Organising Intimacy

Exploring Heterosexual Singledoms at Swedish Singles Activities

Andreas Henriksson

Organising Intimacy

Exploring Heterosexual Singledoms at Swedish Singles Activities

Andreas Henriksson

Organising Intimacy - Exploring Heterosexual Singledoms at Swedish Singles Activities

Andreas Henriksson

WWW.KAU.SE

Content

Content

The single person must be recognized as having relations with others that are quite different from those of a married couple, for example. We often say that the single person suffers from solitude because he is suspected of being an unsuccessful or rejected husband. / Interviewer: Or someone with 'questionable morals.' / Michel Foucault: Yes, someone who couldn't get married. When in reality the life of solitude is often the result of the poverty of possible relationships in our society, where institutions make insufficient and necessarily rare all relations that one could have with someone else and could be intense, rich – even if they were provisional – even and especially if they took place outside the framework of marriage. (Foucault, 1996, p. 159)

Förord/Foreword

A foreword is usually directed at specific others, acknowledging relations and relationships. I do not usually speak English to most of the people I thank below and so Swedish is the predominant language of this foreword.

Jag vill rikta ett varmt tack till mina handledare Gerd Lindgren, Åsa Wettergren och Annika Jonsson. Era skarpa läsningar och kommentarer har kombinerats med en lyhördhet för mina egna idéer som ibland varit större än jag själv lyckats uppbringa. Ert stöd under processen och naturligtvis i det känsliga slutskedet har betytt väldigt mycket.

Läsgruppens Anna-Lena Haraldsson och Magnus Nilsson gjorde en viktig och välbehövlig insats för avhandlingen under de sista månaderna. Jessica Mjöbergs mycket noggranna läsning och specifika kommentarer som opponent på slutseminariet var ovärderliga. Gunnel Forsberg och Stefan Karlsson, kommentatorer på halvtidsseminariet, kom med rätt synpunkter i ett kritiskt läge, då avhandlingen gick från sammanläggningsformatet till en monografi.

I spent a few months at the Open University in England 2012. I am thankful towards the people at the Department of Cultural Geography, who were extremely welcoming and offered me space and time to analyse and interpret my data. I want to thank my temporary supervisors in England, Kevin Hetherington and John Law, for their valuable input on my work. I also want to thank the OpenSpace Research Centre for offering me an opportunity to present my analyses at a seminar and for the members' insightful comments.

Under tiden jag doktorerat har Karlstads Universitet genomgått stora organisatoriska förändringar. Därför har det känts särskilt värdefullt att ha en mer eller mindre oförändrad grupp kollegor, som alltid ställt upp med praktiska tips, skarpsinne och inte minst vänskap. Den ämnesöverskridande miljön med närheten till socialt arbete har varit viktig. Annika, Susanne, Elin, Marit, Stefan, Gerd, Markus, Liselotte, Therese, Karin, Mona och Magnus har på många olika sätt stöttat mig i processen med avhandlingen och berikat min tid som doktorand. Susanne Brandheim är bland de bästa samtalspartner man kan tänka sig som tänkande människa, tack! Markus Arvidson samarbetade med mig och gav viktiga bidrag till studiet av raggningsrörelsen, som har haft betydelse för tolkningen av mina resultat. Jag vill också tacka Alireza Moula för alltid entusiastiska samtal, inte minst för hans metodologiska tips – Maxwell var din förtjänst! Bengt Starrin har på senare tid undersökt pardans i dagens Sverige, och samtalen med honom har varit berikande. Hans bok *Sverige dansar* gav mig viktiga impulser för avsnittet om singelaktiviteternas historia (Starrin & Steffner Starrin, 2013). Jag är imponerad av hur generös Marit Grönberg-Eskel varit med sin tid, inte minst när hon följde med som assisterande observatör under en av mina observationer. Samtalen med henne och hennes skarpsinniga iakttagelser har haft stor betydelse. Stort tack också till Lars-Gunnar Engström och Daniel Bergh för deras generösa hjälp med enkäten och dess sammanställning. Sara Johansson hjälpte som sociologistudent till med transkriptionen av

intervjuer och har på senaste tiden blivit en värderad kollega i korridoren. Clary Krekula läste manuset under de sista skälvande dagarna och gav värdefulla synpunkter. Stort tack till Lena Nilsson för hennes utmärkta administrerande av alla ritualer som hör disputationen till!

Doktorandkollegan Henrik Fürst från Uppsala diskuterade under en period internetdejtingens sociologi med mig och hjälpte på så sätt till att göra mitt datamaterial mer förståeligt och analyserbart – tack!

Jag vill passa på att tacka de studenter jag undervisat under min doktorandtid. Entusiastiska seminarier kring exempelvis textanalys, intimitetsbegreppet och Weber har ofta utmanat mig och tvingat mig att tänka friare, tydligare och bättre.

Att ge av sin tid och berätta om personliga erfarenheter för en okänd forskare är inte självklart. Jag vill rikta ett stort tack till alla dem som ställde upp på intervjuer och enkäten, och som lät sig observeras. Ett särskilt stort tack till organisatörerna av singelaktiviteter, som var mycket generösa med sin tid och sina erfarenheter.

I want to thank the Canadian proofreader, who did a marvellous job with the manuscript at a late stage.

Min familj står mig nära och har varit ett avgörande stöd under doktorandtiden. Min mamma öppna tidigt mina ögon för läsande och akademiska studier, och har alltid varit min främsta förkämpe. Du har betytt och betyder otroligt mycket, och har inneburit mer för mina möjligheter att färdigställa den här avhandlingen än du kan ana. Jag vill tacka min pappa för hans stöd – ibland känslomässigt, ibland ekonomiskt – under min tid vid olika universitet. Och för att han ofta påminner mig om släktens betydelse – du har hjälpt mig att förstå hur vi alltid formas av våra nära relationer, även de historiska, vilket är ett viktigt tema i den här avhandlingen. Min mormor är en förebild för mig. En starkare person är svårt att hitta och din styrka har varit en inspirationskälla för mig även under processen med avhandlingen. Jag har lärt mig mycket om människans relationella liv från min bror, som vet att värdera sina relationer högre än någon annan jag känner.

Slutligen vill jag tacka min pojkvän och sedermera fästman Kent. Medan jag studerat singelskapet, har vi tillsammans utforskat parförhållandet. Din närvaro i mitt liv betyder väldigt mycket. Tack för ditt dagliga stöd, för lyssnandet och för läsandet!

/Andreas Henriksson, 3 October 2014

1. Introduction

> You know, gay people have their associations and lo-
> cales. I don't understand why we single people don't
> have our own places to go to. Like a place to meet, have
> dinners, parties… We're behind the gay community in
> those respects.[1]
>
> - Interviewee

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine various heterosexual singles activi-
ties, and to explore how such activities become locales for different versions of
singledom. More specifically, I have observed a singles association, a singles
cruise, a singles conference, and an online site for singles, all arranged in a Swe-
dish context, and show here how these activities operate with often subtly different
versions of what singledom entails.

In this chapter, I introduce the phenomenon of singles activities, define its concept
and examine its history. I will end by relating singles activities to existing research
about heterosexuality, intimacy, personal life and space/place, and show how find-
ings within those fields can provide my project with relevant research questions.
However, I will begin by introducing the basic research problem that forms the
backdrop of the dissertation's purpose.

The words of this chapter's epigraph were spoken by an elderly lady I met at a din-
ner arranged by a singles association. She had been retired for some years and had
been quite active in the association after the death of her husband.

This retired, heterosexual widow understood her single life as analogous to a gay
life. I interviewed the woman further and came to understand that like LGBT[2] peo-
ple, this woman felt that her intimate and sexual practices diverged from the heter-
osexual norm, and wanted a group of like-minded people with whom to build
community and belonging. She did not mean that she lived the kind of promiscuous
lifestyle stereotypically associated with both LGBT people and young singles. Nor
did she imply that singles like her were somehow sexually ambivalent, appearing
or acting bisexual. Rather, what distinguished her from the normative heterosexual
way of life was her lack of interest in finding a new partner and her willingness to
build community outside of the family.

But are single people really diverging from the heterosexual norm? Is there really a
lack of sites for single people, as the widow implied? Would it not suffice to look
at city nightlife in any Western middle-sized to large city, to conclude that single

---

[1] All my data were registered in Swedish and have been translated into English by me for this dissertation.

[2] LGBT is an abbreviation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender.

life is blooming with myriad different urban spaces like pubs, clubs and cafés (Chatterton & Hollands, 2002; Tan, 2013; Walsh, 2007)? Indeed, someone might easily ask how a heterosexual single person could ever feel marginalised in the hectic nightlife industry of Western countries.

And yet my interviews contain several examples of single people reporting the lack of spaces where they fit in. Part of this sense of exclusion has to do with age. With a growing number of divorcees in the single population, that population has a rising median age. Of those I spoke to, many are 45 years of age and more. The urban singles nightlife scene is what age theorists like Clary Krekula calls age coded (Krekula, 2009), in so far as the crowd is expected to be young.

But I argue that these age-coded expectations are tied to larger issues than city nightlife. Involved here are questions over what singledom really is. In particular, should singles activities focus on matching people up through courtship, or should they allow singles to form communities outside of the family? Is singledom merely a phase between relationships, or can it work as an identity or lifestyle in its own right? As we shall see, questions like these have haunted singles activities since at least the 19th century.

If different versions of singledom suggest themselves through different singles activities, it may be that they are associated with various ways of organising space, intimacy, and heterosexuality. Singles activities come with various spatial arrangements, both on- and offline. It is these themes that I interpret the widow quoted above as invoking. Again, it is not that she equates singles with LGBT people. She implies that building community among singles demands alternative spaces. I would add that those spaces might need to provide a contrast to the heteronormative[3], courtship-focused, and age-coded locales that singles are reduced to at present – much as has been necessary for the LGBT community.

If singles activities are part of determining what singledom is, and if singledom is defined by people not being engaged in a long-term monogamous relationship[4], then the organising of singles activities must in some sense entail different understandings of what kind of relationships singles are not having. What kind of rela-

---

[3] *Heteronormativity*, or the normative power of heterosexuality more generally, has been understood differently in different contexts. Queer theorists often associate the concept with the unexamined binary division between heterosexuality and homosexuality (Butler, 1999; S. Seidman, 1994). Some feminists on the other hand use it to denote compulsory practices of patriarchal sexual dominance (Rich, 1980; Rubin, 1975), while still others regard it as a number of sexual and intimate practices with a certain normative force (Rosenberg, 2002; Rubin, 1993). Judith Butler, finally, coined the phrase "heterosexual matrix" in her early work, which denotes a interpretative bias in society, on the basis of which people understand events around them through the normative binary of homosexual/heterosexual (Butler, 1999). I tend towards the third definition and understand heteronormativity as a number of idealising normative practices. However, I would argue that phenomenon contains elements of the first two definitions.

