural elements, symbolic elements, popular and other discourses, spatial and temporal elements, individual and collective human elements and finally nonhuman elements. Social worlds/arenas/discourse maps lay out the social world(s) in the social arena(s) and study the discourses produced and negotiations acted out by the various social worlds. Positional maps relate two contesting elements and lay out the possible position taken and not taken and their salience in the data.

Clarke (2005, p. 200-202) states that there is not much depth reached by doing a situational analysis from the perspective of a particular social world. The insights are drawn from comparisons. In this study the participants mainly speak from what has been termed the internet dating world. However, I also argue that the participants usually have multiple commitments to various social worlds, which makes them move between them. This is not least evident in their narratives, where they to some extent take over the attitude of one social world in order to contrasting it to the internet dating world. So the participants in this study continually move between different social worlds in their stories and shift perspectives. In other words, they speak from different positions in various social worlds and continually make comparisons with the main social world(s) of internet dating.
Thus there are limitations to this research project. A more in-depth understanding of the social world of internet dating, as it would demand broad comparisons, could only be gained in the future through comparison between this and other study. Therefore this study is laying the groundwork for future research on the social worlds of internet dating and the dating arena. There are many discourses to be studied and a full picture is not possible and not sought for in this thesis. I am particularly interested in the conflicts and negotiations that emerge in the data and what they may signify.

**Diagrams and maps**

In this section I will briefly sketch some of the diagrams and maps made during the research process. Their content will be presented in the empirical part and in the concluding discussion.

The diagram in figure 1 is the integrated provisional theoretical scheme. It is the integrated model of concepts that emerged after the selective coding of the material.

![Diagram 1](image1.png)

**Figure 1. Provisional theoretical scheme of doing internet dating (in relation to the particular internet dating site).** “Learning to manage emotions” is in the center. In this theoretical scheme “searching for a future someone” is the essential social process for action.

Figure 2 is the social worlds/arenas that has emerged in the data and will also be presented in the following sections.
Figure 2. The dating arena and the arena of daily life and the associated social worlds as discovered in the data. Negotiation between the social worlds occurs in the arenas, but even more often in the overlaps/intersection of social worlds. Between social worlds there are continual conflicts of interest. Although the boundaries seem to be rigid they are not; in fact, they are fuzzy. The social worlds also contain “mini-worlds”, or segments (see Clarke, 2005; Strauss, 1978), but these are not depicted in this figure.

The example in figure 3 is an instance of one positional map made during the research process.
Doing internet dating

In this section I will first introduce and do some initial analysis of the Mötesplatsen internet dating site. Thereafter I will present, discuss and relate some insights that have emerged from the analysis of the interviews. I try to (re-)present as much as possible of the complexities, heterogeneities and messiness (if available) in the data in order to avoid oversimplification (see Clarke, 2005, pp. 15-16). The presented data and the analysis should not be read as put in chronological order. Rather, the whole section should be read as a whole, where parts have influenced each other. The research process has not been linear but fluctuating.

The internet dating site

Excitement, buzzes, butterflies in your belly, desire, happiness, yes-no-maybe, hope… This is where it starts. Hopeful meetings in a world full of emotions. There are thousands and thousands of singles here online - eager to find acquaintances, discuss whatever is important or unimportant to them and find a date. If you take the opportunity, there’s a good chance that the adventure begins right here, right now. (Retrieved from Mötesplatsen, 2010-04-12)

This quote is taken from the first page of the internet dating site Mötesplatsen. The internet dating site is a site for action where all of the participants in this study have been involved. From the perspective of the internet dating site this quote represents an idea of what internet dating (on this particular site) is all about. The passage suggests that intense emotions, such as excitement, desire, happiness and hope, are to be expected. The internet dating site, being the actant quoted here, seems not to give any promises to the visitor in terms of finding a partner, although such promises are hinted at, and although these implicit promises may be a reason to why people visit the internet dating site. Rather, the quote hints at an ambiguous future and uncertainty that is ripe with expectancy, all this underscored with intense emotions. The primary emotion that is outlined is hope and this emotion is directed towards the future and what the person might expect from doing internet dating. The quote seems to suggest something that is yet to come, something wonderful that might change the life of the participant of the internet dating site to the better. The quote suggests a future filled with happiness. The internet dating site builds on and structures expectancy and suggests that the activity of doing

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19 All translations from the website and from the interview transcript are made by Samantha Hemström in co-operation with me.

20 By this I mean that the activity of doing internet dating consists of various sites for action and this particular internet dating site represents “one” site.
internet dating is about being in various states of emotions. The emotions are evoked by being involved in the activities of internet dating. The internet dating site opens a door to a “world full of emotions”.

**Public front, semi-public front and the private back of the internet dating site**

I will outline three different segments of the internet dating site (for similar differentiations see Hochschild, 1983, pp. 13-16; Goffman, 1959; see also Strauss, unpublished, pp. 4-5). I do this in order to give a sense of the social environment for some of the internet dating activities on this site. I also do this because I want to differentiate between different levels of exposure of interaction on the site, which in fact represent different possibilities for social interaction among the participants on the site.

The “front page” of the internet dating site may be seen, in idealized form, as its *public front*. On the public front the first introduction to the site is presented for potential members, as well as for already existing members that are about to log on to the site. On the front page/the public front, it is only possible to see content provided by the internet dating company, with exception to some pictures that the users have provided of themselves. The members are thus a part in producing content for the front page.

The pages involved when a participant is logged in are the *semi-public front*; you need to be a member to get access to them. In this segment of the site it is possible for members to present themselves visually and textually to each other. Later on I will discuss this part through the stories told by the members that I interviewed.

The *private back* of the internet dating site is the interaction between members on the internet dating site through e-mail and other means. Their e-mail interaction is concealed from other members. So the degree to which the social life on the site is private or public, depends on the possibilities for interaction that the site infrastructure gives and is thus inherent in the technology as such (see also Christena Nippert-Eng, 2007; Clarke, 2005, pp. 57, 298). The public front is static and excludes interaction among participants. The semi-public front also contains rather static elements, such as presentations and frozen words and pictures. But on the private back more diverse and flexible interaction is possible between the participants, who there come into asynchronous communication with one another.

I will now outline the front page more in detail and analyze it further. Since the front page contains rather static visual and textual material, which is not generated by the participants of the internet dating site, I will see this page as mainly representing the internet dating company. The internet dating site presents itself as “Mötesplatsen/Meeting place - Finding love online” [Mötesplatsen - Hitta kärlek på nätet] at the upper left corner. In Swedish, love is written in definite form (“the love”), which implies that there is one, and perhaps only one, love to be found on this internet dating site. One possible interpretation could be that a notion of monogamous relationships, based on a definite love, is promoted. The phrase also suggests that finding is the main activity of the internet dating site (rather than to be searching for love). Furthermore the “love” can be found on internet; it is a possibility. This is an invitation for people to become engaged in the internet dating site and it makes assumptions about what that participation may consist in.
At various places on the front page the visitor is informed that the internet dating site has won an award as being the best (among other dating sites). This presentation could be read as a strategy of legitimation. If the internet dating site represents the internet dating world, this is to be seen as a way of legitimating that social world, through this site for action, as something worth being committed to (see Strauss, 1982). The activities of internet dating is thus to be seen as normatively accepted and worth doing.

In the center of the front page there is a, in relation to the rest of the page, large photograph, where a woman, who is focused, is intensively looking at a man who is merely visible, out of focus and who is looking downwards. On the picture the text "Excitement, buzzes, butterflies in your belly, longing, happiness, yes-no-maybe, hope" can be read. This text is almost identical to the longer quote presented in the beginning of this section, but interestingly enough, the word “desire” is here left out. In my interpretation of the photograph, there is no need for that word. The picture is about desire and so that emotion needs not be explicated further. Considering, for example, the notion of the “male gaze”, the woman is depicted as desirable (see Laura Mulvey, 1975/1992; for situational analysis on visual discourse see Clarke, 2005, pp. 205-261). The motive of the picture is seen from a (heterosexual) male perspective, as it were. The intended viewer is a male, thus indicating him in the foreground, while the viewer’s gaze is directed to the woman. The viewer subject is implicitly the heterosexual man. One may wonder for whom the feelings, represented by detached words, are intended. Through the kind of analysis carried out here, it is possible to come closer to the feelings and positions that the internet dating site promotes and thereby makes available.

On the first page there is also a randomly selected couple presented, who have “found each other” on the internet dating site, and the visitor has the possibility to read more about them and how they found each other through this particular internet dating site. They are, thus, the good example. They represent the end of the internet dating cycle: to have found someone (compare “finding love online”). Furthermore, the visitor is briefly encouraged to read more about how to best present themselves (what I later call presentation technology), how one uses search tools (search technology) and how one can communicate with others (communication technology). The matching function (matching technology) is not given as much attention on the front page as the other technologies. Present on the front page is also pictures of eight members of the site. Perhaps this is done in order to give the public front a more authentic feeling, to make it more about real persons by indicating the semi-public front as just “around the corner”. Authenticity is crucial for a social world in order to be legitimate and able to survive (Strauss, 1982). The visitor is also able to try out and search for “singles in the whole of Sweden” by inserting words in a search box. The login box is present in the upper hand right corner, and takes up a relatively small space on the site. The intention of the front page seems to be to attract new members, who in fact are not only potential customers, but who also produce the actual content of the site (see Arvidsson, 2006). The internet dating site provides an organized and payed-for service that let people meet with the intention of dating.

