



GÖTEBORG UNIVERSITY

Department of Social Work

Report

Love and sexuality on the internet

A qualitative approach

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Göteborg 2006

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1. Introduction

This is a qualitative study about love and sexuality on the internet. Before I present the purpose of the current study in more detail, I will place the study in an analytical context by briefly outlining my theoretical perspectives. These perspectives, structural and interactionist, constitute my analytical framework which I depart from and return to as I analyze the empirical data. Additionally, I will introduce some of the prior research conducted on love and sexuality on the internet.

Structural perspectives

Since the internet became available to the broader public in the early to mid 1990s there has been a steady increase in the number of users. Some may have several computers in their homes with instant access to the internet through broadband connections while others rely on libraries and internet cafes where they occasionally read an online newspaper or check their free e-mail account - the variations are many. The internet can be described as an expanding web that connects millions of people around the globe. First developed for military reasons, the internet is now used for work, business, and recreation. Perhaps a parallel can be drawn to the development of cars where the first road vehicle was a military tractor. Later, vehicles were made to replace the horse and wagon in the everyday work but were also used for public transport and nowadays not many people raise their eyebrows when someone either takes off on a recreational drive in the countryside or uses the car for visits to distant friends and relatives.

Technological advancements have, in a historical perspective and among other things, connected us to various parts of the world in ways that have previously been impossible (Bauman, 1998; 2000). Sometimes for the purposes of war and colonization, sometimes for work and business, and sometimes for pleasure and recreation. We can travel physically to remote places by railways, ships, and aircrafts, or experience them from our homes through newspapers, radio, and television. We communicate with the inhabitants in these places through short/long wave radio, fax machines, and telephones. These inventions and their usage can be considered part of the globalization of the world and have mostly aimed at reducing the amount of time needed to cross a certain distance (Bauman, 1998; 2000). Bauman says that while modernity was recognized by its solidity (e.g., large rational industries that tightly bonded the workforce to the physical proximity of the factory site; distances between cities or villages were measured by how long it would take to walk there) the second/post-modernity is characterized by the opposite. The keyword is liquidity. Space is covered in no time; the bonds to one place are weaker/looser. Bauman (2000) exemplifies this by comparing two corporations: If you were hired by Ford in the beginning of the last century, you knew you would end your career at Ford; if you are hired by Microsoft today you cannot know where it is going to take you. Altman (2001) points to the inconsistency in the use of the term globalization and the definition of globalization, but one com-

mon agreement, he says, is that it both strengthens and weakens local and national boundaries. With the internet, it is easy to access ideas and cultures from virtually any place in the world in no time, even if the borders should be barb wired.

Altman (2001) writes that globalization is sometimes viewed as a further stage of capitalism, including more countries into this system as well as creating new institutions like the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. Globalization does not only implicate global interconnectedness, but also how communities become affected in local perspectives. There are several examples of how the internet has been the source for exporting and importing trends and behaviors, goods and services, from one country to another (Altman, 2001; Miller & Slater, 2000). Sexuality and relations are two central aspects of human life that, according to Altman (2001) and Bauman (2003), are affected by global development. Giddens (1992), who also recognizes sexuality and relations as central aspects of human life, does not use the term globalization but rather talks about the social/societal development of sexuality and relations within (as opposed to between) countries and cultures.

Historically, says Bauman (1998; 2003), events of which we were aware occurred within physical reach but with globalization we are exposed to events that we cannot possibly do anything about. We now experience a virtual proximity to events at a physical distance as we become aware of a world that we, by no means, can control or handle, and, as Bauman concludes, this inability to respond tends to make us run for shelter. The internet can serve as an example of how technology, again, has exposed us to an ungraspable amount of information, not the least in the area of sexuality and relations. What separates the internet from earlier technologies is that the internet opens up for a kind of interactivity that was previously impossible (while it, indeed, is possible to randomly make phone calls to anyone with a telephone set, this is not a very common way of interacting with others; we have learned not to use the telephone in that fashion). As a medium that allows this kind of interactivity (as opposed to the television which can only project (distant) events), the internet might be the tool for teleaction; to actually respond to physically distant events, a means that Bauman only ascribes to a few; the elite who have the means for such actions. However, experiencing distant events as close (e.g., earthquakes or war in the Middle East broadcast on TV in Europe) while they in fact are unreachable and impossible for one to influence (because of the actual physical distance) might be perceived as problematic and cause fear and ambivalence. Sometimes the internet is portrayed in this fashion; a global phenomenon we cannot control, predict, or influence as private persons. And, as both Altman (2001) and Bauman (2003) state, global problems cannot be solved locally. This, again, generates feelings of fear and insecurity. Part of the fear of the uncontrollable is mirrored in media when the topic is the internet and sexuality. According to various media to date, the internet appears as an infinite, demoralizing, and hazardous place filled with lies and deceit, unstoppable and uncontrollable, and a male dominated milieu from which women and children should be protected. Regarding relations, though, media more commonly describes the internet as the ultimate dating scene, where one's love of a lifetime can be found, or as a fabulous way of staying in contact

with one's current partner. This reflects a tension between desire and fear for a relatively new technology against which we cannot protect ourselves, a technology which we have difficulties to control. But it also reflects the more traditional (historical) perception of love and sexuality (for example, that sex is only possible and acceptable within an age appropriate heterosexual romantic relationship).

As mentioned above, virtual proximity and physical distance is a combination that is ever so present in our information society and Bauman (2003) exemplifies this again when he describes contemporary city life. Bauman observes city dwellers and city life to be a relatively isolated phenomenon. In the city, we are anonymous even though we are constantly surrounded by heaps of others. Although cities grow and more people move in, we tend to isolate ourselves from each other; insecurity/fear being one reason. Internet usage seems to fit in and to continue this development as more people increase their time spent online and, thus, decrease their time spent around other people, at least in the cities. We stay inside, in front of computer screens, which are far safer places than outside our homes as media holds true. However, at the same time we are using the internet to communicate with others to an extent that has never been the case before. We interact with absolute strangers just for the sake of conversations. And we answer strangers approaching us online, strangers that we would normally try hard to ignore, for example, on a bus ride. It seems like the internet isolates us and makes us more interactive simultaneously. As we (in a historical perspective) move from physical proximity to physical distance in relation to other inhabitants in our community, the proximity/immediacy we experience within established relationships change as well, especially in romantic relationships.

Bauman (2003) and Giddens (1992) mean that (romantic/sexual) relationships are considerably different today compared to what they used to be. Marriage today does not necessarily equal a lifelong relation and nor do people wed strictly because of economic (monetary) reasons. Marriage is neither necessarily one's first romantic/sexual relationship nor the last. Bauman (2003) and Giddens (1992) mean that relationships today last as long as either or both parties benefit from the relation and are thereafter terminated. Giddens labels these kinds of relations "pure relationships". Bauman, however, adds a consumer perspective meaning that romantic/sexual relationships are not final destinations, but consumer goods that when consumed become a repellent waste. The further meaning of this is, according to Bauman, that the bonds must be loosely tied so they may be easily untied and tied again. Of course, this adds an amount of uncertainty to the relation as few, if any, want to either become consumed or a repellent waste, and that there might be better choices out there available and ready for consumption. Furthermore, relationships need to have a certain degree of certainty and be of low risk for the parties to make any investments in them. These "loose" and "temporary" relations, and how they are managed, are exposed and described in various media such as television shows, newspaper columns and, nowadays, the internet and are typical aspects of what Bauman refers to as liquid modernity.

Sexuality was historically connected only with reproduction; to give birth to children who were predestined to become necessary resources in the families' every-

day work. Over time, sexuality was separated from reproduction. Giddens (1992) labels this transformation “plastic sexuality”. Sexuality was for a long time restricted to (heterosexual) marriage. At least for women, while men were thought to have a sex drive that was “too difficult to fully suppress”. Hence, infidelity among men was easier to understand and explain compare to the same behavior in women (Giddens, 1992). Today, the acceptance of sexuality has extended to include the aforementioned pure relationships. However, pure relationships might not always be romantic relationships. Sexual encounters might be occasional episodes, existing only for as long (or as short) as the sexual activity requires or sexual relationships that continue as long as the participants are sexually satisfied. Bauman (2003) labels this “pure sex”; sexual activities/meetings permeated by feelings of reliability comprised of temporary engagements without further commitments and money back guarantees if not fully satisfied. The one-night-stand, a single (spontaneous or negotiated) event, may represent Bauman’s term pure sex: to have sex on one occasion without love, romance, or commitment. Contemporary, modern, individuals are responsible for their sexuality; responsible to explore and to experience it, to grow and to nurture it. In the individualization of sexuality, masturbation, earlier linked to a vanishing sexuality, has become an accepted activity in the individual’s exploration of the body for both practice and pleasure. Pure sex is another way to practice sexual activities for individual purposes.

Interactionist perspectives

Even though sexuality has become more accepted when detached from reproduction and marriage, sexuality on the interactive level is still dependent on the surrounding settings in which it occurs. Goffman (1959) has described how various settings influence human behaviors. Situations that occur in these settings must be defined, recognized, and interpreted to evoke situation specific behaviors. For example, we have learned where it is allowed to engage in sexual activities and we have learned what constitutes sexual situations. Furthermore, we must recognize the other actors that take active or passive parts in each situation. Goffman (1959) uses dramaturgical metaphors to describe human actions and interactions in everyday life and although developed to explain face-to-face interaction, the dramaturgical metaphors are applicable in studying the internet as well.

Settings can be perceived as stages upon which we perform and Goffman (1959) divides them into front stages and back stages. The front stage is where we perform in front of an audience whereas back stage is where we may retire and relax. When we perform on these stages, we play different roles depending on the audience, and take on the characteristics we have learned to identify with these roles. Furthermore, we play these roles to attain our goals or to mediate specific impressions. To be believable, our acting and interacting must correlate with the settings and the roles we play. However, as the role may be perceived as believable by the audience, conscious or unconscious divergence and deviation from that role may cause disbelief in the audience as it does not meet their expectations. As we perform on several stages, we

have learned to play several different roles. The internet milieu lacks facial expressions, gestures, and properties that have to be recreated by text and, increasingly more common, graphics¹. Parts of the internet consist of interactive settings, or arenas, such as communities, web fora, and web chats (which will be described in greater length in chapter 3). The internet allows access to these arenas, these front stages where we can perform in front of an audience. Interestingly, these performances are executed while we are back stage, relaxing in our homes, in front of our computer screens. We may appear front stage and back stage simultaneously. In addition, we may play multiple roles in one setting as well as playing one role in multiple settings; we may improve, invent, and try new roles, as it is more difficult to evaluate role behavior on the internet.

Gagnon and Simon (1973) build on the aforementioned dramaturgical metaphors, originally developed by Goffman, but focus exclusively on explaining and understanding human sexual behavior. The foundations in Gagnon and Simon's (1973) perspective are the sexual scripts. Sexual scripts are, as the term implies, manuscripts that tell us who engage in sexual activities, what kind of sexual activities, with whom, in what kind of relationship and with what consequences. These scripts, which are learned, help us to identify sexual settings and interpret situations as sexual depending on the content and the actors. Each culture creates specific scripts, changeable over time, reflecting norms and moral standards as well as individual behavior. For example, some cultures may primarily allow sexual (vaginal) intercourse between two people, one man and one woman, and only within a love relationship. This means that those sexual activities not fitting the cultural scripts are perceived as abnormal and immoral behavior, for example two men having anal intercourse for pleasure "only". These cultural scripts also regulate a society's perception and understanding of sexual phenomena such as prostitution and pornography.

Another researcher who uses dramaturgical metaphors when discussing sexuality is Judith Butler. Butler (1990) continues the thoughts of Gagnon and Simon (1973), presented above, and she talks about the heterosexual matrix in which the norm is heterosexuality and deviance from the norm is perceived as abnormal, unaccepted and, furthermore, punished. In the heterosexual matrix two options constitute the norm: male bodies play male social roles and desire women and, conversely, female bodies play female social roles and desire men. However, these norms may be deliberately broken by engagement in subversive bodily acts; acts that challenge, parody and flout the (hetero) normative behavior. Performances and role taking are therefore central aspects for both Butler and Gagnon and Simon when researching gender and sexuality on the interactive level.

¹ By using a web camera one can broadcast live footage of oneself to one or more spectators and, thus, engage in interactions that include facial expressions, gestures, et cetera. Earlier, web camera usage has been sparse; maybe because of poor quality due to internet connection speed and/or because web camera usage exclude properties that originally made online interaction attractive, for example anonymity. Nevertheless, it seems like web camera usage is growing in popularity as a complement to the prior text based conversations. However, it is hard to say how this development will influence online interaction in the future.

Sexual scripts regulate appropriate sexual behavior in and between different age groups and there are sexual scripts applicable to different phases of life. Individuals often change their sexual practices, for example, when they enter married life, when they become parents, when divorced or widowed, et cetera. Sexual behavior may also change when coming out as homo-, bi-, or transsexual. The sexual scripts are often related to identity. For any sexual behavior to occur, however, the sexual scripts have to define the situation as arousing and to permit the individual to engage in the sexual behavior. Feelings of guilt and anxiety are closely related to sexuality. This, according to Gagnon and Simon (1973), can be both arousing and an obstacle for sexual behavior. As a result, sexual behaviors are often surrounded by silence and executed in privacy. When individuals find ways to be sexual and comfortable at the same time, they tend to internalize this behavior. The anonymity of the internet permits people to test and experiment, to transgress and challenge the scripted norms that regulate sexual behavior in face-to-face situations. Furthermore, it permits people to engage in “deviant” behavior with less risk of negative social sanctions. The question is: what implication does this have for changing the sexual scripts and the rules for sexual interaction in society?

Love and sex on the internet

Turkle (1995) was one of the first to observe sexuality on the internet while investigating Multi User Domains/Dungeons (MUD). These MUDs were arenas where people played fantasy games originally developed from the offline role-playing game Dungeons and Dragons. Elements of the participants’ offline worlds were brought into these online real time fantasy games, for example, wedding ceremonies and sexual activities. In these online settings, it became possible to comfortably experiment with sexuality, both sexual activities and sexual identities, as a part of the game. It also became possible to experiment with gender identities and many seemed to be comfortable exploring new, perhaps previously unknown, parts of them. The text-based arenas on the internet opened up enormous possibilities for exploration when gender, identity, and sexuality became detached from face to face interaction. Simultaneously, the discovery of online sexuality raised questions that focused on the problematic side of the internet, for example, infidelity, deception, and how children should be protected.

Turkle’s observations in 1995 were, more or less, the beginning of a series of studies of online sexuality. A substantial part of these early studies was clinical case studies and general speculations on how the internet would influence human sexuality and relations. Cooper (1998) suggests that the attraction of internet use for online sexual activities (OSA)² was powered by the *triple-A-engine*, consisting of anonymity,

² Online sexual activities and its abbreviation OSA are terms that are frequently used in this report and refer to a variety of online activities that can be related to love and sexuality. Flirting, seeking love/sex partners, keeping in contact with love/sex partner, reading erotic novels, viewing pornography, checking sex ads, buying sex products, seeking support in sexual issues, seeking information on sexuality, or having cybersex are all examples of online sexual activities.

accessibility, and affordability. The sense of being *anonymous* when online has an important impact on sexual behavior for many people as it provides comfortable feelings while accessing erotic material, shopping for sex products, or discussing sexual matters, compared to similar activities in face-to-face situations. Not only do more people than ever have access to an internet-connected computer; the content on the internet is accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There is an instant *accessibility* to online sexuality. *Affordability* is the third component of the triple-A-engine. If not offering a flat rate monthly fee for instant and unlimited access to the internet (broadband), internet service providers may charge a cost per minute fee similarly priced as a local telephone call (dial-up modem). For this expense, it is possible to access virtually anything on the internet. Furthermore, the prices on sexual items found online are, due to the competition between various sites, relatively low. Many times erotic pictures and movies can be found for free, either as samples on the World Wide Web (WWW) or through peer-to-peer programs. Later, the triple-A-engine was expanded by King (1999) who added *acceptability* to the model, meaning that the internet had become an acceptable way for dating as well as accessing sexual material. Tikkanen & Ross (2000) added a fifth A, *approximation*, referring to those unsure of their sexual identity who use the internet in order to experiment with sexual identities in specific contexts.

In March and April 1998, a 59-item questionnaire on internet sexuality was launched on the MSNBC web portal by an American research team. This first large scale survey included 9,265 informants and provided empirical data on those who used the internet for OSA (Cooper, Sheerer, Boise, & Gordon, 1999). In June 2000, a second study, using a refined and expanded 76 items questionnaire, was conducted on MSNBC. The population consisted of 7,037 informants and the findings largely corroborated with those of the first study (Cooper, Griffin-Shelley, Delmonico, & Mathy, 2001). The gender distribution in both samples was 85 percent males and 15 percent females. From this empirical data it was concluded that OSA users did not constitute a homogenous group. Men engaged in OSA to a greater extent than women and, further, men preferred to view erotic material while women preferred interactive OSA. It was also concluded that engaging in OSA posed a risk for problematic behavior for a small percentage of users.

The research that emerged around, and after, the time of these survey studies focused on specific parts of internet sexuality, for example: addiction and compulsivity (i.e., Cooper, Delmonico, & Burg, 2000; Schneider 2000), women (i.e., Döring, 2000; Leiblum 2001), men who have sex with men (i.e., Ross & Kauth, 2002; Tikkanen & Ross, 2003), sex education (i.e., Flowers-Coulson, Kushner, & Bankowski, 2000; Lunin, Karizanskaya, Melikhova, Light, & Brandt-Sorheim, 1997), HIV/STD (i.e., McFarlane, Bull, & Reitsema, 2000; Reeves, 2001), online infidelity (i.e., Whitty, 2003; Young, Griffin-Shelley, Cooper, O'Mara, & Buchanan, 2000), pornography (i.e., Fischer & Barak, 2001; Mehta, 2001; Månsson & Söderlind, 2004), pedophilia (McCabe, 2000; Fontana-Rosa, 2001), and research methods (i.e., Cooper, Sheerer, &

Mathy, 2001; Mustanski, 2001; Ross, Daneback, Månsson, Tikkanen, & Cooper, 2003).

During two weeks in June, 2002, we distributed an online questionnaire in Sweden through the Swedish web portal - www.passagen.se (Månsson, Daneback, Tikkanen, & Löfgren Mårtenson, 2003). Our study, *Kärlek och sex på internet* [Love and sexuality on the internet], currently the largest non-American study, consisted of 1,850 completed questionnaires with an almost equal gender distribution (55 percent men and 45 percent women). The instrument built upon a combination of the aforementioned American instruments and an instrument used in an earlier population based study of sexuality in Sweden (Lewin, Helmius, Månsson, Lalos, & Fugl-Meyer, 1998). The study answered questions on who was using the internet for OSA as well as where, how, and why the internet was used for OSA. Both similarities and differences were found between the American studies and the Swedish study. Previously, the internet was believed to primarily be a male dominated arena, but we found women to use the internet for OSA to the same extent as men. There were, however, differences in the kind of activities they preferred to engage in. Besides gender, age was another factor that proved important to consider when investigating love and sexuality on the internet. Although the informants were between 18 and 65, the sample was eschewed towards the younger end of the distribution; women were slightly younger compared to men.

We showed that men prefer to view erotic and pornographic pictures and movies while women prefer interactive activities, such as flirting in web chat rooms or web communities. In relation to age, older users prefer partner seeking activities while younger users flirt, chat, shop for sex products, seek information on sexuality, view pornography, and look for partners. The respondents claimed that they mainly use the internet for OSA for recreation and of curiosity. However, some of the informants, primarily women, use the internet to buy sex products and to seek information on sexuality. About one third of the informants, both women and men to the same extent, have had cybersex, (engaged in mutual sex talk for the purpose of sexual pleasure) and one third have met someone online who they later have had sex with offline. The vast majority of the informants experience love and sexuality on the internet in positive ways. However, for a small percentage, using the internet for sexual purposes can become problematic (Månsson et al., 2003).

Purpose

The current study, which is one part of a larger research project, aims to continue and deepen our previous quantitative study of love and sexuality on the internet (Månsson et al, 2003). The results from the quantitative study provided us with the users' socio-demographic backgrounds including variables such as age, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, geographic location, educational level, occupation, et cetera. Furthermore, we learned about the prevalence and distribution of sexual activities the users engaged in on the internet. These results were compared to and discussed in relation to empiri-

cal findings from previous international studies. Nevertheless, there are questions that the quantitative study did not answer. For example, the quantitative results reveal little about the users' reasons and motifs, self-presentations and interactions with others online, how they find, use, and perceive the sexual arenas and sexual activities on the internet, changes over time, et cetera. Therefore, the overall purpose of the current study is to investigate *where, how, for what, when, and why the internet is used for the purposes of love and/or sex*. In addition, the purpose is to discuss and analyze the findings from cultural/structural and interactive perspectives. The overall purpose is broken down into several sub questions, clustered around three sections that focus, respectively, on the sexual landscape, the actors, and the online sexual activities.

The sexual landscape

The sub questions in this section are: Which arenas on the internet are used for sexual purposes? Are there specific arenas for specific usage? What is the content in these arenas? How are these arenas constructed? Do they appeal to specific groups? The different arenas (and techniques) in the sexual landscape are identified and categorized. Based on interviews and observations, their functions, characteristics, and qualities are described respectively.

The actors

In this section, the actors are in focus. However, and importantly, the intention is not to investigate user demographics and who the actors might be (although short biographies are included in the appendix), but rather to focus on what the actors do online and how they do it. Central questions are: How do the actors navigate through the sexual landscape? Do they prefer certain arenas? For what reasons do they use the arenas? How do they present themselves in various online settings? What are their thoughts about lies and deceit on the internet? With whom do they interact online? How do they interact with others? Can individual usage patterns be discerned? Do usage patterns change over time?

Online sexual activities

The last section focuses specifically on the range of online sexual activities the actors engage in. The sub questions are: Which are the online sexual activities? What characterizes these activities? How are they used, when, and for what purposes? Why are these activities attractive? What are the consequences of using the internet for sexual purposes? Are there implications for love and sexuality offline? Is the usage of online sexual activities associated with any risks or problems?

2. Method

Before describing the research process and the data gathering techniques used in this study I will present my theoretical starting points that form the basis for my methodological decisions.

Adaptive theory approach

Hughes and Månsson (1988) argue that there is a need for qualitative research methods in sociology to be more theoretically anchored; for theory and research methodology to be used in conjunction with each other. The current study applies an adaptive theory approach regarding data collection and data analysis. The characteristic of the adaptive theory, which is developed by Layder (1998), is that it falls somewhere in between inductive and deductive approaches. Layder means that the contemporary gap between social theorists and empirical researchers has to be narrowed and the adaptive theory is a means to that end. Not only, says Layder, is this gap hampering the enhancement of sociology, but also the production of valid knowledge of our society. The adaptive theory is provisional and, thus, revisable and it builds upon already existing approaches. However, the adaptive theory is not a substitute, but an alternative to these approaches. A central thought for Layder is the relation to earlier social theories and theorists. To gain cumulative knowledge and for new theory to be developed there has to be a link to previous thoughts and thinkers and, consequently, there is no need for a clean cut break with the modernist era (as opposed to the belief of many post-modernists). Layder means that prior approaches to research and theory have been dominated by dichotomy thinking. The adaptive theory perceives those dichotomies rather as placed on continuums where adaptive theory serves as a link between what have otherwise been considered as extremes. Merging, linking, and making use of extreme positions rather than encouraging further diversifications in isolated clusters is a central aspect of adaptive theory. By such an approach, it is possible to focus on both behavior and structure elements as well as interconnections between life world and system elements. Furthermore, the adaptive theory is an approach to strengthen the link between empirical data and theory, which, according to Layder, is beneficial to both empirical researchers and theorists in the production of knowledge of the empirical world.

The adaptive theory is useful in several stages or, preferably to Layder, elements of the research process. With the adaptive approach, theorizing is not an activity that begins after empirical data are gathered, but is part of formulating the research questions. The use of prior theory along with fresh new thinking form creative atmospheres for finding new questions and orienting concepts in empirical areas. These orienting concepts are, like grounded theory's sensitizing concepts, only provisional and help the research move forward generating new concepts or sub-concepts. However, in adaptive theory they emanate from prior theory and not from empirical data as in

grounded theory. Prior theory may be grand theories (often associated with the author) or fragments of these theories that provide valuable background information, often related to more general thoughts on the empirical world. For data gathering, the adaptive theory is inclusive and flexible in order to maximize the possibility for theory-generation. Layder means that a multi-strategy approach is necessary when deciding upon research methods and data gathering techniques. Using as many of these techniques as possible increase the potential for new concepts and ideas to emerge from the data. This is sometimes referred to as triangulation. However, and importantly, Layder does not advocate methodological anarchy, but rather to use these techniques in conjunction with each other and appropriate to the research question. In addition, he emphasizes that the researcher should not rule out any possibilities a priori due to own preferences or paradigms.

Layder (1998) states that adaptive theory is most suited to study the aspects of social life that focus on the activity and the setting, and primarily the ties between them as neither can be understood entirely by itself because of their tight interconnectedness. However, they may still possess unique characteristics. In the current study, qualitative research interviews have been the main technique for data gathering. Below I will present the various aspects and elements related to research methodology. In reality, the elements of the research process were much more intertwined than the following presentation may (erroneously) suggest.

Recruiting informants and the sample

The informants in this study were recruited in different ways. Initially, two informants, known to the research group to have some kind of experience of love and sexuality on the internet, were contacted. They both agreed to participate in the project. One interview was conducted face-to-face (this interview was the only one conducted by another person than the author) and the other was conducted via the internet by using instant messaging software (which will be explained in detail below). Through snowball sampling, another two persons decided to participate on condition that the interviews were conducted online. By a request at the Göteborg university, two more informants were interviewed, one face-to-face and one online. Of these initial six interviewees were two men and four women between the ages of 27 to 40. Based upon this fact and on prior research, a decision was made to seek informants under the age of 27. Furthermore, the positive experience of using the instant messenger for data gathering led to the decision that this should be included as an alternative in all future recruitment of informants.

To reach younger informants a contact was established with Lunarstorm (<http://www.lunarstorm.se>), which is a web community directed primarily to younger people (the mean age is 18 years). Lunarstorm has more than 1,200,000 members in Sweden. Lunarstorm agreed to distribute a request to 1,500 randomly selected members over 18 years old. The request was for people who would like to share their experiences, thoughts, and opinions on love and sexuality on the internet. The broadly

phrased request was chosen purposely in order to receive the most dynamic sample possible. Further, the request read that informants could chose to conduct the interviews face-to-face, over telephone, or through instant messaging software. They were informed that the research was conducted under the ethical guidelines for research in the social sciences and that participation was anonymous. Additionally, a note of who the researchers were along with institutional affiliation ended the request. Interested persons were advised to contact the researcher on an e-mail address specifically created for this project (netsex@socwork.gu.se). This request generated only three interviewees (1 man and 2 women) out of 20 people who initially indicated their interest in participating. This was probably due to such circumstances as the fact that it was summertime, that schools had recently ended or were about to end, and that some who had claimed to be interested never acknowledged the times they were assigned for interviews. About eight months later Lunarstorm sent out the request again to 4,500 randomly selected persons over 18 years old. This time 88 persons replied and by judging from the e-mails, 14 were men and 74 women (even though the e-mail addresses could read virtually anything, most e-mail addresses included first and last names as senders). All men and almost all women who replied expressed a preference for conducting the interviews through instant messaging software (some had not included their preferred choice in their e-mail). Because of the unequal gender distribution, all men and the 40 first women were sent an e-mail to decide date and time for the interviews (the remaining women were sent an e-mail thanking for their interest in the project, but that they could not be interviewed at this time). Of these contacts times and dates were scheduled with 17 informants, 7 men and 10 women, the youngest was 18 years and the oldest 32 years.

Scheduling the interviews was done by e-mailing back and forth elaborating on dates and times. Most informants wanted to conduct the interviews immediately, which, of course, was impossible for one researcher to handle. However, because all informants wanted to conduct the interviews by using instant messaging software I was able to offer times from around 7 o'clock in the morning to around 10 o'clock at night all week. It was also possible to conduct interviews from any internet-connected computer. This increased flexibility lead to that all interviews could be completed within three weeks (five weeks including some follow-up interviews).

Totally, the final sample included 26 informants, 10 men and 16 women. They were between 18 and 40 (men 18-32, women 18-40) and geographically located from the north of Sweden (Jokkmokk) to the south (Malmö) and from the east (Stockholm) to the west (Göteborg). No one was married, but approximately one third said to be in a relationship at the time of the interviews. All of the informants claimed to have first hand experiences of love and sex on the internet. Brief presentations of the informants are available in the appendix.

Two main categories of informants

At an early stage of the analysis, the informants tended to fall into two different groups related to their usage and understanding of the internet in general and the internet for sexual purposes in particular. One variable that seemed to bear an intimate relationship to these observed differences was age, or more specifically, *generation*, which became an important analytical category. In the subsequent empirical chapters, some informants are labeled *the internet generation*. This somewhat vague and imprecise term is used to describe those for whom the internet has been an integrated part of their everyday life when they grew up as youths or even, in some cases, as children. Adults, researchers, and media often talk about and describe the internet as a new phenomenon, but for many in the internet generation, the internet is not new any longer. For example, an 18 year old in the year of 2005 who (or probably whose family) accessed the internet in 1995, when he or she was around eight, has had access to the internet for ten years. For the internet generation, this means that they have had internet access for longer than half their lives.

It is difficult to draw a distinct line between the internet generation and older generations, as people may have had internet access for various lengths of time. It may be easier to define those informants not included by this term; those who typically accessed the internet for the first time as adults and had no internet access in school (years 1-12). However, for the purposes of this study, this term does not have to be exact, but rather a flexible term referring to an otherwise odd group division based on a combination of age and internet access. However, it is possible that it in the future will become necessary to make a distinction between several different internet generations as well, depending on how they use the medium and what meaning they may ascribe to it.

In the analysis of the empirical data, I will focus on generational aspects. However, there are, of course, gender aspects of love and sex on the internet as well which we showed in our previous quantitative study (Månsson et al., 2003). Although these are not the primary focus for the current study, I will indicate some gender similarities and differences in the empirical chapters and return to some of the gender questions in the final chapter.