[4] I use the word "relation" for all kinds of situational or longer-term relatedness between people, while I reserve "relationship" for what Erving Goffman called "anchored relations" (Goffman, 1971, p. 191), that is, relations that have existed in several different situations. Note however that the distinction relation/relationship does not exist in Swedish, where both are usually translated as "relation".

tionship must a person have to no longer be single? And vice versa, what relationships can a person have and still remain single? As I will show, these are questions that the organisers of singles activities seek to answer – and the answers might be different depending on how the activity is organised.

We arrive at the research problem that my investigation of singles activities inhabits. What happens when we understand singledom to entail not merely a specific predefined set of circumstances pertaining to individuals (i.e. them not being engaged in monogamous relationships), but seek to situate it as a socially determined set of practices? What is singledom when we visit the places where people are engaged as singles, such as singles activities?

Sweden has one of world's highest proportions of single-households. This number is rising, as in many other Western countries. While these statistics are interesting in and of themselves, they also indicate a pressing need to examine what kind of cultures and personal lives that flourish within these large populations of singles – and what kinds are ebbing away. What do these shifts in the population actually mirror in people's lives and practices? This is the problem of situating singledom.

While my empirical contribution to the large research task of situating is limited to singles activities, my research can nevertheless contribute to larger issues by considering relevant theories and concepts in preparing for and interpreting my empirical findings. It is therefore important to emphasise that the problem of situating singledom is both empirical and theoretical. The reason is that existing theoretical models may need to be reconsidered if we are to examine singledom *in situ*. To understand how the practices of singledom might vary and how it can be embedded in local arrangements, we may for example need to pay attention to the important sociological concepts of intimacy, relationality and personal life.

This is not to say that I need to be particularly radical when considering theory, for example by reinventing sociological concepts. Åsa Wettergren says that she "bends" rather than "develops" theory through her empirical work, and that is a metaphor I could adopt for my own project (Wettergren, 2005, p. 12). Theory and empirical work belong together when it comes to a problem like situating singledom; without critical engagement with theory, I loose sight of the nuances of social reality; without engaging critically with data, I may never discover what theoretical reorientations are relevant and which are not. This empirical/theoretical work is gradual and not swift; it does not pose any novel theoretical hypotheses, but let theory and data interpretation crossbreed and change together. It *bends* existing models, rather than moulds them anew.

In this context it is important to emphasise again that my purpose is to examine singles activities, and not the entire state of singledom. Had I been interested in looking at singles or singledom more broadly, singles activities would have been only one facet to be examined among many others. I would have been obliged to investigate singles at their homes, the meaning of singledom in media, and so on. I have instead chosen to focus on singles activities. In other words, I make a distinction between the broader empirical and theoretical problem for the sake of which my project was undertaken – the situating of singledom – and the aim of my study,

which is to investigate how singledom is situated in the case of various singles activities. My aim is formulated within and informed by the larger problem, but not equivalent to it.

I have already mentioned examples of singles activities (like singles cruises and singles associations), but I must now go on to delimitate the phenomenon further. In the next section I will provide a definition to clarify what distinguishes singles activities from other related phenomena. In the sections that follow, I will also sketch the history of some of these activities and discern to which lines of research my study might contribute. In tying my research questions to these lines of research, I simultaneously specify the overall aim of the dissertation and show its relevance.

DEFINING SINGLES ACTIVITIES

To delimitate my subject matter, I propose to define singles activities as organised social gatherings that engage people in their capacity as singles. In this definition, I use three concepts that need further elaboration, namely *organised*, *social gathering*, and *singles*.

I will discuss the concept of *organising* in greater depth in chapter 3. Here, I will merely present an overview relevant for the current discussion. Considering several different established understandings of organising (Czarniawska, 2008; Schatzki, 2002; Weick, 1979), I understand it to be a coordinating practice. This means that while a certain way of organising may have a logic of its own, it must to some degree adapt to the various practices it attempts to coordinate. For example, heterosexual speed dating has a certain logic that entails a group of people placed in a specific way around tables and pattern for movements pertaining to either the men or to the women (one or the other need to change discussion partner with regular time intervals). But as a way of organising people, speed dating may need to be adapted to local circumstances. Are participants drunk? Have they never heard of speed dating before? Might it be assumed that some of the participants have met and flirted earlier in the day? Are there an equal number of men and women? All of these questions and more need to be considered when speed dating is organised locally. *Locality* then refers to the assemblage of practices that are being coordinated. It means that locality need not involve geographical proximity (although proximity often is an important organising strategy) (cf. Law, 2002).

Practice in this context refers to a pattern of behaviour that has a given meaning to people, that is, a repeated and repeatable set of behaviours that signifies something to others (Czarniawska, 2008; Schatzki, 2002). Dating is a good example of a practice. It is a set of behaviours: dating involves picking up another person, going to a public venue, and having a joint consumption experience while representing oneself to the other (Bailey, 1988; Bogle, 2007; Wouters, 2004). It also comes with a set meaning; namely that in it, we examine each other as potential partners in a situation not unlike a market.

As organising is a coordinating *practice*, it should *not* foremost be understood as the rationally calculated actions of an organiser (Czarniawska, 2008). Practices

might involve rational calculation, but they also might not. To organise speed dating, for example, might entail some calculation with numbers of tables and amount of time. But to a large extent it also involves a "feel" for ambiance, working with the aesthetic qualities of a locale, working from experience, and coming across as a charismatic host or hostess. In other words, practice is a more general term than rational action, and may or may not include the latter.

Following the definition above, I understand organising to be the on-going encounter between a coordinating practice and the practices it is used to coordinate. Singles activities then emerge as locally coordinated practices, where the practice of coordination has an overarching logic that nevertheless is more or less adapted to local conditions, that is, to the practices it must coordinate.

The second concept involved in defining singles activities is *social gatherings*. It may seem a generic concept, and it purposefully is. The dilemma I have tried to solve by construing this concept is that singles activities include both offline and online activities. While the offline activities are synchronous and proximate – that is, people participate in each other's proximity and simultaneously – the online activities are asynchronous and not proximate: that is, people interact from a distance and with a response delay (cf. Cavanagh, 2007). My purpose in defining singles activities as organising of social gatherings then, has been to include both these ways of organising people.

I define social gatherings simply as temporally and spatially defined areas of heightened potential for communication between two other people or more. Many different things may involve us in a gathering, but space and time are of overriding concern. If we are three people in the same room, we have a greater chance of communicating than if we are not in the same room – regardless of whether we know each other or not. The room in which we are simultaneously present and the time of that simultaneity thus set some important limits to this greater chance for communication. Or in other words: as soon as we leave each other's presences, the chances of our communicating are diminished.

The heightened potential for communication in social gatherings has not retroactively been diminished if we leave the gathering without having communicated with each other. I thus understand the potential for communication as independent of the actual outcome (i.e., whether we actually communicate or not). But this independence only goes one way. While being in a social gathering does not make it necessary (only more probable) that we communicate, if we actually start to communicate, the act of communicating might in fact take us outside the gathering. In other words, in communicating with each other, we may make ourselves unavailable to others (for example by leaving the space or signalling the exclusivity of the shared communication). There is a certain tension then between a social gathering as social potential, and the actual communication that results. This tension in turn may or may not be addressed when organising the gathering in question.

Defining social gatherings as the space and time that make communication between people more probable, makes them a subset of what Max Weber called *social relationship*. Weber says a social relationship "consists entirely and exclusively in the

existence of a probability that there will be a meaningful course of social action – irrespective, for the time being, of the basis for this probability" (Weber, 1968, p. 27). Using Weber's concept then, we could say that social gatherings are a subset of social relationships, distinguished by a certain basis for the probability of communication. That basis is some sort of spatial and temporal proximity – although, as I will clarify below, that proximity need not be measurable in lengths.

Similar arguments as those I make about social gatherings are made by Bengt Eriksson about what he calls "rings [Sw. *kretsar*]" (Eriksson, 2007, p. 101). Rings consist of temporarily gathered people who are mutually dependent during that time. Social gatherings are not necessarily interdependent, although they are temporary. Rings would in other words be a subset of social gatherings.

If we use the concept of social gatherings, it is relevant to say that social media is gathering people up in ways that were not possible with earlier media technologies. The Internet and its various forums, as well as the mobile technologies that let us access the Internet on the go, make us part of something approximating a world-wide social gathering wherever we are and whatever we do. But even on the Internet, proximity is important. If we are members on the same Internet dating site, chances are better that we will start to communicate than if the opposite were true. This kind of proximity is not the proximity of geometrical space, however (i.e., it cannot be measured in length). Rather, Internet technology (as to some extent telephone technology before it) has made it meaningful to talk of proximity in networks as underpinning a social gathering. In short, it is not merely proximity in three-dimensional space that makes it probable that we will communicate; proximity in network space has the same effect. The interrelation between three-dimensional and network space has been the focus of theoreticians in both sociology and cultural geography in recent years (Harvey, 2006; D. Massey, 1994; Mol & Law, 1994; Thrift, 2008).

Social gathering is a matter of degree, not of either/or. The point is not that we are *either* in *or* outside gatherings, but that gatherings make it more or less probable that we will communicate. I argue that we could talk of social gatherings as being more "thick" or "thin": they come with a higher or lower likelihood of our communicating with each other.

Besides proximity in three-dimensional or network space, the potential for our communicating is dependent on a host of different circumstantial elements. Bumping into each other accidentally usually does the trick, as does finding ourselves on board a sinking ship. Knowing each other from before is another factor that makes gatherings "thicker". At the other end, different people being occupied with different projects (like a street where one person is going to the coffee shop, while another is reading a book), usually makes the gathering thin. Being merely proximate, or being part of the World Wide Web, only takes us into a thin kind of social gathering. It may take a joint venture to "thicken" a certain gathering.

One concept that recurs throughout this dissertation is community. Weber treats community as a special case of social relationships, namely one in which people orient themselves towards each other on the premise that they belong together

(Weber, 1968, p. 40f). This belonging can be both traditional and emotional. Weber's definition allows that social gathering can be communities, even if participants do not know each other from before. If people at a social gathering communicate on the experienced premise that they share a belonging, we can speak of a community. For singles at singles activities, such belonging might for example be felt when they share some sense of singles identity, or membership in a singles association.

Social gatherings can be both spontaneous (we happen to bump into each other) and organised. I choose to treat singles activities as *organised* social gatherings. They include such various courses of events as going on a joint trip to India, signing up for a web site, being a member of an association, and taking an organised cruise. Three singles bumping into each other on a street and deciding to go to the cinema would not constitute a singles activity. Such a haphazard encounter lacks organising, or the coordination practice needed to adapt to local circumstances. The singles simply engage with each other and with cinema-going. If the singles however decided to start a network for cinema-going singles, that network would then count as a singles activity: coordinating a network involves various adaptations to local practices – whether these be people's time schedules, the rising price of cinema tickets, and so on.