The mentioned technologies for finding a partner on the internet dating site could be seen as nonhuman actors/actants (see Clarke, 2005, pp. 61-64). Technology is here understood as “inherited or innovative means of carrying out the social world’s activities” (Strauss, 1978, p. 122). Technology structures people’s possibilities for action (see also Clarke, 2005, pp. 57, 298). The search technologies have functions to let members find others in accordance with search criteria, but yet these technologies are of course limited to the search pool as well as to the available search variables.
Matching technologies is a variation on the search technology theme. This technology involves computational matching based on the personal information that the members have furnished about themselves. Presentation technologies are those technologies that creates layout for and spreads the text, images and background information uploaded by the members in various parts of the website. These technologies provide lists of possible pre-defined alternatives to the member and thus the possibility of actions is limited by the internet dating site. The communication technologies make it possible for people on the site to interact and get in “direct” contact with each other, and these technologies include e-mail and flirt-functions. Different internet dating sites often have all these technologies, but combine them in different ways, and makes some more prominent than others. On the first page these technologies are merely indicated, since you have to be a member and logged on to the semi-public segment of the website to get access to them. The communication technology (e.g. sending and receiving e-mails on the internet dating site) is the technology that the participants buy access to. They buy time to be able to interact with prospective partners.

The front page signals something that I will below show to be a core facet of internet dating, namely that it is all about something that might happen; internet dating is a transitional and temporal phase for moving between one’s present life-situation to a future, imagined life-situation. It is therefore placed between now and then. This all points to an emotional crack between the current situation and the life situation as it is imagined.

**Political and economic elements**

Internet dating is not isolated from political and economic systems in society. Some of the participants acknowledge that there in fact is an internet dating company involved in their life of internet dating.

I can answer several questions, been looking at these sites since 1996-97 so I’ve seen some good and some bad ones. In the beginning there were mostly amateurs doing websites for fun where anyone could get the access to join the community, either for free or for a pickle. Today though, it’s more about making as much money as possible. Preferably on lonely, unhappy human beings where the payment goes through some foreign company via the credit card companies that maintain an automatic prolongation via the credit cards. Where they in turn charge your card because you’ve missed cancel it in time or canceling it the right way. (0326, man, 50)

One role of the internet dating company, as acknowledged by Arvidsson (2006; see also Eva Illouz, 2007), is monetizing the search for contact with others. The internet dating company thus creates

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21 By studying these technologies, and perhaps others, it is possible to detect differences between internet dating sites.

22 The age of the participants has been rounded off. The median age of the participants was 46. Out of the 68 people participating, 23 stated that they were male and 35 stated that they were female. The diagram below shows the distribution of those who declared their age and gender. Only a few were between 30 and 40 years old. More females than males are represented in the age group 20 to 30.

Figure 4. Age as represented among persons stating that they are male or female.
hindrances and possibilities for one to get access to other people. As mentioned above, full access to communication technology only is possible if the participants pay a monthly payment. There is an economy behind the internet dating site, where the participants become customers of an internet dating service. Arvidsson (2006) states that the members of internet dating sites are performing immaterial labor, because the value of the internet dating site is produced by the members’ activities on it. Without the members there would be no internet dating site and nothing to make revenue on. Furthermore, I would add, it is the specific form of activity that is made revenue on: the searching for a future someone and its associated emotions.

There is a mutual dependence between the internet dating company and those performing the internet dating activities. The company wants to attract people to become involved in the activities on their particular site and pay for it. Those performing the activities are interested in the internet dating site because it might lead them to potential partners. However, on the internet dating site strategies of resistance do exists. Some participants in fact get access to user-created communication technology. In some user profiles an e-mail addresses or equivalent is given. This makes it possible to contact the persons behind the presentations even though they are not paying for access to all communication technologies on the internet dating site.

**Becoming involved on the internet dating site**

I now turn to the participant’s first encounter with Mötesplatsen. It is apparent that the interviewees, though members of an internet dating service, were not all doing internet dating and those that were, used the site differently. However, they do give similar reasons for why they joined the internet dating site. They describe a situation where internet dating becomes a possibility to meet someone. This may be because of the fact that internet dating fits into the rhythm of daily life and/or that they sense a lack of something/someone in their lives. This implicates that internet dating works as a way to meet someone when there is a lack of time or potential partners in one’s immediate environment. Internet dating also brings a sense of “togetherness” in daily life, which contrasts with the feeling of being “single”.

Men and women seem to come to the internet dating site by slightly different ways. The women more often than the men describe good examples where people that have entered into some sort of relationship with someone that they had met through the internet. These narratives legitimize Internet dating as a social world and make it seem a worthwhile activity (Strauss, 1982). The initial step is to overcome doubt, so that one becomes committed to the collective activities of the internet dating site. Furthermore, many of the interviewees had come into contact with Mötesplatsen through commercials and search engines. Media and other technologies thus play a part in introducing the internet dating site. This may also be linked to the economic aspects of internet dating, since the internet dating companies advertise through various channels to reach out for new members.

How did you get in touch with the concept of dating through the internet?

- Knew it existed, googled. (0843, man, 65)

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23 However, I have not done any in-depth analysis of the content of the semi-public front of the internet dating site. This insight is drawn from a small sample of data from that segment.
Honestly I’d been single way to long. I got the feeling of missing someone and wanted that feeling back, where you feel immortal. So I just decided one day to join Mötesplatsen, that I’d known about through commercials etc. (0791, man, 20)

- Tips from friends that have married and had met through internet dating. (1097, woman, 30)

- Through friends and Google. (0483, woman, 20)

- A colleague of mine told me she’d met her partner through the internet. It did sound a little like she was embarrassed by the fact, and at that point I had literary no idea what internet dating was about at all. Knew nothing whatsoever about it and this was roughly 2 years ago. Then during an autumn power walk I decided to join. This was September 2009, since I’ve got a job containing different working hours, when am I going to have the time to meet guys?.. like never. I was scared as well, because I thought no one would send me an answer, but when I opened the page for the first time I almost drowned in mails. (0001, woman)

**Feelings of being incomplete**

The experience of *loneliness* is, for some, the basic argument for taking part in internet dating\(^{24}\) or being involved in a search after someone/something else. Some describe the situation as a sense of “longing for somebody”, “feeling emptiness” or “feeling sorry for myself”. Loneliness is thus understood as being “without” something or someone, and a feeling of being incomplete. Completeness is to be in a “serious” relationship together with someone, feeling complete and in line with someone else. One wants to be part of an undifferentiated dyad. Some sort of self-feeling, and self, seems to be of relevance here, where the other person mirrors oneself and gives rise to an emotional state (see Engdahl, 2005). The self is intentionally oriented towards what one wants to be.

What’s dating online really about for you? Tell us.

- Okay, this was really an open interview research. I think it’s very much about the need we have for social contacts, confirmation or mirroring. When you’re single you have no one to talk to when you get home. If you want to talk to someone you need to take the first step. When dating online, it’s much simpler for example to mail somebody you don’t really know. Lower requisites. Then, the need of confirmation or mirroring I believe is very strong. Here you have choices of drawing a painting of yourself and make it good and get positive feedback/mirroring on that. Also, it’s another instance of an inherently lonely soul. Of course. (0408, woman, 60)

- […] I joined up at work one Christmas eve and was gonna work the nightshift, felt a bit sorry for myself… that [internet dating] site I find very serious. […]. (0001, woman)

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\(^{24}\) *Loneliness is described as a lack of belonging to someone and is related to discourses on “togetherness” and “love ever after”. However, there are different forms of loneliness (see Freida Fromm-Reichmann, 1959). What is considered here is a kind of ‘creative’ loneliness, which makes people act and orients them towards others. Loneliness appears as a motivational factor that guides people towards others and hopes for long-lasting relationships.*
- That thing about overcoming loneliness… isn’t that what we all long for, all the time? Finding someone we feel complete together with, someone who understands us, who is like us straight through to the core, the soul. To feel solidarity, a connection… But truly, we never really do, understand each other I mean. We have our own perspectives. But when we’re falling in love it FEELS just like the other gets you perfectly. It usually passes :-/. (1928, woman, 40)

What kind of relationship are you truly looking for on this internet website?