Instant messaging software for data gathering

Before describing the interview guide and the procedure, I will briefly explain the software used for data gathering in this interview study. Microsoft instant messenger is, as the name suggests, an instant messaging software which, when installed on an internet connected computer, can be used to chat with others through the internet. There are similar software, for example ICQ (pronounced "I-seeq-you") and AOL instant messenger, but among the informants in this study, Microsoft's version was the

most popular and, thus, used for the interviews. The characteristic for this kind of medium is that it is used for real time communication and is labeled as *synchronous medium*. Other examples of (text based) synchronous media are web chat rooms and some online computer games. The technique has been available for some time (ICQ was the first and became available in November 1996) and has constantly been improved, updated, and released in newer versions. Another characteristic of this medium is that it is only possible to communicate with those who use the same software, for example, Microsoft instant messenger users can only communicate with other Microsoft instant messenger users.

Microsoft instant messenger is software that can be downloaded for free from the various MSN web sites worldwide (i.e., <http://www.msn.com> or <http://messenger.msn.com>). The current version of Microsoft instant messenger is “7 Beta”, but for the interviews version “6.2” was used (Today there is also a version available through the WWW which does not require any software to be downloaded. Further, it is possible to use instant messenger through cellular phones). However, the differences between these versions are negligible in relation to the purposes of this study. The instant messenger is first and foremost designed for text based communication, but more recent versions allow the user to display a picture, add web camera and microphone to the conversation, use a variety of emoticons (facial expressions by using combinations of letters and symbols, i.e., “:)”, “:)”, “: D”, “: P”, “: (”, and “: I” to mention a few), send and receive files (texts, sounds, pictures, and movies), and play small games such as “four in a row”. Several options can be used to personalize the Instant Messenger and to customize the functions of the program (e.g. fonts, colors, backgrounds, logging conversations automatically, saving sent files in a special folder, security, et cetera).

After the instant messenger has been downloaded onto the computer, it can be installed. For the software to work one has to register with the service (in this case MSN Messenger), either by an existing MSN e-mail address or by a Hotmail address (free e-mail provided by Microsoft). It is possible to use any e-mail address, but then one has to create an MSN-passport account. To log on to the instant messenger the user has to type his/her e-mail address and a password. When all arrangements described above are conducted, the program is ready to use. To add friends on the messenger, one sends a request to other users (either by using a known e-mail address or by using the software’s directory to search among its users). If the other person does not use Microsoft’s instant messaging software on his or her computer one can let Microsoft send an e-mail with instructions on how to download and install the software. When a person is added to the instant messenger, the program automatically sends an invitation, which appears on that person’s computer screen, including information on who sent the invitation. This invitation can be either accepted or rejected. If accepted, the two people are able to “see” when the other person connects to the internet and it is possible to interact. It is possible to add several people to the instant messenger and all are put on a “buddy” list. To begin a conversation, one double clicks the name of one of the friends who are online at that moment. Then a “window” appears on the screen

where one part shows the conversation as it unfolds and can be seen by both people and the other part is where the text is written and sent by clicking the send button (or by pressing the enter key on the keyboard). With the Microsoft instant messenger, it is possible to engage in individual conversations with several people simultaneously, but also to include several participants in one conversation.

Many of those who access the internet through broadband connections log onto their instant messengers when they turn the computer on and remain online until they shut the computer down. When online they change (sometimes automatically due to inactivity) the messenger status to let others know whether or not they are available for conversations (preset statuses are for example; busy, be right back, away from the computer, on lunch break, et cetera, but it is also possible to personalize these statuses). Contrary to most web chat rooms with multiple participants, instant messaging software does not require constant presence and activity. On Microsoft instant messenger, every received message is indicated by sound (optional) and a flashing orange color and may be answered at any time. Because of its design and its features, it is possible to engage in conversations and still be available to other users (even if status is set to busy). Further, it is possible to engage in other activities simultaneously, for example surf the web, write an essay in Microsoft Word, talk on the telephone, watch TV, leave the computer to get a glass of water, et cetera. These possibilities, including the launch of a WWW messenger and the extension to cellular phones, have made it possible to interact with other users virtually anywhere anytime.

Interview guide

Prior to the interviews, an interview guide was constructed. Because of the rather broad research questions and a relatively unexplored terrain, it was decided early on that the interview guide should be semi-structured to avoid any limitations due to rigid and preset questions. As suggested by Layder (1998), prior theory, both formal and substantive, was used in the construction of the interview guide. It builds upon earlier questions used in prior quantitative research on internet sexuality (Månsson et al., 2003; Cooper et al., 2000) along with “new” questions stemming from interactionist perspectives and concepts on human behavior, primarily by Goffman (1959) and Gagnon and Simon (1973). Nevertheless, and as preferred by Layder (1998), the interview guide was flexible and allowed to change depending on the informants’ experiences, if new concepts or ideas would emerge, and depending on how each interview would unfold and, thus, contribute to its refinement.

The interview guide, which is divided into nine sections/themes, begins with a set of socio demographic background questions that were put to all informants. Thereafter, in the second section, the informants were asked what experiences they had of love and sexuality on the internet (and were given a range of activities to choose from, completely taken from Månsson et al., 2003). The answer to this question determined how the rest of the interview would proceed. If, for example, an informant said that he or she used the internet for partner seeking activities, this was discussed from a variety

of angles, such as experience of relationships, what arenas are used, what the interaction looks like, benefits and disadvantages of using the internet, how one arranges an offline meeting, if the informant has had any negative experiences, changes over time, online presentations, et cetera. As a consequence, the interviews take their starting point in the various kinds of activities the informants have personal experiences of, which, in practice, means that each interview is unique (although many informants have similar kinds of experiences). The third section focuses on possible changes over time in the choice of meeting places, interaction with others, in meeting people for sex (online and offline) et cetera. For those who had dated online the fourth area discusses casual meetings versus long relations. The fifth section asks questions relating to problems such as if the informants have experienced any unpleasant meetings, if they think they spend too much time online, if they feel addicted, and had any possible conflicts in their current relations related to internet usage. The sixth section includes questions on if the internet had influenced the informants' social and sexual lifestyles. The following section raises questions on what the informants thought about pornography and erotic material on the internet. Section eight brings up questions on self presentations on the internet; how the informants presented themselves and how they believed others to present themselves; concepts of truth and fake identities, use of language et cetera. The last section focuses on if the informants had any experiences of contact/dating sites and/or what they thought about them.

Procedure

Before each of the interviews, the informant was contacted by e-mail and informed that he or she would be added to my instant messenger and then, after accepting the invitations (which appeared on their screens), they were automatically added to my instant messenger's buddy list. Typically, I added the informants the day before the interviews were scheduled or, occasionally, early the same day. When it was time for the interviews (which had been agreed between the informant and me) I contacted them on their instant messenger and, after introducing myself, asked if it was the right person in front of the other computer (two or three informants forgot the times for their interviews and had to be rescheduled). When the interview sessions started, I put my instant messenger status on "busy" indicating that that I was unavailable to others during the interviews, but also to show the participants that my fullest attention. During each interview, a recent picture of me was displayed (and visible at all times) to the informants and in approximately half of the interviews the informants showed pictures of themselves as well (it was primarily the younger informants who showed pictures of themselves).

As suggested by Kvale (1997), the interview sessions begun with providing brief information about the project (which was the same information as provided when the informants were recruited), who I was, and my role in the project. The participants were informed that the interviews were voluntary and, therefore, included the right to withdrawal at any time. Furthermore, they were informed that their interviews would

be kept confidential; that any personal information they would provide would not be traceable to their identity. In addition, informants were asked if they would allow me to log the conversations for further analysis (which was accepted by all informants). Finally, the informants were also given an opportunity to ask anything about the researcher and/or about the study in which they were to participate. The majority did not have any further questions and among those who did it concerned the length of the interviews (an estimate had been provided in prior e-mail correspondence). In one case, an informant requested further verification of the researcher's identity (this informant was given a hyperlink to the university's web site where my name, e-mail, and telephone number was found).

As mentioned before, the interview guide had nine sections/themes that should be covered, but to what extent and in what order depended on what kind of experiences each informant had and how the interviews unfolded. In practice, the interview guide served, as the name implies, only as a guide; a guide that would make sure that all applicable themes were covered. While the interviews were conducted, I had access to the entire battery of questions that we used in our quantitative study (Månsson et al., 2003). In addition, I had access to a condensed version of that questionnaire and I had written down the themes that should be covered during the interview. Because of the broad research questions and the varying experiences among the informants it was impossible to use the interview guide in a structured way, but rather as a support to "semi-free" conversations based upon the informants' experiences. Occasionally I let the informants drift off topic to see if it would lead somewhere, which was the case in some interviews. I also had to bring them back to topic on some occasions by consulting the interview guide. With the exception of the background questions and the questions on their experiences of love and sexuality on the internet, which begun all interviews, there was no specific order of the themes covered. Kvale (1997) means that a spontaneous procedure increases the chances of obtaining lively, unexpected, and vivid answers from the informants.

This disposition made the interviews vary greatly in time, ranging from one to three hours, but most interviews took approximately two hours. Two hours of interviewing is a relatively long time compared to many face-to-face interviews. The reason to this is that typing messages is more time consuming than talking. However, because the informants could leave the interviews for short periods of time (i.e., answered phone calls, answered the door, got coffee, got something to eat, et cetera), the length of the interviews never seemed to be an issue for the informants and I was always able to ask the questions I intended to ask. When all themes had been covered, the informants were asked what they thought of the interview and the interviewer and if anything were missing according to them. They were also asked about their reasons to participate in this particular study and why they had chosen to do the interview via the instant messaging software and how they felt about using this technique. Before they were thanked for participating, they were given the researcher's e-mail address if they would have any further questions. They were also asked if their e-mail addresses could be kept by the researcher to contact them for further questions or to clarify parts

of the interviews if necessary. All informants agreed to this, and approximately one third of the informants were contacted a second time to finish the interview or to discuss a specific question.

When the interview sessions were completed, the conversations were copied from the instant messenger, saved as a word document, and uploaded to a password secured server located within the Göteborg University web. In addition, back-up copies were made and put in a password secured file on a password secured computer. The automatically logged conversations (made by the instant messaging software) were used as temporary back-up copies that were kept until all interviews were printed out. In agreement with the informants, they were removed from my instant messenger immediately after the interview sessions (with the exception of those interviews that were scheduled to be completed at a later occasion). When the analysis was completed, the interviews were compressed and burnt onto a cd-r and locked in a safe at the Göteborg University. Thereafter the word documents and the printouts that included the interviews were deleted and destroyed.

Some complementary observational data

In conjunction with the interviews, some complementary observations were made. Initially they were random and spontaneous for orienting and informing purposes. However, they became more valuable as I learned that I could instantly visit, for example, the specific web communities, web shops, or web chat rooms that the informants described or talked about. This procedure reminded of some kind of unsystematic participant observation, where the informants guided me to various places, primarily on the WWW. This had a twofold impact on the interviews. First, I was able to look at the arenas as the informants described them (and how they worked) which gave me a better picture of their descriptions. Second, I was able to voice my questions to the specific arena in focus, allowing me to ask better and more precise follow-up questions. These observations were not documented and, thus, not analyzed specifically. However, they contributed in their own right by clarifying and visually explaining parts of the interviews. I was able to return to these arenas for further observations during the analysis of the interviews.

Analysis

According to Kvale (1997), transcribing interviews are a delicate process that may have serious implications for the findings. Since I used instant messaging software, the interviews did not have to be transcribed as the informants had already typed their answers, which could be analyzed instantly. When an interview session was completed and the conversation saved I corrected any obvious misspellings and adjusted the order of any statements that were out of pace. Sveningsson, Lövheim, and Bergquist (2003) mean that people who use synchronous media sometimes get out of pace when they

type their messages and that the messages may seem confusing to non-participants or those who may be new to instant messaging. This occurs because it is possible for the participants to type at the same time contrary to, for example, face-to-face interviews where the participants take turns. To order these messages in practice I had to move them to get parts of the conversation consistent and readable (and to look more like a regular face-to-face conversation). However, because this study did not have a focus on how the answers were typed, but rather their content, it was possible to organize the interview printouts for such a purpose.

When all interviews had been conducted, prepared and printed (on approximately 450 pages), the analysis began with several readings of the empirical material. The first steps in the analysis were what Layder (1998) refers to as pre-coding and provisional coding. Pre-coding means highlighting or underlining specific sections, answers, or quotes that seem relevant and interesting without assigning them labels or categories. Provisional coding, says Layder, refers to the provisional use of labels and categories to order and classify the empirical data. However, contrary to grounded theory's open coding, provisional coding is not intended to generate as many categories as possible, but to start connecting the empirical data to concepts and ideas. In my case, during the first round of reading, I used the margins to mark interesting sections that immediately evoked my curiosity and seemed interesting. During the following round of readings, I started to code the interviews, initially based on the informants' experiences of love and sexuality on the internet, i.e. the activities they had engaged in. Gradually, over time, and along with interactionist theory (primarily Goffman, but also Gagnon & Simon) three major areas grew out of the empirical material and were coded *arenas*, *actors*, and *activities* which, along with several subsections (at this stage rather diffuse), made it possible to broaden the analysis from the initial focus on the online sexual activities per se.

At this time, I started memo-writing. Layder (1998) describes memo-writing "as a means of exploring and teasing out whether or in what sense particular codes, concepts and categories really are illustrated (indicated) by data" (p.59). Memo-writing may take different shapes in different research projects and for different researchers. It is important to notice that these memos are provisional (and often personal) and give an overview of data and, furthermore, how the researcher thinks about this data. I went through my pre- and provisionally coded interviews and wrote several documents where I tried to describe my findings and my interpretations of them. According to Layder (1998), it is beneficial to receive feedback from other researchers during the research process. When I finally was satisfied with one of the memos (they partly built upon each other) I presented it to a group of senior researchers who read it and provided me with useful comments. Later, the above-mentioned memo was elaborated upon and extended which lead to new findings and analytical categories. For example, by studying data it became clear that the interactionist perspective was not enough to describe and understand the informants' use of the internet for online sexual activities. It became apparent that internet usage had to be analyzed from a structural perspective as well as an interactive perspective to capture the (online/offline) dynam-

ics and (local/global) context of love and sexuality (on the internet) in the contemporary society. In conjunction with theorists such as Altman, Bauman, and Giddens new and useful categories/concepts for analyzing the empirical data were discovered, for example, globalization, virtual proximity, and plastic sexuality. Layder (1998) means that it is important to use behavioral and structural concepts when searching for the links between behavior and structure (which is an important aspect in adaptive theory).

Throughout the analysis, specific attention was paid to gender and age, both on the interactive level and on the structural level. Prior research shows gender and age to be important variables to consider when researching love and sexuality on the internet (Månsson et al., 2003; Cooper, Månsson, Daneback, Tikkanen, & Ross, 2003). A practical consequence of this can be seen in chapters 3 – 5. Many of the informants use nicknames as their online names in the interviews, but I have chosen to use names that are commonly associated with men and women respectively to mark when a man is talking and when a woman I talking. To do this division I relied on the informants' answers when they were asked about their gender. In addition and for similar reasons, I also indicate the informants' reported ages.

As the analytical and descriptive categories/concepts emerged, I selected quotes from the informants to emphasize these categories. Because all interviews were conducted in Swedish, it was necessary to translate the quotes to English. This was done in two steps. First, I made a rough translation that was more or less a direct translation. Thereafter I made adjustments to make sure the quote captured the meaning in Swedish and became understandable/readable in English. In some cases, I consulted an English/Swedish-Swedish/English lexicon and the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. However, even though I have put great efforts into translating these quotes to capture the meaning of them, they might have been slightly different (in words and nuances) if translated by another person. I could have presented the quotes in both English and Swedish, but because of the relatively few people who understand the Swedish language and the possible risk of making the presentation confused I decided to present the quotes in English only.

Choosing quotes is not an easy task. I have searched for quotes that describe, explain, and emphasize the specific aspects of love and sex on the internet that I discuss in various sections of the empirical chapters. The purpose has been to show the dynamics and the span of the interviews and not to present any quasi-quantitative results. Therefore, I have deliberately tried to avoid such statements as “5 out of 26 informants” or “60 percent of the informants”. However, I have noted gender and age differences, not for the purposes of generalizing the results to the larger public, to note qualitative differences and similarities in their reasoning in relation to prior theory and research. I have tried to use quotes from as many of the informants as possible (in practice 20 informants). Although all interviews have been used in various ways (e.g., in pre-coding and concept generation as well as in memo writing), some of the informants are quoted more often compared to others. This is because I found that some quotes better captured what I wanted to describe at certain points compared to others.

Validity and generalizability in qualitative research

According to Kvale (1997), the traditional positivist meanings of validity and generalizability have little relevance for qualitative interview studies. However, by redefining these concepts they may be useful in the process of producing sound research. Maxwell (1996) define validity as how correct or credible the research(er/s) might be. However, he means that validity has nothing to do with an absolute truth; a study does not have to be true to be useful and believable. This is in line with the adaptive theory which means that validity (and generalizability) increases by regarding any theories as provisional and therefore always revisable and reformulable (Layder, 1998). Consequently, there can be no such thing as an absolute truth. Nevertheless, there are researchers who have identified factors on how to increase the validity in different aspects of research projects (e.g., Kvale, 1997; Layder, 1998; Maxwell, 1996).

A study's validity is often related to various phases of the (non-linear) research process. This can be referred to as the study's internal validity. However, a study is also to be communicated to the public and within the research society and, in some cases, used in practice, which can be labeled a study's external validity. Considering internal and external validity, the researcher can only influence the former during the research process (the external validation of the study begins when the results are published) and therefore the internal validation is largely dependent on the qualities of the researcher in terms of craftsmanship and credibility (Kvale, 1997).

Kvale (1997) identifies three aspects of validation; control, questioning, and theorizing. There are varieties of strategies on how to control the results and there is no absolute agreement among researchers and approaches. For example, grounded theory with its inductive approach claims validation to be built into the research process with continuous control. According to Layder's (1998) adaptive theory a combination of various data gathering techniques (triangulation) and prior theory and research will increase the possibilities for valid research. Nevertheless, it is important that the researcher openly and in detail presents - as well as criticizes - his or her methodological and theoretical choices that might have biased the results. In the research process, comments from colleagues may be helpful in finding and discussing possible loopholes and sources of bias. In the current study, I have described my theoretical starting points and how my empirical data was gathered, prepared, and analyzed. In addition, I have discussed my interpretations of the interviews with colleagues who have provided me with comments and suggestions.

Qualitative research interviews are often criticized because the informants may not report the truth in interviews. Kvale (1997) refers to Becker (1979) who discusses truth in relation to photos: do photos tell the truth and, if so, what kind of truth do they tell. To answer this question we must ask ourselves what kind of truths we think photos are able to tell us. This questioning must be directed to research interviews as well. In the current study, qualitative research interviews are believed to tell us how the informants understand and experience their worlds, about which the researcher asks specific questions. They lend us their unique perspectives on how the

world may be perceived. Do the informants have any reasons to lie? Would they gain something by misleading the researcher? I could not find anything that indicated either among the informants. At the end of every interview session, the informants were asked for their reasons for participating in the study. The reasons they gave did not evoke any suspicious or strange thoughts. Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that the claim that informants may not report the truth in qualitative research interviews obviously applies to other data collection techniques as well.

Kvale (1997) argues that validating is not only related to methodology, but also to theorizing. By theorizing the results, they can be compared to prior theoretical findings, ideas, and the specific area under study. This standpoint is shared by Layder (1998) whose foundational idea is to facilitate theory generation through a pluralistic combination of theories and methods (practice). Again, by assigning theories a provisional status we may revise the theories (and, thus, the truth) at any time.

Another question often asked in relation to qualitative research interviews is whether it is possible to generalize the results to a broader public or not. Kvale (1997) means that there are three aspects of generalizing: naturalistic, statistic, and analytical. The naturalistic generalization is based upon personal experiences and generates expectations rather than predictions. The statistical generalization is most of the time associated with quantitative research that uses random (probability) samples drawn from a known population. In this case the sample is said to be representative and by performing statistical analyzes the results can be ascribed to the population from which the sample was drawn. If the informants in a qualitative study represent a specific population, it is possible to make statistical generalizations. However, this is rarely the case in interview studies, which means that we have to make analytical generalizations. Analytical generalizations are judgments about to what extent the results can be used to explain/guide our understanding of other events. These generalizations build on prior theory and research and by specifying what arguments the results build upon, it is possible for the reader to judge to what extent the results may be generalized. In adaptive theory, this is already built into the approach as such, but Layder (1998) rather talks about it in terms of increasing the results' (new theories) explanatory power. To increase the explanatory power/analytical generalizability in the current study I have used prior theory/concepts that explain human sexuality (Gagnon & Simon, 1973) on an interactive level and general theory on human interaction (Goffman, 1959) and I have used structural theories/concepts (Altman, Bauman, and Giddens) in similar ways. However, the reader has to make the judgment based upon my arguing.

Ethical considerations

Maxwell (1996) and Kvale (1997) mean that ethics should be of concern throughout the entire research process and not reduced or limited to specific parts, for example interviews. Furthermore, it is important to remember the origins of research ethics. The purpose of research ethics was primarily established to protect the individual

without a specific method or data gathering technique in mind, but rather how data had been collected in Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Individuals' rights had then seriously been set aside and violently abused and therefore, the Nuremberg codes were agreed upon to prevent further scientific misconduct. After this several ethical codes have been established, developed, and enhanced to serve different aspects of science on different levels, but most codes have primarily focused on the protection and the rights of the individuals who participate in research projects. However, these codes are to be perceived as guidelines rather than rules meaning that it is the researcher's task to make the ethical decisions and judgments in his or her research project (but in some countries, for example in Sweden, there are laws stating that studies of human subjects must be ethically examined).

To help making these decisions and judgments in this study, the Swedish Research Council's (Vetenskapsrådet) ethical guidelines were used. These guidelines builds on four requirements: information, consent, confidentiality, and usage. The first requirement highlights the importance of informing the informants in a study about its purpose and on what conditions they participate. They should also be informed that their participation is voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw at any time. This is also the content of the second requirement, which states that the researcher should obtain the informants' consent for participating in the particular study. The third requirement deals with the issue of confidentiality and advises that the informants' identities should be protected and that personal information should be stored away from unauthorized access. The fourth requirement states that any personal information collected in research projects can only be used for the purposes of research.

The ethical precautions I took in the current study have already been described above, primarily in the "procedure" section.

3. The Sexual Landscape

In prior research on internet sexuality, one common focus has been on specific aspects of love and sexuality on the internet. However, less effort has been put on ethnographic descriptions of the various arenas (for example as were done by Turkle, 1995, and Sveningsson, 2001, although they did not focus specifically on love and sexuality on the internet) which the actors use for online sexual activities. I will describe the arenas that together constitute the sexual landscape on the internet, what arenas are used for love and sexuality, and what characteristics they possess. This chapter will deal with the question *where*.

Nowadays, many put an equal sign between the internet and the WWW, but there is an important distinction to be made between the two. The internet finds other computers while the WWW finds documents and files (e.g., texts, pictures, sounds, and movies). Consequently, the informants in this study sometimes talk about the internet but actually mean the WWW. Since the introduction in the early 1990s, the WWW has developed and now includes bulletin board systems, newsgroups, and chat rooms that previously constituted arenas in their own right. This development has made people abandon these arenas as they have become more aesthetical and more easily accessed when incorporated on the WWW. Because of the incorporation of these arenas, many users now refer to it as the internet (see Wallace, 1999, for a taxonomy of various internet milieus).

What used to be labeled bulletin board systems and newsgroups on the internet can today be labeled web communities (or web fora) where users gather around a specific topic, a specific interest, or specific identity traits (e.g., sexual orientation, age, and gender). These communities constitute arenas on which their members present themselves and interact through either community e-mail systems or web chats or both. It has been discussed what characteristics a community should have to be labeled a community (see for example Bauman, 2000; Sveningsson, 2001; Tikkanen, 2004), but for the purposes of this study communities are recognized as arenas primarily directed to specific groups of users. Further, these arenas provide the users with possibilities to present themselves and to interact with each other. One important aspect of web communities that set them apart from other arenas (both offline and online) is the possibility to be present even when one is offline, a quality that I will emphasize and return to later.

Other arenas presented in this chapter are web chat rooms. These can be a part of communities, but can also be found on various web sites (e.g., news sites, educational sites, and web shops) Web chat rooms provide users with the possibility to interact with other users in real time (synchronous communication).

It is also possible to interact with other people without using the WWW in, for example, computer games (e.g., Everquest, MUDs) or by using instant messaging software (e.g., Microsoft Messenger and ICQ). In computer games players can interact with each other in real time while playing the game. By using instant messaging soft-

ware, one creates a network of people whom one grants access to participation in real time conversations while others not included in this network are denied access. Many times this feature can be described as a text based telephone. An example of asynchronous media is e-mail, which has a similar function as instant messaging software although the conversations are not held in real time. If instant messaging software would be similar to telephones in how they are used, e-mail could be compared with writing, sending, and receiving letters.

Furthermore, the sexual landscape outside of the WWW consists of file sharing programs. These programs are sometimes labeled peer-to-peer programs (e.g., Kazaa and dc++) and enable users to search for files (texts, pictures, sounds, and movies) on other users computers connected to the same networks (hubs) and to download these files onto the own computer. Although these programs often include a chat, the primary activity is to download files.

The last arenas in the sexual landscape presented in this chapter - bringing us back to the WWW - are web sites (with one or several web pages) as they are sometimes called. Occasionally these sites may include web chats, but typically, these web sites are non-interactive which means that the owner/creator of the web site who decides the content communicated to the visitors. The owner could be a private person, an organization, or a business. Web sites consist primarily of texts and pictures, and occasionally movies and sounds. They can be found either by typing the name of a web site in a web browser or by using any of the available search engines (e.g., Google and Alta Vista).

Web communities

Communities have the distinct feature that they separate members from non-members – them and us (Bauman, 2000). It is impossible to be a member and a non-member simultaneously. However, it is possible to be a member of several communities. All of the informants in this study are members of at least one community, which is not surprising as most informants were recruited through the Lunarstorm community (www.lunarstorm.se). Many communities are similar in their constructions, but are directed toward specific user groups. Although the requirements that must be met to become a worthy member of the various communities may be rather broad, certain members are favored (which does not imply that other members are not welcome), for example because of their age or sexual orientation. I will explain by using some examples from the current study. Lunarstorm is a community primarily directed to younger people and it has a mean age of 18 years among its more than 1,200,000 members. Another “youth community” is Playahead which has almost 1,500,000 members (www.playahead.com). Vilda Webben (www.vildawebben.se), another community mentioned by the informants, welcomes members over 15 years old, but states that it is a community primarily for people older than 25 years (and it also has a mean age of 25 years among the more than 700,000 members). Qruiser (www.qx.se and www.qruiser.se) is a community that focuses on non-heterosexual members and con-

sists (at the first glance the surprisingly distribution) of 30 percent homosexuals, 20 percent bisexuals, 17 percent heterosexuals, 15 percent experimental, 11 percent others/do not know, and 2 percent queers. Sylvia has almost 42,000 members and is a community for lesbian women. Helgon (www.helgon.net) is a community that focuses on people between 16 and 40 years who like alternative music and alternative clothing (synth, hard rock, goth, punk, and alternative). SprayDate (www.spraydate.se) and Match (www.match.com) are two examples of communities for single men and women who are looking for partners, friends, and flirts and these communities have approximately 550,000 and 300,000 members respectively.

The most common functions in communities are presentation sites (which may be referred to as personal “home pages”) with guest books, friend lists, mailbox system, and diaries. Other functions can be interest clubs, discussion fora, picture galleries, member search, and chat rooms. When logging in to a community it is possible to communicate with other logged in members in real time. It is also possible to search for other members of the community by using a search function. In most communities, these search functions are very sophisticated allowing the members to search for other members based on, for example, geographic location, gender, sexual orientation, length, eye color, and interest.

The activity in these communities is immense. Playahead states on its web site that in one regular afternoon there are about 25,000 members logged in at the same time. This number equals the population of a smaller Swedish city. As mentioned above, it is possible to be present in a community even when offline. Because all members have access to other members’ presentation pages and guest books at all times it is possible to initiate a contact – for example by sending a message or writing in the guest book - with someone who is currently offline. When online again, that member can see who has visited the site and read their messages. In some communities, the visitor automatically leaves a trace on the visited pages (consisting of their user name, online status, and a date stamp). The construction of web communities allows members to be virtually present around the clock and at the same time be able to fit their real time presence according to other commitments and obligations as well as to divide their time between several communities. Arenas with this quality are quite different from the arenas described by Goffman (1959) in the respect that the latter demand the physical presence of actors. Once the actors leave the stage, the show has come to an end and the audience will leave too; the next show is not to start before the actors have re-entered the stage and the audience returns. On the internet in web communities, the actors may physically leave the stage while the show continues; it is possible to take part of their presented characters/identities even if they themselves are not physically present. In the end, this makes web communities more time efficient compared to, for example, web chat rooms.

Different communities for different purposes with different participants

Not only do the communities favor certain members because of their age or sexual preferences as mentioned above, member characteristics or demographic backgrounds so to speak, but the members of the communities are also united or separated from each other by the purposes of the communities in question. The communities mentioned by the informants in this study can be divided into three categories: friends network communities, interest communities, and dating communities. Lunarstorm and Playahead aim at younger ages while VildaWebben claims to be for those above 25 years. However, the concept for both these communities is to meet and make friends online. Qruiser and Helgon can be labeled interest communities where Qruiser focuses on the non-heterosexual community and Helgon focuses on specific tastes in music and clothing. On Spray Date and Match the outspoken purpose is dating/partner seeking activities that will result in offline meetings and offline relationships. The division of communities into categories does not make them absolute or static. For example, love sexual contacts are initiated within various kinds of communities. However, as will be discussed below, sexuality is more or less regulated in any kind of web communities. A difference between web communities is that in those aiming at younger age groups (e.g., Lunarstorm and Playahead) the members often interacts with members they also know offline compared to members of other web communities who more often interact with people they have gotten to know online. This difference can largely be related to age.