Last but not least, I define singles activities as engaging people as singles. My point is to say that such activities use the *word* single (or some synonym – and herein lies a complication, as I will explore below) to address its participants. In other words, I understand singledom first and foremost as a label put on people for the sake of an organised social gathering.

In fact, I am hesitant to define the term "single" as anything other than a label. The reason I want such a label definition is that singles activities should be understood as creating certain ways of being single, which potentially give rise to different descriptions of singledom. That is not to say that singles activities are the only activities involved in creating ways of being single, nor that singles stop bearing the cultural identity of singledom outside of such activities (as I was careful to argue above). But singles activities are interesting to investigate because they are part of a larger field of various sites, events, and actors within which single life is shaped and lived. To give a definite definition to singledom would pre-empt that investigation.

I write that singles activities broadly speaking engage people as singles. This statement means that successfully passing as single in these circumstances means something inherent to that situation. It may be that only such people are welcome to participate, or that singles are required to pass a certain test, or that singles have an elevated status. In one way or another, singles activities engage people differently depending on whether they are single or not.

In this dissertation, I have chosen only to investigate contemporary activities where passing as single is a requirement for participation. People who do not pass as single are not allowed to go as participants to, for example, a singles conference or the singles cruise I observed (although they may be welcome as arranger or researcher,

as my being there exemplifies). Singles activities requiring that participants are single, may (inadvertently or otherwise) elevate that label to an identity, in turn raising important issues about what singledom really is. What makes it meaningful to gather as singles rather than, say, as friends or hobbyists? I argue that singles activities such as those I have studied – that is, those arranged exclusively for singles – raise such issues more frequently and with more force than other sites on the field of single life, simply because these activities focus so exclusively on gathering people as singles. This argument will become clear when I analyse my data; interviewees repeatedly try to clarify what singledom entails and how it relates to the gatherings they frequent.

Are pubs and nightclubs examples of singles activities? To a certain extent they may be. It depends to what an extent being single matters there. People go to nightclubs and pubs as for example dance enthusiasts, outgoing couples, friends, or family. They may go as singles, but the activities are often purposefully ambiguous to include coupled or married people as well. If people flirt, that activity often entails giving a certain status to being single – but flirtation is usually not organised, which means it cannot be sorted under the label of singles activity as I define it here. This is not to say that pubs and nightclubs cannot at times come close to or transform into clear-cut singles activities, as when they arrange a "singles night", "speed dating event" or "bachelor/bachelorette party". Generally though, individual pubs and nightclubs would need to be investigated on a case-to-case basis to determine if and to what an extent they are singles activities.

I wrote above that my definition of singles activities does not rely exclusively on a presupposed definition of singledom. Some definition of the term is in place however, to allow both readers and me to find synonyms. The reason for this need is that we must be able to include activities that do not use the particular word "single" to refer to singles. The possibility of referring to synonyms becomes particularly important for the historical survey I will undertake below. The word "single" was introduced very recently into the Swedish language [Sw. *singel*], but the country does not lack historical examples of activities that have engaged people having epithets roughly synonymous to the word "single".

To enable an investigation into historical singles activities, let me therefore define singles as people who are not engaged in a long-term monogamous[5] relationship.

---

[5] It is in choosing an adjective for the relationship that singles are not engaged in, that we encounter one major crux of defining singledom. Let me discuss a few alternatives I have chosen not to use. Does the relationship need to be *romantic* for someone to stop being single? In certain settings perhaps, but that definition hardly applies in an historical context; romanticism is of much later date than singledom. Might we say that the relationship should be *sexual*, to separate it from friendship, for example? That would make sexual intercourse central to singledom in a way I believe few present-day singles themselves would consider accurate. *Intimate* relationships? As will become clear below, I define intimacy in a way that makes it potentially included in monogamous relationships as well as friendships. So when does singledom start and end? I have chosen to answer with a "long-term monogamous relationship", mainly because monogamy today is a generic term (despite including the Greek word for marriage), but nevertheless to differentiate the designated relationships from friendships. I choose to include "long-term", just to avoid including short-lived monogamous affairs that may take place during dating.

This is a purposefully vague definition. Again, the point of making the definition vague is that while not being engaged in long-term monogamous relationships is commonly acknowledged as meaningful in the contexts of all the singles activities analysed, the precise social form and meaning of not being thus engaged is locally, practically, and relationally determined within the network of sites, events, and people where singles find themselves. As clarified above, the term "single" should be seen foremost as a label people use to identify commonality, which can then be specified or kept ambiguous, depending on the local, situational purpose of identifying that commonality. My formal, research-oriented definition of singledom is thus a locally used label pertaining to a loose set of common traits having to do with not being engaged in long-term romantic relationships.

As I will show below, the content of the singledom label can fluctuate considerably between singles activities. Do I have a long-term relationship if my partner and I live apart? In the context of some singles activities it makes sense to answer yes, while in others it makes sense to answer no. Is singledom in fact a psychological incapacity to attach to others? The answer depends on what singles activity you attend; some activities would make it more meaningful to say yes, others no. Is singledom merely a phase in life, or is it in fact the grounds of an identity? Again, some organisers of singles activities are careful to avoid "the identity route", while others pursue it openly.

The discussion above has analytical purposes, but the distinctions made also play out in the "real world". For example, there is a complex interplay between the single label as a fairly generic, open category ("not being engaged in long-term romantic relationships"), and the specific uses to which it is put in various situations. When a singles cruise was advertised as for "singles" for example, many identified with the label, but found that the actual activities did not comply exactly with their definition of single life. These participants felt excluded, something I would interpret as resulting from a "collision" between the generic advertisement that had gathered them in, and the specific notion of singledom that characterised the actual activities.

It might be that this kind of complex interplay between label and context has led some groups, interviewed in others' research, to question whether "single" is the right concept for them (Nordin, 2007). Research has for example found an outright rejection of the term among rural communities of middle-aged and older males living alone in northern Sweden. For them, the term is associated with urban life and youthfulness. Identifying individuals as singles based on some universal trait can therefore only be done by neglecting the local and situational meaning-making that I explore in this dissertation. My definition of singles activities as a label is meant to allow for partial contextualisation of the term (partial because it does not take all the relevant contexts into account, but only singles activities).

To look at singles activities is thus to situate the singledom label, although doing so while being conscious that these activities are far from the only situations where that label is employed. I have attempted both to situate the single label at singles activities, and singles activities in the lives of singles. In other words, I have examined how singledom is constructed at different singles activities. But I have also

interviewed participants about how they understand these activities in what I term *their* single life more broadly.

So what do I mean by "single life"? I define it simply as the relational practices people sustain throughout various situations to accomplish a certain sense of themselves as being singles. I discovered that while singles activities often organise certain ways of being single, people themselves come to these places with their own way of being single, bound up as they are in a relational network. What these people do is utilise the singles activities to modify their relational networks (e.g., by getting new friends or finding partners). In turn, they have to attend these activities on premises that could fit their existing relational network – for example by remaining anonymous, uninterested in partners, or entirely focused on finding a "special someone". In short, there are tensions between the relational practices of organised singles activities, and the relational practices of individuals' single lives. This is a tension I will examine more closely below.

By focusing on a type of site, namely singles activities, I attempt to contribute to the situating of singledom. In this section, I have delineated what singles activities are about, pointing out three important concepts – namely organising, social gathering and single. In the next section, I will examine singles activities in an historical perspective. I will argue that democratisation and the emergence of national cultures slowly eroded the strict separation of genders and classes, as well as between courtship and community that had characterised singles activities during the 19th century.

SINGLES ACTIVITIES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

To use concepts formed for the study of contemporary society for the study of history is tricky at best (cf. Lundahl, 1998). Singles activities are no exception. In an historical context, it makes sense for example to make a distinction between single and married. Sexual relationships outside of marriage were in many societies and time periods seen as illicit. Therefore officially, you were either married or unmarried. Statistics from earlier times thus report percentages of people not having registered a legal marriage, and we as a consequence will never know the number of unmarried couples. It is only in modern times, with the emergence of cohabitation and other forms of coupledom outside of marriage, that it has become meaningful to define singles as people who consider themselves to not be engaged in a long-term monogamous relationship, rather than not having a more narrowly defined marriage. To make a historical perspective on singles activities possible at all, I therefore need to keep the concept of singledom slightly flexible and allow that it has meant different things in different times. That flexibility makes it meaningful to examine historical instances of singles activities as those organised social gatherings where people passing as single *at the time* were engaged as such.

While the statistics are not unequivocal, it is a fact that Sweden has had and continues to have, together with other countries in Northern Europe, an unusually high proportion of single households and unmarried people in the population (Carlsson, 1977; Hajnal, 1965). International media often attributes Sweden's unique numbers to its welfare model. The connection between the Swedish welfare model and sin-

gledom has been discussed in research as well. French sociologist Claude Kaufmann for example argues that the economic security associated with welfare makes coupledom less economically significant in an individual's life (Kaufmann, 2008). For him, Sweden in the mid-20th century constituted a model for the relation between singles and the state that spread to the rest of Europe.

But Sweden's high proportion of singles predates the welfare state. John Hajnal saw these statistics as part of a specific Western European marriage pattern in a famous article from 1965. According to him, from the Middle Ages forward, the proportion of unmarried women in Western Europe was "nowhere below 10 per cent and often above 15 per cent" (Hajnal, 1965, p. 103). The percentage of men was slightly lower, but never below 9%. In comparison, corresponding numbers for African and Asian countries were much lower, from 0 to 5%.[6]

Although these numbers had been exceptional from a global perspective for a longer historical period, 19th century Sweden saw a sharp rise in unmarried people (Carlsson, 1977). Historians have argued that this shift in population patterns, together with enlightenment values, were changing laws and norms about marriage, women's rights, and work at that time. These changes increased people's geographical and social mobility. In Sweden, such changes were particularly pronounced towards the end of the century, not least women's mobility and a related urbanisation and increasing numbers of wage labourers (Artaeus, 1992). Marriage frequency then rose and unmarried people became less frequent up until the 1960s, a trend seen throughout the Western world. But during the 60s, new trends emerged associated with higher levels of welfare, sexual liberation, new living arrangements such as unmarried cohabitation, and the introduction of contraceptive pills (Liljeström, 1988, pp. 276ff; Wouters, 2004). The effects of those more recent changes are still being evaluated in sociology today, as they have made old terms such as *marriage*, *single*, and *family* more ambiguous and possibly even irrelevant (although the social changes may only have revealed ambiguities that were already there).

Let us move from statistics to the activities that single people have found themselves engaged in as singles. I suspect that singles activities have always existed in one form or another. There are few works of history written exclusively on the topic, however. Examples are found in the more extensive literature on singledom history, as well as leisure history. As a way of historicising the phenomenon, I can provide examples from various periods and places that I have deemed relevant for studying present-day Swedish cases. I put emphasis on Sweden's history, but also on the American context, which engendered the phenomenon of dating. Dating is a common word [Sw. *dejting*] and practice in Sweden today, not least in the cases I have looked at.