- I’m looking for a serious relationship. A girl to grow with and feel trust with, aspects I know are key to functional relationships. That, and natural behaviors, being able to spend time with friends and vice versa without problems. I want to have children with her sometime in the near future although not too soon. Marriage may come later on, when you know for sure it is right. And finally I’d like to live a nice life with wonderful memories of what we’ve given each other. I think we all want that. Nobody wants to be lonely, simply put. (0791, man, 20)

**To be looking for someone**

There are differences in what the participants are looking for. But the main social process associated with doing internet dating on this particular internet dating site is to be looking for someone. In the end the participants are looking for something similar to monogamous and heterosexual relationship based on romantic love. To be looking for something else than that is met with skepticism, such as to be looking for an exclusively sexual partner on the internet dating site, which is a major contested issue. On the other hand, to be looking for a partner with the intention of forming a romantic, life-long commitment is not seen as controversial (which will be shown later on). To be doing internet dating and to be looking for someone is thus oriented towards the future and a future relationship with a partner. The activities of doing internet dating probably end when one has accomplished such a relation, since the activity is not about connecting with new potential partners, but rather to create a relationship of a certain type.

What kind of relationship are you truly looking for on this internet website?

- I am primarily looking for a partner. But if it doesn’t feel right I have no problems with just finding friends on the net or real friends or people to just have sex with. But the latter does not happen often. (1043, woman, 25)

What’s internet dating really about for you?

- Internet dating for me is really about finding a partner to have passionate sex with :-) and establishing a live-apart relationship…After a number of relationships (married for several years) I’ve come to the conclusion that it’s best not to wear each other out… (1705, man, 50)

- A way of getting to know someone that could lead to a regular relationship, [I’m] not after finding a sex partner. (0692, woman, 55)

- I am very emotional and longing for love-giving and –receiving – physically and mentally BUT I am not interested in sharing a bed with a new acquaintance right away. (0510, woman, 65)
I would like to meet the love of my life really. Then at the same time I don’t think he’s there, because it’s so sluggish. But if I don’t date on the internet I won’t meet a man at all, because I never “go out”…I work or stay at home. (0581, woman, 50)

I’m looking for a man to share my life with. I have difficulties understanding why you’d need a dating site for casual meeting. (0985, woman, 30)

A very effective way of getting in touch with women for a night out, since there is more to choose from.

A way of getting in touch with “someone” to build a relation with. I’m working on not having internet dating a part of my everyday life :-). (0292, woman, 60).

Persons that previously have been involved in intimate and physically close relationships often seem on the one hand to have an urge to both “be free” and to avoid being too committed to another person, and on the other hand to want the possibility of being committed, though this is often framed as a side-activity in one’s life. The primary goal is not to find another person, but that the person fits into their already existing life. These notions are often associated with the term “särbo”, i.e. being together but living apart.

What kind of relationship are you searching for on this internet site?

- I’m looking for a partner, a life mate. Definitely someone to spend my time with. Not necessarily someone to live together with, even though that would be the optimal goal. I am not interested by those who simply want to establish their value on the market, the ones who are only in it to share stories, nor the ones that date on a regular basis with no intentions of settling for someone. (0292, woman, 60)

How come you don’t necessarily want to live with someone?

- Been married twice, that’s enough. My dream is to find someone that owns a summer place where we could have a life together and at the same time, when I’d feel like it, when I’d need some time alone, I’d be able to do so, and simply go home to my place. (1257, woman, 65)

Internet dating in the rhythms of daily life

Internet dating activities are framed in terms of *everyday life*. In the narratives of the participants, everyday life is to be considered as made up of part-time involvements (see Luckmann, 1978; see also Katagiri, 1992; Nippert-Eng, 1996). In its rhythms, the people of the narratives are mainly moving between home and work (or school). Internet dating is associated with people’s home and spare time. As the home world intersects with the work world, also internet dating is slipping into work related activities. It is negotiated, defended and contested as a legitimate activity in everyday life also regarding where it should be acted out. Most of the participants visit the internet dating site when they have the time, which is in the evenings. If they have more flexible working hours they usually visit the site at any time during the day. However, most of the participants state that they would never visit the internet dating site during working hours. For some participants, being caught visiting dating sites at work would lead to acute embarrassment – they would be seen as “desperate”. For others it would
simply be an unprofessional thing to do, that would go against the grain of their professional identities. Some also state that they do not want to visit the internet dating site too often, since they then might come out as “too desperate”.

You say you never visit the site at work. Why is that? What could/would happen if you did?

- It speaks for itself. When I’m at work I have obligations. I do not log on to Mötesplatsen or other social networks like Facebook when I’m at work. Nothing would happen if I did, but I want to maintain a degree of professionalism when I’m at work. (1526, woman, 25)

When during the day do you visit this internet dating site (and when do you avoid it?).

- During weekdays mostly at lunch, and evenings. On the weekends usually before lunch and evenings. Not too early - seems too desperate. I don’t stay online too long but log on a couple of times during evenings. (1626, woman, 40)

How come you avoid the site at work?

- Because I don’t have access to the internet at work, and when I did have access on earlier jobs, it could become a little embarrassing if anyone would see me surfing sites like that, you’d feel slightly desperate. (1043, woman, 25)

**Taking/saving/spending time**

*Time* seems to be a crucial aspect of internet dating. Time appears as a multifaceted category. People need to “take time” for internet dating activities, but internet dating is also seen as “effective” in contrast to other dating venues, such as the night club. It thus “saves time”. Furthermore, internet dating may be a way to “spend leisure time” There is ambivalence in the fact that internet dating both “takes time” and “saves time”. These two approaches to time spent internet dating are based on a strong commitment, while the third approach discussed here, “spend leisure time”, is based on a lower degree of commitment.

By “saving time”, some mean that internet dating makes it possible to search, sort and evaluate potential partners more quickly. The time aspect is strongly linked to the category “being home” and the fact that internet dating makes it possible to have asynchronous communication with others. The participants have the possibility to date when they find the time (when they are home) as well as to some extent choose with whom they interact. In that respect internet fits into the daily rhythms of everyday life. The effectiveness of doing internet dating in order to meet someone is part of the definition many have of their situation (see Thomas & Thomas, 1928, pp. 571-572) and is also a strong argument for doing internet dating. The ideal of “quality single” is associated with this, as the ideal partner should match one’s own values and the issues one struggles with in everyday life (Arvidsson, 2006).

What’s internet dating really about for you?
- Perhaps you can’t find someone out there, lack of time or energy. Instead you sit in front of the computer, more comfortable, hoping to bump into Mr. Right! (0365, woman, 20)

- It’s about getting in touch with new people. On the internet you more effectively “get to know” the ones that make you curious. It’s about a kind of integration where you discuss values but also even everyday stuff like the weather etc. The ones that you prefer, you meet in real life. So dating on the internet for me is mostly about finding a potential partner. (0624, woman, 20)

- A much more effective way of establishing contact with women than at the pub, since you have much more to choose from. (1460, man)

- Getting to know someone somewhat better and being able to ask the important questions before meeting the person. Also; I save time, money, and energy. Going out is partly difficult, especially being a girl actually… everybody’s been drinking and you don’t get left alone. Through the internet you can (and excuse me for saying this… :) weed out men that don’t match the criterions important to you. Certainly there’s no way of knowing that the person you are meeting through the internet actually is honest, but you learn how to read between the lines… after a while. So I’ve actually been fortunate enough to meet lots of nice, interesting people. I often read that people are tired of going out, so this way is effective, saves time, and it’s easy to weed out the less interesting ones. (0085, woman, 35)

However, as mentioned, internet dating also “takes time”. This may lead to a temporary or lasting abandonment of the internet dating site. One can return to the worlds on the internet, because they persist without one’s participation – they are based on collective actions and efforts. The internet dating site is dependent on the collective involvements of people, but the world persists as individuals come and go. The individuals may also be represented by profiles, but not available for interaction.

At this point I’m not active ‘cause there’s no time. I’m not removing my site but I don’t have time to update it. It’s kind of like growing plants, but not having the time to remove the weeds. Then you simply put a lid on, so it stops growing. (0379, man, 55)

Yet another perspective is that internet dating may be used to “spend time” and that internet dating takes the form of leisure without the ultimate aim of finding and evaluating persons as potential partners. This is a playful use of the internet dating site and is often associated with more of a relaxed attitude towards (internet) dating, than those associated with “finding partner for life” or “romantic love”.

What’s internet dating really about for you?

- Way of passing the time, another way of creating new contacts and meeting new people, expanding my opportunities to meet guys. (0273, woman, 20)

Spatiality, internet dating world/night life world and everyday life

When it comes to spatiality, the home is the place where most of the internet dating activities happens. It seems to be a safe haven where people can be relaxed, in contrast to the “outside”, often articulated
as the harsh and harmful world of night life pubs and clubs. Most of the interviewees’ other commitments in everyday life do not revolve around dating, but rather around such daytime activities as work and school; internet dating is mostly confined to early mornings, evening and for men also night time. Most women avoid night time since they have had e-mails with “sexual content” when logged on in the night, or have friends who have had such experiences. This is however a contested issue.