Becoming a member of a community

To become a member of a community one has to register a nickname (user name) and choose a password. A nickname can sometimes be one's real name or a fantasy name that can allude to almost anything (e.g., "angelina23" or "want to have cybersex"). Occasionally, the nickname reveals something that is in line with the focus of the community, for example in a dating community where age and gender may be incorporated in the nickname. For others, the nickname may reveal something about one's interest or some personality characteristic (e.g., "rockmusicrules" or "mr.niceguy"). Some treat their nicknames as trademarks and register them in several communities to make them unavailable to other people. This is to protect their nicknames from misuse and to keep them connected with their identities only (See Sveningsson, 2001, pp. 131-134, and Tikkanen & Ross, 2003, for a further discussion on the use of nicknames). Cecilia, 20, explains her usage of nicknames:

C: I have my specific nickname which is "Cecilia". I've had that nick since 1999 I think. There's even a TV-show named that now! I've been to festivals where people have asked me "are you Cecilia who have that web page?" I call myself Cecilia online and my friends even call me that IRL sometimes...I'm like "Cecilia the one"! So therefore it's boring and tough if

someone “steals” your nickname and wanders around on different places on the Net and others might believe it’s me or something like that.

Registering nicknames in several communities is not only a strategy of protection. Primarily, informants register themselves because they are interested in the content and functions of the communities. Cecilia continues:

C: I am a member of most communities! Mostly because I want to “register my nickname” everywhere...I am only active on Helgon and Lunarstorm.

I: Ok, that seems smart! Do you share the time equally between the two?

C: No. I am logged in all day/evening on Helgon! I visit Lunarstorm 1-3 times a day just to check if I have got something new.

I: Ok but when we talk about flirting and partner seeking activities, it’s Helgon?

C: Yes, more people who are like me there, music and so on...I am only a member of Lunarstorm because I have distant friends who I can reach only through Lunarstorm.

However, it is also possible for one person to register several nicknames in one community. Some communities are continuously removing inactive accounts and, thus, a person who has several nicknames registered has to keep them active. Above, Cecilia says that she is active in one community while she uses the other to stay in contact with friends. By having multiple memberships, it is possible to use communities for different purposes. This is an example of how members manage their presence in more than one community simultaneously. Another example on how multiple memberships are used is given by Jimmy, 18, who is a member of Lunarstorm and Qruiser:

I: If you would compare the two communities...what would that look like...the difference so to speak?

J: You don’t really try to pick up people on Lunarstorm...because everything is so not serious there...but on Qruiser everything is very serious...there are people who have like three or four dates at the same time...Lunarstorm is more like a friends site.

I: Ok, that’s interesting...can you tell me more?

J: Most people are members of Lunarstorm which makes it a great place for keeping in touch...and there you hang out with your friends...it’s a friends site...

I: Friends you already know?

J: Exactly...Qruiser is a more sexual site...there are many who seek sex contacts...but of course you chat with friends as well.

I: If you would describe how you use Qruiser in relation to Lunarstorm...what does it look like on Qruiser for you?

J: Qruiser is straight forward so to speak...or in most cases at least... There a conversation starts with someone saying “Hi good looking boy/girl!”...you get like three-four mails like that each month or so...on Lunar[storm] it’s like all friends in the beginning...then it moves slowly forward.

Jimmy experiences the seriousness to vary between the two communities. He means that a serious community is characterized by members dating each other while a non-

serious community is a place to “hang out” and chat with friends. For Jimmy, Quiser also represents an anonymous arena where it is possible to make sexual contacts, which is not the case in the Lunarstorm community. Jimmy’s distinction between the characteristics of a serious and a non-serious community is quite contrary to how other informants talk about seriousness. They consider online dating and romance to be serious, while sexual inquiries and sex dates are considered non-serious, which represents a more traditional division between love and sex.

Rules and regulations

The fact that you have to be a member of a community to gain access to it means that non-members are fenced off, walls between them and us are erected and guarded and no one is let in without applying for membership. However, as both Bauman, 2000, and Goffman, 1959, write, the settings/communities are accompanied with sets of rules that produce desired behavior among their members and, consequently, protect their members from possible fears within the communities; fears produced by fellow members. By becoming a member, one also accepts to follow the rules of the community and if one breaks the rules, the membership may be temporary or permanently terminated. These rules vary between communities, but usually they deal with the very same legal issues (drugs, prostitution, racism, and copyright issues) as in offline communities and societies. Interestingly, many web communities have found the need to establish specific regulations regarding sexuality. In some communities, sexually explicit language and sexually explicit pictures are forbidden. For example, VildaWebben states that to become (and continue to be) a member of the community, one must not use sexually explicit language, publish pornographic pictures or texts, e-mail sexual hints, ask questions about sex, engage in cybersex, ask/write about sex organs, describe sexual preferences/desires, offer sexual services, use presentation page as sex ad, openly present sex related interests/preferences, or use sex related nicknames. Lunarstorm is not as explicit as VildaWebben, but state that pornographic texts and pictures are prohibited as is sexual harassment. These prohibitions are not specified by Lunarstorm (except from what is stated in the law), but rather lies in the eye of the beholder.

Quiser also regulates sexuality. However, their rules are quite different from those on VildaWebben. Quiser states that sexual contacts between children (under 15 years) and adults (over 15 years) are illegal and unacceptable, incest and prostitution is illegal and unacceptable, sexual pictures must portray people over 18 years, even though not illegal (in all countries), no pictures of animal sex are allowed, and no homo- or transphobia is allowed. Quiser concludes that every human is unique regarding fantasies and dreams about love and sex. Further, those who do not accept a specific member’s sexual desire or expression do not have to visit his or her site.

SprayDate warns their members about people pretending to be someone else (potential stalkers) and tell their members to be careful with their addresses and telephone numbers. They also give advice for offline dating. SprayDate encourage their

members to report anything that can be labeled as child pornography, but also “disgusting pictures”. Neither is defined on the web site. Alongside with the rules about child pornography SprayDate state that the members have to be above 16 years and they have incorporated a function making it impossible to search for anyone younger than 18 years old.

With one exception, the aforementioned communities’ regulations of pornography represent a politically correct view and something that their members have to be protected from. An interpretation of this is that without rules and regulations, the owners of these communities expect a presence of pornographic pictures and texts that would affect their members negatively. The Quiser community approaches pornography in a different way by leaving it to their members to decide what they want to consume as long as it is within the national legal framework. These, quite opposite, directions mark a clear distinction between heterosexual and non-heterosexual communities.

Besides pornography in particular, sexuality is in some communities regulated within the love complex where sex is possible only within a romantic relationship. Vilda Webben with its older population represents a more traditional view in this sense and therefore has the need to be very specific in its distinction between sexual relationships and friendships. By emphasizing friendship, they oppose the other communities mentioned in this section. In some other sense Vilda Webben at the same time represents a refuge for those who want to escape the dating sites and various sexual interactions.

Web chat rooms

Web chat rooms are places on the WWW where people can meet and interact with each other in real time. Goffman (1959), Bauman (2000, 2003), and others have described how we have learned not to talk to strangers; that our movement within our communities/societies is guided by the constant avoidance of situations where we might be forced to interact with complete strangers. We do not randomly approach unknown people to engage in a conversation as that behavior would appear rather strange to the one approached as well as to other bystanders. However, in web chat rooms, this would not constitute improper behavior (not implying that there are no rules for web chat rooms/web chat communication), quite the contrary, not engaging in any conversations might be seen as suspect behavior. Web chat rooms, varying in size, can be a part of a web community, a news site, or a web portal. Adding the possibility to chat in real time on a web site increases the value of that site (Månsson & Söderlind, 2004). A distinction can be made between chat rooms accessible to community members and chat rooms accessible to anyone – open chat rooms. A community often has other functions for interactions and may not prioritize a web chat. While a lot of the communication within a community uses the community mailbox system, a chat room demands continuous attention from the participants because all communication occurs in real time. Sveningsson (2001) has described the participants of a web chat room as

well as how they interact with each other. She finds different types of participants, how they form a group with boundaries framing this group of participants from other occasional visitors as well as other groups. Again, web chats, as a technique for real time communication, followed in the footsteps from the earlier multi user dungeons/domains, which became available to a larger public when introduced on the WWW. However, the current trend is that chat rooms are becoming less popular in relation to communities and the use of instant messaging software (This trend does not only regard the transition from web chat rooms to instant messaging, but can be related to the overall development of arenas on the internet. I will discuss this development in the end of this chapter). In addition, instead of becoming members or faithful followers of specific chat rooms as described by Sveningsson (2001), people now become members of communities and only occasionally visit open web chats. Furthermore, there seems to be a generational aspect of the use of web chat rooms. On the Aftonbladet web site, a newspaper site with web chat rooms, it is possible to see the participants and more than half of all participants join chats specifically aimed at people over 30 years (as observed on a weekday in February 2005). Nonetheless, web chat rooms are still places for love and sexuality for people of all ages. Alicia, 19, met her girlfriend in a web chat room:

A: I met my partner online...

I: Were you looking for a partner? Before the two of you met?

A: It wasn't meant to be like that...but I was flirting =>

I: Where was that? What site?

A: Aftonbladet chat [news site]

I: Have you met other people online whom you later met IRL?

A: No...not that I'm aware of...

I: I meant people you were aware of...how did it happen when you and your girlfriend met?

A: No...usually I'm never on the Aftonbladet site, but one day I was bored and went there. She had trouble with a friend...then we moved to msn messenger and then it went really fast, she came to visit me in a week.

The Aftonbladet web chat rooms are open to anyone and are places where one can spend some time chatting with the other participants who enter and leave the chat room throughout the day. As Sveningsson (2001) describes, the conversations in web chat rooms can be both playful and serious. Alicia, who entered the chat room because she was bored, became involved in a serious conversation with a girl who had trouble with a friend. After a while, they left the open chat room to continue their conversation in private. At a later stage, they became interested in each other, which in turn lead to an offline relationship. For Alicia and other informants open web chats constitute platforms on which contacts with other participants are initiated, but topics considered private are talked about in private and not in the open web chat. The most popular choice among the informants in this study is to talk in private through MSN Messenger or ICQ.

Camilla, 21, is a regular visitor to web chat rooms. She has met five men offline who she first met in web chat rooms.

C: Let's say you meet on Aftonbladet, and then you chat via msn messenger for some time and realize that it would be fun to meet IRL, and then you meet.

I: Does it take long from meeting someone on Aftonbladet until you meet IRL?

C: It's different, but most often a month or so.

I: What makes you "interested" in a certain guy online? What makes you move to msn messenger for example?

C: You move on to msn messenger mostly because there are incredibly disturbing persons on Aftonbladet. But you get interested in someone because you like the same things and have the same sense of humor I guess and so on...

I: Tell me about those disturbing persons...who are they and what makes them disturbing according to you?

C: They send very sexually related messages

I: What do the messages say? Any examples?

C: Some tell very detailed stories about what they would like to do with you and others are seeking horny willing inferior girls...

I: Do you find it uncomfortable?

C: Not uncomfortable but disgusting.

I: How do you deal with it?

C: Usually I ignore them.

The "disturbing" persons makes Camilla prefer to go elsewhere when she finds someone she becomes interested in. In relation to Sveningsson's (2001) different web chat users, these persons mentioned by Camilla would be labeled "sex maniacs", who only participate for the purpose of finding a cybersex partner. However, Camilla is able to ignore these "sex maniacs" and continues to use web chats for pleasure and to find men for offline dates. Sveningsson's (2001) informants did not use web chats for offline dates (although it might have occurred occasionally anyway) but used it primarily for the purpose of online conversation and, thus, emphasized the importance of the online relationships compared with offline dittos.

In most web chat rooms, one does not know the other participants with the exception of those who usually participate in the same chat room. Knowing someone in this regard means that participants are recognized by their nicknames and any information relating to them. Sveningsson (2001) writes that an important aspect of a web chat is to know the other participants. In the larger web chats with several hundred members, this may mean to know the participants of a specific subgroup. Sandra, 18, claims that she knows those whom she chats with, but they are only online acquaintances:

S: I write messages in the public chat and later it can be private messages and often msn messenger at a later stage.

I: Would you say that's the regular way for it to happen?

S: Yes.

I: Are you looking for someone special there? Do you know these people beforehand?
 S: I know those I usually chat with.
 I: Ok, do you meet them online exclusively or do you know them IRL as well?
 S: Online only.
 I: Are you looking for a partner in the public chat?
 S: No, I'm searching for guys and then I filter.
 I: Can you elaborate on "search and filter"?
 S: You ask for guys in the right age range and things you like...then you get some answers and if it's "serious" answers maybe you can talk private with them.
 I: I see...what's right age range for you?
 S: Between 20-30.
 I: Are there people of all ages where you chat? Do you find guys in the ages you look for?
 S: No, most of the time those who send me messages are older or not serious.
 I: You mentioned that before...what's in those messages?
 S: Well, they want sex and so on.
 I: What do you do then?
 S: I tell them I'm not interested or I ignore them.

Sandra has developed a technique on how to find people to chat with based on age, sex, and "seriousness". When she finds a match, she may consider chatting in private with them. However, many times she gets messages from the "sex maniacs" mentioned above, which she considers non-serious, and those who are older than what she prefers. As mentioned by other informants she rejects those who only send sexual messages. She says that most of those who get rejected get irritated. Some continue to send their messages while others just give up.

The seriousness is an important aspect for Sandra when she logs on to web chat rooms. She means that serious men tell something about themselves and ask questions about her. In most chat rooms, it is possible to send private messages and those who are "seriously" interested in chatting with her send private messages immediately. By evaluating the content in the messages she gets she tries to get a feeling if it is a serious and honest person or not. Most important in Sandra's evaluation, is whether they remember her from one day to another and continue to chat with each other over a period of time or not.

Role Playing Games

Role playing games was one of the first ways to interact with people around the world through the internet. Those who participated in these games, which were based on the game Dungeons and Dragons, created online role characters who lived in a fantasy environment. These games were labeled multi user domains/dungeons and were text based. By playing the games, the participants used their characters to experience adventures with other participants. The environment, as well as the characters, had to be described in text. It was in role playing games on the internet Turkle (1995) discovered

cybersex. She found that in these games, the characters and their interactions shared many aspects of regular offline life. Some of the characters fell in love and married each other and the wedding ceremony was held online with other characters present. Apparently, these games evoke feelings with offline consequences. It was not only the character who fell in love with each other, but sometimes also the persons behind the characters which sometimes lead to offline relations. One of the most important findings by Turkle (1995), although she does not state it explicitly, is the internet's potential for love and sex as it became possible to be intimate with other (physically unknown) persons through text based messages which in turn generated offline feelings. Patrick, 32, used to administer a MUD and he met his former partner within this game:

I: You said you met your former partner through the internet...can you tell me about it, where, and how etc.

P: She was a player in an internet game which I administered...I had registered her and one day I just went towards her and started to flirt and from there it became deeper...

I: Ah, what game?

P: A mud if you know about those?

I: Yes I do...they seem to be less frequent nowadays...is that right?

P: Yes, they can't compete with the newer online games...it's a thing from the past when telnet was the best working thing on the internet...with telephone modem and weak computers etc.

I: But you met in this game...

P: Yes...we talked for hours and hours...and it was in real time so to speak, so it feels more alive compared to web talk...and further it had lots of vivid functions, emotes and a "virtual body" you have...

I: Then you met in real life?

P: Yes...we talked for a month or so before we decided to meet...in "XX country"// She came from "YY country" you see...

Today multi user domains/dungeons and other text based role playing games are rare. Patrick says that multi user domains/dungeons are not as common anymore because new online games have emerged with the increased internet connection speed and increased computer power. The function of real time communication continued in web chats (as described above) where the game part diminished and the conversation itself became more important and where communities became established. The game part developed in another direction that focused more on the game and less on the conversation – at least conversations not found necessary for playing the game.

However, some of these older role playing games have been enhanced and still attract players all over the world. Elisabeth, 40, met her current partner through a newer version of a role playing game called Everquest. She explains the characteristics of the game, her character, and how she interacted with the other players:

E: Both of us were playing a role playing game where you play a character that you "are". Since many years I was living in a destructive relationship and in the evenings I played this

game. It's a fantasy game where you develop your role character and make friends. You are doing things with other people and it's like a society in its own. It's difficult to explain. We did a lot of things together and together with other people. It's deeper than a chat, you get to know each other, how you behave among others, how you deal with setbacks and so on.

I: Ok, where do you play this game?

E: It's called Everquest, there are quite many games like this and I have tried many of them. Many people have met in game, got married in game, and I have heard of many who have gotten married IRL. You buy and install the game, pay a monthly fee – it's not possible to play offline. It's a huge thing. It was the first online role playing game and came out some years ago, now there are better games with better graphics, it's very immerse.

I: Ok so you started playing while you were still married?

E: Yes, I was still married and “escaped” into the game for a period. There I had my friends and contacts and met the guy I see today.

I: Does your role character have any traits from the real you or how to put it?

E: Yes it has. There is no way you can “hide” the real you when you have played for some time. The person you are shines through.

I: Does love and sex exist between these characters?

E: Absolutely. With my female role character I have gotten many sexual hints, but that's nothing I seek purposely but rather ignore it. Many of those seeking sex are probably quite young.

I: Ok, have you ever had sex with someone even though it's not your purpose?

E: With the guy I have a relationship with today.

I: How did it happen?

E: We “met” every night, either alone or with others, we had a lot in common and became friends at first. Then you talk about your own life and things outside of the game, he knew about my destructive marriage and I got to share his everyday life. He asked for my phone number after we had known each other for 7-8 months and we started to talk over the phone.

I: But did you have sex online?

E: Well, we talked about sex, what we wanted to do when we met IRL and so on?

I: Did you talk often about this?

E: Yes we did.

I: Detailed conversations?

E: Not really, we were both a little shy I guess.

When reading Elisabeth's story of how she started playing Everquest, it is clear that it quite quickly opened up as a new social arena for her. On this arena, she met people she had not known before and some of them became her friends. In a period of her life when she felt her relationship with her husband had become destructive, she was able to “escape” to her online friends with whom she was able to discuss her marriage and her problems; her offline world was brought to her online world.

Among other things, this incorporation of players' offline struggles into the game becomes a part and colors one's character. Furthermore, Elisabeth means that although the character is made up, it is impossible to maintain a false identity as personal traits shine through over time. A character is thus, in the long run to quote Elisa-

beth, more or less based on the players' offline personas and experiences and roles are played as in other offline settings. Because online characters and interactions are replicas of their offline equivalents, the players act and interact in ways that reminds of offline behavior. Although it is possible to make up identities and characteristics in role playing games, Turkle, among others, show that people react intensely and become very upset when such things are revealed (Turtle, 1995). In Elisabeth's case, interacting with another character later made her bring her online world to her offline world. I will elaborate on this further in chapter four and five.

What appears like being alone playing a computer game can for some people be an entire world filled with relations and social interaction, which – as it was for Elisabeth – become a world with social relations that feel more meaningful than one's current offline situation. However, not uncommonly, the online world becomes the offline world when people who have met online decide to meet offline and start an offline relationship.

In this study, only two informants mentioned their experience of role playing games and none of them play these games today. However, in many ways these games remind of other interactive arenas that have emerged in the sexual landscape, for example communities.

E-mail

The technology to send messages via e-mail started to develop in the early 1970s by Ray Tomlinson. With an e-mail program it became possible to exchange messages with people using the same program. The addresses used to reach other people consisted of a combination of username and hostname with the "at" (@) symbol in between. These addresses are the standard used in today's e-mailing. A sent e-mail could then be opened and read in the recipient's mailbox. Over the following years, the programs were refined and more functions were added, such as the possibility to send "carbon copies", to reply and forward e-mail. However, it was not until the end of the 1980s that commercial e-mailing became possible. Later, in 1993, e-mailing started to become available to part of the public with internet access.

E-mail is a much faster and less formal way to communicate compared to regular mail. E-mail also makes it possible to send messages to people that one does not know or probably would not have communicated with without e-mail access. To send and receive e-mail, one has to have an e-mail program and an e-mail address. Today it is possible to find free e-mail services on the WWW, for example Hotmail. As mentioned earlier, this technique of sending e-mail is used within many communities, which can only be used by their respective members. E-mail communication is not conducted in real time and is called an asynchronous media.

In this study, e-mail was not often discussed by the informants as being used for the purpose of love and sex. Rather, the informants used instant messaging software (discussed below) for their everyday communication and only occasionally e-

mail. However, Jacqueline, 19, for example, says that she occasionally e-mails her boyfriend to keep in contact when one or the other are away from home.

Instant messaging software

Because of the technical risk of viruses, spam (e-mail advertising), and the limited file size one can receive many people now prefer to use instant messaging software to communicate with others. However, there are non-technical reasons to choose instant messaging software as well. For example, since it is possible to choose the participants in ones instant messaging software network it provides protection against strangers and puts the user in charge of the interactions. It reduces the risks of bumping into strangers at random so to speak (as noted by Goffman and Bauman) as is the case in web chat rooms and unlike web communities it is oneself who dictates the rules.

The technical functions of instant messaging software have been described in greater length in the methods chapter and are used for synchronous (real time) communication. Instant messaging software and e-mail are primarily used for private interaction and are, thus, different compared to web chat rooms where many people participate at the same time. In this study, most informants use ICQ or MSN Messenger for real time interaction. Lena, 38, means that using instant messaging software is a logic progression when one finds an interesting person in a community:

L: I think it's like this...If you start talking a lot to someone...or if you imagine there are a lot of people there who want to meet someone or so, then I think a lot of people move on to ICQ and chat there once in a while. When they want to talk more simply put. Because it's impossible to talk on the VildaWebben [community]. I have successfully been able to talk on Vilda with this guy from Stockholm [through the community chat] but that is because we are quite fast typists and have a way of communicate with short messages. But if you want to have such a flowing conversation it's an impossible setting to be in. But then again, I believe many chat routinely and in that case VildaWebben is enough. Like if you are tired and just want to say hi. You might even have nothing to say at all. I think it's a completely different thing.

Lena explains that a community chat can be used for fun or relaxation, but for private, "one-on-one" communication, instant messaging is preferable, which reminds of how some of the other informants described their use of web chat rooms. In this case, the instant messaging software is used as an extension and a compliment to web communities and web chat rooms.

Typically, the older informants use instant messaging software for communication with people they have met online, for example in communities or web chat rooms. In a way, they continue to use this medium like they use web chat rooms and communities but for private conversations. For the internet generation, instant messaging software may be used in this fashion as well, but for them it is more common to use this technique for communicating with the friends they already have offline, very

much like using regular telephones. Although it is possible to disconnect and thus appear as offline, many informants with broadband connection are online “all the time” and change their online status depending on what they are currently doing. Many informants appear online at the same time as they are surfing the web or doing their homework. They can also have several independent conversations running at the same time. Consequently, they can nearly always be present and ready for communication with friends within their network.

Apart from using instant messaging for keeping in touch with friends, this technique is an important feature of flirting and dating. For informants who use the internet for finding offline dates, instant messaging software often serves as the “middle station”. After communicating in web chat rooms or through community mailbox systems, the participants may decide to continue the conversation elsewhere and some people share their ICQ numbers or their instant messenger addresses. Jimmy, 18, uses instant messenger for online flirting, but he has met those he flirts with offline at some point before he starts to flirt online:

J: I meet them IRL and then I find out their [instant messenger] addresses and then talk to them there.

To know - or at least have knowledge of – a potential partner offline before starting to flirt is typical for informants in the internet generation. Theo, 20, gives another example of how these younger informants use instant messaging as a tool for matching up presumptive partners. In this case, Theo did not know the woman offline, but his friends had met her and could “vouch” for her.

T: I have friends who know a girl who they have given my messenger address to try to match us together.

Because (increasingly) many people use this program, it is easy to find and add friends. In some cases, members of communities include their instant messenger addresses in their community presentation. Edward, 18, describes a scenario when he initiates a contact like this:

E: I usually write something like “Hi! I noticed in your presentation that you like movies, so do I” or I can write “Hi, you seem to be a person with a nice life style, maybe you are up for a date if you are single?”

I: And what would they reply?

E: Often they start saying something like “Hi, great! What was your last movie?” And then they give me their msn or so. Or they start to flirt a little with “maybe we could have a date, what do you like sweetie?”

I: So you share your msn/icq addresses quite early?

E: Yes, most of the time. Or they could have their msn address in their presentation.

I: Ok, is it allowed to contact someone if their msn is in their presentation? Or allowed...do people do that?

E: No, I don't. I start with a mail. Maybe to be polite.

Although some prefer private chat rooms, others find instant messaging to be suitable for having cybersex. Especially since the program can be used to share pictures and, thus, allows not only text based conversation but also some visual effects. It is also possible to add sound and web cams to this software even if this seems to be rare among the informants in this study. However, Emilio, 33, sometimes uses MSN Messenger to share nude and erotic pictures with others. These pictures of him and others are taken with digital cameras:

I: You said earlier that you had exchanged pictures with private persons...would that be in these kinds of contacts?

E: Yes.

I: What kind of pictures is it? Do you use web cam, digital camera, or scanner?

E: Digital camera

I: Is it erotic pictures?

E: Yes

I: Maybe pornographic pictures wherever the line may be drawn?

E: Yes

I: Do you send or receive pictures?

E: Mostly receive.

I: Ok, is it nude pictures or more advanced pictures? What makes them send you pictures? An agreement?

E: We agree upon it and there are both nude pictures and more advanced pictures.

I: Ok, I have no idea on how this happens...do you request pictures from each other?

E: If a girl says that she has pictures then one asks to see them of course.

I: She says it like that?

E: I ask I suppose.

I: Ok, stills only?

E: Yes.

I: Have you hesitated to send pictures at any time? ...aren't you worried about those pictures showing up in other places?

E: Well, I haven't thought about it that much.

I: Do you talk about it before you send anything?

E: No...

The possibility to choose whom to add, the possibility to talk in private without being disturbed by others, the possibility for multiple conversations, and the possibility to be always available are some important factors contributing to the increasing popularity of instant messaging software. This popularity is further increased by the easiness to send and receive short messages quickly, the possibility to share files without size limit, and the flexibility to add sound, pictures, and real time video to the conversations. In addition, the developers of instant messaging are continuously updating their software and there are reasons to believe that instant messaging will replace older techniques for internet mediated interaction.

Peer-to-peer software

Peer-to-peer programs are frequently used to access pornographic movies and pictures on the internet. The users install software – found free on the internet - on their computers, for example Kazaa or Direct Connect. With this software, the users are able to connect to networks which sometimes consist of more than 5,000 users sharing enormous amounts – several thousands gigabytes of information (a reasonably new standard computer hard drive of today has the capacity to store 40-200 gigabyte). When connected to these networks, it is possible to access pictures and movies (games, applications, documents, music, et cetera) from other users' computers, or more precisely, from the folder the users decided to share. The software allows users to search for files by type, size, and name and those files that match are presented on the screen along with information on which users that have the files as well as their connection speed. With a typical 8/1 Mbps broadband connection (8Mbps downstream/1Mbps upstream) a 90 minutes long movie (approximately 0.7 gigabyte) is downloaded in 10 to 15 minutes. By clicking on the desired files, one has them downloaded onto one's computer. The technical aspect of peer-to-peer software is further explained by Månsson and Söderlind (2004, pp. 102-106).

In this study, the informants use this technique to download pornographic pictures and full-length pornographic videos. The popularity of this software can be explained by the triple-A-engine mentioned in the introduction chapter (Cooper, 1998). Being able to download pornographic material online eliminates the need to expose oneself in, for example, an adult video store while renting or buying adult movies and magazines. Further, it is possible to access these at all times for no additional charge than the cost of an internet connection. Along with free samples found on the WWW (discussed below), the informants in this study use the peer-to-peer software to access pornographic material and explain that they would never pay for it. Interestingly, this technique is, in regard to downloading pornographic material, only used by the male informants.

Web sites

On the WWW, several web sites/web pages are related to love and sexuality; how many would be an impossible question to answer. With the exception of web chat rooms and web communities (which have already been discussed earlier in this chapter because of their specific interactive characteristics), these web sites can largely be divided into three sub categories in relation to love and sexuality. There are pornographic web sites, sex web shops, and sex information web sites (Månsson & Söderlind, 2004, have made an extensive analyze of pornographic web sites which they divide into eleven sub categories that include web communities as well as web shops. However, the division of web sites into three categories in the current study is not

based on pornographic web sites but on web sites relating to love and sexuality in general).

Månsson and Söderlind (2004) used the search engine Google and the keyword “sex” which resulted in as many as 252,000,000 hits and institutes measuring internet behavior claim that “sex” ranks among the top keywords used in searches. This illustrates the classical “economic” relationship of supply and demand for sex related material and shows the importance of investigating the WWW in relation to human sexuality. This also suggests the WWW to be a huge market for making profit on human sexuality in various ways.

Pornographic web sites

While the word sex gave 252,000,000 hits on Google, the word porn (short for pornography) resulted in 86,000,000 hits (Månsson & Söderlind, 2004). The pornographic web sites vary in content and design. Some web sites are made by professional entrepreneurs while others are made by private persons. Some contain pictures or short movies while others contain erotic novels. The commercial aspect of these sites has been extensively researched by Månsson and Söderlind (2004) who also present a taxonomy for the various web sites (Ibid. chapter 3).

When browsing the WWW for sexual purposes, web sites containing erotic novels and pornographic pictures are the most popular. In this study, it is more common for men to view pornographic pictures and movies while female informants seem to prefer erotic novels, which corroborates well with earlier research (Cooper et al., 2003; Månsson et al., 2003). Most of the times they find pornographic material on web sites that contain links to free samples (e.g., free6.com). Occasionally the informants also find pornography through “pop-up” advertising. This has been the case for Edward, 18:

I: You had also been on sites containing porn pictures...did you find them through google?

E: Exactly. As pop-ups some times. When it comes to pictures then free6.com is a site with good categories.

I: Ok, that's a link site with a lot of categories...does good and bad porn exist in your opinion?

E: Hmm...a difficult question...yes, there is bad porn...it's bad when there are no clear cut categories. I would rather not see a lot of gang bang when I want to see good looking brunettes.

Interestingly, Edward does not make a distinction between “good” or “bad” content in a traditional meaning, but rather talks about “bad” pornography as something he does not intentionally look for. For him the various categories that are found on link sites are attractive as they help him to find the pornographic pictures he looks for without having to be confronted with the kind of pornography he does not look for.

The sample sites and advertisements that informants label as “free” are originally intended to lure the users to pay sites (Månsson & Söderlind, 2004). Some of the

men “knew” that the free pictures they viewed served as commercials or “teasers” but as they were satisfied with the samples they could access for free, none of them had ever paid for online pornography.