---

[6] I will not discuss the possible causes of the Western European marriage pattern that John Hajnal discerned; that is a large topic that lies outside the scope of this book. For a discussion and critique of different hypotheses about these causes see Chudacoff (2000).

I am no historian and have no historical ambitions, which means I lack the means to connect the different dots of this slightly anecdotal tour through history. There are however a few historians who have described certain transitions in the history of singles activities. That is true particularly of courtship in the late 19th and the 20th centuries. I will discuss these findings as a way to gauge the changes that may have led to the present-day situation.

The most pressing difficulty in writing about singles activities from an historical perspective is identifying what historical phenomena should be included. I have defined singles activities as organised social gatherings that engage participants as singles. The problem, looking at history, is that we have scarce data on in what capacity people felt engaged in different activities. One solution would be to look at the marital status of participants. That approach however yields ambiguity, as some candidate historical singles activities varied in regards to whether they admitted married couples or not. In Swedish rural dancing, traditions of different villages either encouraged or disallowed married couples to participate (Ulvros, 2004, p. 174). Would it make sense to say that rural dancing was a singles activity in some villages, but not in others? That distinction would be difficult to sustain in my opinion, as these dance traditions were usually very similar in other respects.

As examples of singles activities are few and far between in the historiographical literature, I have adopted a liberal strategy when deciding what to include. For the sake of this historical exposé, I have decided to include described organised social gatherings where we can surmise that single participants' not being engaged in long-term monogamous relationships was significant for if or how they participated.

History has many terms for single people and the particular word *singel* did not become part of the Swedish vocabulary till the 1990s.[7] When I write about singles activities historically, I therefore refer to all those organised social gatherings where some people's not being engaged in long-term relationships was significant for their participation – regardless of how that non-engagement was termed (or not termed).

Overall, the examples I have collected can be divided into two categories: courtship and community. In heterosexual courtship, men and women mingle with the intent of finding a mate – for example for romantic adventure, sexual exploits, or lifelong relationships. It is more difficult to find examples of the category *community* in the literature. The older examples (19th century) show single-sex communities of singles created for purposes other than romance or sex – for example economical or social. During the 20th century, when the pressure to marry diminished, welfare improved, and acceptance of sexual experimentation increased (particularly in the USA), we find communal and courtship singles activities coalesce (cf. Chudacoff,

---

[7] It is difficult to establish with any certainty when the word "singel" started to be used in Swedish. Searches in newspaper corpus indicate mid-1990s. I also believe that it is significant that Swedish author Ninnie Gernandt published a journalistic-style book about singles live in 1994, where she mentions that English has the word "single" and that it lacks an equivalent in Swedish (Gernandt, 1994, p. 24f).

2000; Illouz, 1997; Wouters, 2004). Courting becomes a pastime for some singles and a way to define oneself as single rather than merely a way to find a mate. In America, sociologists started to talk of a dating and rating system in the 1930s, when college students competed for status by dating (Bailey, 1988). Courtship and community there could be said to have coalesced into a unified system.

Homosocial households in 19th century Sweden

Let me begin earlier, however. In the first half of the 19th century, Swedish laws and social attitudes engendered a highly hierarchical and rigid society with strict separation of men and women. Society recognised four estates: the nobility, the clergy, the bourgeoisie, and the peasantry. This period saw an increasing number of people outside these estates, which was one contributing factor behind the dissolution of the estates system, not least through parliamentary reforms in 1866 (abolishment of the parliament of estates).

The 19th century had four terms for single women (Carlsson, 1977). Lady [Sw. *fröken*] referred to unmarried women of the nobility. Miss [Sw. *mamsell*] referred to single women of upper commoners, while "old maid" ([Sw. *jungfru*], actually meaning "young woman") was the term for women of the middle classes. The unmarried women of the lower strata of society were called maids [Sw. *piga*].[8] Circumstances looked very different for single women of these different categories. Nevertheless, all were confined by the laws forbidding women from many lines of work. They also lacked the legal right to manage their own finances – that right instead fell to their fathers, mothers, or older male relative – or to her husband if she married. If a woman remained unmarried and her legal custodian did not provide particularly well for her, her estate might matter little to her living standards. As unmarried women from the lower classes could always work as maids, they sometimes had better chances to provide for themselves than women from families of better means – at least when they were still young and strong and could work hard.

The increase in the number of single women led to this group becoming a centre of political attention in the 1800s. Because of laws barring women from large sectors of the economy, many unmarried women and widows lacked the means to provide for themselves. As a result, the growing number of single women was leading to growing poverty and social exclusion. In a society where poverty was seen with suspicion, not least because local communities were legally bound to provide for the poor, singledom among women became a stigma. Historian Iréne Artaeus mentions that city councils, wielding considerable power at the time, refused many unmarried women, even those from the nobility, a right to settle in their cities (Artaeus, 1992, pp. 80ff). They feared that the local communities would ultimately be obliged to pay for their subsistence.

---

[8] Except for the nobility's "lady", none of the other three terms for single women corresponded exactly to any of the estates, meaning that unmarried daughters from the same estate could be addressed with different terms, depending on the occupation of their father, their income, and so on.

The dire circumstances for unmarried women seem to have brought them together. Artaeus writes that all-women households were not uncommon (Artaeus, 1992, pp. 95ff). This arrangement allowed women to save money and have social relations. Artaeus also writes that society was unforgivingly judgemental towards unmarried mothers, and that women with children out of wedlock could find sought-for acceptance in each other's company.

By the time an unmarried woman reached 40, she was often seen as a "lost cause" in terms of marriageability (Artaeus, 1992, p. 97). For women of well-to-do families, this shift in status could be a blessing. Young daughters of wealthy families were used as economical assets by their fathers and would-be husbands. As they stood to inherit, and as the legal right to manage their finances fell to their husbands, marriage was a contract of sorts between father and husband. But daughters were assets only so long as they remained chaste. The life of a young unmarried woman was therefore highly regulated by her family. Once she reached 40 and was regarded as single for life, the regulations usually diminished. At that point, she often moved in with her mother or other unmarried sisters or cousins. These were the better-off all-women households. Artaeus writes that such households were still relatively poor, but often employed a maid who worked less for money than for accommodations and presumably for the company of other unmarried women. This *mamsell*-maid combination seems to have been fairly common, and might have entailed relations on more equal terms than in other households.

Less well-off single women could find low-cost accommodations with widows. Widows who had inherited their husbands' property and found themselves with a house but no other income, often rented rooms to other single women of lesser means. Artaeus writes that some of these widows seem to have been more accepting of unwed mothers than society at large, and therefore attracted members of that group to their boardinghouses. Aged maids sometimes found themselves working for these widows as a means to pay for accommodation.

In the middle of the 19th century, Sweden changed in several ways regarding single people's situations. Estates were no longer regarded as the legal foundation of society. Vagrancy laws were abolished, meaning that people could legally be without work and thus achieve a greater geographical mobility. Cities lost their age-old right to decide whom to admit as dweller. From the mid-19th to early 20th centuries, women and men became gradually equal in law, although culture and society changed less rapidly. One of the earlier changes gave all unmarried women over the age of 25 the right to manage their own finances (1863), a right which married women had to wait another 58 years to attain (1921). For more than half a century, remaining unmarried was the only valid way for a woman to retain control over her own affairs.

During this time, the boundaries between the classes became less formal. While differences in economic means remained, the bourgeois culture that became mainstream downplayed such differences, and a *comme-il-faut* attitude was adopted among most classes. As we will see, this new attitude affected singles activities as well.

Dancing as a singles activity

Dancing is a complex phenomenon with many meanings and histories. One of the forms it takes is that of women dancing with men, with an underlying possibility of forming lasting relationships. This kind of dance is an important instance when dancing functions as a singles activity. Swedish dancing as a singles activity has a long history. Traditionally, the estates had very different dance traditions; the peasantry had local village traditions, while the bourgeoisie and nobility often borrowed dance styles and music from continental Europe (Ulvros, 2004).

Historian Eva Helen Ulvros writes that dancing was a central aspect of rural life in 18th and 19th century Sweden. Most people learned how to dance, and dancing was a frequent, even daily, activity. Ring dancing and dancing with a partner were both in evidence. In some areas, married people were welcome to dance, while in others they were not. Dancing at Christmas and other feasts was for everyone in a village, while the more frequent and informal dances drew more – though not exclusively – young people.

It is difficult to know what functions these dances had for different people and in different circumstances. The distinction between married and unmarried seems to have played a role, indicating that dancing may have been an important occasion to court.

The nobility and bourgeoisie had a more formal style of dancing. During their balls, different established dance types succeeded each other in a given order. Ulvros writes that a number of dance styles belonged to the typical nobleman's or noblewoman's education. According to her, formal balls "were an essential amusement, particularly among the young. They were the primary arena for the marriage market in high society" (Ulvros, 2004, p. 178).

Towards the end of the 19th century, the strict divides between the different estates' dance styles started to unravel (Ulvros, 2004, pp. 188ff). While the old nobility would never have danced in the same locales as the gentry, the Vauxhalls and dance palaces of the late 19th century mixed the dance customs of the nobility and bourgeoisie and hosted a mixed clientele. The inspiration for these locales came from the continent, where they had existed since much earlier in the century.

But the perhaps most significant changes took place in rural dancing, where some degree of formalisation occurred. Up until that time, a village dance was usually hosted in a private house or happened more spontaneously outdoors. Now almost every village had its own dance hall. One reason for this change was that the early temperance, sport, and workers' movements took charge of arranging local dancing. These movements developed the activities, perhaps to draw in a larger clientele, and started taking entrance fees to cover their expenses. Within a few decades, many local dance halls had developed, with live music and weekly festivities. These halls often attracted an audience from outside the village and became known over a larger area. Going to dance halls became a popular pastime among Sweden's still overwhelmingly rural population.

With the Vauxhalls and dance palaces in the urban centres, and rural dance halls, what I would call Sweden's singles activities scene had been established for several decades to come. It is difficult to know when this scene started to change again, but among my informants there were several who made references to the now-disappeared dance palaces and dance halls, arguing that singles cruises and singles associations were a much-needed replacement. These comments suggest that present-day singles activities are still thought of in reference to these earlier activities (particularly by older singles).

One could argue that what had happened at the penultimate turn of the century was a democratisation and nationalisation of singles activities. In other words, there were no longer any formal and absolute boundaries between the different dance locales. Additionally, the locales also borrowed music and dance styles from each other and often picked up on international trends, thus blending styles from various social groups. A national and more open culture for singles activities started to emerge.