When the dating arena is discussed more generally in the participant’s narratives, there is a contrast made between the internet dating world and the night club world. Their differences and similarities are pointed out by many of the participants. When making these comparisons, the participants take the generalized attitude of both worlds (see Mead, 1934), while at the same time being involved in the e-mail interview situation. Other worlds on the same dating arena, i.e. places where you can find partners, are the work world, the circle of acquaintances and people one has met through various other activities (see figure 2 above). The night club world is depicted as shallow and cold and directed towards others’ physical appearances, while the internet dating world is said to be more oriented towards values and personal traits (see also Arvidsson, 2006). However, this is a contested issue and some state that the internet dating world is shallow and cold and that people here only make temporary connections and no real intimate bond, a phenomenon explained by the fact that people are always evaluating each other on the internet. Also, in the night club world one has different means for presenting oneself, whereas the written language is the most prominent means on the internet.

What’s internet dating really about for you?

- Finding someone with the same values to build a relationship with. Since I work pretty long hours every day with people older than me, I rarely meet interesting people at work. And on the weekends I hang out with people I already know = no new acquaintances. Do not feel comfortable at the pubs or whatever, too shallow, and plastic. (1593, man, 30)

- Don’t wanna do nights out by myself and don’t have that many friends that are single to go out with. I find flirting at bars and such pretty unpleasant. To show off, be clever etc. Here I can be honest from the start. (0932, woman, 20)

- Suppose dating online benefits the ones who write and express themselves well. In any case that’s how it is for me. If I meet a guy at the pub or wherever, I could fall for him, whether or not he can spell, but here I ditch the ones with poor writing skills (language, grammar, spelling etc) […]. (1626, woman, 40).

Do you see any differences in dating on the internet compared with more traditional ways of meeting people?

- […] At 19 you’d make out with someone you necessarily didn’t even know the name of, but on the internet you gather information before anything happens. (1097, woman, 30)

Elaborate on the situations where you feel that you have to hide that you date on the internet.
- I’ve met people with a negative attitude towards internet dating. They see it as a sign of desperation; I’ve sometimes regretted sharing that part with them. That’s probably all I can come up with. (0483, woman, 20)

What’s internet dating really about for you?

- A chance to meet guys without having to go out. Fun to read and get to know each other a bit before getting together. I’ve had 7 dates this time around, and even though none really clicked, I’ve had great fun meeting them. You always learn something new and they’ve all been so nice. Besides, you realize more and more what it is you actually want in a man, what’s important… Many people only seem to be looking at the pictures and do not care what you have written. It is not less oriented towards looks than at night clubs. Some people have old photos or write that they are fitter than they actually are. This may become awkward when you actually meet. (1626, woman, 40)

**Legitimating the internet dating world**

The legitimacy of the internet dating world is associated with how open a person is about her or his internet dating activities. It is not possible to discuss the internet dating activities so openly in some social worlds and on other arenas, since that would lead to problematic and thus emotional situations. A person either deploys an integrative or separating attitude towards one’s internet dating activities in different situations in the person’s daily life (see also Strauss, 1982, 1984). When it is possible to integrate the internet dating world in other social worlds and when such dating is seen as a legitimate activity there, tensions lowered. Being “desperate” is something that needs to be negotiated for internet dating activities to have legitimacy even in the world of internet dating. That negotiation also becomes necessary when the world of internet dating is “brought up” in other social worlds and arenas where the person participates. On the internet dating site, dating is of course the activity that people expect each other to be involved with.

In what way do you think people in your environment see dating online as an activity?

- I talk about where I meet my women openly. Some I’ve met with friends or during nights out. Others I’ve met through the internet. The people in my surrounding appreciate my being active. The women I’ve met through the internet are intelligent, bright, attractive, interesting people. Some have befriended my friends and are still peripherally a friend of mine. The people in my surrounding see internet dating as a good way of meeting someone with similar interests. There are definitely possibilities for creating a solid relation with somebody through the internet. More so than in the arms of some strangers that you have met at a night club. When a new woman is introduced into my circle of friends, people in my environment ask at what site we met, and they do that with the same nonchalant tone as when, years ago, they asked me how I and someone else knew each other. (0379, man, 55)

Have you ever been uncomfortable with dating online?

- I wouldn’t use the word uncomfortable, but, sure, sometimes it can get slightly unpleasant when my friends tell me to stop internet dating and meet boys in reality instead. I shake it off pretty easily though. (1809, woman, 25)
You write that dating online is labeled desperate. In what kind of situations do you sense that?

- The actual dating process itself is hardly desperate, because everyone’s there to find a partner. It’s more the whole deal of internet dating being a second hand choice (since the ’normal’ way of finding a partner ’shouldn’t’ involve anything beyond living your everyday life), that makes creating an account feel like a desperate move […]. (1334, man, 25).

What’s internet dating really about for you?

- […] this is better than going out because I’ll never run into a female with such a rare occupation on the streets. This is perhaps more about me. Here it is clear from the start what it’s all about. It makes the first contact much easier. (0379, man, 55)

**Being ”serious” and ”unserious”**

The dichotomy “being serious” and “being unserious” is advanced in the stories told and understood as two positions, associated with identity formation. Being serious is to be genuinely committed to the primary activity of internet dating: finding a long term partner. Being unserious is a characteristic ascribed to those who are more interested in temporary relationships of sexual nature, only interested in talking and just being friends. These people are often “silenced or only discursively present - constructed by others for their own purposes”, in the material (Clarke, 2005, p. 46). A way of negotiating this activity is to claim that while one is having sexual partners from the internet dating site, one is still genuinely interested in finding a long term partner. Unseriousness is also ascribed to another group of people, namely those that are too desperate and “too committed” in their search for a partner. The notion that internet dating takes time and is something that just happens is encouraged.

**Going on a date**

Internet dating activities are not only confined to the internet and the internet dating site. Internet dating also involves going on “dates”, which means that persons meet up somewhere for a face-to-face meeting. At that point, the activities of internet dating are transferred from the mediated internet site, to another site for action. Most of the participants acknowledge that the person they will meet is “not the same” person as the one they have corresponded with on the internet dating site (compare Fürst, 2007). They regard the mediated meeting as something else, since it is a different way of communicating and the pictures and presentation may not be in line with how they act and look during the date. If a social world ends where the effective use of its discourses is no longer possible (Strauss, 1978; Becker, 1982) then a social world can transcend different communication channels (see also Shibutani, 1955, 1986; Kazmer & Haythornthwaite 2001 Haythornthwaite & Christine Hagar, 2005). However, this transition between communication channel may lead to a conflict-ridden situation (see also Fürst, 2007; Lawson & Leck, 2006). Many of the participants develop strategies for presenting themselves on- and offline and plan for dates (Hardey, 2004). They learn that they need to present themselves as honestly and authentically as possible; they are committed to finding a long-term partner and inconsistencies will be revealed sooner or later (see also Hardey, 2004). Many feel skeptic about the authenticity and accuracy of other people’s profiles if they have been on dates with persons that do not live up to their online presentations. Moving between medium is a difficult step for some. There needs to be a congruency between expectations and what happens on the date (see also Fürst,
So inconsistencies are strong reasons for people to perceive a situation as problematic and are thus sometimes met with an inhibition of one’s spontaneous acts (Engdahl, 2005; Mead, 1982, p. 43), for example in the form of embarrassment and the action to flee. These experiences may result in people making their presentations as “accurate” as possible to avoid future incongruities.

When does it go wrong? Any specific situations?

- When people are impolite. Neither men nor women are always considerate toward other human beings. Someone with hopes and dreams might be sitting across the table, like you. It’s the same rules here as if we were sitting face to face. Same things hurt, same things turn people against you, same things make you smile etc. Some appreciate jokes, others want serious conversations. Anything that might go wrong here are the very same things that can go wrong in “reality”. Although there is one difference. You do not see the other person, you cannot read their body language, and all you can do is read the written words. Things can get ugly if someone isn’t who or what they say they are. I met a woman who wanted me to be thin. I said my stomach was slightly chubby and took for granted, foolishly, that she’d be thin as well. She was extremely big. Large. I ran when I saw her and she followed me through the halls. I found some friends of mine at the bar and hid behind them. She found me, to my friends’ satisfaction, and I had to tell her I was a little surprised over her size. She was completely unsympathetic about it and meant that if that would have been a problem I should have asked […] (0379, 55, man)

What’s dating online really about for you?

- To me it’s about getting in contact with other people and communicating freely, being able to have conversations with everybody DESPITE them being attractive or less attractive. Then, when I develop a real interest in someone, I want to meet them more or less straight away in reality. Reality is so different. Profile pictures are a requirement. Full body pictures a requirement. Honesty is the best. (0609, man)

**Disappointment, being too desperate, embarrassment and being bound loosely**

However, as disappointment reoccurs the members learn to cope with these conflicts. They lower their expectations and learn to “go with the flow”. They no longer dream; and have become now-oriented, rather than oriented towards the future. There must still be “hope” and a longing for someone, so that the activities are still worth doing (Strauss, 1982, 1984). Hope makes internet dating into a quest, where people “looking for someone” and it engages the participants in further activities. As mentioned, the internet dating site tries to instill this emotion in order to make the participants stay on the site and continue doing the internet dating activities. But while being in a state of hope is the situation in which the internet dating company prefers its members to be, too much hope can lead to disappointment as the expectations are not met. Emotions, once again, rise when there is a problematic situation and they are formative for further social situations.