Not all online pornography web sites are intended to generate profit. There are sites labeled “amateur sites” that are published on the WWW by private persons. However, sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the pornographic amateur sites and the professional sites (which will be discussed in detail in chapter 5). Some informants report that they prefer the amateur web sites to the professional ones. Emilio, 33, explains his preference:

I: What makes you prefer amateur sites?

E: They feel more natural. It’s a girl or a couple who want to share their lust with other people and that’s what I want I guess...like when you chat about sex with a girl or when you have telephone sex.

Nevertheless, in some cases privately published amateur sites link to pay sites and web shops for which they are paid an amount of money. They may also sell pictures and movies they produce themselves (see further in Månsson & Söderlind, 2004, pp. 28-33 and 59-61). Characteristics for amateur sites are that the entire business is owned and run privately.

Sex web shops

Sites that fall into the second category found on the WWW related to love and sexuality are sex web shops marketing sex products - such as adult videos and magazines, clothing, and sex toys. When sex shops established themselves online they made it easier for people to shop for sex products, as they could be entered in private without exposure to others. In this study it is primarily women who report that they shop online. However, these web shops are also visited by curious surfers who do not intend to make a purchase, but who are interested in viewing the various products available. Some informants mean that shopping for sex products online is not as embarrassing as it would be to shop for these things in an offline store. Others say that shopping online for sex products has increased their self-confidence and that now they would not feel embarrassed to visit offline sex shops. Many would choose web shops even in the future because of the convenience. Among the informants in this study, vibrators seem to be the most popular purchase.

Online shopping is not exclusively for singles. Miranda, 25, visits online shops with her boyfriend and they find products that appeal to both of them:

I: You mentioned that you had been doing some online shopping...what did you buy?

M: A couple of vibrators for me, a sex game (no fun), videos, and clothing.

I: Ok, have you been doing any offline shopping as well?

M: No.

I: Would you have bought these things if you hadn’t had access to the internet?

M: Not likely...maybe if I was in Germany...it's too embarrassing.

I: Yes...what kind of videos do you buy? What kind of clothing? Is it you or your partner who shops or do you shop together?

M: My partner...if he sees something sexy he wants me to wear....the videos...he only buys strange things which only make me laugh when we watch them...but they turn him on so it's ok...

I: Ok, so it's primarily for him then?

M: Yes...well I think it's fun as well but if I shop it's sexy lingerie...

I: Ok, so the two of you buy lingerie?

M: No, he doesn't...once he bought a piece of cloth that was supposed to be a dress...it's only me who buys lingerie.

In this case, Miranda buys clothing while her boyfriend buys vibrators and adult movies that are incorporated into their sex life. Without the access to web shops, none of these sex products would have been bought.

Sex information web sites

The third category of sites on the WWW is directed to provide their visitors with information about love and sexuality. Some of these web sites are published by offline organizations, such as RFSU and RFSL, which are providing information on issues of sexuality to the offline community as well. Other web sites have sections or "departments" where professionals provide information on love and sexuality (for example Netdoktor.se). Added to this are the columns found in online newspapers. Many of these web sites include discussion fora where visitors can discuss sexual matters with each other or a possibility to send questions to "experts". Consequently, these informational/educational web pages can be perceived along a continuum ranging from professional to private opinions.

Elisabeth, 40, is interested in and curious about relationships and is a frequent visitor to such pages:

E: I read on message boards where people talk about sex and relationships. Sexliv.com is such a page where there is a message board that I read once in a while. Netdoktor is another page I like to surf to, as I said, I'm very curious, never write but read. I think it's exciting to see what other people ask about, how they do, what people like and so on.

Elisabeth is surfing these pages randomly to satisfy her curiosity. She does not participate in any discussions, but anonymously reads what other people have written. Further, Elisabeth does not make a distinction between professional and private opinions. Her main interest is what kind of questions others ask about sexuality, how they have sex, and people's sexual preferences.

Other informants use these informational sites in similar ways, but also seek information regarding sexual problems. Many believe the WWW to be a good alternative for those who do not "dare" to come to a "youth clinic". Jimmy, 18, has also used

the WWW to seek information but he emphasizes that it should be used as one source among others as some information may be difficult to find:

J: Regarding sex information I don't remember the name of the site...I was introduced to this site and from there I clicked on links to find what I was looking for...

I: Ok, do you remember what kind of information you were looking for?

J: Guys' development into manhood and sexual orientation.

I: Did you get better information on the Web compared to from school, friends, or parents?

J: I got better info about guy's development at the youth clinic and concerning sexual orientation I got better info through homosexual friends.

I: What's your opinion about the information on the Web in general?

J: It's mostly about the general thing...everyone is developing differently and so on...you can't find the precise answers you are looking for...and concerning sexual orientation they said that it wasn't abnormal and that there are many organizations that support this issue...I also found many "coming out of the closet"-stories...generally I think the info was good for those who want to know some things, but most things you can't find...so it's probably best to search IRL.

Paul, 18, means that one advantage of seeking information on love and sexuality on the WWW is the anonymity. Not having to talk "face-to-face" with someone and the possibility to formulate and prepare the questions in advance makes it superior to other sources. Further, he thinks that the Web is a good complement to the regular sex education in schools.

Interactive and non-interactive arenas

The arenas presented above can be divided into two types. One type is interactive and the other is non-interactive. Non-interactive arenas are those containing texts, pictures, and movies – primarily found on the WWW. Web shops can also be described as non-interactive arenas. It is possible for multiple users to be on a non-interactive arena at the same time, but it is impossible to notice others or communicate on these arenas. Consequently, non-interactive arenas are the most anonymous arenas on the internet. However, it is possible for the owners of these non-interactive arenas to record the number of visitors, by counting the number of entries and by placing cookies on visitors' computer hard drives. This makes it possible to trace the different web sites the users have visited.

The interactive arenas are web chat rooms, web communities, and instant messaging software. Characteristic for these are that they exist for the purpose of communication. In these arenas, it is possible to meet people and to interact with them. These arenas have different levels of anonymity where web chat rooms open to anyone have the most anonymous users and any instant messaging software have the least anonymous users.

It is possible to appear anonymously or to present a “false” identity in any of these arenas; one has to play a role, either true or false, when interacting with others. Furthermore, it is possible to “lurk” (a person who lurks is present in the setting but does not interact with other persons in that setting) in web chats, but others can notice an anonymous and inactive participant and initiate a conversation with him or her. In communities, there is often a need to register before entering or gaining access to various functions of the communities. This means that an identity consisting of at least a nickname must be created, but often there is a form including several questions that must be filled out. When interacting through instant messaging software, the participants must acknowledge each other, making it virtually impossible for unwanted anonymous persons to gain access to that arena.

In this study, most informants have experiences of both interactive and non-interactive arenas, but Cooper et al. (2003) have found that people seem to prefer either non-interactive or interactive online sexual activities. It is possible that the informants in the current study are comfortable with discussing love and sexual matters as all of them interact with others regarding issues of love and sexuality. Furthermore, the fact that the informants in this study were recruited from an interactive community may contribute to them being more interested in online interaction. Those who prefer non-interactive sexual activities only may not be interested to begin - all of a sudden - to interact with others in this regard and, therefore, may not have volunteered to participate in this study and thereby choose to continue to remain anonymous on the anonymous arenas.

Hot arenas and protected arenas

Henriksson and Månsson (1995) talk about hot arenas and protected arenas among gay men at sexual meeting places. They mean that the participants have to learn how to “play” the game, to know what behaviors are allowed and where these can be performed. The concepts of hot arenas and protective arenas are suitable to use when studying the interactive arenas for love and sexuality on the internet as well. According to Henriksson and Månsson (1995), to be present in the hot arenas signals sexual availability and, further, sex is allowed and sometimes expected. In the protective areas, on the other hand, sex is neither expected nor allowed.

As described earlier, some communities declare with emphasis that they are protective areas – for example VildaWebben. Any kind of sexual contacts are prohibited and if violating these rules one may be suspended. On other communities, like Quiser, it is possible to initiate sexual contacts. In public web chat rooms it is possible to approach other participants sexually, but a cybersex conversation (described in chapter 5), for example, is almost always moved from the open web chat, by the participants, to a private chat room or an instant messaging software.

According to the informants in this study, public web chat rooms are the “hottest” arenas on the internet. In these arenas, sexual words are used and sexual approaches are commonplace. Sometimes they seem to be directed to anyone in the web

chat room and sometimes they may be directed to a specific person. Occasionally, the nicknames in public chat rooms indicate sex, age, and sexual orientation, for example “Annica27bs” (meaning female 27 years old and bisexual). One explanation to why the web chats are considered the hottest arenas may be because they are anonymous and open to anyone. Those who participate in these web chats are aware of the high frequency of sexual approaches and although many may find it annoying, they claim to be able to ignore it.

Contrary to the public web chat rooms, instant messaging software can be described as very protective arenas. When using these, sudden sexual approaches are not expected. Some informants mean that instant messaging software are to be considered private arenas which one has to be “accredited” by the owner to enter. Most of the time this is respected, but occasionally an unaccredited person may enter into this arena. In that case, it is easy for the administrator/owner to “block out” these persons from further access. However, although being considered protective, these arenas can easily transform into hot arenas where sexual messages, sexual pictures, and sexual movies are exchanged. In this case, there is an agreement between the participants that this transformation is accepted.

In general, communities may be placed somewhere in between the anonymous and hot public web chat rooms and the protective arenas, like ICQ and MSN Messenger. Here many informants indicate whether they are interested in being contacted. Some may write in their presentation that they are married or in a relationship while others emphasize their single status. According to the informants, this seems to be respected most of the time. However, communities show a great variety considering the level of sexuality allowed.

Typical for arenas on the internet is that they can change from hot to protective and vice versa depending on the participants’ purposes and tolerance. Consequently, it is not enough to consider the setting and act according to prior knowledge, but one has to consider how the other participants are acting – even in a known setting.

Concluding remarks

Together the aforementioned arenas constitute what I refer to as the sexual landscape on the internet. As shown in this chapter, the internet is not homogenous, but consists of places and techniques with specific characteristics. How these arenas are constructed and their functions determine the possible behaviors that relate to love and sexuality. This is in line with both Goffman (1959) and Gagnon and Simon (1973) who emphasize the settings’ *potential* to enable specific behaviors, in this case behaviors relating to love and sexuality.

In the current study, two types of arenas can be identified – interactive and non-interactive. Generally, the non-interactive arenas contain pictures and movies, text material, and online stores. The owner/producer decides the content. In these arenas the visitors/surfers are anonymous and, therefore, not possible to observe. These characteristics make them ideal places for activities that people would hesitate to engage in

– or at least engage in to a lesser extent – if they had to perform the activities in front of others or if there was a possibility to be observed by others. Discretion is the key word here; if interested or curious, there are places to explore for every taste and the places are always open. The interactive arenas are constructed for the purpose of interaction/communication. Because interactive arenas have a lesser degree of anonymity, the participants and their behavior may be observed – even if they do not engage in any conversation – which is a fundamental difference to non-interactive arenas. Owners/moderators of interactive arenas decide who may participate, the rules and regulations for participation, and the sanctions if these rules and regulations are violated. However, interacting on the internet is more anonymous compared to face-to-face interaction.

The more anonymous the participants can remain, the more sexually explicit the arenas get. If there are risks of being discovered, observed, or banned from an arena, the less sexually explicit it gets, unless there are special agreements made between the participants or if the aforementioned risks are calculated as unlikely to occur. Therefore, distinctions can be made between hot arenas and protected arenas. Nevertheless, some arenas are able to change depending on the participants' intentions.

The current study – as well as earlier studies of online sexuality - also shows that different parts of the sexual landscape have generational dimensions as well. This is shown among the communities with millions of members, primarily coming from the internet generation. Furthermore, it seems like the internet generation more easily adopts and takes advantage of the new techniques compared to the older users. There are also interesting differences between the generations as to *how* the arenas and techniques are used. For example, with the relatively new instant messaging software available, the older informants use it primarily for managing their online network while the internet generation uses it to interact with their offline network (which then, as a logic consequence, becomes an online network).

As the technology develops and becomes more refined, some arenas disappear while new arenas are invented and increase in popularity. This development is fast paced which makes it yet more difficult for researchers to study online behaviors as new arenas produce new possibilities and, therefore, new behaviors. Turkle (1995) and Sveningsson (2001) are two examples of this since the arenas they have studied – MUDs and web chat rooms - have dramatically decreased in popularity over the years. This rapidly changing environment and technique is significant for the liquid modern times, says Bauman (2000), and nothing is built or invented to last forever any more, but rather to be upgraded and replaced continuously by new inventions. The skills required to master the new techniques (and arenas) are not becoming institutionalized perpetual knowledge, but are only useful for a limited period.

There is no reason to believe that the sexual landscape described in this chapter will consist of the same arenas in the future – maybe not even in the near future. To acquire the most recent information on arenas used for love and sexuality on the internet it is, therefore, important to start investigating the sexual landscape from the users'

perspectives. Presently, communities are the most popular arena for interaction with others. This is because communities do not require constant physical presence; the users decide when to enter and when to exit but can remain online all the time by their presentations and the available functions; they can always be reached through their community. They are also easily accessed through the WWW. Instant messaging software, currently the most popular technique for real time communication, is attractive because of similar reasons, namely that it does not require constant physical presence. If compared to a telephone, there is no need to talk or listen constantly; it is not even necessary to constantly sit by the phone to make sure no calls are missed. When logged in with instant messaging software one automatically shows one's availability and can be reached by others within – and this is crucial – networks of their own choice; free from unwanted participants and, consequently, unwanted discussions. Currently there is a tendency for instant messaging software to enter the WWW, which means that the technique can be used without having to download the software and therefore increasing the flexibility.

The rapid and constant development and improvement of arenas and techniques on the internet is logical in the contemporary society. Bauman (2000) says that this is typical for the liquid modernity; there are no finish lines, but a constant quest for improvements through upgrades which make the previous versions seem ancient and so out of date that no one would bother to keep them or hold on to them. Releasing, for example, the function of instant messaging from the previous requirement of downloading the software first makes it even more instant as it can be used anywhere by anyone with a WWW browser. In the end, continues Bauman (2000), upgrades and improvements become means to save time or to decrease the amount of time needed to execute specific tasks. This is exactly what communities do; allowing members to be always present with their presentations and mailboxes, making it possible for members to spend time on other activities. Not unlike when fishermen threw their rods away to begin fishing with nets which made them available for other duties in between emptying their nets. Fishing with rods later became a free time activity because of its amusement and excitement rather than its contribution to the household economy.

4. The actors

While the previous chapter focused on the arenas and technologies used for OSA on the internet – the sexual landscape - this chapter will focus on those who use the internet for OSA. In our previous research we have described the OSA-users' characteristics, how much time they spend online, for how long they have used the internet, et cetera (Månsson et al., 2003). The purpose of this chapter is rather to focus on *how* they use the sexual landscape on the internet. This landscape does not possess sexual meanings in it self until actors move through it and begin to participate in various activities, using the techniques, and – more importantly – identify (or interpret) the places as sexual in which the activities have a sexual meaning. Of course, it is possible for arenas, for example, an adult site with sexually explicit material, to exist on the WWW without any visitors, but to become identified as sexual, someone has to interpret the content as such. Furthermore, it is possible to have different definitions of sexuality, sexualities, and maybe even various “degrees” of sexuality depending on the surrounding sexual scripts (Gagnon & Simon, 1973).

Before participating in any activities relating to love and sexuality, the arenas have to be found on the internet. Some informants know what they look for in advance while others travel randomly across the sexual landscape. As mentioned in the previous chapter, arenas on the internet may change from non-sexual to sexual and vice versa which means that the participants may find themselves in situations they had not predicted. Whatever reasons may exist, the internet provides an infinite set of options and choices, which is how Bauman (2000) characterizes the liquid modernity; there are many options but no goals in sight.

In the previous chapter, the arenas were divided into interactive and non-interactive arenas. Non-interactive arenas do not confront or expose the participants to each other. By being anonymous, participants mind their own business, so to speak, and even if they would like to engage in communicative activities, these arenas do not provide the possibility (unless one administers the arena and, thus, communicates one's messages). On interactive arenas, on the other hand, there is a need for participants to present themselves (or at least be prepared to engage in communication upon requests). As interaction on the internet is (currently) primarily text based, the presentations are different from those made face-to-face. However, the presentations also differ depending on the settings, the other participants, and the purposes for making the presentation (Goffman, 1959).

For many users the internet is integrated in their everyday life. Love and sexuality is incorporated into the everyday use, but varies with age, gender, marital status, purposes, and prior experience as well as with more technical aspects of the internet's possibilities. These aspects also affect with whom they interact on the internet. Over time, the individuals learn how to use the internet in ways that suit them and their individual needs and desires. They also learn how the internet can be used to link online with offline and vice versa.

Navigating through the sexual landscape

In our prior research, we showed that most people find online sexual material by surfing (Månsson et al., 2003). To surf is to move from one web site to another by clicking on hyperlinks. Sometimes the term also refers to the use of search engines (e.g., www.google.com and www.altavista.com) to find web sites on the WWW. However, surfing refers to a behavior on the WWW (which is not equal to the internet as mentioned earlier). Surfing on the WWW can be done at random for distraction and relaxation or focused as a means to find specific information. Apart from surfing the web, navigating through the sexual landscape also means to discover new technology and to learn about its potential, to explore its limits, and to incorporate it in ones regular repertoire.

In this study, it becomes clear that there are several aspects that influence how one navigates through the sexual landscape on the internet. To some extent, these aspects are technological, for example, the development of newer software (Instant Messaging) and techniques (peer-to-peer) as well as increasing computer power and connection speed. This development facilitates the navigation by making it easier to explore and expand the possibilities and capacities of the internet. However, there are also – naturally – individual aspects of navigation. Some of these aspects are related to previous knowledge, experience, marital status, and how friends and relatives use the internet. As shown in chapter 3, there are also generational aspects that influence navigation patterns and previous research has shown men and women to prefer different activities that belong to different arenas (Cooper et al., 2003; Månsson et al., 2003). Ulrica, 26, did not navigate actively toward specific arenas, but learned about them successively in school and over time as she was using the internet:

I: Did you find the right communities right away or did you search for them?

U: I knew of Lunarstorm already...and we used mirc [mIRC] at school, and then you get to know others along the way.

For Ulrica the internet was not entered for any particular reasons. Other people in her immediate surroundings were using it and so she begun to use it herself. Once online, she widened her knowledge through other people's experiences. Perhaps this kind of navigation can best be described as a random, self-propelled travel, which has no evident aim or goal. To communicate with others is the main reason and having to move to new (interactive) arenas is an improvement rather than a set back. Moving along with upgrades and improvements is fundamental not to be left marooned in a place deserted long ago. A feature of the liquid modernity, according to Bauman (2000) is to keep all bonds loose so they can be easily untied when it has become time to move on. Furthermore, age is an important factor to consider as the internet generation seems to be more adaptive to the aforementioned upgrades and improvements because of their more loosely tied bonds to specific arenas and techniques.

Navigating through non-interactive arenas

For Elisabeth, 40, curiosity is the primary reason that guides her while she navigates through the sexual landscape on the WWW.

E: I am very curious and have been surfing to various places. I have tried to chat and also viewed porn sites occasionally.

By being curious, Elisabeth has found specific sites where she can read about sex and relationships. Although she never participates in any discussions, she thinks these sites are very exciting to visit. Sometimes people recommend certain web sites that she visits and sometimes she just follows links from one web site to another. For Elisabeth, it is not as important to keep up with the latest techniques for real time interaction. Once she has learned how to find what she seeks, the mission is complete. Lena, 38, tells a similar story and says that she mostly gets tips from her online friends in communities and in chat rooms. Lena also has an online relation with a man who guided her to various pornographic websites:

L: I mostly view pornographic material with him...

I: So you go into websites and view...

L: No, he has a gigantic collection of...he's been collecting for a long time...so much of it comes from him because he has recently found something...

I: How does he share it then?

L: Well either...he sends me the address to a specific web site and then I click my way onto that site and check it out or he sends me pictures or if he finds a movie somewhere...

Elisabeth and Lena primarily describe their present activities on the WWW; how tips and suggestions from web chat rooms help them to explore the sexual landscape. Both arenas have a high level of anonymity. Interestingly it is not friends and family offline that guide them to places with sexual content, but rather people they meet online. If no one is able to guide them, they surf to find what they seek. According to Gagnon and Simon (1973), talking about sexual matters may be embarrassing and this could explain the navigation pattern described above by Elisabeth and Lena, namely to keep this behavior online. The internet has made it easier to explore and experiment with sexuality while keeping it away or at least on a "safe" distance, from the offline world in which this behavior could be judged by others. In our contemporary society, as Giddens (1992) states, we have been made responsible for our own sexuality, but it is still considered by some as something that belongs to the private sphere.

Some informants are surfing the WWW to buy sexual products. The motivation to do so, for most informants, is convenience and to avoid the embarrassment they think they would experience if they went to a regular sex shop. One informant says she is driven by curiosity to see what kinds of sex toys are available, even though she would not necessarily make a purchase.

Paul, 18, explains the way he navigates when he seeks pornographic pictures and movies or erotic novels on the WWW:

P: Usually it is by using google.com and searching for erotic novels and sex novels and then you find them, but if you end up on pay sites, you usually look somewhere else.

I: Ok, so you have never paid to get access to any web site?

P: No, the sites I have visited you don't have to pay anything, it's been more or less sites where pictures, novels, and so on are uploaded...

I: Do you find pictures and movies though search engines as well?

P: No, in that case I usually go to Free6.com [a web page with pornographic links in various pornographic categories]

Over time, by surfing the WWW, Paul and others have learned which adult web sites to visit. When the informants have found web sites that provide them with the material they seek, those web sites become favorites to which they return. When parts of the sexual landscape are mapped out the way the users navigate change, as they do not need search engines anymore nor to randomly surf the WWW to find what they seek. Both men and women use the WWW to find pictures, movies, or novels. Among men, as mentioned in the previous chapter, it is also commonplace to use "peer-to-peer" programs, for example Direct Connect or Kazaa to access pornographic pictures and movies. Navigation through the sexual landscape may be encouraged by curiosity and interest and to some extent be self-propelled as one learns the techniques and arenas to find what they seek, especially regarding the non-interactive arenas. Further, the non-interactive arenas can be thought of as Goffman's (1959) back stages, where it is neither necessary to perform in front of others nor to maintain a personal front. This feature makes the internet attractive for exploring any parts of sexuality that might be either stigmatized or embarrassing offline.

When navigating through the sexual landscape on the WWW, it is possible to end up on adult web sites one had no intention to visit. This is possible by the use of sex related key words within the "meta tags" on pornographic websites, a WWW address similar to already existing web sites, and by the use of pop-up windows. This means that sometimes the user does not navigate by him- or herself, but is forced into certain web sites regardless of what reason the user intentionally may have had.

Navigating through interactive arenas

Besides seeking information, pictures, or movies, many informants navigate through various interactive arenas. As opposed to the non-interactive arenas that were described, in Goffman's terminology, as back stages, the interactive arenas can be compared to front stages. According to Goffman (1959), being front stage supposes some kinds of performance, because the front stage automatically includes an audience that cannot be barred. How, and for what reasons, do people navigate in these, exposed arenas for love and sexuality? Marianne, 18, is a member of the Lunarstorm community but because of her bisexual orientation, she is also a member of a non-

heterosexual web community (www.quiser.se). Her navigation strategies are directed by her interest in meeting and communicating with other people - friends as well as dates. Marianne explains:

M: I'm a member of Quiser where there are a lot of gay people...and there I have been flirting and dating and so on...it's easy to meet other people of the same sex there because everyone is open with their sexual orientation.

I: So you spend more time on Quiser compared to Lunarstorm?

M: Yes I do.

I: Ok...I would like you to tell me how you are using Quiser...like for how long have you been a member...the purpose of your membership...well how you are using this community to put it simple...

M: I haven't been a member that long, just a couple of months, I use it to seek friendship dates, and because of the fact that I'm bisexual it's a great site for me to seek others...

For Marianne, it is not only her sexual identity that influences the way she navigates through the sexual landscape on the internet, but also age and marital status are factors that influence her navigation pattern. She uses the Lunarstorm community to meet people in her own age and the Quiser community to meet non-heterosexuals as well as to find potential partners. These reasons may change over time and along with a changing life situation. Desiree, 18, who is also bisexual, is currently in a relationship and does not use Quiser for partner seeking activities now, but instead to stay in contact with family and friends. This is an example of how an arena acquires a new status as something else; the arena is still there but its meaning has changed. These changes also influence the frequency of visits to that site; sometimes one's presence decreases in one arena while it increases in another. Nothing in the liquid modern times, as Bauman (2000; 2003) says, stays the same for longer periods. However, in this case, the arena has not changed, but the potential ascribed to it by the informant, who now plays a new and different role compared to what she used to do when she visited it before.

As mentioned above, dating can be one explanation to why some people surf to - and eventually join - specific types of interactive arenas. Michael, 26, has had internet access since 1997 and he uses the internet on a regular basis, mostly to keep in contact with friends, to book movie tickets, and to check web sites with cars for sale. He is currently single and joined SprayDate for the purposes of meeting a partner. Instant messaging, he says, is an important part of online dating. This means that it is not enough to know how to surf on the WWW, but by entering the internet dating scene one has to be able to use - and be able to keep up with - several arenas/techniques, which in the end determine how the informants navigate for the purposes of dating.

A desire to engage in cybersex (cybersex will be described in greater length in chapter 5) exemplifies how specific reasons determine the navigation on the internet for sexual gratification. According to the informants in this study, cybersex partners are commonly found in web chat rooms. Paul, 18, says:

P: I went to a web page on the internet with erotic content and into a chat room where I asked if anyone wanted [to have cybersex] and after some time there was a girl who wanted to talk and so...well...so it was...

I: Ok, did you ask if anyone wanted to have cybersex or did it just happen?

P: I asked, I don't click on someone and say "now we're going to have cybersex", that's too forced, so, it's better to ask and if no one wants to..."that's life".

As briefly mentioned earlier, the informants find their favorite places and techniques that they return to more frequently compared to others. However, these places and techniques are also tied to specific activities. A rough division is needed to categorize arenas and activities so actors and audience know in advance how to act. This reminds of what Goffman (1959) describes as institutionalizing of the roles played; the combination of action and place repeatedly producing similar behavior. Ulrica, 26, says that she is a member of many communities, but she is only a regular visitor to the Lunarstorm community.

I: So Lunarstorm is where you spend most of the time when it comes to communities?

U: Yes, Lunar is where you are logged in all day...but if you talk to people, you talk on the MSN Messenger.

As has been explained earlier, the reasons for becoming a member of a certain community or communities vary among the informants. Hitherto, navigation through the sexual landscape has been described in terms of technological development and individual reasons. Among the informants, especially those in the internet generation, there are also examples of how their offline networks influence this navigation. Louise, 24, for example, uses a web community to stay in touch with her friends:

L: You have many friends whose telephone number you don't know but most of them have Lunarstorm so there you can talk to them...

Family and friends are important reasons to find ways to interactive arenas. Sometimes the informants get suggestions of web sites to visit or communities to become members of and sometimes they may explore new software for communication.

Among the informants, there are several examples of how they are deserting communities, web sites, and techniques that used to be their favorites. There are several reasons to why this occurs. Alicia, 19, was a member of Sylvia, but has recently abandoned that community:

A: Now that there is a membership fee at Sylvia and because of that it's less people there and it has become boring too.

Alicia mentions the membership fee and her current relationship as reasons to leave the community. Some informants mention that they do not feel affiliated with a certain community anymore. Other informants find the life in front of the computer to be too time consuming or that they have given up older techniques when new ones have

emerged. Again, this behavior is, according to Bauman (2000; 2003), very significant for the liquid society.

The presentation of selves in internet life

As mentioned above, the sexual landscape on the internet consists of both interactive and non-interactive venues – front stages and back stages in dramaturgical terms. When viewing adult web sites, downloading erotica by using a peer-to-peer program, or reading posts on a web forum, the user is anonymous to other people in the sense that he or she does not have to present him or herself (although some peer-to-peer program have chat possibilities). In various internet fora, this behavior has earlier been referred to as “lurking”, referring, in short, to the activity of a person who appears as a spectator rather than a participant. It is also possible to lurk in open chat rooms, but one’s presence will be shown as “anonymous” or something equivalent, which makes the other participants aware of lurkers. For the purposes of this study, it is sufficient to recognize the distinction between interactive and non-interactive venues. The interactive venues, such as chat rooms, communities/dating sites, and role playing computer games, presume and build upon the participants presentations before any interaction takes place. The content of the presentation will determine the initial interaction.

Among the informants in this study, it is clear that how one presents oneself is largely dependent on the setting where this presentation takes place. For example, presentations are different in web chat rooms compared to web communities, and further, the presentations vary in content and design within web chat rooms or web communities. To complicate this even more, the presentation is also influenced by individual reasons for making the presentation. These presentations can be compared to Goffman’s (1959) personal fronts, which include such information as gender, age, race, looks, et cetera. In short, online presentations are personal fronts that vary according to settings and individual reasons. They are made anonymously and, therefore, there are chances that online presentations do not always agree with their offline dittos. Therefore, each presentation must be evaluated by the participants. One way they may be analyzed is to use the concepts of synchronous and asynchronous presentations, the first referring to presentations made in real time (on the spot) and the latter to presentations that may be accessed at any time.

Synchronous presentations

Online synchronous presentations are made in real time, for example in a web chat room. The equivalent would be face-to-face presentations without any visible cues or telephone presentations without any audible cues. They are made instantly even though they might be recalled in later interactions. Mistakes and slips of the tongue need to be corrected instantly to keep the presentation together and to avoid suspicious eyes and disbelief. These presentations, or personal fronts, share many qualities with offline presentations as Goffman (1959) has described them. In web chat rooms, the

first impressions are made by the participants' nicknames and, as mentioned in the previous chapter, these may reveal something about the individuals themselves as well as how they would like to be perceived by others. Presentations in web chat rooms are often less detailed compared with those made in web communities. This is because the format of web chat rooms makes it less suitable for detailed presentations and, thus, the participants automatically become more anonymous. Further, presentations are made in real time and sometimes only for one occasion. Nevertheless, if one frequents a specific web chat room on a regular basis, one may be remembered by others who recognize nickname and, perhaps, some fragments of a prior presentation. Prior research has shown that knowing the other participants in a web chat room is an important aspect in the subsequent interactions (Sveningsson, 2001). However, the presentations may become more detailed if, for example, two people decide to create a private web chat room or to use instant messaging software. Camilla, 21, explains:

C: When you chat with someone on msn and icq, you have most likely been chatting with that person sometime before and you "know" each other a little bit...