One example of this democratisation comes from a 1943 sociological study. Inspired by American sociological fieldwork, Martin Allwood and Inga-Britt Ranemark set out to describe a Swedish village in depth (Allwood & Ranemark, 1943). The village, which they called "Village Average" (Medelby), had a population of just over 1 000. One of the sites the authors describe in their study is the dance hall, which they refer to as "a commercialised development of the peasant society's barn dances" (Allwood & Ranemark, 1943, p. 251) (the dance hall was owned and run by the local sport association). As this dance hall had recently replaced its live orchestra with speakers and a record player, Allwood and Ranemark write:

> On this point then, Village Average has been brought into harmony with the standard-ised record music of the rest of the country. Every Saturday night during the summer, a number of banal hit songs are broadcasted over the entire little community, always the same ones, entirely without personal touch in the performance. Everything according to the Stockholm template. Very few of the records played have any originality or musical worth. Most are treacly Swedish imitations of real Jazz music, though lacking its vigour and made banal. Any notion of composing or performing music in Village Average itself died when this mechanised music was introduced (Allwood & Ranemark, 1943, p. 254 my translation from Swedish).

The quote is permeated with that time period's sociological critique against mass culture and technology. But I believe it also speaks to the democratisation and commercialisation that Swedish singles activities had undergone since the late 19th century. National values had taken over from local and class-specific ones. This national culture was emphasised through the downplaying of geographical and class-related distinctions. New technologies, such as recordings, were part of making this shift to national culture possible.

Very similar trends appeared on the other side of the Atlantic at this time, in the United States. As I will discuss below, the early 20th century was the time when dating emerged in the States (Bailey, 1988; Wouters, 2004). Much like the Swedish dance halls, dating replaced older class-specific courtship forms. A national courtship practice for all classes, dating was nevertheless permeated with bourgeois cul-

tural values like commercialisation and consumption. This contradictory trend, where bourgeois culture was elevated to national culture, is described in historian Beth Bailey's book on dating, and I would argue that her words partly apply to 20th century Swedish dancing as well:

> Young people had a sense that class lines were flexible and not primarily determined by income or by occupation. […] they and their families participated in the general culture – a culture defined as middle-class (Bailey, 1988, p. 11).

Although dancing in Sweden displayed tendencies towards national culture similar to those described by Bailey, I would add that matters were slightly more complex here. While rural dance halls were commercialised, they were owned by large, democratic membership-governed mass-movements that were foremost driven by idealistic concerns (such as reducing drinking or promoting sports) (cf. Frykman, 1988). As the quote from Allwood and Ranemark shows, the dance halls also incorporated elements from peasant culture rather than merely the bourgeois values of the time. Thus, while the Swedish national culture embodied in dance halls underplayed geographical and class-related difference, it appears to have been more of an amalgam of different class cultures, rather than straightforwardly bourgeois.

In the literature on contemporary and historical singles, much of the attention has been paid to single women (Artaeus, 1992; Carlsson, 1977; Evertsson & Nyman, 2013; Reynolds, 2008; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). The reason for this focus may be that singledom in most societies and time periods has been particularly stigmatising for women (Kaufmann, 2008). Very little historical research has been done on single men (however, for a present-day example, see Nordin, 2007). One exception comes from the American context, where Howard Chudacoff has written on bachelor subculture at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th.

Bachelor America

The number of bachelors reached a peak in the American population towards the end of the 19th century, and Howard Chudacoff argues that commercial interest and the culture at large started to accommodate this large cohort (Chudacoff, 2000). As a result, a veritable bachelor subculture emerged, with identity markers, specific views on life, and cultural products like newspapers.

In most respects, America followed the European marriage pattern with high median marriage age and a large proportion of singles. Public institutions treated singles as a social problem. As in Sweden, laws against vagrancy were instituted, as well as laws directed more directly at singles. In several cities, bachelors over the age of 25 had to pay a special bachelors' tax, for example.

Like Artaeus' single women cohabiting in Sweden, Chudacoff's early 19th century bachelors often found accommodation with other bachelors. It was also common to live with one's parents or with other relatives. Chudacoff argues that what changed in the late 19th century was that the strong relations between singles and their fami-

ly of origin started to fade as geographical and social mobility increased rapidly.[9] Bachelors emerged as a group of urban dwellers without strong ties to family and tradition.

The social reformers of the time also paid attention to bachelors, seeing in them the social dilemma of modernising America. With increasing urbanisation and detraditionalisation, these reformers considered single men to be detached nomads lacking social mores and binding relations.

One phenomenon that particularly disturbed these reformers was the boardinghouses where many bachelors found cheap, although often unsanitary accommodations. The city districts in which these boardinghouses were located were associated with social problems. Chudacoff cites sociologist and social reformer Harvey W. Zorbaugh, who

> …lamented the individualism that boardinghouse districts cultivated. "It is a world of atomized individuals, of spiritual nomads," he wrote. The theme of "spiritual nomads" and the "lodger evil" continued to pervade the meetings and writings of moralists and social workers well into the twentieth century (Chudacoff, 2000, p. 76).

In reality, Chudacoff notes, boardinghouse accommodation often led to friendships between the bachelors themselves. Rather than embodying the atomised individual, as social reformers argued, many bachelors developed strong relations with other men – both friendships and love. Besides, while bachelors were overrepresented in the boardinghouses, this type of accommodation was not representative of the bachelor population as a whole.

One important contribution Chudacoff's makes with his book is to acknowledge the organised relationships among bachelors that their contemporaries were unable or unwilling to recognise as such. Rather than understanding the large number of bachelors as an outcome of disappearing social cohesion in an era of rapid social change – which was and has continued to be a default analytical framework for the growing bachelor population at this time – Chudacoff highlights the new forms of cohesion and relations that bachelors established between themselves at the end of the 19th century. He even speculates that the establishment of a bachelor culture not only was an outcome of the high proportion of singles in the cities, but a contributing factor to this statistical trend.

The singles activities of this era in American history seem to have been highly gendered and homosocial. Very few of the activities mentioned by Chudacoff involve women, although dance halls and singles' clubs for both sexes, focused on

---

[9] Surprisingly, Chudacoff shows that immigration was not a direct contributing factor to this new dislocated population of singles. Whereas marriage was more frequent among first generation immigrants than in the general population, it was among second-generation immigrants that the large proportion of singles could be found. These singles had a family of origin in America, but distanced themselves from it more than earlier generations had done. The parents' difficulties fitting in to the new society may have been one cause, but other causes included the urbanisation, industrialisation, and modernisation underway in most European countries at this time.

courtship, were started by social workers as counterexamples to prevailing activities.

Chudacoff argues that bachelors vacillated between constituting a subculture and a counterculture. Whereas they embodied ideals of autonomy and freedom, prevalent male virtues in American society, they were also unmarried and were as a consequence perceived as amoral and unbound by social custom. Parts of the bachelor culture were expressly against marriage, and openly sought ways to live without it. Chudacoff notes that such resistance might be constitutive of a counterculture, a term coined by sociologist Milton Yinger to denote cultures and lifestyles that "'reject or oppose the dominant values and behaviour of society'" (Chudacoff, 2000, p. 13). Bachelors thus not only relied on and reinforced, but also opposed different streaks in mainstream American culture.

In the last chapter of his book, Chudacoff discusses developments in bachelorhood up to present times. As in the West more generally, marriage in America became more common in the 1940s and 50s. In this period, bachelorhood came to be seen with suspicion, even sometimes as a psychiatric disorder. But this post-war marriage boom was only temporary. During the 1960s and 70s, the proportion of singles started to rise again, this time reaching historical heights in the 1990s.

The growing wealth in society has allowed many singles – particularly men – to have a home of their own. Cohabitation without marriage has become acceptable and even prevalent. This development means that marriage statistics do not say as much about singles as they did before the 1960s – many singles are in fact in a long-term relationship without being married. Chudacoff also mentions that divorces have become commonplace. Whereas being single in the past meant never having been married, the current group of singles increasingly includes divorcees. As a result, the median age of singles has risen. It is in connection to this new constellation of singles that Chudacoff discusses new singles activities in America that seem to coincide fairly well with the activities studied in this dissertation:

> [During the 1980's and 90s] there was a proliferation of singles clubs and personal advertisements in newspapers and magazines explicitly directed toward individuals who were sailing the rough seas of postdivorce life. Dances for older singles, special singles outings at resorts, plus meetings and lectures for Parents Without Partners and other such groups arose alongside the bars, weekends, trips, and other entertainments that still attracted the not-yet-married. As well, singles clubs explicitly for people in the thirties, forties, and fifties formed across the country (Chudacoff, 2000, p. 273).

Despite these new activities, Chudacoff also writes that singles culture no longer includes homosocial communal places, where single men can form strong relationships within a group. Being a bachelor today, he concludes, is a more individualist and anonymous affair, where relations to others are often channelled by the market or one-on-one relationships of friendship.

Chudacoff engages with contemporary society through *comparison* with the past, rather than by tracing actual historical developments that have led to the contemporary situation. Few studies of singles activities take this latter approach to historical change. Two books on dating can however be said to apply such a way of writing singles history.

The rise, fall, and dispersion of dating practices

Two works examine historical changes to practices that could legitimately be called singles activities. These are Beth Bailey's work on the emergence and change of dating in America, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, and Cas Wouters' *Sex and Manners – Female Emancipation in the West 1890-2000*, in which he maps the 20th century changes to courtship in four Western countries (Bailey, 1988; Wouters, 2004).

Bailey examines the emergence of dating as a dominant courtship convention[10] in early 20th century America. She analyses written material, such as guidebooks, journals, novels, and commercials. In the decades before dating came on the scene, a courtship ritual labelled "calling" dominated these sources. Calling meant that a man was invited to meet a woman at her home, usually under the supervision of her parents (although the latter usually gave the couple a few minutes alone). In contrast, dating happened on the man's initiative and meant that he took the woman out for some joint consumption, typically a dinner or a movie.

In a few decades, dating came to dominate the American notion of courtship entirely. Bailey argues that what set this particular convention apart from others was its conceptualisation of courtship as economy. Whereas calling had been imagined in terms of family and home (who is or is not allowed into a woman's household), with dating people reimagined themselves as consumers and producers on a status market. For example, young college women and men who got many dates were soon also the most popular in their colleges. If you had many dates, it afforded you

---

[10] Convention is a fairly complex concept. On the one hand, Bailey argues that conventions such as dating are highly consistent with the culture and society in which they emerge. For example, she presents dating as though it "was an accommodation to modern life" (Bailey, 1988, p. 26). On the other hand, the conventions also have some traction beyond being extensions of general culture. Bailey talks of "calling" surviving for a while after dating became dominant, as well as dating taking on some of calling's characteristics.