Being “too desperate” is a controversial issue in the internet dating world. One is expected not to be too committed to internet dating activities and not to become emotionally attached to someone right away. At the same time one is expected to develop an attachment to a person over time. People come and go. Being desperate is associated with negative feelings and is a label associated with those who try “too much” and such people are generally considered as “un-dateable”. Because of this, persons are continually negotiating their own engagement with the internet dating activities. They need to manage
their emotion and learn the right internet dating attitude, e.g. to be cool, which is one of the characteristics considered to lead to certain success. A cool and relaxed attitude towards internet dating is encouraged and is associated with not being disappointed and saddened often and not losing hope. However, as mentioned above, internet dating as such has also been seen as a desperate act. But on the internet dating site the participants are committed to the same type of activities, and doing internet dating is seldom seen as desperate there. A problematic situation has entered by the term “too” one is doing something that brakes with habitual action.

Some of the participants have learnt to handle and manage incongruent expectations. One strategy is to meet others as quickly as possible and avoid expectation-raising correspondence. As communication on the internet dating site or other avenues online, establishes social relationships, it is hard to move that social relation to other, un-mediated sites for action (compare Fürst, 2007). A calm attitude is encouraged as the most effective one: it means to be cool and relaxed and not have any expectations beyond the present moment. The internet daters learn to manage their expectations, hopes and dreams for the future (compare Hochschild, 1983). In other words: they learn not to be desperate or disappointed. One is not to be committed too quickly in the relationship. A part of internet dating is about revealing oneself, trying to be personal in order to achieve intimate relations. But this may lead to disappointment when a relationship is suddenly terminated. This forces the person to learn to handle the interaction in other ways so that she or he does not lose a sense of self, or self-feeling. The participants are mainly committed to the arena of dating and the internet dating world, and thus others are evaluated as potentially being a future someone. If the other is not “right” the relationship is terminated rather quickly. This leads to tension, frustration and even sadness. The participants learn to distance themselves from their dating, because their self-feeling would otherwise become too vulnerable. Internet dating is about making an intimate and emotional bond, and trial-and-error seems to be an important facet of that quest. Others however broaden their perspective and see other members as a potential friend, not only intimate partners.

At what times do you feel excitement when dating online?

- I used to get that tingly feeling all the time in the beginning. I’d get my hopes up quickly, thinking I’d found my prince after just a few letters exchanged. But I learned pretty soon that it’s often false hopes and that you shouldn’t tell the other person everything about yourself immediately, ‘cause all of a sudden the he stops answering your letters. It doesn’t happen all the time, but it happens. So I’m afraid of hoping too much before getting to know the other person. Today I get belly butterflies, but not instantly. After writing quite a lot and really getting to know the person, the sensation that it could actually lead somewhere makes it happen. (0738, woman, 20)

What’s dating online really about for you?

- […] Internet dating can also be very trying and take a lot of time. I only answer letters from people that I feel a genuine solid interest in – it takes too much time writing letters of nonsense to people that don’t even fit my profile. Also it’s very frustrating when “talking” to a guy for while, building up some sort of friendship where both have shared things about life and personal stuff etc, then actually meeting him and all of a sudden he’s just not interesting anymore. And the other way around. All of a sudden this “friend” has vanished. It’s without a doubt hard to open up time and time again, sharing your qualities. Eventually you talk less… […] (1564, woman, 40)
In order not to become too committed to the internet dating activities – such commitment may lead to disappointment or desperation – people tend to learn to become bound loosely to the internet dating world. Internet dating should thus be something that could be easily abandoned and regarded as a side-activity in relation to one’s other commitments in daily life (compare Becker, 1960).

When during the day do you visit this internet dating site (and when do you avoid it?).

- During weekdays mostly at lunch, and evenings. On the weekends usually before lunch and evenings. Not too early - seems too desperate. I don’t stay online too long but log on a couple of times in the evenings. (1626, woman, 40)

In what way do you think people in your environment see dating online as an activity?

- I think people understand it more and more and realize that it’s actually a smart way that works for many. [...] I’ve got the feeling that it’s respected as a tool to find love, even by people not using it themselves. (0791, man, 20)

The last statement is a way of presenting internet dating as an acceptable way in which to meet a partner. However, there are instances when it is seen as inappropriate, a fact which may lead to embarrassing situations. Commitment to the internet dating activities differs between “younger” (in between 20-30 years of age) and “older” participants in my study (40-65 years of age). Older persons tend to blend their personal commitments to other social worlds with their commitment to the social world of internet dating. Perhaps this is because there is a discourse about older people lacking opportunities to find intimate partners. They are considered committed to their work, children and so forth. Therefore, the discourse on internet dating effectiveness puts their dating activity in its proper context for them. However, younger persons have a harder time coping with the internet dating world in their everyday life, since they are expected to have more options and not to get “seriously” involved with someone else. They are also considered to have more spare time and to be used to get involved with others intimately through other means. On the dating arena generally, there are thus no obvious reason for these people to get committed to the internet dating world; in contrast to the older generations that are said to lack time or strength to participate in other worlds, the young seem to have access to a wider selection of social worlds.

The feeling of embarrassment is associated with the situation where one’s internet dating activities are exposed at a time when they are inappropriate. One takes other peoples’ attitudes towards one’s own activity, which gives rise to an emotional state; one’s tendency to act is thus inhibited (see Engdahl, 2005). Being desperate is associated with this situation. This is a situation in which the social worlds intersect and the boundary between them is tested. The sense of being caught between two worlds is at its peak. This in-between space is tension-ridden and the emotion of embarrassment indicates the boundaries between the two worlds. In order for internet dating to be in as little conflict with other social worlds as possible, it is supposed to happen at home, in one’s spare time, and in the evenings (see figure 2).

Why do you avoid visiting the internet dating site while you are working?
Because I don’t have access to the internet at work, and when I did have access on earlier jobs, it could become a little embarrassing if anyone would see me surfing sites like that, you’d feel slightly desperate. (1043, woman, 25)

**The temporality of being involved in internet dating**

Internet dating is also a temporal state. For some participants internet dating is also a state to which they return several times throughout their lives. Some of them have met a partner through internet dating before and then return to internet dating when their relationship ends. To be leaving the internet dating world means to let go of the internet dating activities. One exit point is when the person has found “someone”, another is if the activities do not seem to lead anywhere, or if a person lacks the time needed for a valid commitment do internet dating. When people for example begin to date and commit themselves to each other, the commitment to the internet dating site and internet dating activities loosen. They are moving out from the dating arena, and into another arena, the arena of love and family life. This shift also implicates a change in the person’s everyday commitments. People sense that it would be awkward if she or he was still involved in internet dating while building a committed relationship to another person. Probably, this is explained by the prevalence of monogamy in society.

From when you met, how has your relation developed?

- A big difference with dating on a site is that you are able to monitor the other person, in contrast to when you’re at a pub. You can find out how much the person is logged in etc. That’s one of the hard parts. If you meet someone, say at the pub, you wouldn’t know if that person was dating others or just looking for dates. Here it’s more up front. If for example someone removes his presentation, that’s an indication he’s taking your dating seriously. (0985, 30, woman)

**Discussion**

The focus of this study is on the social organization of internet dating as a common collective activity. An underlying research focus has been on the social significance of emotions for action and the framing of internet dating in everyday life. The ambition has been to open up for a greater understanding of internet dating as an everyday activity. In this section I will first outline some contributions that this thesis can bring to the social and behavioral sciences. I then present and discuss the findings of this study.

**Academic contributions of this thesis**

This thesis has been written in relation to a wide range of debated issues within different disciplines of the social sciences. Here I will discuss how the results of this thesis may contribute to those discussions. The results are not sorted in order of relevance.
First, in this study internet dating has been theorized as a collective activity. This has been done in order to understand how it fits into the rhythm of everyday life, as well as how internet dating is related to other dating activities. The number of studies on everyday life has grown in recent years in the social sciences (Sztompka, 2008). The focus of these studies is on social events or “humans action in collective contexts” (Sztompka, 2008, p. 25). Internet dating has not been theorized as a collective activity before and attention has therefore not been given to how it fits into the rhythm of everyday life.

Second, a social world perspective has in this thesis been used on new areas that are of concern to the social sciences. These are the internet and everyday life, as well as emotions and symbolic boundaries. Through this expansion of the social world perspective, three new concepts have been developed: (1) “Moving between”, as the continual process of moving between social worlds. (2) “Hidden activities”, which are the activities within a social world that are implicated and/or silenced in relation to the dominating activity of the world. (3) “Good examples”, which are people or things that increase people’s commitment to a social world.

Third, the perspective adopted in this thesis has also made it possible to transcend media-centrism. The focus has been on the actual activities of people, and these activities traverse the mediums. This perspective is particularly pertinent when it comes to internet dating, which only occurs on the internet but involves other sites for action as well.

Fourth, there has been a lack of studies in the field of adult education that has paid attention to emotions and informal learning. Previous studies on emotion only concern formal learning environments (see Stephen Brookfield, 1994; John Dirkx, 2001). This thesis takes a new route and opens up a new field for adult education.