Many informants agree with Camilla that instant messaging is used to chat with people they already know. Ulrica, 26, emphasizes this and says that she uses instant messaging software with those she knows offline:

U: Most of the time you already know those you talk to on msn...I try to have it that way at least.

I: Ok, you know them irl or they are old online friends?

U: Both. Those who I would consider to be my friends irl.

I: So those you have on your messenger friends list have you have also met irl?

U: Yes, most of the time. Or those you enjoy talking to. I think it's hard work to start talking to new people...I hate all opening lines *smiles*

In many cases, instant messaging software is reserved for interaction with already known people - preferably known even offline - as opposed to occasional visits to web chat rooms. This also influences how love and sexuality are expressed in various settings, as I will elaborate on later. Sharing one's MSN Messenger or ICQ-address decreases the level of anonymity and, thus, generates greater feelings of trust between the participants (which is also an important factor in online dating). When people decide to take this step, it allows them to present themselves more extensively, partly because of increased trust, but also because they have established some ties and can continue to interact over time. However, even though the usage of instant messaging software is more personal in the sense of "knowing" the other person, it also serves as a secure buffer zone, which, in Bauman's (2003) terms, illustrates the possibility to be physically distant while being in the virtual proximity. However, most of all it illustrates the loosely tied bonds that are, according to Bauman, so significant for this era. As it gets easier to become close to someone, it gets equally easy to terminate a person from any further contacts.

Asynchronous presentations

Presentations in, for example, web communities are different to those made in real time. These presentations can be referred to as personal web sites, accessible at all times to all members of the community; presentations that I will label asynchronous (to make a distinction from synchronous presentations). Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical toolbox is primarily suitable for instant meetings and instant events; immediate performances in front of an audience, much like free jazz icon Miles Davis who created his tunes in the very same instant the tones were played. We cannot know how Goffman would have approached today's asynchronous presentations as they appear on the internet. One way to think about these kinds of presentations is to compare them to autobiographies. Autobiography is a word emanating from the Greek *auton*=self, *bios*=life, and *graphein*=write (Wikipedia, 2005), meaning that one writes about one's life, who one is, what one's like, et cetera. Autobiographies may be written by anyone and published in books, newspapers, or magazines. Nevertheless, this privilege seems historically to have been reserved exclusively for the famous part of the population. This has now changed as almost anyone with internet access can theoretically publish, his or her more or less ambitious autobiography. Furthermore, as Bauman (2003) observes, there is a growing interest to expose/share private matters in public; matters that ordinary people experience in their everyday life. There is also an interest to take part of other people's privacy.

However, contrary to the aforementioned autobiographies, online asynchronous presentations may be continuously updated and maintained by the person behind the presentation and, thus, bettered and improved over time. Another difference compared to synchronous presentations is that they are sometimes combined with a picture, either a photo of the persons in question or any other image of his or her choice (to include pictures in presentations have now become a common feature in instant messaging as well). Emilio, 33, is a member of SprayDate and labels his presentations as "serious":

E: The presentation site is serious. I show a picture of myself [the picture of Emilio is taken in a specific way, making it difficult to recognize him]. I have a short catchy description of myself. I show my interests by the groups [on SprayDate] I have joined.

Henrietta, 27, a member of the same community, claims her presentation to be serious as well:

H: I have a serious presentation site compared with several others. I write about myself, my interests and what I'm looking for. Nothing about sex though.

Both Henrietta and Emilio are currently singles and partner seeking and it is important, according to them, to put some thought and work into their presentations to show their "seriousness". By making serious presentations, they mean that their presentations represent themselves, their interests, and their preferences; that they portray the truth.

However, some informants “modify” their presentations slightly to obtain the preferred results. This does not necessarily imply that the presentations become grandiose or overstated. Quite contrarily, those informants claim that their presentations are rather “understated”, meaning that they portray themselves as less attractive than they believe themselves to be. Goffman (1959) labels this discrepant roles; roles in which secrets are kept from the audience by over-communication or under-communication of the facts. Ulrica, 26, explains:

U: I’m a little paranoid because I’m a little bit over weight...and because of that I start to rave about that I’m ten times fatter than I really am...because you’re afraid to see the disappointment in the other one’s eyes when you finally meet.

I: Ok, and then you’re actually slim compared to your description?

U: Exactly, but it’s good to feel slim sometimes hehe.

I: Would you call this a strategy of yours?

U: Yes...yes, when you mention that so maybe...but I always rave [about the weight] because I’m afraid of other people’s opinions.

The possibility to elaborate with one’s physics is absent in face-to-face interactions in the everyday life, where any presentation has to match the person it describes or he or she will be immediately dismissed as untruthful (Goffman, 1959). Furthermore, to remain believable, it is important that the entire audience, present within the same setting, receive coherent presentations. However, as one’s presence online includes a high level of anonymity, compared to offline, it is possible to play more than one role; to use more than one personal front within the same setting. In addition, for practical purposes, it is possible to manage multiple personal fronts in one setting by using several web browser windows simultaneously. Whether this is a commonplace practice or not is debatable as it takes a lot of effort to manage them.

On the other hand, to use multiple personal fronts in different settings seems to be more common in this study. The reasons to make and use several presentations vary. Some say that in web communities they rarely visit nowadays, their presentations have automatically become out of date. Others, who have presented themselves in several web communities, may prioritize one that they maintain and keep up to date. Jimmy, 18, explains why he has more than one presentation:

J: It was a long time ago I wrote my presentations...the one on Lunarstorm is older and more “childish”...the one on Quiser is actually more open [personal] compared to the one on Lunarstorm.

I: In what way?

J: On Lunarstorm it’s more like “hi my name is, I like this and that, and do this in my spare time...I listen to them and them [music] and these are all my nice Lunarstorm people...” On Quiser you write a lot of fun stuff and get to know people by talking to them...

I: If you look at your presentation sites on Lunarstorm and Quiser...are you putting more effort into getting a nice site? And consequently get a good presentation of yourself?

J: No I don't...I used to spend much time on it before...but now I just make sure it's up to date and so on...other than that...no...maybe change the background color...

I: Ok, is it important that they are up to date?

J: Not really...sometimes you just post some news that has happened to you and so on...

I: Do you put more effort into either of them?

J: Qruiser because it's the better site.

I: Do you present the same person on both sites...if you know what I mean?

J: When you look on my Lunarstorm presentation, you find a more strict presentation of who I am...but the one on Qruiser explains what I will do in the future and not who I am or what I have done...you rather talk to people about those things...the past that is...

I: I get it...but why the distinction?

J: I think it has to do with my personal view on both sites...on Lunarstorm I never contact "new" people while on Qruiser you find new people all the time...friends...Qruiser is a non-prejudiced site...a gay site...I like that mentality better...those on Lunarstorm is often more childish...

In Jimmy's case, his presentations fill different purposes. Although both are based upon a description of him, they are rather different. Each presentation is adjusted to fit each setting in which he emphasizes different parts of himself. In the Lunarstorm community, his presentation describes who he is and what he has done, while in the Qruiser community he presents what he wants to do and become in the future. Adjusting our performances according to the settings are not a behavior exclusive for internet milieus but, as Goffman (1959) states, exactly how we act in different offline settings as well. The norms in each setting effect the way we perform and present ourselves. However, Goffman says, it is important to keep these different performances separated; to not let anyone in the audiences take part of both. If so, the performer might be revealed. In offline settings, continues Goffman, some individuals solve this problem by moving to settings where they cannot be recognized – they leave their hometowns. This solution might appear as the only alternative for stigmatized individuals. The internet has made it possible for some to find arenas where they can express, explore, and develop parts of themselves without being stigmatized and without leaving their hometowns.

One issue regarding internet interaction has specifically been discussed; the possibility to use a fake identity and "gender bending." While it is a popular belief that people are "lying" online, earlier research has shown gender bending (when one pretends to be of the opposite sex) to be uncommon (Cooper, Delmonico, & Burg, 2000). However, in their study Cooper, Delmonico, and Burg (2000) found almost 50 percent of the sample to have misrepresented their age. Like many other informants in the current study, Jacqueline, 19, believes people to lie when they present themselves online:

J: For example, I have seen presentations where people I know use so much make-up that you can hardly recognize who they are. I believe that many of them want to look as good/sexy as possible to get a lot of "friends out there".

I: Ok that is interesting...boost one's good looks or how I should say?

J: Yes, but my experience is that it is mostly girls who “do these things”.

I: These are interesting observations...do you think that people do this in text as well?

J: Yes, but not as much.

However, when this question is reversed, not many informants admit that they have lied themselves. Those who have lied have only done so once or twice when they were new to the internet. Paul, 18, talks about a process in which he has changed his way of presenting himself:

P: I haven't used a fake picture but I have probably been lying, but nowadays I'm more like “take me as I am or go to...” or something like that.

I: Ok so it may have happened when you began to use the internet but you don't do it any more...do I understand you right?

P: Yes, I started to be more and more myself instead of someone else.

I: What made you make things up about yourself in the beginning, about what, and why did you become yourself?

P: Well, in the beginning I wanted to be a tough guy with big muscles and so on because so many other guys were like that...but after awhile I realized that there were girls who liked that soft type, and that's how it happened.

I: So it was something you learned while using the internet so to speak...do you think it could be the same for other people as well? I mean that they become the more themselves the longer they have been online?

P: If you have been online for a longer time, throughout the years I think you change in the way you chat or communicate with other people, you start to act as you would want other people to act.

When confronted with the possibility to play any role that would appeal to them, the informants do try this. Nevertheless, it seems to be a parenthesis in their internet life; a behavior they, quite soon, quit. The informants, primarily those in the internet generation, seem to discard this “masquerade.” For them it is more important that they can trust others while online, as they would not like to spend their time on something that would be only a hoax. They use the internet for real life purposes and create networks connected to their offline life. Using Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective again would indicate that as long as they might be revealed, they have to keep their personal fronts coherent in front of their respective audiences.

Nonetheless, the belief that others use fake personal fronts remains despite personal experiences. Edward, 18, has been dating people from the internet and every time their offline appearances have been corresponding to their online presentations, but he still believes many people online lie about their identity:

E: There are lots of people, who do these things, lying and show fake pictures of themselves, but it has never happened to me, but I know these kinds of things happen all the time.

I: How do you know that? Do you have any examples where it has happened? Is it the pictures that don't correspond with reality?

E: Well you read it in the newspapers and hear it on the news...yes pictures and that person's age.

Given the possibility for modifications of identities in online presentations, as has been shown above, a related question is how these presentations are perceived by other actors. Even though they claim not to lie themselves, the majority of the informants in this study believe others to lie in their online presentations. Some of the informants claim that these opinions emanate from the way the issue is discussed and presented in the media. The consequence of this is that the informants have to evaluate and judge the validity of each online presentation; they have to be the audience who has to recognize any deviance from the expected presentation. Goffman (1959) says that we tend to evaluate those parts of a performance that are difficult to manipulate, for example sex and age. When online there seem to be several strategies among the informants on how to do this without the visual cues that are present in offline settings. Many informants claim that authenticity increases with the length of the interaction (the longer the more reliable). Some say they can judge people's age by examining what kind of language they use, including abbreviations. Others examine the content of the presentation, which is dismissed if it appears "too good to be true." A few informants say that any judgments and evaluations are impossible and claim they proceed by intuition alone.

Interacting with others

In the previous chapter, a distinction was made between interactive and non-interactive arenas in the sexual landscape on the internet. The interactive arenas serve as meeting places where communicating with others is the main purpose. Even though online interaction may appear as very random within a large group of more or less anonymous participants, there are certain patterns that can be identified. These patterns are dependent on several variables such as the reasons one engages in online interaction, where this interaction takes place, in what context, and with whom. In addition, there are generational differences in these interaction patterns on the internet.

Among the informants in this study, there are some primary reasons for engaging in interactions with other people for the purposes of love and sexuality. The older informants mainly engage in online interactions to meet a partner or to stay in contact with their current partner. Often there is a specific reason to why they log on to the internet as well as to why they visit specific interactive arenas. Michael, 26, says:

I: What are you doing when you are online?

B: I chat with friends on ICQ, check my e-mail, write posts in discussion groups, and SprayDate of course.

I: So no surfing just for fun?

B: Well that too maybe, but most of the time I visit the same web sites. It's not like I just surf on a website for example and click my way from there. I think I'm pretty predictable in my surfing habits.

Among the informants in the internet generation, online interaction seems to be more of a regular everyday activity where they hang out with their online and offline friends, look for partners, and chat with people who share their interests. For the younger people, this can in certain ways be compared to Foot Whyte's (1943/1993) street corner society, where the street corner is the natural venue to hang out with friends while, simultaneously, keeping an eye on the neighborhood. For these informants, online interactions do not have the outspoken purpose of finding a partner even if that would be a (sometimes desired) consequence. For many, online settings are equal to any offline settings and, thus, spending time in those settings it is fully possible that some meetings can result in offline relationships or sexual meetings, even though it may not have been the initial purpose. Cecilia, 20, explains how she has met partners in a music community:

C: I'm not there to "pick up someone" or to find a partner, I'm there to talk to people and automatically you start to flirt with someone.

I: Is it those contacts, where partner seeking is not outspoken, that can become more than just a regular contact?

C: Something like that yes.

I: Have you ever met someone online that you also have met in real life?

C: Many times. 10-20 times, mostly guys. Or maybe even 15-30 when I think about it.

I: Did it ever lead to a shorter or longer relationship or to a sexual meeting?

C: Yes, it has resulted in five relationships, others have resulted in kissing, but never just "sex and goodbye"...or...well actually it has too, but it wasn't the intention from the beginning...

With a few exceptions, like in the example above, the internet generation in this study primarily interacts with people of approximately the same age who they most likely know offline as well. However, when looking for a presumptive partner they may extend the circle of friends to include people from the same school or from the same geographic location. David, 18, says:

I: Have you met anyone online that you later met in real life?

D: Yes a few, I started to talk with the one I'm dating right now on Lunarstorm, which in turn lead to a coffee date in real life

I: How did the two of you hook up on the web then?

D: Well like, she was dating a friend of mine and then I found her through another friend's guest book in which I wrote "Hi"

I: And then she replied in your guest book?

D: Yes she did. Apparently she had been interested in me for a while because she had seen me at parties.

I: And you knew who she was before so to speak?

D: Yes.

Older informants, on the other hand, are mostly not acquainted with the person they chat with beforehand. They engage in online interactions by being members of, for example, dating communities where they interact to get to know people who could be presumptive partners. For these informants age and geographic location matter, but they are subordinate aspects. These generational differences can be a part of the explanation of the declined popularity of web chat rooms, as younger people prefer to interact with people they know. At the same time, as described earlier, younger people more rapidly adopt the new techniques.

Related to the various degrees of anonymity, interactions are different in different venues. For example, the more anonymous the venue, the more sex talk (sexual suggestions, sexually explicit language) and offensive comments one meets. It seems like anonymous venues promote sexual oriented interactions much more than others. Alicia, 19, gives an example from a web chat:

A: When you are in the chat room and you are bisexual you get offered to join threesomes and so on. It seems to be the new hip thing to have a threesome girl girl and guy.

I: Offers from heterosexual couples? From the man or the woman or both?

A: Sometimes from the woman, sometimes from the man and sometimes from both. Most of the time it's the girl who's interested in a threesome actually...so it's a little hip to be bisexual as well

I: Ok, but they appear as hetero couples where the man is always hetero and the woman bisexual...is that correct?

A: Exactly! At least the woman is curious...it's very annoying though!

I: In what way?

A: Well no...but if you are on the Aftonbladet web chat, you always get private messages from couples and guys who want a threesome and you don't have time for everything.

I: Time to answer everything?

A: Yes, you want to be polite, but it's easy to miss those messages you really want to answer when everyone is sending private messages. You get confused...=)

I: Ok, but these messages you get...are they offensive to you? Do you feel uncomfortable?

A: Some can be very explicit, but I never get uncomfortable. You learn to ignore it after some time. Mostly it's the single guys who use the most explicit language. They think it's cool to be a bisexual girl.

However, this is not to say that sexual interactions do not occur among people who know each other or within a relationship, but in that case, they probably know each other and have a mutual definition of what is acceptable to include in the conversation. Edward, 18, means that to have cybersex within a relationship could be viewed as having foreplay with the purpose of building up fantasies and expectations when the partners are physically separated. Again, this is an example of how the informants express thoughts on the internet in the liquid modernity, as described by Bauman (2000; 2003),

with the newly emerged quality of being both distant and immediate at the same time. Further, to continue the thoughts of Bauman, to be able to interact from within one's safe haven generates greater feelings of security and comfort in relation to the uncertain and insecure, even dangerous, outside world where space is to be shared with strangers. This promotes our willingness to interact with others; it might even encourage us to risk our self-esteem and take chances in these interactions as we can easily unplug the mains and disappear.

Internet as part of the everyday life

It is of importance to keep in mind that those informants who use the internet for sexual purposes also use the internet for other purposes not related to love and sexuality. Further, their overall internet use is part of their everyday life. Internet use can be an integrated part of one's work life and/or a favorite free time activity, where the internet connected computer serves either as a work tool or as an entertainment center. For many people, besides representing either work or entertainment, internet is integrated in the everyday life where, for example, networks are maintained, relationships nurtured, sexualities explored, and new acquaintances made. The internet has become an important arena for many people; an arena that influences their everyday life, primarily because of the reciprocal relationship between the users' online and offline worlds.

How new technology becomes introduced and, thereafter, integrated in people's everyday life depends upon various factors. According to Bauman (2000), the lowest common denominator is time; but actually, it is time and space. Inventions aim to cover a given distance as fast as possible. The internet enables us to be more time efficient than ever. At home, we can be online with our workplace; on our workplaces, we may interact through the internet with family and friends. We may occupy ourselves with several tasks simultaneously in front of our computer screens. However, there are generational differences here as well. Among the older informants, it seems like the integration of the internet in their everyday life concerns rather specific areas. It can be sending e-mails, reading online newspapers or doing their banking. Considering their online sexual activities, they are focused on such things as partner seeking and accessing pornography. Nowadays, the internet has made these activities accessible from people's homes. These older informants spend their time online on the purpose they are online for and do not just "hang out" with friends or randomly surf the web. The youngest informants in this study, who have grown up alongside with the internet, seem to integrate it in a somewhat different way. Rather than using the internet for just a few things, they seem to handle multiple activities at the same time. Contrary to the older informants, they do not separate online sexual activities as specific events, which mean that they do not log on to the internet solely for engaging in online sexual activities. Sexual activities, for the youngest informants are interwoven in their general internet use. A typical example of this is given by Edward, 18:

E: I met a girl in my hometown...she was visiting...the next day when I was hanging out on Lunarstorm I saw a picture of her and thought...was it her I saw yesterday? So I checked her up and it turned out to be her...so we got in touch with each other and talked for a week before we met...and we had sex later on...

For the internet generation, the boundaries, if there are any, between online and offline are blurred, while older users tend to purposely shift between the two and keep them separated from each other. One possible reason for this may be the previously discussed perception of the internet as “reality” or not; the internet as entertainment and a work tool or an inseparable part of the everyday life.

How the internet is integrated in the everyday life is, of course, also dependant on the kinds of offline activities - or parts of offline activities - that are possible to transfer to online activities. Secondly, the integration is dependant on which of their offline activities the users want to transfer to online activities. In addition, it is fully possible to try online activities without having experiences of the equivalent offline activities. Transferring an offline activity to an online activity does not necessarily mean to quit the offline activity, but rather to merge the two, where offline experience influence online behavior and vice versa. One example of this is cybersex, where an offline experience or fantasy can be tried out online with someone and at the same time can a cybersex experience serve as foreplay for a future offline sexual encounter. We have shown that age correlates with the kind of sexual activities people engage in (Månsson et al., 2003).

The young informants in this study are those who spend most time online. Perhaps this is part of the answer to why they have integrated the internet in a different way compared to the older informants. They can, are willing to, and do transfer many of their offline activities to online activities. This is possible because large parts of their friends are online at the same time as well doing the same thing. David, 18, explains:

D: In my school everyone has an internet connected portable computer which means that you are often online. At home I only have a modem connection, but I am still online very much.

I: For how long are you online per day?

D: I don't want to count...but a regular day about 8 to 10 hours.

I: You don't want to count...do you think is it too much?

D: Yes I do. It sounds like you're not doing anything else doesn't it?

I: What would you do otherwise? Do you feel like you are missing out on something else?

D: Not really, but it feels like it's a lot of time spent in front of a screen.

I: Ok but you like it right? Or would you rather spend less time online?

D: Of course I like it, I like communication. But it feels like when I tell a regular working person who's a little older, 8 to 10 hours sound incredibly much.

I: If you compare with your friends then?

D: About the same, there are those who spend more time online, but those not going to a “computer” school are spending less time online. It seems like older people spend less time online.

The time spent online varies very much with other activities in the informants' everyday lives, such as work, family, partner and other interests. This is true for all informants, but a generational difference can be recognized as well. It seems like older informants are more concerned not to let the computer take control of their offline life; as if they fear that this would be the case unless they consciously regulate their time online. Henrietta, 27, says that in periods, she does not use internet much and she turns the computer off when she has a specific task to do. Emil, 18, on the other hand, combines doing his homework and using the internet. Maybe parts of this can be ascribed to various degrees of responsibility one has in various phases of life, but it also indicates that the informants in the internet generation are able to combine several activities, for example, to be online, chatting with friends while doing their homework. This is an excellent example of how we become more and more time conscious in the liquid modernity. The internet connection speed also has an impact on the time spent online. Broadband connections seem to facilitate longer hours online and some of the informants recognize that they spend considerably more time online now compared to when they were connected by slower telephone modems. Cecilia, 20, says:

I: How much time do you spend online per day?

C: Haha, too much **thinking** everything between 3 to 10 hours.

I: So it varies quite much?

C: Most often it's about 8-10 hours a day, but not on weekends, then I spend less time online.

I: Ok, but are you actively online, not just logged in?

C: The computer is powered up all day, but I'm active around 8 to 9 hours, active with internet/homepages/picture program

I: Ok I see...have your usage pattern changed as time has passed, does it look different now compared to in the beginning?

C: Do you mean now as opposed to in the beginning of the day or now as opposed to the beginning of the internet usage?

I: I mean since you got access to the internet.

C: When I first got internet I was in front of the computer one hour a day because it was a modem connection. Since we got broadband it became a lot more. Now I'm kind of an internet addict, I'm climbing the walls when the connection screws up or does not work.

I: So your time online has been dependent on you internet connection speed sort of?

C: Yes.

Many informants think they spend too much time online; more time compared to the average, they believe, regardless of the actual number of hours they spend. However, they do not claim to have any problems with the time they spend online, but retain the feeling that it is too much. Some place their internet use on a continuum where it is placed in between being outdoors and get fresh air on one end and watching TV on the other; that it is better to use the internet than watching TV, but worse than being outdoors.

Individual internet careers

Even though some aspects of internet use are similar among the informants in relation to variables such as age and gender, as discussed in this and the previous chapter, it is possible to talk about individual internet careers. An individual internet career, when it comes to online sexual activities, has little to do with the kind of careers we usually associate with, for example, a substance abuse career or a work life career. The internet career does not start with flirting and romantic e-mails, continue with online erotica and shopping for sex products, and end with real life sex meetings. Rather, an internet career is a learning process based on experiences in which strategies are formed, in relation to oneself as well as in relation to others. One person may try cybersex only to find that it did not suit him or her. Another may find online dating a perfect way of meeting potential partners.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, by navigating through the sexual landscape the informants find favorite activities and arenas to which they keep returning. Generally, their usage of arenas and activities become more refined as they become more skilled, both technically and socially. They learn how to use the computer and software to access erotica and pornography; they learn the formal and informal rules in web chat rooms and communities; they learn a language consisting of specific words and abbreviations; they learn how to interact for various reasons; and they learn how to set up offline meetings with people they have met on the internet (cf. Sveningsson, 2001).

A common feature among the informants as they become more experienced is that they become more focused on what they want and where to get it, preferably as fast as possible. Again, this impatience, that we cannot afford to waste any of our valuable time, connects to the liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000). The impatience may also push the development forward, contributing to the developing of computers that are even more powerful, as well as faster internet connections and software that is even more sophisticated. An example of this is Emilio, 33, who has have experienced that his online dating procedure has changed over time:

E: I've gotten more focused lately...

I: Can you elaborate a little on that?

E: Well I've gotten more impatient and if she doesn't want to use the telephone I terminate the contact faster.

He continues:

E: I think less of what she may look like, then I have learned how to make it [the offline date] easy going and nice. It works out most of the times.

I: Can you explain the feelings when you meet women now compared to before?

E: It's less exciting now.

I: Because you know what is going to happen?

E: Yes, I know if it's going to be serious, I've tried various strategies...irl-date-strategies...I suppose I've gotten better at interpreting the girls' signals.

Henrietta, 27, has become more focused as well and she says that she has gradually lowered her expectations when it comes to real life dating. Another aspect of learning internet dating is that many of the older informants have met significantly more partners since they started with online dating compared to earlier in their life. Perhaps the availability of single people online makes these informants move quickly to the next if the first did not work out. Many dating sites, as well as media, advertise internet dating as the perfect way to find a perfect partner. However, as Bauman (2003) says, in the liquid modernity, it has become more common to pick and choose among potential partners, much like shopping for consumer goods.

For many informants the internet has gradually become an indispensable part of their lives. Some claim that they would refuse to give it up, even if a partner would ask them to. Others have negotiated on how the internet may be used for sexual activities within a relationship. I will return specifically to the sexual activities in the next chapter.

Concluding remarks

Navigating through the sexual landscape on the internet is a process where arenas and techniques are explored and inventoried. In many cases, the way the users navigate reminds of backpacking travelers exploring foreign countries. Before the departure, the sexual landscape is unknown for the users, but as they move through various online territories, they draw an imaginary map which serves as a reference for meetings with others as well as for new places they visit. The routes of their trips are affected by their interests, their level of curiosity, their purposes, people they meet online, and by recommendations from people in their offline network. As they see new places, new cultures, and make new acquaintances, they may discover new sides of themselves that may inspire and influence their future life online as well as offline.

For some travelers, discovering new places, new cultures, and/or new people is an important part of back packing and this trip may serve as a goal in itself, which mirrors Bauman's (2000) thoughts on the liquid modern society. Some find favorite spots during their trips to which they return time after time. Others meet people who they become friends with, who they continue to meet online and sometimes offline. Yet others find out that online traveling did not suit them or their purposes and choose other activities instead. Occasionally, navigating through the sexual landscape on the internet may confront the travelers with events or material they would have preferred to avoid and that will have an impact on how they continue to use the internet.

On the internet, people present themselves in various ways depending on the settings as well as individual purposes. In this sense, online presentations are similar to how Goffman (1959) describes people to present themselves in various situations in their offline everyday life. Faceless, sometimes anonymous, meetings and interactions

(which may change in the future with, for example web cameras) are significant for the internet and the prominent core feature that distinguishes the realms of online and offline from each other. Face-to-face meetings and interactions, as opposed to their online equivalents, may reveal such physical characteristics as gender, age, and physical appearance, but rarely, for example, marital status, occupation, or sexual preferences. According to Goffman (1959), our personal fronts, including speech and gestures, allow us to direct, deliberately, how our performances will be perceived by the audience. However, we cannot know whether these personal fronts are real or true; even the speech and gestures may fool us in this regard. It seems, if we rely on Goffman's account, as if manipulation with gender, age, and physical appearance would be the difference between the presentations online and offline; deceptive and distorted roles may be played, more or less, regardless of setting.

There is a belief among the informants in this study that many internet users, because of the aforementioned possibility to remain anonymous on the internet, make up their identities. Most of the time they relate these fake identities to people who use fake or improved photos in their presentations as well as to people who pretend to be older or younger than their actual age. Gender bending seems to be, like previous research states (Cooper, Delmonico, & Burg, 2000), a rather uncommon practice. However, while they believe others to lie online, the informants claim that they themselves prefer to be honest despite the fact that others may not. Some informants present themselves in a rather understated and less favorable manner compared to how they perceive their actual offline appearance (they do not consider this as lying). By doing this prior to offline dates, they will automatically appear as better offline compared to their online presentations. Rather than talking about deceit, the internet, with its anonymous settings, allows people to play and experiment with roles that are parts of them, but difficult or impossible to play in their offline surroundings. Perhaps, it allows people to try many more of the roles in their repertoire as well as develop them or even try on new roles without, as Goffman (1959) says, having to move from their hometowns.

Even though there are many similarities between online and offline interactions, online interactions have some distinct features. The internet facilitates interactions between people who would normally not meet offline due to, for example, their geographic location, age, or different interests. While this is true, the internet changes the way we interact. On the internet, people may approach and interact with people whom they do not know, and to whom they have never talked before. Furthermore, the content may be radically different compared to in our offline interactions, as we may be more comfortable talking about certain topics online. Bauman (2003) says that we become more and more isolated, putting up fences and walls around us to protect ourselves, increasing our sense of comfort. The internet could be seen as continuing this trend as we may isolate ourselves in separate rooms in the same house in front of our personal computer screens. However, it is also possible to claim the opposite as we approach and interact with more unknown people than before. Physical distance and virtual proximity; we keep a comfortable, secure distance to others while we at the same time interact intimately with them.

There are generational differences in how people interact on the internet. This is largely dependent on how the internet is integrated in the users' everyday lives as well as what possibilities they ascribe to it. For many in the older generation the internet represents a technology that enhances or replaces parts that previously belonged solely to the everyday life (e.g., mail, banking, newspapers, ticket booking and reservations, shopping, dating) and, typically, they start using the internet in these areas. People in the internet generation have, perhaps without even reflecting on it, adopted and integrated these online activities as parts of their everyday life because they grew up with the technology. This makes them less susceptible for the fast-paced development and less prejudiced against new inventions, which is a valuable asset (or a requirement?) in the liquid modernity as observed by Bauman.

Generational differences also influence with whom the users interact. Internet communities directed to youths have millions of members making them attractive meeting places for this category. Those in the internet generation incorporate their off-line friends and acquaintances in their online life and communicate through the communities and instant messaging software. The internet is more like an extension of their everyday life rather than something that is separated from it. While older users often need a reason to be online, the users in the internet generation "hang out" doing nothing special. This is possible partly because they do not need to focus exclusively on one specific activity, but engage in several activities, online as well as offline, simultaneously. The time spent online in different age groups also reflects this generational difference.