Although she shows important continuities between dating and more general cultural trends in early 20th century America, Bailey writes that the dating convention had a great deal of autonomy in relation to that culture. Perhaps this autonomy of dating as a practice or convention has become especially salient in recent years, as it has spread with popular culture from America to other parts of the world where it is not always congruent with the dominant culture (however, see Krause & Kowalski, 2013). With Internet dating, which emerged a whole decade after Bailey published her book, dating and its market metaphor have grown global, suggesting a complex interplay between culture and courtship in which the latter has a great deal of autonomy.

What I take from Bailey's history of dating in America is that while dating may have been a convention in 1940s, it no longer is one. Nevertheless, dating prevails and spreads, not least in a Swedish context where the word *dejting* has been increasingly used since the late 20th century (cf. Daneback, 2006). This is the argument I propose for labelling dating a practice rather than a convention.

Practices are not much different from Bailey's conventions. The difference is that practices are not established and unequivocal ideal ways of doing things in a certain situation, whereas conventions are. Both are grounded in the general culture and society where they emerge, and both can impact culture and society. As practices spread, however, they may or may not adapt to host cultures (Czarniawska, 2008; Schatzki, 2002). With the global spread of courtship practices – for example, through the Internet and popular culture – and without one system achieving a dominant position and becoming the convention, it may indeed make sense to say that conventions have given way to various coexisting practices that come with different meanings and value systems.

a certain worth, which in turn made other popular people available to you for dating. Sociologists of the time called this a "dating and rating system".

In her final chapter, Bailey discusses dating after 1965 and writes that this convention has given way to a period of uncertainty in the realm of courtship rituals. The reason, according to her, is that dating has not been replaced by any other dominant convention for courtship.

> Can you say, today, what it means if a middle-class girl in Middle America picks up the phone and calls a boy? Can you say for sure what it means if a thirty-five-year-old man or woman offers a member of the opposite sex his or her business card at a social gathering? (Bailey, 1988, p. 143)

Bailey argues that if we answer no to these questions today, it is because we live with several different conventions, none of which takes precedence in the situations she mentions. Eva Illouz, who has also studied dating in 20th century America, makes a similar argument. She suggests that throughout the past century, different conventions have loaded courtship with so many various meanings that meeting someone of the opposite sex today often creates equivocal situations (Illouz, 1997).

Illouz writes on the topic of courtship that it

> …is not, as a prominent conservative thinker suggests, that contemporaries suffer from an amoral relativism. Rather, they are committed simultaneously to too many values, institutional and anti-institutional, driven by economic interest yet affirming the creative power of emotions and spontaneity (Illouz, 1997, p. 292).

The equivocality of courtship can have the proliferation of practices as a cause. An alternative explanation is proffered in Cas Wouters' book *Sex and Manners*. Wouters has compared 20th century courtship manuals in four countries (Wouters, 2004).[11] Inspired by Norbert Elias, Wouters attempts to survey fairly large-scale international changes in courtship culture. He argues that the period as a whole can be characterised by informalisation, where the emancipation of women has undermined older patterns of formal rules. Like Bailey, Wouters situates courtship in national culture. His book features many detailed examples of what he calls courtship regimes. Germany for example was long dominated by criticism of "cultured" courtship and exhortations to be more "natural". Singles should encounter each other at less formal gatherings, for example "'in the countryside, at a social gathering, at a ball, playing an instrument together, doing a sport'" (Von Franken cited in Wouters, 2004, p. 58). Flirting was frowned upon as too mannered.

---

[11] Both Bailey and Wouters focus on written material, particularly instruction manuals, rather than actual behaviour. Alternative and dissenting practices are usually much less represented in culture, whereas dominant forms are often idealised and naturalised. The authors' choice of data material might therefore help explain why the writers have settled for concepts such as convention and regime to describe courtship. But whereas a certain way of doing things might seem to have dominated from the point of view of mainstream cultural representations, things might have looked very different in real life. Writers like Illouz and Claire Langhamer have sought to provide a nuanced understanding of the relationship between cultural representation of courtship and actual practices (Illouz, 1997; Langhamer, 2013). While they find culture and practices overlapping, the relationships they describe suggest a less than perfect resemblance.

Wouters does not mention the spreading of any courtship regime from one country to the other. When courtship rituals start to converge on informalisation in the four countries, Wouters attributes that convergence to the spread of another international movement in the West, namely women's liberation. That liberation then translates into more informal interaction between the sexes that does away with the need for formal courtship regimes.

With his informalisation thesis, Wouters hints that rather than becoming plural, courtship regimes simply disintegrate in contemporary culture. It is not that we have plural rules for how to behave in courtship and how to interpret each other's behaviour, but rather that rules for such situations have vanished or at least become much less pressing.

Between Wouters on the one hand, and Bailey and Illouz on the other, emerges an important empirical debate that my data may eventually allow me to lean in on: is the equivocality in matters of courtship a result of the proliferation or the erosion of courtship practices? I will return to and discuss this issue in the final chapter of the book.

History of heterosexuality

One historical development that is not touched on in either of the works discussed in earlier sections, although it is certainly relevant to all of them, is the emergence of heterosexuality as a complex pattern of discourses, institutions and practices[12] during the 19th century. Inspired by Michel Foucault's work on the history of sexuality and Queer Theory (Foucault, 1979; Jackson, 1999; Rich, 1980; Rosenberg, 2002; S. Seidman, 1994), some historians have mapped how a new notion of pleasurable heterosexuality as central to healthy relationships between man and woman became dominant around the turn of the century 1900.

Pia Laskar investigates Swedish sex manuals from 1800 to 1920 and shows the intricate discursive work that went into shifting the understanding of gender and sexuality (Laskar, 2005). She argues that procreation was central to the notion of heterosexuality at the beginning of the 19th century, whereas pleasure and romance became *sui generis* signs of normal sexuality at the end of the period. Instead of using procreation as a yardstick for determining normality, normal sexual activity needed an opposite in the form of, for example, homosexuality.

While the 19th century has sometimes been described as anti-sexual, Laskar and other historians argue that thinkers and commentators during that century acknowledged sexual desire in both sexes and gave a great deal of attention to the phenomenon (Michel Foucault, 1979; Laskar, 2005). The crux was that those thinkers and commentators understood regulation of sexual desire to be not only attainable but

---

[12] In some contexts, scholars write of the historical emergence of heterosexuality in the 19th century. In these instances, the word heterosexuality works as a metonym for the wider discursive and institutional arrangements, as well as the specific sexual and intimate practices that emerged at that time. The point is not to suggest that sexual actions involving more than one sex was invented at that time.

also normal. Thus research on, and talk and cataloguing of sexuality went hand in hand with its regulation by individuals and society alike. As a consequence, sexuality came to be the object of the sciences of medicine and psychiatry.

At the end of the 19th century, rapid urbanisation and the breakdown of traditions broke up many existing communities. Social reformers feared that these changes were bringing havoc to society in the form of poverty, individualism and – most importantly – perversion. In response, movements against promiscuity and prostitution emerged, both in Sweden and abroad. Writers like Laskar and Margaret Jackson have argued that these movements were part of politicising sexuality. Sexuality in the general population was tied to notions of public health and nativity.

How singledom played into and was affected by these changes to heterosexuality has not been examined in research. As we have seen in earlier sections, particular singles and singles activities were, or seem to have been, affected by these trends. In the early 19th century, singles seem to have been a predominantly economical issue, as seen in American bachelor taxes and the connection between singledom and poverty in Sweden. Later, Chudacoff's American bachelors were the target of social reform movements, presumably because they personified what social reformers at the time saw as the socially isolated individual of modern anomie (Chudacoff, 2000). Poor single women in Sweden, and in particular single mothers, were central figures when their contemporaries debated "the social question", that is, the rapid changes to society and its destruction of community (Artaeus, 1992). These debates were contemporary with similar debates on heterosexuality, although it is difficult to say if and how the two were interconnected. A bit later, Swedes started to debate dance halls as these came under critique by social and religious reform movements (Frykman, 1988). Whereas the labour and temperance movements supported and often themselves arranged these rural singles activities, a vociferous group of religious believers, politicians, and social scientists saw in them the social and moral evils of the day. *Dansbaneeländet*, a derogatory term for dance halls, became an oft-used title for this issue. Sexual promiscuity was one of the fears these debates invoked. And lastly, as marriage became popular again in the post-war period, the psychiatrisation of heterosexuality had reached a point where American psychiatrists speculated whether singledom was a psychiatric disorder (Chudacoff, 2000).

Heterosexuality and singles activities thus seem to have interconnected histories. While these interconnections are far from having been mapped out, some general inferences can be drawn. At the same time as sexuality was politicised and psychiatrised, so too was heterosexual singledom. Singles activities, often being seen in the eyes of contemporaries as indicative of the state of singledom more generally, were drawn into this political and scientific debate. In the process, these phenomena went from being a matter of individual and communal economy and procreation, to occupying the complex set of issues that Foucault has called biopolitics (Foucault, 2004; Rabinow & Rose, 2006), namely the interplay between government power, population, and sexuality.

Summary of historical exposé

The historical examples of singles activities discussed above can be divided into two categories, namely courtship and community. I would not suggest that these are the only possible categories of singles activities. However, I would argue that these categories describe two types of activities that have existed historically. Calling, the courtship ritual that preceded dating, is a clear-cut example of a courtship singles activity. The bachelor subculture in late 19th century America is a corresponding example for the community category. Between these two is a range of singles activities that features elements from both categories. These categories might therefore be read as ideal types to which actual examples correspond more or less exactly.

One important aspect that all singles activities have in common is that they are places for singles to meet. As I defined them, they are social gatherings, characterised by the potential encounters they make possible. As we have seen, this relational aspect has had at least two modes in the past. On the one hand, people have used singles activities to meet potential partners (what I have called courtship). On the other hand, they have come to singles activities to be part of a wider network of people (community). I write network here to be as inclusive as possible. As we have seen, friendships were common among singles, but so were acquaintances, more instrumental relations, as well as a general sense of belonging to a community or group. We are therefore dealing with a kind of social gathering that facilitates a wide array of relations.

Let me begin by summarising examples leaning more towards the courtship category. Western Europe underwent significant social and cultural shifts during the 19th century. In at least Sweden and the United States, these shifts led to the emergence of more national conventions for courtship. Whereas such activities previously had been highly class-segregated, now at least an image of equality and commonality became the norm. In Sweden, this change was associated with rural dance halls and the Vauxhalls and dance palaces of the cities. Dating had similar national characteristics when it emerged as a courtship convention in the States.

More recently, national conventions for courtship have become less dominant. Researchers have noticed difficulties people have in framing potential courtship interaction. Some argue that courtship practices have multiplied and that this multiplicity leads to ambiguity. Others say that courtship conventions lost their meaning altogether when women's emancipation made interaction between the sexes less formal.

Historiographical accounts of community-oriented singles activities are sparse. From the examples I have cited, we can surmise that communities of singles were predominantly homosocial in the past. Single women lived with other women, and single men lived with men. There were exceptions of course; some women and men lived with their families of origin, which could include both male and female members. Bachelors boarded with male friends who had female spouses, or rented rooms in boardinghouses governed by women (often widows). But nevertheless,

the tendency seems to have been that the singles in one community were of the same sex.