Fifth, in the research on mediating technology the social formative aspects of emotion have not been given much attention (Derks, Fischer & Bos, 2008). Furthermore, the sociology of emotions has not focused on internet research (see for example Turner & Stets, 2005). This thesis thus is part of filling that gap.

**Doing internet dating in search for the future someone on the dating arena**

In this section I will present the provisional theoretical scheme of doing internet dating (see also figure 1). This scheme is the integration of the empirical categories that has emerged throughout the study. Learning to manage emotions appears in the center, while being in the “search for a future someone” is the essential social process that energizes this theoretical scheme.
In this thesis internet dating is studied as based on common collective action. The internet dating site under study is a “site for action” (Strauss, 1978). People are doing internet dating by carrying out internet dating activities. There are heterogeneities and differences in the actions and ambitions of individuals, but a common tenet is the common collective search for a future someone or something. This is the essential social activity of internet dating and it is clearly related to the quest for a different future state. In the present the emotion of hope is heralded by both the individual and the internet dating site. They mutually constitute this emotion as the basis for doing internet dating and being in search for a future someone or something. People are committed to the internet dating activities through hope. Hope is based on the resistance against and tension (a problematic situation) within one’s current life situation. But hope is also about something that is underway; it is prospective and imagination is thus of crucial importance. The future involves another person. The sought for relationship is a stable heterosexual and monogamous relationship coupled with the emotional state of happiness. People believe that they become “complete” if they find someone, while being incomplete is associated with fear and loneliness, an emotional reason for becoming engaged in doing internet dating. Happiness is something that people strive for when doing internet dating. However, hope and orientation towards the future are also constantly being framed as problematic in internet dating activities. Since the future is present in imagination and since it is not certain, people’s expectations are sometimes dashed. This leads to a problematic situation tainted by the emotion of disappointment, and this might lead to an abandonment of internet dating activities altogether (since these are built upon hope). In order to avoid this to happen, people manage their future oriented emotions by adopting an emotional attitude more grounded in the present. This is an emotional attitude of being loosely committed to the internet dating activities. However, this may lead to a blasé attitude (see below) where the person stops caring about their internet dating activities. The flipside of being loosely committed to internet dating is being too committed and acting in desperation. In all this the internet dating site provides a site for action while at the same time structuring peoples actions by “tuning and turning” their emotions and longings into something to create a revenue of. The emotions

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25 In the discussion I see emotions as based on the problematic situation, where one’s tendency to act has been inhibited (see above; Engdahl, 2005; Mead, 1982, p. 43).
of the participants are thus molded and made use of by the internet dating site (compare Strauss, 1992, p. 4).

As the future is present, it is something that the individuals need to handle or negotiate, and they need to appear as being in control of their future. The individuals are looking for a different life situation through searching for and later (perhaps) “finding” someone. There are two major positions taken: one that strives for romantic love (this position is more common among the younger participants in my study) and another one that strives for intimate companionship without cohabitation (more common among the older participants). The search is about creating certainty in the future, while the search itself and the situation that the internet daters are involved in, is often seen as uncertain and ambivalent. The search is oriented towards the social relationship with a future someone and many seem to expect that this relationship will mean happiness, certainty and a new plan for the future. One may then see internet dating as a space in-between, where the intentional transformation of one’s identity seems to become possible. The social activities involved in doing internet dating are, thus, intentional and temporary. They are intentional since there is a goal in the search for a future someone and temporary since they are construed as a way to overcoming one’s current life situation and are thus future oriented. Furthermore, as these activities appear as temporary and intentional, the ambition for each individual is always to make internet dating activities unnecessary and ultimately take part in some other activities. The social world of internet dating, based on a site for action that is temporary, intentional and transformative, in fact strives for its own destruction (from the viewpoint of the individual participant). But internet dating as such is upheld by the continuous activities of doing internet dating as well as by the technologies and discourses of the internet dating site. The collective action is destructive; the social world of internet dating exists because people need it as a stepping stone. The internet dating companies, however, of course have an interest in the continuation of internet dating activities.

Internet dating activities are structured by the internet dating site and the search for a future someone is staged on the website and in the broader situation. On the internet dating site, people have a common orientation towards dating. This makes the activities more centered on figuring out if the other person is one’s future partner. The structure of the internet dating and the shared activity of doing dating, create a sense of certainty of what the situation is all about. Doing dating in other social worlds may be a more uncertain business, since it is not necessarily the primary activity of those worlds. Also, by participating in the common activities of the internet dating, a specific version of doing dating and internet dating is promoted and learned by the participants.

The participants come to share a collective identity by being committed to the same type of actions. They are doing internet dating as individuals, but thereby they also act as representatives of that particular social world (see Strauss, 1992, p. 4). They also have to accord with or negotiate the primary activity of the internet dating world: to be looking for a future relationship. On the internet dating site, there is a shared notion that dating activities is the primary, if not only, activity on the site. This makes it a space where people have a shared understanding about what everyone else is up to. However, this shared understanding may work as a constraint and there is little room for flexibility and therefore few opportunities to create relationships that are not based on the dating script. Some participants state that they have a hard time coping with internet dating, where intimacy is required as part of an evaluation process. If there is no match, the intimacy comes to an abrupt end, since there are no other activities or shared commitment to fall back upon.
The emotions involved in internet dating must be managed. For example, too much hope might lead other members to conclude that their hopeful peer is of the desperate kind. Furthermore, too much hope also might lead to disappointment when the expectations about the future are not met. Such scenarios include meeting a date offline and discovering that she or he does not live up to expectations. People learn to manage their emotions in order not to hope too much. They learn to become relaxed and loosely committed to the internet dating activities. They learn not to use their imagination excessively, but stay grounded in the present and go with the flow, while being loosely bound to the activities. By managing one’s emotions this “management” could itself lead to an emotional experience. In other words, this management leads to an inhibition of one’s initial tendency to act, which thus produce yet another emotional state (Mead, 1982; Engdahl, 2005). In this case, the management seems to lead to a sort of blasé attitude. Georg Simmel (1990 p. 256) argues that under the rising money economy, the individual feels lost among the value differences and the individual "experiences all things as being of an equally dull and grey hue, as not worth getting excited about, particularly where the will is concerned". Simmel (1990, p. 257) continues: “The search for mere stimuli in themselves is the consequence of the increasing blasé attitude through which natural excitement increasingly disappears. This search for stimuli originates in the money economy with the fading of all specific value into a mere mediating value”. In the situation described in this study, something similar is happening; people are supposed to be relaxed and not to show their hopes and imaginative acts too openly. This restraint of emotion may produce the blasé attitude described by the participants. The participants are also encouraged to stay in the present moment, rather than acting on an imagined future. This management and the experiences of doing internet dating might lead participants to lose hope and leaving the world of internet dating. Other reasons for leaving the world might involve lacking the time required for participation. Internet dating is depicted as time consuming. At the same time however, it is also described as a time-saving measure in relation to other social worlds on the dating arena. It may also be a way of spending one’s leisure time. Internet dating, as a social world, must thus be worth doing (Strauss, 1982, 1984).

A certain degree of authenticity is also necessary to sustain social worlds (Strauss, 1982). To be authentic is to be in line with the shared notion of what the social world is about. I interpret authenticity in this situation as the ability to show one’s commitment to the primary activity of the social world of internet dating. However, dissent may pop up, though the participants may also hide their intentions if they are not in line with the primary activity of the internet dating site. Dissent could consist in looking for sexual relationships and reject finding a long term partner for a monogamous and heterosexual relationship. Internet dating gains legitimacy (see Strauss, 1982) by making its primary activity oriented towards “serious” relationships, making its participants looking for long term commitments. From a broader perspective, such commitments are usually ascribed higher value.

**Internet dating in the rhythms of everyday life**

I will here briefly introduce, discuss and sketch out three concepts that have emerged during the research process, that are related to the conceptual tool box of the social worlds perspective. Two of these concepts are related to the social worlds of home and work and the arena of daily life. The first one is “moving between”, which denote the movements between social worlds, and the second one is “good examples”, i.e. things and people working to pull in new members to the social worlds. These concepts will be discussed in relationship to internet dating as part of the rhythms of everyday life.
The third concept, “hidden activities”, will be discussed in relationship to a specific social world, in this case the internet dating world.

Figure 5 shows the relationship between some of the sensitizing concepts in this thesis and the three new concepts: moving between, hidden activities and good examples. One may actually see moving between as the essential social process in this diagram. However, this reoccurring daily life process is discovered only in the intersection of boundaries and is recognized by heightened emotional tension, which demarcates the symbolic boundaries of the social worlds. Segmentation of social worlds (Strauss, 1982, 1984) and other processes may also be involved. A good example is the boundary object, something which translates between existent commitments to social worlds, and pulls people into new commitments. The role of boundary objects is dependent on the authenticity and legitimacy of particular social worlds. A social world usually consists of a primary activity (Strauss, 1978; Becker, 1982). However, hidden activities of social worlds might appear as silenced and/or implicated in the data.