5. Online love and sexuality

In chapter three, focus was set on the arenas on the internet, which constitute the sexual landscape. These arenas were found to have different characteristics and to appeal to different groups. In the following chapter four, focus was placed on how users moved through the sexual landscape and their interaction with others online. Further, internet usage was examined as part of the informants' everyday lives as well as the link between online and offline. With these prerequisites, outlined in the previous two chapters, it is time to focus on the activities relating to love and sexuality and how they are experienced and perceived by those who engage in them.

Online sexual activities were defined in the introduction as activities relating to love and sex, for example flirting, seeking love/sex partners, keeping in contact with love/sex partners, reading erotic novels, viewing pornography, checking out sex ads, buying sex products, seeking support in sexual issues, seeking information on sexuality, or having cybersex. Most of the online sexual activities are immediate replicas of existing offline sexual activities but with new characteristics and qualities, which may have changed or modified them. Love and sexuality have historically been affected by technological advancements. Each step has meant increased availability (Månsson, 1998). Pornography, for example, has moved from hand made paintings via cinemas and glossy magazines to adult video shops and cable-TV and, now, to the internet. At the same time, the content and values regarding love and sexuality have been interrelated to historical, cultural, and societal factors (Bauman, 2003; Giddens, 1992).

By its unique characteristics, the internet provides people with opportunities to explore and expand love and sexuality, either by curiosity or by coincidence. Others may extend their sexual repertoires by tips and ideas emanating from interactions with others. Not only has the internet made it possible to access adult material and shop for sex products, but to flirt, to fall in love, and to date presumptive partners - and everything can be done in front of a computer screen.

Flirt, love, and maybe a date

As shown in chapter three, there are several arenas on the internet where it is possible to flirt and to date. Regardless of setting, the procedures are similar but with individual influences. Most of the time people meet because they happen to visit the same setting (ranging from dedicated dating sites to public web chat rooms) where they for various reasons start talking to each other. Occasionally they start to flirt and this may, for some, result in meetings offline.

It begins with a flirt

According to our previous research, online flirting is one of the most popular activities among both men and women, which corroborate with the findings in the current study

(Månsson et al., 2003). The informants are flirting in various interactive venues like in web chats and in communities. Flirting on the internet can be a way of showing one's interest in another person with the intention of finding a real life partner. For others, flirting can be a recreational activity or a part of finding a partner for cybersex without any intentions to meet in real life. Flirting with someone offline includes a potential risk of being misinterpreted or rejected and, perhaps, leading to embarrassing situations from which one cannot easily disappear. Many of the risks associated with offline flirting can be avoided or reduced on the internet. Internet may serve as a buffer zone where "sensitive" and potentially "embarrassing" questions (defined as such by society's sexual scripts) can be asked. David, 18, means that certain things become easier to ask about on the internet.

I: Can you describe why it is easier to establish relations online?

D: Simple, you probably dare to speak more and to make a fool out of yourself. If you make a fool out of yourself, you can just unplug the chord and the problem is out of your way.

I: Are you becoming more open online, is that what you mean?

D: Of course, you dare to take more chances.

I: Can you give me an example of how you dare to take more chances?

D: I mean, if you are in a discotheque, for example, you just don't approach someone and say "Hi, how are you! Who are you?" but this is what you dare to do online because there you can easily "disappear" if you want to.

Perhaps this is one of the most significant features of the internet; the possibility to "disappear" if something should go wrong, the possibility to take chances without having to face any sanctions. Like Bauman (2003) observes, in the liquid modernity we seem to isolate ourselves and hide behind walls because of fear of and insecurity about other people. Nevertheless, in order to interact with others we must approach them and to do so we must leave our safe havens and, thus, expose ourselves to our fears – that we cannot predict the outcome. The internet becomes a safe way of interacting with others, which may encourage us to interact even more. It is possible to be intimate while keeping the distance; it is possible to take chances without risks.

One way of taking chances is to flirt with others online; to engage in interactions (verbal, textual, or visual) with a romantic touch, sometimes leaning to the sexual. According to our previous research, men and women flirt online to a similar extent (Månsson et al., 2003). However, men initiate such contacts more often than women do. This is an example of how the internet reproduces traditional sexual scripts, which state that men should take the initiative. The sexual scripts also state with whom it is appropriate to engage in sexual behavior. Elisabeth, 40, believes those who flirt online to be young while Sandra, 18, believes the opposite. Both could be right as the internet enables people of different age to flirt with each other. This is an example of when the internet allows users to break with traditional scripts that claim people engaging in sexual behavior to be of equal age (Gagnon & Simon, 1973).

Emil, 18, does not like to initiate romantic contacts offline, but by using the internet he gains control over parameters that he find uncontrollable offline. For ex-

ample, he is able to find out if the person is single and shares his interests, without feeling “pushy”. Flirting online also adds dimensions which are absent in offline flirting. Because many informants are feeling comfortable, secure, and less shy in front of their computer screens, they are able to express themselves and their feelings in ways that they would never do offline. Marianne, 18, says:

M: Because of the fact that you begun to chat on Messenger and ICQ you could talk more openly because you weren’t as shy on the internet and the Messenger and you wrote and talked about subjects that you would never do face to face with a flirt hehe. Then when we met it felt great because he knew how I was, who I was, what I looked like and it was so obvious that he wanted me and it was just to jump onboard.

In those cases where online flirts precede offline meetings, the internet serves as an “ice breaker” and preference checker to avoid surprises offline. This vouches for smoother offline meetings. Time conscious as we are in liquid modernity, according to Bauman (2000), we want to make sound investments, low risk high yield, of course as fast as possible. Consequently, we do not want to spend our valuable time on investments that do not pay off. The internet offers inside information upon which we can make decisions about whether or not we will proceed.

While most informants report that they have to date offline to evaluate if there will be a sequel in the future, some informants claim to have fallen in love just by chatting and flirting online with another person. Maybe parts of this could be ascribed to the fact that it is possible for people to be more open with their thoughts and feelings online. Alicia, 19, met her current girlfriend in a web chat room:

I: Did you think that the internet could be a place to find a partner?

A: Absolutely not! I had picked on my friend because she fell in love on the internet...I was really mean and told her you couldn’t [fall in love on the internet]...but I’ve apologized for that now...

I: How did you fall in love on the internet? What made it turn out like that?

A: Well, she was cute and wonderful. It was not until one night when we had talked on MSN Messenger I fell in love. I knew she was in love with me before I told her. She was so young (16 years) that I really did not want to admit it myself. Then I really fell in love when we talked on the phone and even more when we met.

I: Ok, but how did you feel it was love...how should I put it...what made you sense those feelings?

A: I don’t know...they just appeared. She gave me many compliments and so on...I couldn’t eat nor sleep...so in two weeks I lost like 10 pounds.

Changing medium from the web chat room to the more private instant messaging software was crucial in Alicia’s case and, subsequently, led to feelings of love. These feelings grew even stronger when they did their next change of medium and started to talk over the telephone. This is quite the opposite compared to how we normally picture this procedure, using phrases like “love at first sight” among others. It is clear that

visual appearance play a less significant role online. Moreover, the internet constitutes a new arena for flirting where the first impression is text based (which may change in the future as it becomes more common to show photos as well).

From online flirts to offline dates

To fall in love with an online flirt, to become interested in another person on the internet, regardless of the online setting, may for some lead to a point when they want to meet each other offline. We found more than a third of the informants to have met someone online who they later met offline and had sex with (Månsson et al., 2003). For the majority, the process from initial contact to a real life meeting seems to follow a similar pattern. Many of the informants claim to have found someone to flirt with or a potential partner in a web chat or in a community, chatting and exchanging e-mails, but before long they add each other to their instant messaging software. This gives them a chance to get to know each other in private and to share pictures of themselves if they have not done that earlier.

After chatting online through instant messaging software, some informants report that they change medium and begin to use the telephone in their communication. Some informants say that a telephone number and a voice verifies the other person; decreasing the risks of being deceived. According to Goffman (1959), the audience (those who view performances) will continuously evaluate any performance during the show and look for inconsistencies and errors that may reveal any frauds. An unwillingness to take the step from the internet to the telephone is to signal that something might be wrong. How long the transition from computer to telephone takes varies from case to case and from person to person. Emilio, 33, means that for him, the change from computer to telephone represents the first step toward a real life meeting and if the other person is unwilling to use the telephone instead of the computer, he ends the online flirt. This is an example of how we carefully consider our investments which Bauman (2003) holds as a typical feature of the liquid modernity. Will the investment reimburse the time devoted? It seems like the older informants become more impatient the more experienced they get in online dating. They know what they search for and have developed strategies on how to not waste any time.

Among the informants in the internet generation, a fast change to telephone seems to be of less importance. Part of the explanation for this could be related to the fact that many of these informants are still living at home and may not be as willing to share their family's telephone number. The telephone is not as individual nor has the same level of privacy (others can listen to a telephone conversation) as instant messenger. In addition, as described in the previous chapter, many in the internet generation already know, or know of, those they interact with offline as well, which reduce the need for verification. Another explanation may be that they perceive their computers to be as trustworthy as any other media used for social interactions. Therefore, they are less suspicious against online interactions compared to the older users.

To communicate in real time is a way for the participants to get a chance to find out if they want to meet offline. The benefits that make real time communication popular for these reasons are speed, security, and authenticity. At what point the informants decide to meet offline varies greatly. Henrietta, 27, has met about 16-17 persons on the internet whom she also has met offline:

I: How long does it take before you meet in real life?

H: It varies. I think I was chatting for a couple of months with the guy I'm currently dating before we met the first time. I met another guy half an hour after we had met on the internet.

Regardless of how long it takes from the first online meeting to the decision to meet offline, the choice of offline setting is important. For the first offline date, it is common to choose a public, neutral, meeting place such as a café or a bar. Such places make it possible for easy withdrawal from awkward situations by just leaving. In addition, these places with other people present increase feelings of security, as they are settings that we recognize and ascribe, according to Goffman (1959), certain kinds of behaviors. However, it seems to be more common among the older informants in this study to meet at home or in a hotel compared to the informants in the internet generation, probably because they have the means to travel and to rent hotel rooms. Furthermore, they may already be in committed relationships and, therefore, keen to avoid public settings. In addition, online dating has not yet become a fully acceptable manner to meet partners. Elisabeth, 40, decided to meet in a hotel room with a man whom she had met a year before in an online role playing game:

I: How did it feel to meet in real life...you already knew pretty much about each other both generally and intimately so to speak?

E: We met in a hotel room. We had decided that it would be in total darkness so it should feel less awkward, but sure, it was weird to meet a physical person who was a "stranger" and at the same time not. It was a special experience.

I: Please tell me more about it...

E: It was the first time we met but we did not actually see each other. We had known each other for a year I think and had had daily contact over the telephone for six months. We were worried that the appearance of the other as a physical person would feel weird so we chose to meet in total darkness :-) so we just heard each others familiar voices while having physical contact...yes we had sex. It felt strange but he met my expectations, then it took awhile until we met again because of practical reasons.

Many informants, regardless of age, are anxious to meet offline with someone from the internet. Most of the time they are anxious about whether or not the person they have met online will be the same offline, both physically and intellectually, as well as how they will react in each other's presence. There are several strategies mentioned by the informants on how they deal with their anxiety. In Elisabeth's and her date's case, they decided to meet in complete darkness because of this and, thus, extended the time where they kept their imaginations of each other that built upon the characters from the

online role playing game. Their online characters met, not their offline personas. According to Bauman's (2003; 2004) thoughts on how we form partnerships in the liquid modernity, this may serve as an example of purchase on approval, a money-back guarantee if not fully satisfied; (blind) testing the quality of goods and services before making a purchase decision. Another way of handling the anxiety when meeting a date for the first time has to do with one's expectations. David, 18, for example, says that he does not set his expectations "too high" prior to such meetings:

I: ...when you talk via MSN and the telephone for some time before you meet someone, you might create a picture of that person, and it's that picture from earlier conversations I wonder whether or not it has met your expectations?

D: Some characteristics may not be what you expected. Often people are more open on the internet than they are in real life, so you may get disappointed.

I: Do you have any examples you might remember?

D: Well, they are quieter...

I: So the internet makes it easier to communicate, but it's still hard in real life?

D: Yes, a little bit more difficult in real life.

I: Have you ever brought that up with someone you have met like that?

D: Of course, you say like "this feels awkward"

I: And they say...?

D: [They say] yes. And then you have to start talking about something to ease the tension, maybe talk about something you have in common.

I: Something you have been talking about earlier on MSN or the telephone?

D: Exactly.

To lower one's expectations and to make understatements about one's looks and virtues seem to be two strategies that may help to reduce the anxiety when meeting an online date in real life for the first time. On the one hand, I will appear better than I have promised and, on the other hand, I expect the other person to appear worse than promised, but without making me disappointed. This minimizes my vulnerability, it protects me from failure; I knew it, I was prepared for the worse, and the outcome was expected. Nevertheless, those who dare to play have the chance to win. Bauman (2004) states that the seemingly infinite range of possibilities and experiences in the liquid modernity generate feelings of both anxiety and excitement.

As David, 18, explains above, to know things about each other from earlier internet conversations makes it easier to start a conversation on the first offline date and awkward silences may be avoided, again a strategy to control the situation. Goffman (1959) means that common definitions and reference points support our social interactions which otherwise could become embarrassing and confusing, making the participants uneasy and doubtful. This sneak preview (knowing each other before meeting offline) may create expectations on the future as well as backgrounds against which the participants can be matched respectively.

The majority of those who engage in online dating seek partners for relationships. Among the informants, there are those who say that they found the right partner

within a few tries, while others still search for a match. When online dates have emanated in a relationship, two different scenarios seem to occur. Some informants claim that when they find their partner, they terminate their interactive online life by deleting their online presentations and leaving the communities or dating sites. Others want to keep their online friends and continue to be a part of their communities, which can sometimes become problematic within a relationship. Ulrica, 26, is living together with a man she met on the internet and still spends time online:

I: Did you negotiate or talk about what is ok to do?

U: No, but we can both be jealous and so on the internet...because it's difficult...to see your partner chat with a girl who you do not know and so on...and if you would sneak up behind his back you could see something you might interpret as flirting...but if you read everything you would know it wasn't.

I: Do any of those misinterpretations happen occasionally?

U: It happened in the beginning...but then it became rarer and now it never happens.

I: Can you tell me [about such occasions]?

U: When he was chatting with his ex girlfriends and he didn't want to write anything [to them] when I was around...but actually they were talking about me and so on and he felt embarrassed talking about his feelings about me...but now we know each other's friends so it's not a problem any longer...but still it's in your head...my ex boyfriend went off with another girl...

I: I see, but nowadays it's ok for you to keep your friends online without any misunderstandings and jealousy?

U: Totally ok...

I: Would you give it up if your partner would ask you to?

U: Give up the internet?

I: Your friends on the internet. Continue to stay in contact with people.

U: Hmm...No, I don't think so...it's such a big part of my life...

If one continues to live one's life on the internet, there are possibilities that one will meet other people online that may not only be attractive, but presumptive partners as well. To continue the online life is also means a risk of meeting a partner for sex. In her study, Whitty (2003) found people to rank online infidelity as betrayal as much as offline infidelity. To view pornography, however, was found less threatening compared to online interaction because of the lower probability of subsequent offline meetings. Here it is important to remember the generational differences. For those in the internet generation, shutting down their internet life may not be an option. They have involved and incorporated the internet in their everyday life to an extent that makes it impossible to live without it. Furthermore, as Bauman (2003; 2004) notes, the word of advice among relationship experts in the liquid modernity is that commitment means closing the doors to other (perhaps better) romantic possibilities.

No bonds thanks!

Even though the internet has had a significant impact on how we meet partners in the beginning of the 21st century, not all internet-related dates lead to relationships. As mentioned in the introduction, in a prior study we found that more than one third of the respondents reported that they had met someone online who they had later met offline and had sex with (Månsson et al., 2003). Further, this study showed that 16 percent men and 23 percent women had met their current partner online. There is, noticeably, a difference between the number of offline meetings leading to sex and those leading to relationships. It is more common that these dates lead to sex than to relationships. Henrietta, 27, explains:

H: I haven't always had the purpose of finding someone for a serious relationship. Some times I have met someone just because I have found him nice (as a friend) or to have sex with him...but that's rare on the other hand...or more like...before I've met them I could have had serious thoughts, but after we've met I might have thought that sex would be possible, but nothing more than that. This may have happened with 3 or 4 persons.

I: The last time we talked you told me that if you wanted sex, you were guaranteed to find it on the internet...can you say something more about that?

H: If you're a girl who wants sex it's so easy to find it. It seems like every guy "is there for you" if you just want them to...If I'd like sex I'd simply write to one of my mail contacts on SprayDate.

I: Yes, you told me before...you don't write anything sex related on your presentation...but you can use e-mail for those conversations if you feel like it?

H: Exactly. It's nothing I would write to everyone, in those cases it has to be someone you have been chatting with and know who it is...

I: Maybe seen a picture?

H: Absolutely.

I: Can you just propose sex in an e-mail just like that?

H: Yes, it has happened, but then with people I've already had sex with. Those I've been dating...and have had good sex with.

This is a typical example of what Giddens (1992) labels the plastic sexuality, the separation of romantic relationships from sexuality and vice versa; the one has not necessarily anything to do with the other. Henrietta makes her decision about future possibilities at the actual date. Furthermore, she has learned that the internet is an arena where she can find men to have sex with without any commitments; it is possible to find sex partners without having to invest in relationships, without any bonds. The door to future possibilities is kept open as the liquid modernity suggests.

Some of the informants explain that they have become friends with some of their dates and despite the fact that they found the date to be a mismatch offline, they may continue to keep in contact through instant messaging software. In some cases, they keep having sex while they continue to search for a partner for a committed rela-

tionship, another significant feature of liquid modernity; engaging in sexual relationships with no strings attached or promises made for the future (Bauman, 2003; 2004). This exemplifies how our sexual scripts change over time, how new sexual behaviors, previously impossible (morally or otherwise) to engage in, are becoming part of our sexual repertoires (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Furthermore, it exemplifies how our personal responsibility for our sexuality in contemporary society is manifested.

Sometimes the expectations are not met offline, while in other cases people find out, despite several dates, that they do not match. However, the internet has made it easier to start over again with a new date. Some informants in the current study claim to have been on several offline dates. Emilio, 33, has dated women from Spray-Date for the past three years:

I: How many have you had contact with [on SprayDate]?

E: If you mean those I have been e-mailing with then I don't know. It has to be at least one hundred.

I: And some you have met in real life?

E: Yes.

I: How many would you say?

E: About fifty.

The internet, with its specific features, makes it easy to dispose of any mismatches and to start the procedure all over again. In the liquid modernity, the online daters have learned to avoid investing too much in one presumptive partner, to avoid betting all their savings on one horse, but make sure there are several options (or candidates) if one or more would fail. They know that the internet is filled with people who look for partners and that the best choice might still be out there. However, some informants say that some people they meet online are not seen as presumptive partners for amorous relationships at all, but as possible sex partners for one or a few occasions. Emilio says that in these cases he is very open with the fact that he seeks a sex partner by steering these conversations towards sex. If he receives positive responses, it may result in mutually agreed sex dates. However, engaging in sexual talk can be defined as a specific online sexual activity as well.

Cybersex

In our quantitative study, we found one third of the informants, both men and women, to have engaged in cybersex (Månsson et al., 2003). Cybersex is defined as when two or more persons are engaged in sexual talk on the internet for the purposes of sexual gratification. An emphasis on the interactive aspect discerns cybersex from other sexual activities on the internet, such as viewing erotic pictures or movies. Cybersex is primarily a real time activity and has been described as an interactive sex novel (Månsson et al., 2003). We found those engaging in cybersex to spend more time online for sexual purposes and to have more offline sex partners compared to those not engaging in cybersex (Daneback, Cooper, & Månsson, 2005).

Intimate sex talk with strangers

Among the informants in the current study, two patterns can be discerned regarding with whom they have cybersex. Either they have cybersex with their current partner or with someone completely anonymous, the latter being the most common. This means that, most of the time, the participants do not know each other beforehand and, therefore, it is more common to have cybersex in web chats (which were shown, in chapter three, to possess a high level of anonymity). Paul, 18, has tried cybersex a few times and I reuse a previous quote from him:

P: I went to a web site with erotic content on the internet and into a chat room where I asked if anyone wanted [to have cybersex] and after some time there was a girl who wanted to talk and so...well...so it was...

I: Ok, did you ask if anyone wanted to have cybersex or did it just happen?

P: I asked, I don't click on someone and say "now we're going to have cybersex" that's too forced so it's better to ask and if no one wants to..."that's life".

To approach a complete stranger in this manner would be irrational, rare, and downright impossible in any but a few offline settings as it breaks against society's sexual scripts (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Besides the content of the conversations, cybersex is not at all comparable with telephone sex. People rarely dial numbers at random and engage in sexual conversations with whomever answers the telephone. In this perspective, the internet has added more possibilities when it comes to how we can engage in sexual talk with others.

To have cybersex means, practically, to write sexual text messages to each other, sometimes accompanied by erotic pictures or movies. These conversations can be about sexual fantasies as well as offline experiences. Most of the time the participants create settings and moods in which they share detailed descriptions of sex acts. Sandra, 18, uses cybersex for fantasies that should be somewhat connected to what is possible offline:

S: You write descriptive messages of what you are doing with the other person's body...sexually.

I: Ok, is it real life events you describe then?

S: No you fantasize about the other and what you want to do

I: Ok so there is no need to have any real life experience beforehand?

S: Experience of sex?

I: Well do you have to have had the sexual experience you describe?

S: No, you just need to know how to have sex and so on...then you can have cybersex.

Although it is possible for many people to participate simultaneously in a cybersex event, it seems like cybersex has much in common with the traditional sexual script of two persons having sex within private enclosures (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). The words on the screen and one's imagination are the primary ingredients of cybersex, making the actual authenticity of one's cybersex-partner to be of less importance. In fact, not

having this information could serve as an arousing aspect of cybersex. When having cybersex, it is possible to play different roles, somewhere between fantasy and reality, while being anonymous. For example, cybersex can be part of a homosexual coming out process. Tikkanen & Ross (2003) refer to this as approximation, which is defined as the possibility for online experimenting in order to determine one's sexual identity. We found that more than one tenth of the self-defined heterosexual men in their sample had had cybersex with other men (Ross, Månsson, Daneback, & Tikkanen, 2005). Furthermore, cybersex can be perceived as practice grounds for eventual offline encounters, both homo- and heterosexual.

Using sexually explicit language

To give detailed descriptions of sexual actions, like in cybersex conversations, can be both difficult and liberating. Some informants mean that it is difficult to know how to use sexually explicit words, especially when others are present. This can be one of the difficulties when trying cybersex for the first few times. Some may avoid cybersex for this reason alone while others feel liberated when they are able to express sexual words that normally are not part of their vocabulary. Lena, 38, means that using an explicit language when she has cybersex has broadened her sexual repertoire.

L: Normally when I have sex I don't talk...or even like to...I'm not interested in talking dirty and you know...but at the same time when you have cybersex you have to talk sex...

However, cybersex does not require the participants to pronounce the "dirty" words, as they do not pass over their lips but through the fingers on the keyboard. Along with not having to face each other at the same time - whether it is one's partner or an anonymous person - this makes it easier to be open and frank about one's sexual wishes, fantasies, and desires. Such openness is the opposite of what is commonly ascribed to offline heterosexual sex acts, which are often surrounded, according to Gagnon and Simon (1973), by silence and embarrassment. This is probably a major aspect of the attraction of cybersex, at least for heterosexuals. On the internet, it is possible to have cybersex with another person while being comfortably silent and explicitly verbal simultaneously, including the possibility to withdraw smoothly from possible embarrassments.

Among the informants, there are those who have tried cybersex and found it dissatisfactory. Alicia, 19, has tried cybersex a few times but did not like it, mainly because of the explicit language in the conversation.

A: I have tried it, but didn't find it to be any good and have decided not to be talked into it again.

I: Does it feel like you were "tricked into it"? How?

A: Well I guess I was horny for some reason, and then someone, who I didn't even know, wrote something arousing and it just happened...

I: Was it the only time?

A: I've had it with a guy and a girl on two different occasions. I thought it would be different with the girl, but it wasn't...

I: Ok, that's interesting...was it a similar experience with the guy and the girl? Can you describe it...you don't have to be detailed if you don't want to.

A: I guess it was better with the girl...she didn't use as explicit language as the guy did, then she was more right compared to the guy.

I: Can you explain that?

A: Girls know what girls like you see =)

To use sexually explicit language and to give detailed descriptions of sexual conduct might be easy when it concerns someone else, but to connect and incorporate it with one's own sexuality might be a more difficult obstacle to overcome. Nevertheless, sexual talk is commonplace in the liquid modernity and newspapers, magazines, and TV-shows give detailed descriptions on how to find the perfect ways to sexual gratification. Foucault (2002) tells us that similar detailed sexual talk was present in history as well. About 400 years ago, fantasies, desires, and impure thoughts should be, without restraints, brought to the confessor, as it was important to achieve forgiveness. By talking about sexuality in this confessional manner, the talk itself became, over time, filled with arousing and exciting qualities.

Reasons to engage in cybersex

As mentioned earlier, cybersex can be used as a practice ground for future sexual encounters, an activity somewhere in between hugs and kisses and intercourse. Another reason for engaging in it may be the possibility to share, anonymously, sexual desires and fantasies with others. Paul, 18, means that cybersex serves two goals for him - to become aroused and/or to reach orgasm:

P: Sometimes you want it to be arousing, sometimes it's like both are expected to reach orgasm.

I: Ok, so it may vary from time to time?

P: Yes, sometimes you may feel like you don't want to reach orgasm but rather become aroused...and if it's a boy/girlfriend it can be very teasing and arousing.

I: Would you say that's where the difference is...different with a boy/girlfriend? To build up something until you meet for example?

P: Yes, if it's a couple chatting over MSN for example, it can be an arousing event until you see each other, a different form of foreplay. Between two persons who don't know each other it's just regular cybersex.

I: Do they differ in any other way according to your experience? What's regular cybersex?

P: Regular cybersex is cybersex but when you're "done" it's like turning the lights off, nothing more is going to happen. On the other hand, if it's a couple you'll be able to bring the cybersex into a date later that day.

According to Paul, cybersex can be had instead of foreplay, in order to arouse one's partner before an offline meeting. However, as mentioned earlier, to have cybersex with the own partner seems rare among the informants. We found masturbation to be as common for men as for women when they have cybersex (Månsson et al., 2003). Nevertheless, masturbation is not necessarily a part of every cybersex event. According to Sandra, 18, it varies with the occasions:

I: Are you masturbating when you are having cybersex?

S: Well you're supposed to.

I: Have you engaged in cybersex many times?

S: Yes, but I haven't been masturbating every time.

I: Ok, when you do...is it "in front of the keyboard" or on a later occasion?

S: Sometimes I don't masturbate at all, but when I do it's in front of the keyboard. It has only happened 2 or 3 times that I have really done it myself, but I've had cybersex on several more occasions.

I: What makes you masturbate...does it depend on with whom or what you talk about?

S: It depends on with whom, how it's done and how much it turns me on.

Even though she is "supposed to" masturbate when having cybersex, she only does so when it feels right for her. Sandra has gained control over the sexual situation. Furthermore, it is possible for her to engage in cybersex without the purpose of reaching orgasm. By being able to control the situation when using the internet, Leiblum & Döring (2002) mean that women have an advantage online compared to offline, where sexual and physical violence constitutes the reality for many women.

For Lena, 38, to masturbate when she has cybersex is distracting and impractical. She prefers to keep the fantasy – the interactive sex novel – in her mind and uses it on a later occasion. Again, it is words and imagination, not what is actually real and true, that is most important in cybersex. Further, this means that cybersex is a flexible activity in which it is possible to engage for a variety of personal reasons. For example, one participant may masturbate when engaging in cybersex while the other is only collecting "an erotic novel" for later use. In this sense, cybersex may be perceived as a form of interactive pornography.

Pornography on the internet

Although the definition of pornography may lie in the eye of the beholder, pornography is predominantly produced by men for men. Furthermore, a large proportion of the available commercial pornography is produced in the United States (for example, Vivid Entertainment Group, founded in 1984, is currently the largest producer of adult movies (distributed by satellite, the internet, rental movies, and mail order DVDs) with an annual revenue close to 100 million dollars. They have recently expanded their business to cover cell phones as well). Månsson (1998) writes that the producers of pornography are early adopters of technological development and that new media con-

tributes to an increasing availability of pornography. Among online sexual activities, we found viewing pornography to be the most popular activity for men – by far (Månsson et al., 2003). However, in the same study we found interesting generational differences, especially regarding women's pornography consumption. They found that approximately 25 percent of the women between 18 and 34 years viewed pornography on the internet. For women between 50 and 65 years, only 4 percent reported that they viewed online pornography.

Although men are (and have been) generally more positive to pornography compared to women, it has become more accepted by both men and women over time (Månsson, 1998). However, the majority of those who consume pornography, then and now, are men (Gagnon & Simon, 1973; Månsson, 1998; Månsson et al., 2003). This corroborates well with the findings in the current study, where the majority of the men and about one third of the women have viewed online pornography.

Porn stars and amateurs

It appears that the porn industry have realized that the arousing potential of pornography combined with easy and anonymous access makes it easier for some men and women to overcome a possible resistance to pornography. The porn industry also knows that if women would consume pornography, the market would immediately double. Consequently, it is of importance for these actors to reach as many people as possible and to find those who are willing to spend money on pornography. On the internet, this is done in several ways, for example by using pop-ups and e-mail to advertise their businesses. Most of the time the advertisements consist of free sample pictures and movies. Another strategy is to re-direct traffic to various adult web sites or to use domain names that remind of non-pornographic web sites (cf. Månsson & Söderlind, 2004). Most informants find this aggressive advertising to be an annoying part of the internet. Theo, 20, is also concerned about his mother who has to see all this pornography:

T: I find it incredibly annoying that there is such a range [of online pornography]. I mean all these pop-ups my mom gets in her face when she logs on to the internet.