Chudacoff, writing about America, proposes that such single-sex communities disappeared over the course of the 20th century. He argues that no other kind of singles community emerged to replace them, and that single life therefore became more individualised. With this proposition, Chudacoff could be said to argue the importance of singles activities for the relational life of singles – and here we must include not merely potential partners, but friends, acquaintances, and all other relations that are involved in shaping a single life.

The question of whether communal singles activities have continued up till the present or not also raises the question of whether courting and community are mixed in contemporary singles culture. One can speculate that if the reason behind the homosociality of singles communities in the past was the formalised interaction between genders, then female emancipation and the sexual revolution of the 1960s created the opportunity for mixed gender communities of singles. In turn, such communities would have contributed to the ambiguous character of courtship in present-day society, as interaction between singles of different sexes might be framed as both courtship and community-building. The dating and rating system identified by American sociologists in the 1930s is an early example of courtship becoming a pastime among college students, a pastime that determined status within a mixed gender community of singles.

If singles activities have involved singles in different kinds of relations, what has that meant in terms of how singles have lived? The historical exposé gives relatively few clues as to the exact relation between singles activities (of either category) and participants' arrangement of single life. Two direct causal links are however discussed in the literature. It seems evident that the poverty associated with singledom, particularly among women, necessitated and shaped the same-sex households in 19th century Sweden. These households in turn made life more bearable for these women. Secondly, Chudacoff describes the emergence of a commercially driven world of urban singles activities for bachelors, and argues its importance for the formation of their subculture. These two cases show a direct relationship, but are highly specific and difficult to generalise.

If we refrain from arguing causality, I think it makes sense to suggest that singles activities at least have reflected and possibly even facilitated various historical forms of singledom. The endogamous marriage system of the 19th century was underpinned by class-separated courtship activities. In parallel, singledom was very different depending on which class or estate you belonged to. The national, "universalistic" courtship activities of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were contemporary with the emergence of geographically and socially much more mobile singles who were somewhat distanced from their families of origin. At the same time, the politicised discourse about heterosexuality was not least directed against various singles activities such as boardinghouses, dance halls, and dating. When these activities were seen as problems, singles were also understood as social dilemmas, psychiatrically diagnosable or otherwise undercut by political and professional discourses. In various periods and places – for example, the late 19th century

in America, and the 1960s in the West more generally – communal singles activities have become more prevalent in society. This prevalence has happened in tandem with the emergence of singledom as a valid lifestyle or subculture on its own. In recent decades, as the median age of the singles group has risen, partly because of the rising number of divorces in society, singles activities have also adapted to accommodate this ageing cohort. My research might shed light on how this set of practices has evolved in the wake of these population changes.

The historical exposé provides several important elements to the study of singles activities. First, it validates the existence of singles activities as a general phenomenon transcending the cases considered in this book. Secondly, it adds community and courtship as two important categories to consider in the analysis. Thirdly, it emphasises equivocality as a central characteristic of contemporary interaction between singles.

SINGLES ACTIVITIES AND CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH

The study of singles activities has relevance in a society where a large and growing proportion of the populace define themselves as singles. But how is it relevant in contemporary research? In the following sections, I will discuss how trends in sociology and social science may help frame singles activities and make given the phenomenon wider relevancy. The result will be a number of research questions, which I will enumerate at the end of this chapter.

Intimacy and personal life

One theme that emerges in the historical exposé above is the importance of relations at singles activities. These include a wide array of relation types, from long-term coupledom to fleeting acquaintances. To examine such an assortment of relations, we need concepts that transcend specific relational types. Even more than that: as the historical discussion above indicates, it is not only that singles activities enact[13] many different relation types. Historians have discerned an emerging equivocality in interactions between men and women; people engaging in such interaction have difficulties determining the precise nature of their interactions. It may be that the mentioned assortment of relations can arise from similarly equivocal interaction at the singles events. We therefore may need concepts for kinds of interactions that lend themselves to various kinds of relations.

In recent years, sociologists have tried to find concepts to capture the changes they perceive in close relations[14] (Bauman, 2007; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Edwards & Gillies, 2012; Giddens, 1992; Gilding, 2010; Jamieson, 1999; May,

---

[13] I borrow the concept of enactment from Annemarie Mol, who adopts it as an alternative to the more theoretically loaded "performance" (Mol, 2002). To simplify Mol's definition, enactment is the staging of people and things to achieve semiotic significance.

[14] I have chosen "close relations" as the general term for friendships, monogamous relationships, relations between siblings, parent-child relations, and so on.

2012; Oswin & Olund, 2010; Povinelli, 2006; Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). For years, the discipline assumed "family" as a central and often unproblematic notion. From the 1960s onward, Western societies have seen a shift away from old ways of arranging a family. New arrangements for close relations have emerged such as unmarried cohabitation, rainbow families, and living apart together (LAT). But there is also a shift away from the family unit altogether: divorce has become more acceptable and as mentioned above, more people remain or return to singledom during their lifetime.

In the wake of these changes and challenges to family, many sociologists have called for a new empiricism that forgoes notions of family to instead examine how people themselves arrange their relations (Povinelli, 2006; Smart, 2007). It is out of that empirical work that concepts with relevance for my discussion on singles activities have emerged.

Intimacy is a mode of interaction that many people consider an important quality in their relationships (Illouz, 2007; Jamieson, 1988, 1999, 2012). Interestingly, intimacy is not exclusive to monogamous relationships, but can be found as a valued experience within friendship and other relations as well. For this reason, intimacy has figured large in the sociological debates about changes to close relations.

While sociologists have long speculated and investigated intimacy, Anthony Giddens was one of the first to introduce the concept in the context of what he calls late modern societies' take on close relations (cf. Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). In his book *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Giddens argued that intimacy had increasing importance as a value people use to evaluate their relations (Giddens, 1992). Intimacy forgoes collective or traditional values underpinning close relations (e.g., "family" or "holy matrimony"). Instead, intimacy is contained in the individual's personal experience of closeness. Consonant with late modern individualism, intimacy means that we have no authority or tradition to fall back on if our partners feel dissatisfied with the relationship and wish to end it. Adopted as the prime relational value, intimacy thus requires constant work and offers little sense of constancy or security for people and their relationships.

Giddens also argued that as intimacy transcends specific types of relations, its rising importance as a value in relationships means that boundaries between, for example, friendship and coupledom will blur. He used the LGBT community as an example of how friends and ex-partners could be part of an extended family.

Giddens' claims about intimacy have been heavily criticised and newer arguments based on his reasoning have a much less prophetic tone (Budgeon, 2008; Jamieson, 1999; Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). While Giddens argued that intimacy is becoming more important as a relational value, sociologists today make less ambitious assertions, arguing that intimacy as he described it is an important experience at least to those who remain outside the traditional established forms for relationships, and who try to forge new kinds of relations without taking that structured landscape for granted. While this latter argument says little about society at large, it has become useful for exploring communities and relationships outside the heterosexual family norm – as well as for doing critical sociological work on the family itself.

I use the concept of intimacy to investigate open-ended interactions during singles activities. Open-endedness in this context means that participants are uncertain of what kind of relation such interaction underpins – or whether they underpin any relation at all. For example, it is often undecided whether men and women who interact during singles activities do it as a kind of play, as the beginnings of a monogamous relationship, to foster community among singles, or to start a friendship. Nevertheless, the experience of an encounter itself is often treated as valuable.

There is a complication however. For Giddens and other writers, intimacy is a *personal* experience (Giddens, 1992; Mjöberg, 2011). My observations cannot very well reach that personal level of experience, but primarily concern organised practices. The question I have come to ask myself is therefore if and how intimacy as a personal experience and organising may belong together. This question is a central theoretical concern in the book, as singles activities affect participants' relational networks in part by organising ambiguous encounters that seem to be intimate for some of them. If I can determine how organising and intimacy may belong together, I then can ask how intimacy plays into the organising of singles activities. I examine the issue of organising and intimacy closely in chapter 3.

Two other concepts to come out of sociological debates on family and new forms of close relations are personal life and relationality. Instead of assuming that the family is the normal shape of close relations, sociologists like Carol Smart have created concepts to capture a much broader set of relations (Smart, 2007).

Smart argues that having a relationship includes much more than simply two individuals being close together. It may for example involve the nation-state (sanctioning marriage), but is even more commonly configured by friends, houses, parents, earlier spouses, children, different cultural backgrounds, and so on (cf. Simmel & Wolff, 1950, pp. 126ff). A relationship is not least about organising this large number of interconnected relations. It is a constant and complex practice that calls the participants to repeatedly determine the nature of relationships.

I would argue that Smart's concept of personal life is an example of how we effectively can open up the many different practices that make up relationships. As long as we only focus on how two people relate to each other, it will be difficult to discern the subtle differences in practice that differentiate relationships.

One concept Smart adds to her toolbox – she writes about personal life as an analytical toolbox, rather than as a fully-fledged theory – is relationality. This concept has been used far and wide, both before and after Smart added it to her array of concepts (Smart, 2007, p. 46f). It may need some clarification. I would define relationality as the *how* and *what* of relationships. It is a practiced answer to how one should "do" relationships and what relationships really are. A married couple has a relationship inasmuch as an unmarried, LAT couple also has one. But one difference between the two is how they practice their relationships and potentially what they understand their relationships to be. This difference is one of relationalities. Two married couples can also have different relationalities, for example when one uses religious frameworks to understand their life together, while the other uses secular concepts for the same purpose.

The concept of relationality thus adds differences to the sociological perception of relationships, and contributes towards demonstrating the difficulties inherent in sustaining, within sociology, unitary concepts like "family"; if families may have different relationalities as they do and think their togetherness differently, perhaps we need to talk of "doing families" for example (Bruce, 2012; D. Morgan, 1996). Relationality therefore contributes towards the new empiricism concerning close relations, inasmuch as it asks us to explore aspects of those relationships that existing conceptual systems may overlook.

What Smart does, is to add relationality to her overall framework of personal life – thereby suggesting how and where relationality is enacted. For her, relationships are always more than two people, and so it is in a network of present and remembered friends and families, as well as cultural and religious belongings, that relationality is arranged and negotiated. This can be exemplified by Katie Bruce's study of marriage ceremonies, through which she, using Smart's concepts, shows how couples' joint negotiations and decisions regarding whom to invite and where to place people at for example the dinner table, also are ways of understanding their own togetherness (Bruce, 2012).

Singles have personal lives involving friends and families. Each of their relations – be it to parents or friends – also involve relationalities. I would argue that there is an additional relationality inherent in single life; singles must negotiate and enact the *how* and *what* of their *not* being engaged in a long-term monogamous relationship.