Emotions “define the contours of the multiple worlds that are inhabited by different subjects” (Sara Ahmed, 2004, p. 25). In other words, I believe that the problematic situation can reveal individual and collective commitment to action, and the underlying social worlds associated with those commitments. In short, the problematic situation reveals the symbolic boundaries between social worlds. This is of relevance to any a social worlds perspective. As Becker (1982) writes:

One important facet of a sociological analysis of any social world is to see when, where and how participants draw the lines that distinguish what they want to be taken as characteristic from what is not to be so taken. Art worlds typically devote considerable attention to trying to decide what is and isn’t art, what is and isn’t their kind of art, and who is and isn’t an artist; by observing how an art world makes those distinctions rather than trying to make them ourselves we can understand much of what goes on in that world (p. 36).
There has been a growing interest of symbolic boundaries in the social sciences (Michèle Lamont & Virag Molnar, 2002). Lamont and Molnar (2002, p. 168) define symbolic boundaries in the following way:

Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space. They are tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality. Examining them allows us to capture the dynamic dimensions of social relations, as groups compete in the production, diffusion, and institutionalization of alternative systems and principles of classifications. Symbolic boundaries also separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership [Epstein 1992, p. 232]. They are an essential medium through which people acquire status and monopolize resources. (Lamont & Molnar, 2002, p. 168)

Symbolic boundaries, in relation to social worlds, are usually seen as fluid and in a constant flux (see Strauss, 1978; Becker, 1982; Clarke, 1991). I argue that the role of emotion and the rise of conflicting demands for action in fact show the limits of the social worlds and create a situation of negotiation and sense-making among those interacting. I argue that the symbolic boundaries between social worlds are never articulated until a problematic situation occurs.

Strauss, Becker and Shibutani all agree “that a particular social world ‘ends’ where its distinctive discourses are no longer in use, no longer practiced” (Clarke, 2005, p. 55). I argue that the boundaries between social worlds only become visible in the points of intersections. Without intersections there are no possible means to articulate a boundary.

The points of intersection are where social worlds overlap and where tensions arise (Star & James Griesmer, 1989; see also Elkjaer & Huysman, 2008). Tension is thus a set of differing commitment to action (Star & Griesmer, 1989; Elkjaer, 2004; Elkjaer & Huysman, 2008). I want to deepen this line of reasoning and link it more explicitly to a social pragmatism and a Meadian framework. If the intersections are to be understood as points of overlapping social worlds, it is in fact in those instances that the symbolic boundaries between the social worlds are negotiated. Problematic situations, or tension, are a set of differing commitments that signals a symbolic boundary through the rise of emotion. A problematic situation is then understood as the basis for emotion and emotions gives direction for further actions (Engdahl, 2005; Mead, 1982, p. 43; Denzin, 1984).

Internet dating activities are fitted into the rhythm of everyday life when internet dating is mainly done at home, in contrast to when the participants are working. Internet dating is seen as safe not least because it is done “inside” (one’s home), in contrast to night life dating which is done “outside” (one’s home). Internet dating is something that often is done in people’s spare time and when they are at home, away from work. The internet dating activities are carried out through the internet. It is possible to visit internet dating sites at work. “Internet” is then something that translates between commitments to different social worlds; it is a boundary object and makes the dating arena and other arenas intersect. Boundary objects translate between social worlds and make it possible for them to cooperate or co-exist (Star & Griesmer, 1989). While doing internet dating at home and alone is legitimate, it is often a contested issue when it is done during working hours. Some participants in my study argue that internet dating at work would be unprofessional. Others argue that internet dating at work could lead to embarrassment. Embarrassment could then be interpreted to signal the boundaries between the two
worlds. This negotiation over where to put the boundary could perhaps be understood by the concept “boundary work”. Nippert-Eng (1996) relates boundary work to the realms of home and work. I argue that her line of thought can be adapted in order to consider negotiations between social worlds at their points of intersection. Boundary work is defined as "the process through which we organize potential realm-specific matters, people, objects, and aspects of self into 'home' and 'work', maintaining and changing these conceptualizations as needed and/or desired" (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p. 7). Future studies should give more attention to this process.

People usually enter and leave a social world based on their commitment to it. I have previously argued that people “oscillate” between social worlds in everyday life (Fürst, 2007). Admittedly, that oscillation occurs only when we study two social worlds in relation to each other. In any case, there is a broad social process of “moving between” several social worlds throughout everyday life. The concept “moving between” takes into account the processual and temporal character of commitment to social worlds. However, the practice of “moving between” is seen from the perspective of the individual. From the viewpoint of the interaction between social worlds, this moving is the actual point where the social worlds intersect. If the moving between social worlds do not pass through an intersection there is no tension between the social worlds, and they are seen as separated (but can be overlapped). In order to study the process of “moving between”, one needs to analyze the narratives of the participants (or other empirical instances) and look for their commitment to various social worlds, follow these commitment throughout the narratives and in that way identify the points at which the participants “move between” and what happens when that occurs. One example of this is the person that moves from the social world of internet dating into the world of work. This gives rise to tension and embarrassment, not least when the person takes the attitude of the other and its associated social world; it is thus that is the boundaries between worlds is defined – as part of a sense-making process.

Strauss (1978, p. 124) has in a similar vein discussed what he calls “orbiting processes”. These processes involve “moving from one to another [social world], retaining both or dropping the original, plus simultaneous memberships. Hence, there is a calculus of compatibility, neutrality, and incompatibility. This stands in relation to ease of movement, to probability of remaining, to marginality and to experienced nonauthenticity” (Strauss, 1978, p. 124). Movement is essential here and the different variations on belonging to social worlds are discussed. Strauss describes the different modes of being involved in two social worlds at the same time and also how one is able to move into a “new” world (compare Shibutani, 1955). But he nevertheless misses the processual dynamics of continually moving between social worlds..

Kazmer and Haythornthwaite (2001) state that individuals “juggle” social worlds in their daily life and that new social world need to be integrated into a set of already existing worlds. Such an

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26 Star and Griesmer (1989, pp. 411-412) also discuss oscillation between social worlds. However, they relate it to marginality and cultural categories. Their example includes being “black” and “white” and how marginalized people need to oscillate between these two cultural categories (note that they understand social worlds as cultural categories). Furthermore, the authors seem to mean that only marginal people inhabit more than one social world, though they recognize how this creates tensions (Star & Griesmer, p. 411). “People resolve problems of marginality in a variety of ways: by passing on one side or another, denying one side, oscillating between worlds, or by forming a new social world composed of others like themselves” (Star & Griesmer, 1989, p. 412, my emphasis). However, I argue that we all continually move between social worlds in everyday life, but that we do not become aware of this until a problem occurs, and this happens when social worlds overlap and we sense tension. Everyday life is not a seamless movement between social worlds. We move between social worlds and we acknowledge our movements when we begin to take the attitude of two or more social worlds, when a tension between commitments to different social worlds arises.
individualistic perspective however, does not take into account the meso-level interpretations of this process. Furthermore: juggling and orbiting are processes which see social worlds as separated; I see social worlds as always to some extent, or at least potentially, overlapping by being on the same social arena.

It is possible to think of the individual as having a set of varying collective identities associated with certain social worlds that emerge, disappear and merge in the course of the individual’s action. As individuals are representatives of social worlds, social worlds are brought into interaction. I suggest that the temporal character of commitment to social worlds is brought forward when we analyze the process of moving between social worlds. This is done by mapping various commitments of actions in narratives (or other empirical instances). Furthermore, this may reveal what I call the “hidden activities” of social worlds, i.e. activities marginalized in relation to the primary activity of a particular social world, related to implicated and silenced actors (Clarke, 2005). In the narratives analyzed in this thesis, the activities of doing romantic scams and explicitly searching for sex, were identified as hidden activities on the internet dating scene and in relation to the dominating primary activity of looking for someone with the purpose of making a long term commitment.

A “good example” is a person or thing that represents a social world and that is seen as admirable. Such an example can make another person committed to the same activities. A “good example” is understood as something/someone that makes a person overcome doubt about making a commitment to a social world. The something and/or someone “pull” this new person into the social world. In this thesis, the “good examples” were those that had found someone through their involvement with internet dating. For some, it is this that makes the social world of internet dating desirable. For example, as an answer to the question “How did you get in touch with the concept of dating through the internet?” a woman stated “Tip-offs from friends that has married and had met through internet dating”. I have also indicated that there might be “bad examples” that work to “push away” people from being committed to a social world. These pushed-away people might then orient themselves to generate, or engage in, another social world. These concepts, though not suggesting anything about social causality, might in future be used to indicate where to look for data (see Blumer, 1969; Clarke, 2005).

The commercialization of emotion and the emotional order of doing internet dating

The internet dating company behind Mötesplatsen has an economic interest in the participants’ internet dating activities. The search for a future someone and something is commercialized as the participants need to pay money to be able to fully communicate on the internet dating site. But there is resistance from non-paying participants that include hidden messages in their profiles so that they can be contacted without payment. The internet dating site is dependent on its members; without them there would not be any internet dating activities on the site.