For the professional actors who already produce pornography, it has been easy to extend their businesses to the internet by publishing pictures and movies that have already been produced in magazines and on DVD. With their already contracted porn stars, the extra cost for online publishing is very low, practically non-existing. These new distribution channels along with new advanced and cheap technological equipment for production dramatically cut the cost on each level. Nevertheless, these prerequisites apply to private persons as well and they have made it possible for almost anyone to produce and distribute pornography. There are examples of private persons who publish web sites with pornographic pictures and movies of themselves. Some have the ambition to make money on their web sites while others simply want to expose themselves. Two of the informants in this study say that they share and trade

amateur pictures online. Occasionally, they find these amateur pictures on the internet, but they also trade pornographic images portraying themselves. I quote Emilio, 33, one more time when he describes that he trades pictures with some of the women he chats with online:

I: What kind of pictures are you exchanging? Do you have a web cam, digital camera, or scanner?

E: Digital camera.

I: Is it erotic pictures?

E: Yes.

I: Pornographic pictures wherever that line is drawn?

E: Yes.

I: Do you send these pictures or do you receive them?

E: I receive them most of the time.

I: Ok, is it nude pictures or more advanced? Do you make an agreement beforehand or what?

E: We make an agreement and there are both nude pictures and more advanced pictures.

I: Ok, I don't know how this works...do you request pictures from each other?

E: If a girl says she has pictures of herself you ask if you may see them of course.

I: Just like that?

E: Well I suppose I ask.

I: Still pictures?

E: Yes.

Amateur pornography has become a large genre of the pornography found online. This is, perhaps, not surprising as amateur pornography is perceived to contain great market values (The Playboy magazine concept, for example, built on the fantasies and desires of "the-girl-next-door"; the everyday life's ordinary girl). As described by Whitty (2003) the possibility to meet a porn star offline is minimal; to meet the girl (or boy) next door is, on the other hand, highly possible, which might stimulate thoughts and fantasies. Amateur pornography seems more authentic compared to the commercial variants. Some informants mean that amateur pictures reflect genuine sexual lust from people who enjoy sex as well as to expose themselves; the actors are not forced to participate.

Sometimes it is difficult to tell whether web sites are produced by "bona fide" amateurs or amateur couples with exhibitionist interests or created by the professional porn industry, trying to make money on the appreciation of amateur like pornography. In many cases, the boundaries (if there are any) between professional and amateur web sites are barely visible. Furthermore, Månsson and Söderlind (2004) have shown how pictures can be perceived differently depending on the web page where they are posted. They write that the meaning of an innocent picture may become distorted and filled with a completely different meaning when placed in, for example, a pornographic context.

The attractiveness of online pornography

Anonymity is an important aspect of understanding the attraction of online pornography. Through the internet, it has become possible to access pornography in ones home without having to expose either oneself or one's sexual interest to others; to avoid being stigmatized because of one's interest. The range of available pornographic material online is wide; almost any wish or desire can be found online. This is different compared to the early 1970s when, according to Gagnon and Simon (1973), photos of sexual action were difficult to find in the United States.

The possibility to access pornography on the internet seems to have replaced adult magazines and adult rental movies, at least for many of those who use the internet for sexual purposes. Patrick, 32, says that he occasionally rented adult movies, but since he went online, the internet is his only source for pornography. Yet for others, the internet was where they first encountered pornographic material. This was the case for Edward, 18, who has had internet access since he was 12 years old.

I: ...did you ever view porn or read erotic novels somewhere else before you discovered it online?

E: It was on the internet.

I: Only on the internet?

E: Well I may have seen a minute of a movie too.

I: On cable TV?

E: Yes on Canal+ or TV1000.

I: But you have never rented or bought movies or magazines?

E: No.

The younger women among the informants in the current study occasionally view pornographic pictures, but most of the time, they say, it is by accident, a misspelling, or a boyfriend who has shown them. The majority of those who purposely search for pornography online are older. For them, internet may not have been their first encounter with pornography and erotica. Nevertheless, the internet, with its specific features, may have encouraged them to do it; something they would not have done otherwise. Elisabeth, 40, who uses the internet to view pornography and to read erotic novels, claims she would never have done it without internet access.

Women who read online erotic novels occasionally view pornographic pictures online too. However, some express an ambivalent view regarding their pornography consumption. Elisabeth, 40, explains:

I: You say that you have been surfing on porn sites, can you explain further? What sites for example?

E: I can follow links that other people recommend and can get curious and surf around.

I: When you say porn sites, is it with pictures?

E: Yes, that's what it has been.

I: Any specific kind of porn sites?

E: A specific interest you mean? In that case no.

I: Yes, there are sites with amateurs and more commercial and with various interests, hetero, homo, bi etc.

E: No I have not checked any specific interest, little of a double standard here for me because I don't like porn really, so more of the amateur kind in that case, but not very often and I have no compulsive behavior in that matter. // I prefer regular heterosexual pictures and texts, man and woman together.

I: You talked about your attitude to pornography earlier, double standards you said...can you elaborate a little? Is there such a thing as ok porn and less ok porn in your opinion?

E: Yes there is, private persons who want to show themselves voluntarily is ok, but not commercial porn. I don't want to have anything to do with the porn industry really. The attitudes to women frighten me plus it's a rather distorted picture of sexuality that is mediated in my opinion. But then as I have visited those sites and "gotten stuck" for a while that's double standards.

I: How do you think about this "double standard?"

E: I'm not finished with the thinking yet. It's there and when I have gotten there and been viewing it doesn't feel good afterwards. Some primitive part of me thinks it's exciting and afterwards I feel a little disgusted. It's a fantasy part in some way.

I: Ok, is it only on the web you view/read pornography?

E: Yes.

I: Would you have done it if the internet hadn't been there, but videos and magazines?

I: Nope.

Although surrounded by double standards and moral issues, those informants who view pornography report that they like viewing it and get aroused by doing so. Perhaps this is one part of a normalization process, making pornography more accepted than before. However, some are feeling anxious and guilty for getting aroused and masturbating to something they consider morally wrong. Gagnon and Simon (1973) mean that these feelings may even reinforce the excitement and arousal. Some might have been curious to view pornography in the past, but relinquished to do so because of their internal sexual script and society's sanctions surrounding (the consumption of) pornography (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). The internet seems to have made it easier to break the individuals' sexual scripts regarding pornography, even though feelings of guilt may follow. Henrietta, 27, who opposes the degrading attitudes towards women mediated through, for example, online pornography, states that the pornography that is supposed to appeal to women is not the kind she prefers to view.

H: On those rare occasions I want to view porn I'm not interested in erotic pictures. Then I want to see everything if you know what I mean.

In the liquid modernity, as Bauman (2003; 2004) tells us, we prefer instant gratification and online pornography might serve as an excellent example of this. By clicking the mouse, it is possible to access pornography instantly and by an equally easy click it

disappears, leaving no physical traces or clues to what has been going on; no magazines and no DVD movies can be found in the apartment and used as evidence. Perhaps this contributes to the reduction of any feelings of guilt and anxiety. It only exists for an instant.

Affordability is another aspect contributing to the attractiveness of online pornography. None of the informants has paid to access pornography on the internet. On the contrary, they claim that it is easy to find web sites that contain free pictures and movie clips. Others use peer-to-peer programs to download pornography to their computer. For many of the informants, the common understanding is that everything found on the internet should be free of charge. Not paying and, thereby, not contributing to the porn industry may, for some, minimize their ambivalent feelings. However, it might be wrong to claim that online pornography is free of charge as the users pay for their internet connections. Those who view pornography online pay the internet service providers for access to the internet, which also includes access to pornographic material. How, then, can the porn industry thrive online? Månsson and Söderlind (2004) have analyzed the money flow in the porn industry, and recognize that money is made through other activities rather than the free samples found on the internet, for example by integrating it with web shops and cellular phones.

Reasons to view pornography

In our previous research, we have shown various reasons to why people log on to the internet for sexual purposes, for example, curiosity, recreation, and distraction (Månsson et al., 2003). The primary incitement for men to view pornography, however, is to reach orgasm. For Emilio, 33, this is the only reason he views online pornography.

I: Do you masturbate when viewing porn?

E: Yes I do.

I: Does it happen rarely, sometimes, most of the time, or always?

E: Most of the time. If not I wouldn't be on that site in the first place.

Theo, 20, agrees, but also mentions an additional reason:

T: I want to reach orgasm when I view porn...if it's not at a party as a joke

I: What do you mean by "at a party"? That you start up the computer at a party?

T: Well it has happened at some boring parties...and then it's surrounded by laughing and jokes...and has been bad parties as well.

These quotes show, as Gagnon and Simon (1973) advocate, that the use of pornography depends on the social context and, furthermore, that this affects the consequences. The reason to view pornography within the group, as mentioned by Theo, is not to facilitate group masturbation. Rather, Gagnon and Simon say, to view pornography in groups may be an activity to reinforce homosocial masculinity. The masturbatory practice has transferred into the private sphere among heterosexuals in Theo's age group.

Women also masturbate to online pornography. However, similar to when women have cybersex, the majority do not masturbate simultaneously as they view online pornography, but rather at a later occasion. They store the experiences, perhaps as erotic fantasies or stories, which can be controlled and used on suitable occasions. In addition, many women seem to prefer to read erotic novels compared to viewing pornographic pictures. Henrietta, 27, however, means that these two activities serve different purposes for her:

H: I'm not a fan of those erotic pictures where you have to guess what's happening. If I'm aroused I want to see everything.

I: Is it the same with erotic novels?

H: No, I read erotic novels to become aroused so they may be whatever.

I: And then porn movies are the "next step" or what?

H: It's hard to explain... I view porn to be satisfied when I'm aroused, erotic novels to become aroused.

Pornography is known to arouse both men and women to a similar extent and it seems like women take advantage of this, perhaps as a consequence of the responsibility for their own sexuality that has been ascribed to them. Earlier women rarely used pornography in private, but rather together with their partners (Månsson, 1998). Among the informants, there are examples of how the use of online pornography is negotiated within a relationship. Miranda, 25, tells that she and her boyfriend sometimes view pornography together, an activity that has contributed to make their sex life better:

M: In the beginning [of the relationship] he didn't dare to show me what he was doing, but when I found his porn magazines and found the "history" on the internet he gave up. Since that our relationship has become better actually...because we are open with it.

I: You are saying that your relationship has become better...has your sex life gotten better as well from your point of view? Including viewing and reading erotica on the internet?

M: Has it! Wow...he gives me more respect now...and in online erotica you can find an idea which you try later on...so yes it's definitely much better.

I: You get inspired by viewing pictures and reading novels?

M: Yes.

Månsson (1998) refers to Danish research, whose findings corroborate with this scenario. Although it may not be suitable for everyone, finding sexual tips and ideas on the internet, as mentioned by Miranda, whether it is cybersex or online pornography, can be perceived as forms of online sex education in the sense that it contributes to enhancing the sex life.

Online sex education

In our study, we found that 26 percent women and 16 percent men use the internet for sexual education (Månsson et al., 2003). Among informants of 18 to 24 years, the per-

centages were the highest with 35 percent of the women and 22 percent of the men seeking information about sexuality online. Some informants in the current study claim to use the internet to find information about various parts of sexuality, ranging from socio-sexual to biological questions. Those who answer these questions online are both professionals and peers. By approaching different sources and combining them, people receive different points of view in the answers to their questions. Furthermore, the internet in combination with offline sources has been found fruitful for some informants in the current study. Jimmy, 18, for example, says that he is unsure of his sexual identity and has combined the internet with the youth clinic and friends offline to search for information about homosexuality. He means that the best thing with the internet is the possibility to talk to other homosexual men to gain knowledge on homosexuality. There is research claiming that the internet may help homo- and bisexuals in their “coming out” process, either by talking to other homosexuals or by creating open homo- or bisexual identities online (Ross & Kauth, 2002). As mentioned in chapter 3, several professional web sites provide their visitors with information about sexual matters. Some of these web sites also include the possibility to interact with other visitors in sections where they can discuss or post messages. However, some informants experience that it can be difficult to find certain information on these web sites. Ulrica, 26, says:

U: if you have problems with something you can look it up [on the internet]...but there aren't that many sites on the internet...unfortunately...

I: Would there be a demand for it?

U: Yes, absolutely, I think that I would use them. There are many who are afraid to visit youth clinics and other places...

I: Have you ever felt that you wanted to look something up?

U: Yes I have...I have problems with my menstruation and such things and then it would have been nice to find something that could make you stop worrying...

I: Did you try Netdoktor.se? Rfsu?

U: Yes, but I couldn't find anything...then there are those who wonder about different things...when I was younger I just loved to read those columns in the magazines.

I: You mean things that aren't really related to biology? That these columns bring up?

U: Both!

I: What could that be for example...various positions, is my boyfriend normal etc?

U: Exactly => is this normal seems to be the typical question.

Elisabeth, 40, agrees with Ulrica and expresses that for her the internet makes it possible to position herself in accordance to how other people describe their sexuality. Curiosity about other people's sexuality along with the desire to be normal seems to be major reasons to search for information about sexuality on various web sites. As mentioned earlier, talking about sexuality within relationships and families might be difficult for some. To bring up one's own sexuality among friends might be equally difficult. The internet provides opportunities to compare oneself anonymously to others.

Finding information on sexuality on web sites is one way of gathering knowledge. However, some informants report that they are learning as much about sexuality by talking to other people on the internet. Sandra, 18, says that it is easier for her to talk about sexuality when she is online:

I: Can you give an example of what you talk about regarding sex and sexuality?

S: You talk about what you like sexually and what kind of experiences you have and so on.

I: Do you talk about this with guys or girls on the web chat?

S: Only guys.

I: And you talk about it with girls in real life?

S: Yes, like that.

I: Is it different talking about it with a guy rather than a girl?

S: Yes, guys are more curious...and when on the internet you don't really know who the other one is and that makes it less hard to tell or ask.

I: Which is an advantage?

S: Yes it can be.

I: Are there differences regarding what you talk about too?

S: I don't talk about details with my IRL friends, but that's what guys on the internet want to hear all about.

I: And you're happy to tell them about details?

S: Not really. I usually say that it's private.

I: Ok, can you still feel that it's fun/relieving talking to guys about sexuality?

S: Yes, you get tips about what guys like...and get advice and so on.

I: So you may learn things? Can you give me an example of what you've learned?

S: How guys prefer oral sex.

I: How to do it so to speak?

S: I guess you can say that.

Sex information and education on professional web sites on the internet primarily consist of socio-biological, formal, explanations of sexuality while the sexual performance, the action so to speak, is taught by peers. In a way, this division mirrors our contemporary sexuality education, where biology is taught by schools and the sexual performance is taught by non-professionals. Gagnon and Simon (1973) mean that sex education occurs until people reach into their 20s. After that, sexuality is discussed to a significantly lesser degree and sometimes even silenced. In addition, Gagnon and Simon mean that sex education differs greatly between genders, where female sexuality – compared to male sexuality – is repressed, related to love and romance, or not talked about at all. Even though female sexuality is discussed in schools nowadays, a recent Swedish study confirms the gender differences observed by Gagnon and Simon; gender differences in today's sex education remain despite the opposite intentions (Bäckman, 2003). However, non-professional knowledge of sexuality is shared in same-sex groups between peers and by practical experience. The findings in this and other studies on internet sexuality show that this may have changed now. With the internet, people of all ages, both men and women, search for information on sexuality

and talk about sex with other interested people. Further, the internet has made it possible to talk about sexuality with others in ways that have been impossible before.

As mentioned in the previous section, some informants incorporate pornography in their relationships, either to become aroused or to find inspiration for expanding their sex life. Paul, 18, says that by viewing pornography he has become more curious and interested in sex:

P: I like sex and it's nice to explore new things.

I: I see, did you learn something from it or have you become interested in something that you haven't known or liked before?

P: I guess I have learned something and maybe become more interested in the opposite sex...I've become curious as you say...

I: Of what possibilities sex has to offer you?

P: Yes, exactly.

I: Is there something you have "liked" on the internet that you have tried in real life? Something you had never tried before?

P: I can't really remember...maybe trying bondage.

According to prior research and the informants in this study, to use the internet for sex educational purposes seems to be highly coveted.

Risks and problems with online sexual activities

In our quantitative study, we found that only a small percentage of those using the internet for online sexual activities experienced it negatively (Månsson et al., 2003). Negative effects, risks and problems emanating from using the internet for sexual purposes, can be divided into subgroups. Prior research directed towards the negative effects on people who engage in online sexual activities focuses primarily on STI/HIV and on sexual compulsivity/addiction (primarily conducted within the disciplines of medicine and psychology). In media, on the other hand, the negative aspects of online sexual activities often include pornography, prostitution, and pedophilia. Occasionally media present stories containing the dangerous aspect of meeting an unknown person from the internet offline.

When the informants in the current study were asked if they had had any unpleasant or negative experiences that could be related to their use of the internet for sexual activities, no one mentioned sexual transmitted infections. However, previous research clearly indicates an increased risk for STI among those who are using the internet to find offline sex partners (McFarlane et al., 2003).

Instead of the risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection when dating people from the internet, the informants rather talk about the potential risk of encountering violence and physical harm if they meet someone from the internet. However, but not surprisingly, only women claim to be afraid of this. Camilla, 21, explains:

I: Do you meet the guys in a specific place?
 C: We meet in a public place.
 I: Is it the guys who come to your town or do you go to theirs?
 C: No I'm not going anywhere.
 I: Is there a reason for that?
 C: It could be a little risky.
 I: In what way?
 C: Well you actually don't know what kind of people they are...they could be axe murderers or rapists.
 I: Did you ever have an unpleasant experience when you have met someone from the internet?
 C: No.
 I: Do you know if there are those in your area who have [had an unpleasant experience]?
 C: No.
 I: I think it's a good thing to be precautious...but what substantiate your thought of these people as potentially dangerous?
 C: You have read about girls who have got into trouble. And it's possible to pretend to be someone else in front of the computer screen. But when you meet in a public place I don't think it's much more dangerous than meeting someone from a pub.

Camilla's reasoning is not unique among the female informants. One part of their fears is primarily based on stories told by media while almost none of them actually have had a frightening experience nor know anyone who has. The other part emanates from their belief that people make up their identity on the internet, something most informants claim they are not doing themselves. Ulrica, 26, who is the only one who has had a frightening experience, reports that she was almost raped on one date:

U: I met a guy from X-town and went to his place where I almost got raped, but I got away in the last minute.
 I: That sounds scary. Lucky you weren't hurt.
 U: Yes it wasn't fun...but you learn from you mistakes =)
 I: Yes, but it's too bad if you have to learn from such mistakes isn't it?
 U: But still I kept going on blind dates...but there is something that's teasing with it...the excitement =) But still it may have been a slight warning NOT to go home to strangers.

To reduce the risks when they meet people from the internet, they choose public places and tell their family and friends where they are going and with whom. Often they leave their cell phone numbers with family and friends as well.

None of the informants report to be addicted to online sexual activities. However, some claim to be addicted to the internet. In our study, Månsson et al. (2003) we also found many people claiming to be addicted to the internet. They interpret this as a way of indicating the internet's importance in their life. Among the informants in the current study, many feel they are spending too much time online, although not only for the purpose of love and sex.

By using a scale measuring sexual compulsivity, Cooper, Delmonico, and Burg (2000) found approximately 10 percent, primarily men around 30 years old, to be sexual compulsives (according to that scale), which corroborates well with our own research (Månsson et al., 2003). We have suggested that this scale may be a measurement of sexual curiosity and interest rather than solely compulsivity (Daneback, Ross, & Månsson, 2006). Nonetheless, even if they are absent in this study, it is important not to ignore those who actually experience online sexuality as a problem, but rather to focus the efforts on identifying and providing adequate help for this group.

The factors that make online sexuality attractive for the majority may be the same factors that, for some people, make online sexuality problematic. For example, by being anonymous and not having to expose oneself or one's sexual interest to others, by having unlimited access around the clock, both at home and maybe at the work place, and by the low cost of an internet connection that gives access to online sexual activities.

Concluding remarks

A range of the broadly defined online sexual activities is mentioned by the informants in the current study. For example, some use the internet to flirt and to find partners while others engage in cybersex or view online erotica. Furthermore, there are those who seek information about sexual matters from both professionals and peers online. The sexual activities possible to engage in online, are all reminiscent of the kind of activities that people engage in offline. However, with the internet's specific characteristics and features, these activities are changed and modified to various degrees compared to offline.

The internet has made it possible to talk about sexuality in new ways, for educational purposes as well as for sexually gratifying purposes. In our contemporary society, sex talk is often present in public, in newspapers, and on TV shows (Bauman, 2003). At the same time, as Gagnon and Simon (1973) observe, sexuality may be a difficult issue to talk about in private relationships or with close friends. There is, thus, a discrepancy between public and private sex talk. By using the internet, it has become easier to engage in private sex talk, the kind of sex talk that involves one's own body, thoughts, and desires. Perhaps this possibility has meant the most for women, who might have found the internet as a place where they can explore and express their sexuality without the risk of negative personal sanctions (an aspect that homosexual men discovered early on). Maybe this is one explanation to why women prefer to engage in interactive sexual activities on the internet, compared to men's preferred choice (Cooper et al., 2003).

Sex talk is evident in a range of online sexual activities, perhaps most obviously in cybersex, where the outcome of the activity is dependent on the participants' sex talk skills. However, cybersex is an extreme example and because of its explicitness, some of the informants in the current study find the activity difficult to engage in. On the other hand, the sexual explicitness is one of the primary attractions of cy-

bersex. Other sexual activities contain sex talk too, but these would not qualify as cybersex. For example, some informants use the internet to find information on sexuality because they may ask those questions that are difficult to ask one's partner, parents, relatives, or even to professionals in offline settings. Furthermore, it is possible to ask for advice and detailed instructions on how to increase sexual pleasure as well as how to improve sexuality within relationships. In addition, it is possible to approach sex talk on the internet without participating, but to take part of other people's sex talk online by observations (lurking). Obviously, these examples are not limited to the internet but have implications on offline sexuality as well. Perhaps not immediately noticed in people's offline sex talk (even if there are such examples), but maybe in their offline sexual practices.

One aspect that is legible among many sexual activities on the internet is the sense of instantaneousness. Bauman (2003) talks about how people in the liquid modernity avoid long-term commitments and bonds that cannot be untied. Online, it is possible to engage only in those activities that are immediately gratifying and that can be disposed of after they have been used. Simultaneously, this mirrors how we perceive offline relationships, which have led to a situation where we prefer "no bond relations" from which we can escape without any hassle if we find out that there are better options around the corner. The internet, arguably, has reinforced this tendency. On dating sites, one may instantly validate one's value on the dating scene or browse the market to investigate future possibilities. It is common to initiate dates with several presumptive partners to save time and not to waste any energy in vain if one or more candidates would be mismatches. Another example of the "no bonds phenomenon" is that dates which do not hold a future as romantic relationships can still lead to provisional sexual relationships.

Finally, it appears that most people find the possibilities to use the internet for love and sexual purposes to be positive. By using the internet as a tool to explore and to experience as well as a tool to overcome awkward or embarrassing everyday situations, individuals create their own sexual landscape online.

6. Summary and discussion

The overall purpose of this study was to investigate where, how, for what, when, and why the internet is used for the purposes of love and/or sex. This aim was broken down into three sections that focused, respectively, on the sexual landscape, the actors, and the online sexual activities. The empirical data consisted of 26 informants, 10 men and 16 women, who were, with one exception, interviewed online through instant messaging software. In this chapter, the main findings will be summarized as well as discussed in a more general context.

Main findings

On the internet, several arenas constitute the sexual landscape and they can be divided into interactive and non-interactive arenas. Generally, the purpose of the interactive arenas is to facilitate communication between the visitors while non-interactive arenas consist of one-way communication (from the producer/owner/administrator). Furthermore, they can be divided into synchronous arenas (e.g., web chat rooms and instant messaging software) and asynchronous arenas (e.g., web communities and e-mail), which in turn can be divided into private and public arenas (fig. 1).

Fig 1. Characteristics of arenas on the internet.

	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Private	Instant messaging	E-mail
Public	Web chat rooms	Web communities

In the current study, there was a tendency among the informants, particularly those in the internet generation, to prefer private synchronous techniques and public asynchronous arenas. This development can be ascribed to technical development (communication by instant messenger is faster than e-mail), but is also a response from users who must administrate their presence online (and offline) in many arenas simultaneously (communities do not require instant presence to take part in the interactions as web chats do). Furthermore, the informants in the internet generation prefer to choose or create their personal networks and to be able to dismiss unwanted interaction/persons. However, at the same time, they broadcast themselves to an unknown audience, for example in web communities, but they feel comfortable to do so because these arenas are asynchronous and, thus, less threatening. They do not have to respond to possible hostilities and awkward situations that may occur in real time.

The arenas in the sexual landscape have different levels of anonymity, where the non-interactive arenas, for example web sites and web shops, are the most anonymous. The level of anonymity in interactive arenas primarily depends on whether or not they are accessible to the public, as public arenas are more anonymous than private arenas (fig. 2).

Fig 2. Online arenas ranked by their level of anonymity.

High level of anonymity	Web sites/web shops Web chat rooms/role playing games Web communities E-mail
Low level of anonymity	Instant messaging

Anonymity has been found to be one of the most important factors that explains the power and attraction of using the internet for sexual purposes (Cooper, 1998). In this study, the most sexually explicit arenas are at the same time the most anonymous arenas. This relates to Henriksson & Månsson's (1995) concepts of hot arenas and protected arenas. The hot arenas are in general more likely to involve sexual talk, sexual references, sexual pictures, and sexual invitations/offerings among the (anonymous) participants. Protected arenas, on the other hand, are less likely to involve this unless anything else is understood and negotiated by the participants (or the owners/administrators). This means, however, that protected arenas are dynamic and can transfer into hot arenas and vice versa.

The internet facilitates the trend observed by Bauman (2000; 2003), that we in the liquid modernity, become more and more isolated from each other because of fear, insecurity, and uncertainty. At the same time, the internet facilitates the possibility to interact with more people than ever. Moreover, it seems like we, because of the secure buffer zone provided by the internet, dare to approach and interact with people we would not have approached or interacted with otherwise, because of either our sexual scripts or our geographic locations. Furthermore, this has made it possible to talk about topics, especially topics of sexual nature, that our sexual scripts would have told us not to talk about with others. This creates a (comfortable) virtual proximity at a (safe) physical distance.

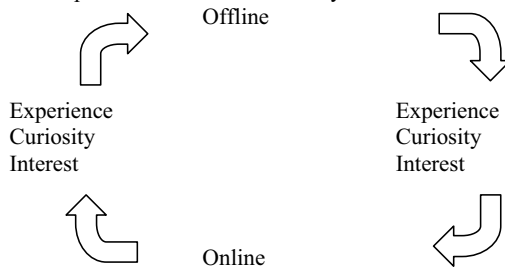
Although the current study as well as prior research has discerned individual and gender related usage patterns among those who use the internet for sexual purposes, the current study emphasizes the *generational usage patterns*. Users in the internet generation integrate their internet usage differently compared to the older users who mostly have a specific purpose to use the internet, for example to visit online dating sites or to view erotica and keep their internet life separate from their offline life. The younger users do not need any specific reasons to be online, but log on to "hang out" as most of their peers do; the internet is part of their everyday life. This means that the older users log in specifically to engage in sexual activities while for younger users, sexual activities may or may not occur as part of their everyday use of the internet. In addition, younger users prefer to interact online with peers they know or know of offline, either from school or from their neighborhoods, while older users interact online with people of whom they have no prior knowledge, at least initially, probably because of the missing link between the internet and the everyday life.

The informants in the current study, regardless of age, use the internet for sexual activities ranging from online flirting and dating to engaging in cybersex and viewing erotica. Furthermore, the informants shop for sex products and seek information about various sexual issues. Online sexual activities are reminiscent of the kind of ac-

tivities people engage in offline. However, on the internet, these activities are, to various degrees, changed and modified in comparison. In addition, different people engage in different activities depending on their preferences and purposes.

Regardless of the kinds of online sexual activities people engage in, these activities, by experience, curiosity, and interest, influence the users' offline sexual behaviors as well. For example, people may try things online that they try or fantasize about offline. Nevertheless, people bring experience, curiosity, and interest to the internet, which influences their online behavior, for example, when they have cybersex or flirt. The interrelationship can be seen as an ongoing process. The figure below illustrates this interrelationship (fig. 3).

Fig 3. The interrelationship between love and sexuality online and offline.



The Quin-A-Engine: theoretical connections

The Quin-A-Engine (anonymity, accessibility, affordability, acceptability, and approximation), mentioned in the introduction and used throughout the analysis, has been used to explain the power and attraction of online sexual activities by several researchers in the field of internet sexuality. At present, however, the model consists of empirically identified areas; concepts this far only briefly commented and elaborated upon. In this and the subsequent sections, I will try to connect these concepts to prior theory in order to, as suggested by Layder (1998), further increase their explanatory power as well as to link the empirical sightings to theoretical reasoning and vice versa. It would be out of the scoop and limitations of the current study to claim an exhaustive discussion in this regard; rather it should be seen as a tentative attempt to show the interconnections between theory and practice.

Anonymity

Of the concepts that constitute the Quin-A-Engine, anonymity is arguably the most important aspect of internet sexuality. Although interrelated, the anonymity provided by the internet, enables users to take advantage of the other aspects of the model such as accessibility and affordability. Anonymity means that we can act opposite to the behavior appropriate to society's sexual scripts without facing punishment and sanctions (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). It provides us with the freedom of acting without being seen and, thus, not being controlled by others; virtually the opposite of Foucault's

panopticon. Without being observed and without having to expose our thoughts, feelings, and desires, anonymity increases the room for possible actions; actions we might otherwise hesitate to execute in public; actions not coherent with our roles (Goffman, 1959). Of course, the importance of anonymity has to do with the perception of sexuality in general, which, according to Gagnon and Simon (1973) varies with space and time (culture and history). Foucault (2002) shows, in the first band of *The history of sexuality*, how sexual talk was regulated, historically and culturally, regarding content and situations. Sexuality was first tied to families and later released from the realms of the romantic relationships, as Giddens (1992) observes, but regardless of where the actions took place, sexual talk was more difficult to liberate. Gagnon and Simon (1973) state that even within established relationships sexual talk might be a difficult obstacle for many people to overcome. In addition, to turn to strangers with intimate sexual talk would be awkward for most people and against our sexual scripts as well as causing vexation and, perhaps, could lead to legal charges of sexual harassment and sexual molest. The regulations and difficulties surrounding sexual talk might have contributed to increase its arousing and exciting potential. Online, sexual talk, whether it is cybersex, education, or both, has become liberated (compared to offline) although some examples in the current study show attempts to restrict sexual talk in certain settings.