The explicit ambition of the internet dating company is to “provide” contact between potential partners on the internet dating site. The internet dating company formalizes and standardizes the search for a future someone to make a profit from human emotion and longing (see also Arvidsson, 2006; Illouz, 2007). Attraction and love has been associated with spontaneity, but under the rule of internet dating sites, it is more and more converted into a rationalized mode of partner selection (Illouz, 2007, p. 90).
Illouz (2007) argues that what she calls emotional capitalism is on the rise; economic relationships have become emotional and emotional relationships have become economically interesting. In what follows, I will emphasize the second aspect of emotional capitalism.

The participants on the internet dating site perform a form of immaterial labor by imagining possible social relationships with others (Arvidsson, 2006). In doing internet dating, the participants’ hope and longing for happiness are commercialized by the internet dating company. The participants in internet dating are also performing something similar to emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7). But this emotional labor is not necessarily made in accordance with a company standard (compare Hochschild, 1983, p. 8). Rather, the internet dating company makes money on the essential social process that regenerates the internet dating world: the hope of future happiness. The participants could be seen as carrying out an immaterial emotional labor. This is done by imagining a possible happy future; while they are doing this, they are producing profitable content for the internet dating site through their internet dating activities.

I argue that social worlds are associated with emotional orders. Emotional orders are the emotional side of social worlds. In the case of internet dating, emotional orders are constituted by the participants’ partaking in internet dating activities and on the conditions for actions set by the sites and the situations in which the participants find themselves. Emotional order is not to be confused with feeling rules, which are rather stable rules for emotional display (see Hochschild, 1983). Emotional orders are more dynamic and change when the conditions for action change.

Emotions rise in the inhibition of one’s tendency to act (Mead, 1982, p. 43). Emotions, as felt experiences, are “corporal evaluative inhibition of the act, initially, experienced from the perspective of the other, on the basis of a functional identification with her or him” (Engdahl, 2005, p. 17, emphasis removed). The functional identification that is part of one’s self-formation is a bodily synchronization with the other person by explicitly or implicitly performing similar actions as the other. In other words, this could be understood as a part in forming collective action. As the attitude of the other is taken by the self towards the act the social dimensions of experiencing emotions is brought forward. Emotions thus have the role in the present to direct oneself to the completion of the inhibited act in the future (see von Wright, 2000, p. 98). For those performing internet dating hope is experienced in the present. As the current life situation is met with resistance the participants’ life situation could be seen as a problematic situation. Hope, as an emotion, orients the person’s towards completion of the act in the future. In the future lies happiness, thus the intentional character of experiencing hope is directed towards yet another emotional state in the future. This future emotional state is clustered around the discourse of a heterosexual and monogamous relationship based on romantic love. The shared experience of hope produces the so-called imaginary life of the internet daters, which the internet dating company makes revenue on (see also Arvidsson, 2006). However, the role of and the actual process of functional identification needs to be studied in future research.

People involved in internet dating are encouraged to feel hope, which is also necessary in order for them to continue with their internet dating activities. The internet dating company wants the participants to be committed to the internet dating site and produces, for economic reasons, conditions for hope and imaginary acts. The internet dating company makes it possible for the participants to search and hope for a future someone and something; it has no interest of people actually finding someone and leaving the internet dating world. The internet dating company wants the participants to
continue with their dating activities on the internet dating site, while the participants, whilst being in hope, want to end their commitment to the dating activities and start a happy and long-term relationship.

The role of the internet dating company is to, through the internet dating site, turn attention to and tune conditions for specific forms of emotions to appear. The internet dating company is thus part in the negotiation of the emotional order of the internet dating world. I suggest that the role of the internet dating company is to “fit” their version of the emotional order to the anticipated emotional experiences of the internet daters, which is being in a state of hope. In other words, they come to be attuning the internet dating site to the initial experiences of the internet daters. This is done in order to reproduce hope and orient people towards the ideal of heterosexual and monogamous relationships based on the idea of happiness in romantic love. The internet dating company has an interest in keeping the emotional order of the internet dating site static, as hope is to be ever present and reproduce the valuable internet dating activities. The internet dating company commercializes the feeling of hope and the search for happiness in a heterosexual and monogamous relationship. This endeavor is materialized in the social action that the internet dating site makes possible and allows. The emotional order of the internet dating world is both produced and reproduced by the discourses on the internet dating site as well as by the participants themselves as they are involved in internet dating activities. In that respect, there is a process of regulating emotions involved in emotional orders. The emotional order thus comes to be exemplified by the representatives on this particular internet dating site.

As the participants come to be socialized into the world of internet dating, they learn to manage, or to regulate, their hope, i.e. accept events as they unfold, be relaxed and stay focused on the present. The participants come to negotiate the emotional order and are both having “too much hope” (in example despair) and “too little hope” (in example disappointment). Both despair and disappointment are given rise to by problematic situation: the idea of the future is not met. The commitment to the internet dating world is based on hope. But being “too committed” to the internet dating world is then the same as having “too much hope” as well as “too little hope” is being “less committed” to the internet dating world. The participants need to feel the right amount of hope in order to be able to conform to the emotional order of the internet dating world. The consequence of going into too much or too little hope is to become loosely bound to the internet dating world and being in a state of blasé attitude (see Simmel, 1990 pp. 256-257). All in all, participants with a blasé attitude are loosely committed to internet dating, because internet dating is about the future and that future is hopeful but contingent; it is encouraging but also risky – it is a future to which one should hold on lightly in order not to be disappointed. They are in a position between hope and hopelessness.

Part of the commercialization of emotions is the crystallization of the emotional order by the internet dating company, where they try to fit the initial emotional experiences of the entering internet daters. By this the company is producing a circle of actions, where dating continues as long as there is hope. Money is created through this circle of hopeful actions. The company wants to reproduce these actions and since the company do not want to let go of the participants. There is thus a struggle between the fixating tendencies of the internet dating company and the experiences of the internet daters. Some people come to resist the involvement of paying to an internet dating company in order to get access to the communication technologies of the internet dating site. They are still part of the internet dating site as they are producing content on the site. They are part of the immaterial labor force that is the basis for revenue for the internet dating company. The immaterial labor is not acknowledged by the
participants and when they come to question their activities it is seldom the internet dating company they are focusing on. As the participants come to be giving attention to their life in the internet dating world, it is not possible to do in depth comparisons between the extent of commercialization on the dating arena, as well as in other arenas, and its various social worlds. This is something that could be of relevance for future research.

The participants strive for a stable life situation in accordance with the norms of monogamous heterosexuality and romantic love. Perhaps the expectations are set too high, which then may cause a blase attitude. When the normatively informed hopes are not met, the participants may feel disappointed and loose hope. The world of internet dating, at least the one under study, is oriented towards searching for a partner as its primary activity. This leads to social relationships becoming more fragility when entered into within the context of internet dating. People are evaluated from the standards suggested by monogamous heterosexuality. An array of emotions is thus invested in the other, as the means of fulfilling an imagined future. But people tend to come and go. The social relationships of the internet dating world thus has a temporary character and hold people together until further notice (Zygmunt Bauman, 2003). As no other kind of relationship is possible beside the romantic one, the relationship with a person ceases when romance ends. However, participants tend to negotiate this problem and also include the other as a possible friend. This then conflicts with the exhortation to be “serious”, in other words to comply with the primary activity of the internet dating world where the other is evaluated as a potential partner (with all the associated normative claims, hopes and dreams of the future).

This study has mainly focused on one internet dating site. Future studies should set out to compare activities on various internet dating sites (i.e. other sites for action) to outline their varieties and conditions for actions, as well as to analyze the social worlds of the internet dating arena in more detail. One assumption could be, as indicated by some participants in the material, that there are differences between various internet dating sites regarding their primary activities. This research approach presumes that internet dating is not bound to the internet. As stated by Shibutani (1955) social worlds depend on effective communication, despite whatever boundaries they may have, and the same thing goes for the internet dating arena. Further studies could, as has been done in this study, avoid a media-centric focus on the boundaries of certain mediums, and instead study empirically what people are doing. In such future studies, the new sensitizing concepts used in this thesis would be relevant.

We may once again dwell upon the thoughts of the protagonist in Proust’s novel Sweet Cheat Gone. Once the object of our longing is brought into our direct experience, we feel that it is not what we have longed for. The happiness, which appeared as a bright shimmering light of the future, diminishes as the sought for object comes into our “possession”. From this perspective our difficulties and constraints in life, based as they are on desire, will continually reappear.

And yet, however keen my joy at the moment of her return, I felt that very soon the same difficulties would crop up again and that to seek happiness in the satisfaction of a moral desire was as fatuous as to attempt to reach the horizon by walking straight ahead. The farther the desire advances, the farther does true possession withdraw. So that if happiness or at least freedom from suffering can be found it is not the satisfaction, but the gradual reduction, the eventual extinction of our desire that we must seek. We attempt
to see the person whom we love, we ought to attempt not to see her, oblivion alone brings about an ultimate extinction of desire. (Proust, 1930, p. 77)
Appendix 1. Copy of e-mail - request for participation

Figure 6. The e-mail sent out by the internet dating company.
References