At the same time, we must not fail to notice the increasing exposure of sexuality in today's society in general. Bauman (2003) observes how issues that once belonged to the private sphere of life now occupy prime time television as well as magazines and newspapers. However, this one-way communication does not invite to discussion and interaction; rather, the agenda is set, no matter how skewed, and by the intensity it is broadcasted, it may actually be difficult to avoid. Are there, thus, still reasons to remain anonymous when encountering sexual issues? Throughout the current study, there are examples of generational differences and the concept of anonymity is such an example. People in the internet generation do not talk about being anonymous in the sense that they prefer to be unknown and unnoticed or that they prefer to operate incognito; they talk about anonymity in the sense of being unseen and to have easy ways out of certain situations. Perhaps the exposure of sexuality in public venues has contributed to changing the sexual scripts of what is possible without sanctions and embarrassments, especially for those in the internet generation.

Accessibility

In some ways, accessibility is related to anonymity (regardless of the exact definition). To be able to engage in online sexual activities from a home computer ensures ones anonymity and even more so from a personal (in the word's actual meaning) computer. For some, anonymous access is a precondition to engage in online sexual activities.

Access is also related to the content of the sexual activities. As found by Gagnon and Simon (1973), pornography was difficult to find in the early 1970s, but with technological development this has changed (Månsson, 1998). However, with the

internet there are few limits to what can be found by anyone with internet access. We also have instant access to people who seek romantic relationships or sex partners. The instant accessibility to virtually anything we might ask for reinforces our consumer tendencies, as Bauman (2000) points out as a characteristic of the liquid modernity. Because we, the citizens of the liquid modernity, feel insecure and uncertain when we meet people, especially for romantic or sexual purposes, the internet enables us to prepare (for) these situations securely in front of the screen (and the walls of our rooms).

As has been shown in the current study, the users in the internet generation incorporate their use of the internet for sexual activities in their everyday usage of the internet. In their age group, almost all their peers have internet access, which means that this group is of great interest for future studies of how the internet is used. For this generation, the internet enables them to access specific sexual activities, but equally important, and sometimes simultaneously, to access and be accessed by their friends as well. This is completely different to how older generations use the internet.

Altman (2001) means that sexuality is affected by globalization as it has been in history with colonization. Today we can access aspects of sexuality from almost anywhere in the world (which is regularly on the agenda for governments, for example in China) and, of course, sexuality can be exported to almost anywhere in the world (for example American produced pornography). Furthermore, we can meet and date people from other parts of the world, people we would not meet under other circumstances. As the internet continues to expand throughout the world, there will be more users/consumers of online sexuality, which means that the market for exploitation will grow simultaneously.

Affordability

Related to accessibility is the low cost that is associated with internet usage. In some cases, the cost equals that of a local telephone call while others pay a monthly charge for broadband connections. The low cost reinforces the usage patterns of the internet generation who spend considerably more time online compared to older generations. Furthermore, the supply of businesses online creates competition and keeps the costs of goods and services low. However, this study shows that people are unwilling to pay for pictures, movies, and text material online. The primary reason is that they can find this material online without having to pay for it. Some may pay for memberships in specific communities or dating sites although some abandon such places when they begin to charge for their services. A common strategy among these web sites is to supply free memberships, but to charge for extra features. Web shops, on the other hand, are more popular than offline dittos according to the informants, but this is more related to anonymity than cost.

Low cost and an endless line of options reinforces consumer behavior. We can afford to consume; to use and dispatch, and to start all over again. Furthermore, this, in turn, is reinforced by the liquid modernity, which does not have any goals (Bauman,

2000; 2003). We can afford to be online for long hours to try, to investigate and to compare alternatives.

Acceptability

Following affordability and easy access is acceptability. The more people use the internet for sexual purposes, whether shopping for sex products or seeking a partner, the more acceptable it becomes. The by Bauman (2000; 2003) observed trend of exposing topics relating to relations and sexuality in society makes us accept this as part of our lives. With the plastic sexuality, as observed by Giddens (1992), we became responsible for our own sexuality and the internet is one arena that can contribute to fulfilling this responsibility. Among people in the internet generation, it is acceptable to use the internet as a way to flirt and find partners. Over time, acceptable online behaviors seem to stabilize, but differently so depending on age. For example, as shown in the current study, those in the internet generation prefer not to lie about their identities. In addition, communities that aim toward older internet users might agree upon what constitutes appropriate levels of explicit sexual invitations and language. However, sexual fantasies, thoughts, and dreams not acceptable according to our sexual scripts are easy to break online (as described below).

Approximation

Approximation is closely related to anonymity. Or rather, anonymity is a precondition for approximation as it allows people to approximate, to play roles and to experiment with their sexual identity while remaining anonymous. The need for approximation can be understood in the light of Gagnon and Simon's (1973) sexual scripts and Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective. Belonging to a sexual minority is stigmatizing in our hetero-normative society and greatly decreases the possibilities to find partners, partly because there are fewer presumptive partners available in general and partly because there are fewer arenas to meet these few presumptive partners. Because of society's surrounding sexual script, there are few opportunities to practice and experiment with stigmatized sexual identities, and such practice and experimentation will be punished in various ways by the hetero-normatively oriented majority (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). This is because such behaviors are against the sexual scripts. Inevitably, it is difficult to find one's sexual identity in the first place, but also to express it in one's everyday life once it has been found. We can, therefore, assume (and this is substantiated in prior empirical research, for example Tikkanen & Ross, 2000; Ross & Kauth, 2002; Ross, Månsson, Daneback, & Tikkanen, 2005) that we will find heterosexuals in online venues specifically directed to homosexuals. These venues might be the only refuge for people who are unsure of their sexual identity; the only place to talk to homosexuals and eventually meet partners.

Not only has it been difficult to break sexual script, but also to play two incongruent roles in one setting. Goffman (1959) says that one must be assured that any deviance from one's front stage role cannot be revealed by the audience; one must

keep such clues securely back stage. Thus, a change of the front stage role requires the actor to leave the stage, to substitute it for another stage where the new role can be played. By using the internet, it is possible to explore these stages, to take advantage of them while remaining on one's regular stage. Thus, the internet provides additional arenas to sexual minorities where sexual identities can be explored and played with.

Changing existing sexual scripts

Arguably, using the internet for sexual purposes will influence and change our sexual behavior, or parts of our sexual behavior, and in some regards, this has already taken place. Furthermore, with the internet, new interactive patterns have emerged when we approach love and sexuality. However, it is impossible but to speculate about the consequences of internet sexuality as we cannot predict the future technological development and how it will be used.

The internet influences our sexual scripts in several ways and on several levels (even though they influence each other as well). On the intrapersonal level, the internet enables easy access to a variety of online sexual activities that would otherwise be restrained by the sexual scripts. It is easier to overcome these barriers online and people may discover and learn things previously unknown to them. In the current study, for example, several informants claim to view pornography and to read erotic novels online and, despite ambivalent feelings, find that they enjoy the activities; that the activities arouse them and improve their sex life. Another example is those who have found cybersex, the interactive sexual talk, to be liberating; that being able to talk more freely about sexuality with others has been liberating, but also a source for excitement. For others, the internet has made it possible to shop for sex products, something they would not have done offline. These are typical examples of how the internet has contributed to expanding the limits of the intrapersonal sexual scripts by expanding the range of possible sexual behaviors. By extending their intrapersonal scripts, they also open up for extending their sexual repertoire within their relationships as well (if their partners agree). Because of society's sexual scripts offline, women have probably extended and expanded their sexuality online more than men have. While men simply have transferred offline activities to online activities, for example regarding pornography consumption, many women started to consume pornography when it became available on the internet, where they do not risk any negative offline sanctions. In similar ways, women have found that they can use explicit language, visit online sex shops, and seek temporary sexual contacts for the same reasons. In this perspective, women's sexual scripts have approached men's and the changes are towards what we may ascribe as a traditional male sexuality. This is at the same time where the sexual scripts have not changed, as the traditional (heterosexual) male sexuality serves as the norm even online.

On the interpersonal level, the internet has enabled us to meet others for either romantic or sexual encounters. It has widely broadened the range of presumptive partners by extending the arenas where we may seek them. However, the current study

shows at the same time that to what extent this feature is utilized is largely a generational question. People in the internet generation tend to seek partners in their adjacent geographic locations. In their case, the internet rather facilitates other aspects of online dating and flirting. For example, it enables them to approach people they know, or know of, more easily compared to meetings face-to-face as they can withdraw from awkward and embarrassing situations. The designs of the interactive arenas influence how they are used. One example is the search engines; that we are able to specify what we believe to be an exact match for us. This has reinforced the “supermarket” sense of dating, the sense of shopping around, consuming the goods, and dispatching the waste. In addition, we learn how we should talk to others when we seek partners online. The current study shows examples on how sexual encounters can be negotiated and pre-determined. Many things can be dealt with before an offline meeting, which, for some, increases the possibility of a satisfactory outcome. Mutual sexual talk for the purposes of sexual gratification is another example of the internet extending and changing how we may talk about sexuality, not the least for women, as mentioned above. Furthermore, it is possible to break with age related scripts, the scripts that regulate at what age sexual and romantic encounters are appropriate as well as the maximal age difference between partners in romantic/sexual relationships. The internet has become a secure buffer zone; in front of the screens, we feel safe, secure, and willing to engage, openly, in interactions with others, even those related to love and sex.

Using the internet for online sexual activities also influences the sexual scripts on the cultural/collective level. The large numbers of users worldwide all contribute with their views, thoughts, and experiences of love and sex. This means that a variety of aspects of love and sex are available for anyone who might be interested. Furthermore, as more people use the internet for sexual purposes, the more accepted it becomes. For example, to use the internet to find partners has already become a matter-of-course. In addition, the seemingly infinite supply and consumption of pornography on the internet contribute to its normalization. However, Miller and Slater (2000), Altman (2001), and Bauman (2000) mean that some cultures, western in general, and American in particular, might force their cultural expressions upon other cultures.

The current study shows that the internet generation is specifically important to consider when investigating love and sex on the internet. The internet generation will influence the sexual scripts on the cultural/collective level greatly, as they incorporate the internet intimately in their everyday life. For them, using the internet for sexual purposes is just an online activity among others. In addition, events offline influence their behavior online and vice versa. The internet is part of their culture in a way it is not for older generations.

Love and sex on the internet and the liquid modernity

What is the relation between engagement in love and sexuality on the internet and the liquid modernity? To make this connection we can relate to the thoughts about sexual scripts on different levels; independently identifiable but interrelated. If we assume

that cultural sexual scripts influence our interpersonal scripts and our intrapersonal scripts, and include love and sexuality within our general concept of culture, we are able to see that societal and cultural changes influence our behavior, our actions, and our thoughts and vice versa. By widening our scoop, we can see the context in which the internet is used for love and sexuality. This means that we can use the surrounding context as an analytical concept to explain why we use the internet for love and sexual purposes. Bauman's (2000) thoughts of a liquid modernity as a continuance of post modernity is one way of placing internet sexuality in a wider context.

Time/space

Time and space; a key issue in Bauman's (2000) liquid modernity. Globalization, despite the disagreement of its historical beginning, has made it possible for people to cover more space in less time. It has allowed (some) people to move freely around the world (the most remote parts of the world can be reached in a day by jet planes) and has allowed capital to flow even more easily, just by pushing a few buttons. The consequence of this is that the solid world dissolves; nothing is guaranteed to last for long. A factory, for example, can be shut down in one part of the world and moved to another place in order to increase profits during a board meeting. Therefore, we cannot know whether our job today will be our job tomorrow. We must prepare to be flexible, to think of back up plans, to make sure we have alternatives when (note: not if) the world changes. This calls for careful investments: investments that are no pricier than we can afford to lose, investments that are loosely tied to its anchor points.

This change can be noted on the internet as well. The fast-paced development means that techniques and arenas of the internet will be out of date before long and time invested to understand and master them will be wasted. Consequently, the interfaces have to be user friendly in the sense that they should be uncomplicated to learn and to master and affordable to dispose of. One example is the World Wide Web interface, which gathers many techniques and arenas that previously required specific software and knowledge to use, but require minimal efforts to start using. The pace of development increases the importance of broad knowledge instead of deep. To specialize is risky. When specific knowledge becomes useless, one is deserted, marooned. By obtaining *surface knowledge* one can continue to cruise despite shifting winds and without losing too much of the invested time.

Another strategy to become less susceptible for fast-paced development is to keep many horses in the race simultaneously, to be familiar with new technology and their applications. Many informants solve this by becoming members of several communities; if one is terminated or become out of date, there are still options available. Nevertheless, it is important to make good investments and choosing the right paths might be more important than to investigate their ends. This adjustment to the time/space changes of the liquid modernity means that we can expect the arenas where we observe love and sexuality on the internet today to change in the future and the old

ones only to be inhabited by enthusiasts. The fast-paced development, however, evokes uncertainty and insecurity: which ones are better, which ones to choose?

Unsafety, insecurity, and uncertainty

The German word *unsicherheit* captures the meaning of unsafety, insecurity, and uncertainty altogether (cf. Bauman 1998). *Unsicherheit* is a result of the liquid modernity, a result of globalization in which we can neither predict the future nor do anything about. Furthermore, *unsicherheit* is a result of a world where we have come to fear others, strangers, whose behavior and motives we cannot predict, strangers that inevitably inhabit our world as we gather in cities far from the small villages of the past. Consequently, there are both structural and individual meanings of *unsicherheit*.

We cannot protect ourselves against *unsicherheit* on the structural level, but individually, we tend to become more reserved, to not trust strangers, and to protect ourselves we isolate ourselves behind fences and walls, denying others access to our safe havens. However, the internet has provided us with ways of approaching others while keeping them comfortably distant. The internet constitutes a buffer zone, which allows close examination of the strangers; we can put them under scrutiny and evaluate whether they appear to be as friendly, sincere, and promising as we hope. Thereby we can gradually lower our guards and communicate with them, as if they had been our long time friends; and they might become our friends. Furthermore, the buffer zone let us to lower our guards so much that we can talk about things we do not normally talk about in the same way offline, things such as love and sexuality, without facing any (offline) sanctions.

On the internet, we entrust strangers our thoughts, dreams, and fantasies about love and sexuality more openly than people do in our immediate surroundings, as we would expect them to judge us in accordance with the sexual scripts. In this regard, we can say that the internet has opened up for sexual expressions in ways that have previously gone against the sexual scripts. However, there are reasons to believe that the increasing trend to expose private matters in public, facilitated by media, encourages this.

One conclusion of this is that regarding love and sexuality, we have come to fear those we normally trust and to trust those we normally fear. Those we entrust our secrets are no longer those closest to us, such as the family; we equip ourselves with private computers, locking ourselves up in separate rooms, to communicate with others. As shown in the current study, this has been problematic for some couples and an object for discussion and negotiation. Nevertheless, this kind of interactions provides us, simultaneously, with the *sicherheit* of our homes as well as opportunities to lower our guards.

Consumerism

Bauman (2000; 2003) recognizes that the liquid modernity reinforces consumer behavior. To consume means to acquire (buy), use, and dispose. This is the opposite to the

production societies of the past, where we produced what would be essential for survival. Moreover, in those societies we produced goods prior to services, or experiences for that matter. In the consumer society, we probably produce more garbage than anything else. Actually, waste has become an industry in its own right with corporations who have agreed to handle our garbage from bin to dump. But where we used to pay to acquire goods, that is, those products that would make our everyday life a little easier, we now pay for goods and services that give us various psychological experiences, things that amuse us. Regarding wide screen TV sets, sporting events, and exotic holidays, this is obvious, but even salt- and pepper shakers are now made to appeal to our sense of psychological satisfaction rather than for their functionality. There has been, thus, a shift of what is possible to consume.

There have been additional changes in the consumer society. Previously, the goods were built to last for long periods and if the products would break, it was possible to buy spare parts to repair the items. Most of the time this could be conducted by the owner who had the skills necessary for such operations; later, as the products became more complex, it was possible to call upon a specialist to service the item. Nowadays, if our purchases break or do not meet our expectations, we may request new items or demand our money back. If the guarantee is void, the products are thrown in the garbage and substituted with models that are more recent. Occasionally, to acquire customers' loyalty to specific brands, there may be offers to upgrade the item to a better one at little cost (and the items are trashed by the shop instead).

However, with the fast-paced development, the consumers hesitate to pledge their allegiance to a specific product as it may become out of date. They would not want to be stuck with something that may prove useless, or even worthless, before long. This has created a flowering business for rental companies. To rent means that consumers pay only for as long as they keep the products, they can use it without any bonds attached to it. As soon as it proves unsatisfactory or become out dated, they can return it to the store.

Another characteristic of the consumer society is the search for the best option, the most valuable product, and the soundest investment. However, as new options constantly emerge and call for attention, promising instant pleasure and amusement, the consumer faces the difficulties of making the right choice. Freedom of choice is a praised slogan among capitalists, but with an endless line of choices, choosing might be easier said than done. What further complicates this is that in the liquid modernity, there are no goals. There are plenty of races to take part in, but there are no goals in sight, only better or worse choices. To choose is to shop. Shopping has become an everyday activity, an activity in itself. We shop for items, goods, and services that give us instant pleasure, and by doing so we become impatient when we cannot find what we desire or when we cannot acquire it fast enough (although credit cards have helped us to overcome the latter), but once acquired, a seemingly better alternative appears or lurks just around the corner.

We have become full time consumers. Consumer patterns invade all parts of our lives. Favors are made with the expectation of being rewarded; "what's in it for

me” precedes many propositions. Investments are supposed to pay off, instantly or over time. As Bauman (2003) observes, this is how we perceive relationships as well. The bonds must be loosely tied so they can be untied easily if better options would appear or when they become unsatisfactory. Lifelong relationships are no longer required or desired. On the internet, it is easy to review potential partners, but also to verify one’s own market value. The detailed presentations online help to find one’s preferences and by further conversations more information is gathered before any decisions are made. Typically, those who seek partners online have more than one alternative. If there would be a mismatch at an offline date, they continue their online searching. Some of the informants in the current study keep in contact with former dates, some become sex partners while waiting for the perfect match, which many seek to find. To view online pornography is another example of consumer behavior in the liquid modernity reinforced by the internet. It can be found for free and after being instantly consumed, it can be disposed of without leaving a trace.

Concluding remarks

One of the most important aspects of love and sexuality on the internet that was found in the current study is the generational differences. Although respondents in all ages engage in similar online sexual activities, the current study shows, however, that age influences the users’ online behaviors as well as the preferred choice of arenas and techniques. The figure below displays some of the major generational differences (Fig 4).

Fig 4. Generational differences in internet usage

The internet generation	Older generations
Use internet as part of everyday life	Separate online from offline
Early adopters of new arenas and techniques	Stick to arenas and techniques that fulfill their purposes
Interact with people they already know	Interact with unknown people
Engage in several activities simultaneously	Engage in one activity at the time
Perceive anonymity as face less interaction	Perceive anonymity as unknown interaction
Do not make up identities	Engage in role playing activities
Spend long hours online	Log on for specific purposes

This has several consequences for internet sexuality research; aspects that might be beneficial for our projects, especially if they involve younger people. For example, to place internet use in a wider context that includes the informants’ everyday lives, to acknowledge the relation between online and offline, to include non-sexual arenas, to acknowledge that deceptive behavior and role-playing might be uncommon for younger people, to view online sexuality as mixed with other activities, and to couple love and sex.

The internet has proved to be different compared to what prior research has claimed it to be. Perhaps we were taken by the moment as we realized its infinite possibilities, described as either utopia or dystopia. Conceivably, we preceded its evolution and were a little bit too eager, which led to speculations before any empirical data was gathered. These first publications did not predict the direction of the development and many predictions made ten years ago were not fulfilled. For example, we have yet to interact with others wearing helmets and gloves, to become genderless online, and to extinguish the boundary between man and machine and become cyborgs. Instead, the internet became a tool to make difficult situations in our everyday life easier; which included interaction and communication with others and talking about love and sexuality in a more liberated fashion, things that were sometimes complicated in modern and postmodern times. This means that we have to be careful when using previous assumptions derived from a time when we believed the internet would mean the same to everyone and that the internet was determined once and for all. We need to re-research, to re-discover the internet, to base the research upon empirical observations of how the internet is used and relate it to prior theoretical assumptions, structural as well as interactive and individual. Some theories, or parts thereof, may have to be revised and complemented while others may prove as successful on the internet as in any other place. One way to continue internet-related research would be to focus on how the internet generation, those who have been brought up with internet as a natural part of their everyday life, will continue to utilize the internet. Furthermore, we should acknowledge the liquidity, to paraphrase Bauman, of the constantly changing internet.

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Appendix

Below, the informants who participated in the current study are briefly presented in alphabetical order. The first 20 are those who are quoted in the text. The remaining six are not quoted in the text, but have, nevertheless, contributed to the text and its development by being important parts of the analyzed empirical data. Names and some characteristics have been modified or distorted in order to keep the participants anonymous.

Alicia is 20 years old. She is bisexual and is engaged to her girlfriend who she met online. Alicia currently lives at home with her father in a town with almost 100,000 citizens. She has recently completed “gymnasiet” (senior high school) and now works part time in a store. Alicia has accessed the internet for approximately four years and spend about one hour online per day. She visits websites, web communities, and uses instant messaging to communicate with friends.

Camilla, 21, is heterosexual and has been single for one year. She lives alone in an apartment in one of the largest cities in Sweden where she studies at the university. Besides her private internet connection, which she has had for six months, Camilla uses the internet in school, at the library, and at her parents’. She logs on to the internet everyday, but the time spent online ranges from one to five hours. She surfs the web, hangs out in communities, and chats through instant messaging. She has dated four men through the internet.

Cecilia is a 20 years old heterosexual single woman. At present, she lives with her parents in a town with more than 10,000 citizens. She has completed “gymnasiet” (senior high school) and is currently unemployed. Cecilia has had access to the internet at home for six years, the last two years through a broadband connection. She estimates her time online to be somewhere between eight and ten hours per day during the weeks and considerably less on weekends. Mostly she hangs out in specific communities and chats with friends through instant messaging. She has dated 15-30 men through the internet and has initiated relationships with five of them.

David is 18 years. He is heterosexual and is currently in a relationship. He lives with his parents in a town that with approximately 100,000 citizens. At present he is a “gymnasium” (senior high school) student. He uses the internet in school and estimates that he has had access to the internet at home for somewhere between four and six years. On a regular day, David spends eight to ten hours online for both school work and leisure. Often he hangs out in communities and uses instant messaging to communicate with friends. He has dated a few women through the internet.

Edward is an 18 years old heterosexual single man. He lives with his parents in one of the largest cities in Sweden. He is a last year “gymnasium” (senior high school) student about to finish his studies. Edward’s parents have had internet access since 1998

and have currently a broadband connection. He spends about three or four hours online per day, more on weekends. He spends his time on different communities and chats with friends through instant messaging. He has dated eight women through the internet.

Elisabeth, 40, is a divorced (but dating) heterosexual woman. She lives with her child in a town with less than 10,000 citizens. Currently, she is a university student. Elisabeth has been connected to the internet for five years and since one and a half years she is connected through a broadband connection. She averages four hours online per day, but the time spent online varies greatly. She spends her time online by surfing various web sites and playing computer games. Elisabeth has dated one man through the internet.

Emilio is 33 years old. He is heterosexual and currently single. Emilio works as a teacher and lives in a town with more than 10,000 citizens. He has had internet access for eight years at the time for the interview. Two years ago he began to access the internet through a broadband connection. He spends two hours per day online when he surfs the web, checks his e-mail, and visits dating sites. He has dated about 50 women through the internet.

Henrietta, 27, is heterosexual and currently single. She is about to finish her university studies and get her degree. She lives in a town with about 100,000 citizens. Henrietta has had access to the internet since 1996. Her time online varies greatly depending on whether or not she has other assignments to deal with. During such periods, she remains offline. She visits specific web sites, for example newspaper sites, discussion fora, and dating sites. Also, she uses instant messaging to chat with friends and dates. She has dated 16-17 men through the internet.

Jacqueline is 19 years old and heterosexual. For two and a half years she has been living with her boyfriend in a town with more than 10,000 citizens. She is a last year "gymnasium" (senior high school) student. Jacqueline has had access to the internet "for as long as she can remember" and two years ago she began to access the internet through a broadband connection. She is online for about two hours per day and spends most time on communities. She has no experience of dating people through the internet.

Jimmy is 18 years old. He is uncertain of his sexual identity and labels himself as experimental. Currently he is single but dating. He lives in a town with more than 100,000 citizens and has recently completed his "gymnasium" studies. Jimmy has had internet access for three years and spends approximately five to seven hours per day online surfing, gaming, and chatting. He has dated two women through the internet.

Lena, is a 38 years old heterosexual single woman. She lives in one of the largest cities in Sweden and works as a teacher. She has had internet access for six years and spends

an average of two hours per day online. Most of her time online is spent on browsing the web and chatting with others. Lena has dated three men through the internet.

Louise, 24, is a heterosexual woman who lives with her boyfriend and two children in a town with less than 10,000 citizens. Currently, she is on paid maternity leave, but otherwise unemployed. Louise has had access to the internet at home since 1998 and a broadband connection since 2001. She spends approximately two hours online per day on a regular basis. Most of the time online is spent on writing e-mails and hanging out in communities. She has never used the internet for online dating.

Marianne is 18 years old and bisexual. She is currently single but dating. Marianne lives with her parents in a town with more than 10,000 citizens. At present she is unemployed, but she is about to start working in a local industry. She has had internet access for five years and spends approximately five hours per day online. On the internet she mostly hangs out in communities and chats with friends through instant messaging. She has dated two persons through the internet and both have led to offline relationships.

Michael, 26, is heterosexual and currently single. He lives and works in a town with more than 100,000 citizens. He has had access to the internet since 1997 and broadband connection the last three years. He uses the internet to surf on various web sites, to write and send e-mail, to chat with friends through instant messaging, and to date. Michael uses the internet for an hour and a half each day. He has dated ten women through the internet.

Miranda is 25 years old and heterosexual. She is engaged to her boyfriend whom she lives with in a town that has more than 10,000 citizens. She has had access to the internet for two years and spends about one hour per day online. Miranda browses the web to find information and writes e-mails to her friends. Miranda has dated four men through the internet including her present boyfriend.

Patrick, 32, is heterosexual and single. He has a university degree and is currently working. Patrick lives in a town with more than 10,000 citizens. He has had internet access since 1995 and a broadband connection since 2001. He spends approximately 4-5 hours online per day. When online he plays computer games and hangs out in web communities. Sometimes he surfs the web to find information. He has met two women through the internet and had a long term relationship with one of them.

Paul, 18, is heterosexual, single but dating. He lives in a town with less than 10,000 citizens. Currently, Paul is a last year "gymnasium" student (senior high school). He has had internet access at home for two years and he spends on average five to six hours online per day. When online, Paul chats with his friends, hangs out in communities, and buys music. He has met three or four women through the internet.

Sandra is 18 years old. She is heterosexual and single. At present, she lives at home with her parents. The town she lives in has more than 100,000 citizens. She is a “gymnasium” (senior high school) student. Sandra has had internet access at home for four or five years. She spends somewhere between five and seven hours online each day. Sandra uses the internet to seek information and to meet people. She engages in web chat rooms, hangs out in web communities, and browses the web. She has met five people through the internet. One date led to a relationship and the other four led to sex and friendship.

Theo is 20 years old. He is heterosexual and single. Theo lives and works in a town with more than 10,000 citizens. At present he lives with his mother, but is about to move to an apartment before long. He has had internet access for, approximately, five years. Most of the time online is spent hanging out in various communities and chatting with his friends through instant messaging. He has dated seven women through the internet. Several dates have led to sex, but none has resulted in a relationship.

Ulrica, 26, is heterosexual. She is engaged to her boyfriend with whom she lives. Her education is “gymnasium” (senior high school). Presently she is on sick leave, but usually works in a food store. Ulrica has had access to the internet for five years. She spends approximately ten hours per day online when she chats with friends and hangs out in communities. Ulrica has dated about 40 men from the internet. Six has led to sex and three has led to relationships of which one is her current relationship.

Amanda is 19 years old. She is heterosexual and lives with her boyfriend. She lives in a town with less than 10,000 citizens. She has had internet access at home since 2003. Amanda spends about two hours per day on the internet. Most of her time spent online she surfs the web and hangs out in different web communities. She has dated two men through the internet.

Danielle, 18, is bisexual and is engaged to the man she lives with. She lives in a town with more than 10,000 citizens. Currently she is a “gymnasium” (senior high school) student. Danielle has had internet access for four to six years and spends, on an average, nine hours per day on the internet. The time online is spent in communities and chatting with family and friends. She has dated two men through the internet and the second date is her current boyfriend.

Johannes is 18 years old. He is heterosexual and currently single. He lives with his parents in a town with more than 10,000 citizens. He is a “gymnasium” (senior high school) student. He has had internet access at home for two years and spends an hour and a half online each day, mostly chatting with friends and visiting communities. Johannes has no experience of dating people through the internet.

Karin, 23, is heterosexual and currently single. She lives in a town with more than 10,000 citizens. At present she studies at the university where she will complete her degree at the end of the semester. Karin has had internet access at home for six

months, but used the internet at the library before that. She estimates that she spends about four hours per day online, but two hours per day when she has to be at the university. She uses the internet to stay in contact with family and friends through communities and instant messaging. Karin has never dated anyone through the internet.

Rebecca, 21, is heterosexual and currently in a relationship. She lives with her mother and sister in a town with more than 10,000 citizens. Presently, she is a student at a *folkhögskola* (folk high school). Rebecca has had internet access for four years and her time online ranges from one to seven hours per day. On the internet, she hangs out in communities, e-mails, downloads music, and plays computer games. She has dated seven or eight men through the internet and her current boyfriend is one of them.

Sebastian is 18 years old. He is heterosexual and single. He lives with his parents and studies at a “gymnasium” (senior high school) in a town with more than 10,000 citizens. He has had access to the internet at home for four years. Sebastian’s time spent online ranges from four to eight hours per day. He hangs out in communities and chats with his friends through instant messaging. He has dated between five and ten women through the internet, depending on how he defines “dating”.