It may seem strange to argue that to not be engaged in a certain relation involves some sort of relationality. Does not relationality emerge in the practices of relationships? Not necessarily. If not having a relationship involves determining what a relationship is, and if we have defined relationality as the how and what of relationships, then relationality must also be involved in arranging and negotiating what it means for a relationship to not be at hand. Carol Smart's argument that relationality does not necessarily happen between two people, but rather in a network of remembered and present relations, also makes this move more plausible – singles are involved in such networks as much as are couples.

To make this point as clear as possible, I have coined the term non-relationality. Non-relationality involves enacting in personal life the how and what of the relationship one is not engaged in.

Non-relationality is to be understood only as an empirically useful concept, not a theoretical one. To for example suggest that people are always enacting the relationality of relationships they are not having would be to approach the nonsensical. There are always relationships we are not having, and so with this far-reaching suggestion, non-relationality would cover everything and nothing of human practice. The pertinent question is in what situations the absence of relationship is socially significant. These are the cases in which non-relationality becomes a useful concept. Identifying oneself as single is one such situation, as it entails making not being engaged in a monogamous relationship significant for self-presentation. Another example would be the decision to end a relationship, for example in a di-

vorce. That non-relationality is the how and what of not being engaged in a relationship can therefore not be taken in the strictest logical sense to mean all possible relationships we are not having. By "not being engaged in a relationship" I am in fact referring to a specific kind of relation to a specific or non-specific other. That relation is one of not having a relationship, the how and what of which is determined in people's personal lives. For example, having an ex-husband entails a relation to him, but that relation is one of not-being-a-couple. So what does the relation entail? If we follow Smart, the non-relationality of having an ex must be determined in the relational network you have to other people, including the ex-husband himself. Importantly, non-relationality does not need to concern non-relationships to specific others (e.g. an ex-spouse). In certain situations, it might be significant to not have relationships to imagined others. Non-relationality is the how and what of the relationships we have had, desire, remember, ended, lost, crave, or wilfully abstain from.

As non-relationality concerns actual relations, not the logical absence of relations, it should be understood as a subcategory of relationality. Non-relationality does not in other words cover something that relationality misses. It is a specific type of relationality that it is useful to name as such.

Take the following example. Many singles crave a relationship with someone they have not yet encountered. This craving can be interpreted as part of what they take singledom to entail. Their feelings, thoughts, and actions are, as it were, the content of their not being engaged in a relationship. Although it is a relationship to someone non-specific, craving a relation as a single can be interpreted as relationality – for example by analysing the image of "the fairy tale prince", as Jean-Claude Kaufmann does in a book on French single women (Kaufmann, 2008). More specifically, the practices that result from the craving in question constitute non-relationality in that they are part of determining what it means to not be engaged in a relationship.

Singles activities by definition lend meaning to participants not being engaged in long-term monogamous relationships. Therefore, some sort of non-relationality is involved in such activities. But whose non-relationality is involved, to be exact?

I have followed Carol Smart in arguing that relationality plays out in a network of relations. In other words, individuals cannot themselves, independently of others, determine what relationality they arrange. To use a concept defined above, one could say that relationality needs to be *organised*; it may have a coordinating logic, but that logic needs to be adapted to local practices.

For example, if we decide to look at how singles activities are organised in regards to relationality, participants' own relationalities are local. Perhaps a singles cruise is organised around the notion of matching people up (speed dating-style). Some singles resist that notion and say that the activity feels artificial and forced; their resistance may be understood as local practices that need to be handled when organising the cruise.

But which practices are coordinating and which are local may vary depending on our research interests. We can also look at the cruise from the point of view of the participants. It is possible these passengers lack the ability to organise the singles activity as such, but they may nevertheless have the ability to understand this cruise as part of their personal lives. They may have gone on the cruise with the hope that it would provide a romantic setting for coincidental encounters, according with their image of relationships more generally. Their disappointment may make no difference to the cruise, but it can be organised and integrated in various ways into their own non-relationality (waving it off as a mistake, complaining about the ways of contemporary society, changing one's notion of relationships, and so on).

The singles activity non-relationalities can be studied from the perspective both of specific singles activities and of individuals' personal lives. Therefore, I have chosen to include chapters on both. The question then is: What non-relationalities are organised by singles activities, and how do singles in turn frame those activities when organising the non-relationality in their own personal lives?

Singles activities and heterosexuality

Heterosexuality is sometimes taken to denote all sexually loaded actions between men and women. This is a highly unspecific definition that contributes little to the sociology of sexuality. Recent decades have seen a social scientific understanding of heterosexuality emerge, which associates heterosexuality with a certain historically and culturally specific social formation (Adams, 1997; Butler, 1999; Hockey, Meah, & Robinson, 2007; Jackson, 1999; Jonsson, 2009; Laskar, 2005). According to this historical account, heterosexuality may have started during the 19th century when human sexuality was increasingly investigated and categorised using new methods and theories in medicine, biology, and psychiatry. These new scientific findings then translated into and helped promulgate family patterns and attitudes in the wider population. Indeed, with feminist author Stevi Jackson, one can speak of heterosexuality as a societal pattern of identity, institution, experience, and practice, that is tightly tied to gender and includes distributions of resources and labour (Jackson, 1999).

Many researching heterosexuality have focused on the invention and stigmatisation of homosexuality during the 19th century, arguing that homosexuals worked as a discursive contrast to heterosexuality, the exclusion of which lent clearer discursive boundaries to the latter. More and more focus has however been put on the stigmatisation of those heterosexual practices that have been deemed abnormal at one time or another (Hockey et al., 2007; Hubbard, 2000). Michel Foucault, one of the earlier proponents of a critical historical perspective on heterosexuality, for example identified four "targets and anchorage points for the ventures of knowledge [about sexuality during the 19th century]: the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult" (Foucault, 1979, p. 105). Many people sorting under each of the four items on Foucault's list were presumably categorised as heterosexual.

With feminist and queer theories, critical studies of heterosexuality have also turned to present-day society and culture. Although heterosexuality is constantly

undergoing changes, many argue that heterosexuality has status as normal and natural, reducing other sexual practices to abnormalities (Butler, 1999; Rubin & Butler, 1994; Warner, 1999). To clarify how heterosexuality operates in society, some authors have argued that it can be read as a normative model of sexual practice they call *heteronormativity*. Feminist Gayle Rubin presents us with the most comprehensive list of what people normatively assume constitutes "normal" heterosexuality: married, monogamous, procreative, non-commercial, in pairs, in a relationship, same generation, in private, no pornography, bodies only, and "vanilla" (the latter in contrast to s/m practices) (Rubin, 1993). This list makes it clear that one need not be LGBT to fall outside heteronormativity. [15] As Hockey, Meah, and Robinson write, many who consider themselves heterosexuals clash with heteronormativity at one time or other in their lives (Hockey et al., 2007). Perhaps then heteronormativity is not only destructive to individuals in the LGBT community, but equally to certain periods and situations in most people's lives.

As heteronormativity works to set boundaries to a range of sexual behaviours many would label heterosexual, critical studies have asked what position singledom has acquired. This line of research is very limited, however (Budgeon, 2008; Evertsson & Nyman, 2013; Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004; Walsh, 2007), and I hope this dissertation will contribute to it.[16]

As authors like Judith Butler and Michel Foucault have argued, the complex societal pattern we call heterosexuality is a conglomerate of practices that go far beyond the merely sexual. In part because it is actually many things (institutions, intimacy, biology, conventions, and so on), while many would claim heterosexuality to be unified, they argue that it tends to subvert itself. This subversion of heteronormativity is pushed not least when practices show the underlying multiplicity of heterosexuality. It is this poststructuralist argument that lends a critical edge to concepts like intimacy and personal life: by highlighting differences and complexity where discourses around heterosexuality claim unity, they are deconstructive. This argument also lends a critical edge to my own study, which uses these concepts.

Where do singles frequenting singles activities stand in relation to heteronormativity? On the one hand, courtship rituals tend to reproduce marriage as an ideal, thus reinforcing heteronormativity. On the other hand, building community around the identity of singledom may challenge heteronormativity, if and when it validates personal life lived outside of coupledom. The singles activities that blur boundaries

---

[15] Researchers have pointed out that Rubin's list of normative assumptions about heterosexuality, need not apply to all in equal measure. For example, rich men can often visit prostitutes without having their normality questioned, which is a more difficult feat for less well-off men (Monto & Milrod, 2013). One can also ask if and how the list has changed over time. These issues need not concern us here however; my point is simply to say that heteronormativity entails more normative assumptions than those stigmatising LGBT-people, and that those assumptions also make many heterosexual practices look suspicious.

[16] As I discussed in above, singles activities and singles were objects of scientific and political discussions that in turn were contemporary with the establishment of heterosexuality as a dominant pattern in society. The exact function and import of those objects are still to be investigated, however, and fall outside the scope of this dissertation.

between courtship and community can be interpreted either way. One can speculate whether such blurring helps subvert the marriage norm inherent in courtship, or whether it keeps singles communities aligned with heteronormativity (Budgeon, 2008; cf. Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004).

Chudacoff writes that American 19th century bachelors oscillated between constituting a subculture and a resisting counterculture (Chudacoff, 2000). But even when singles are in general agreement with dominant culture, not being engaged in monogamous relationships itself might transgress in some ways against heteronormativity. Singles activities can be assumed to occupy an ambiguous position in these regards by both reinforcing and transgressing against the norms. How should we term this kind of transgression within heterosexuality, this oscillation between reinforcing and challenging the norm?

It may be tempting to try the term "queer" on singles to emphasise their ability to subvert heteronormativity – but there are good reasons not to. As Sasha Roseneil writes, even if singles live a life outside of heteronormative marriage, many do it involuntarily and with a desire to find a mate (Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). Some writers have coined the phrase "proto-queer" for practices that almost, but not entirely, leave the realm of heterosexuality (Linné, 2003). This might be a useful concept for understanding the queer possibilities of phenomenon like singles activities, but seems less useful for investigating their ambiguous position in relation to heteronormativity.

In their book *Heterosexuality in Theory and Practice*, Beasley et al. discuss heterosexual challenges to heteronormativity at length (Beasley, Brook, & Holmes, 2012). Beasley et al. work from within what they call the gender/sexuality studies tradition, which recognises the normative issues inherent in questions about gender and sexuality and attempts to approach them reflectively and critically. Beasley et al. show that this field of study has left central aspects of heterosexuality largely unexamined. Feminists and queer theorists alike may have assumed that heterosexuality is more or less inherently heteronormative and devoid of enjoyment and change. Beasley et al. want to assert that there is a subversive potential within heterosexuality itself, that is, that it entails transgressive practices that need not be consciously oppositional or queer, but that nevertheless facilitate non-normative and more equitable arrangements. For these authors, heterosexuality need not be inherently normative (although it often is). They also describe heterosexuality as fluid, meaning that it entails myriad different practices, some of which have transgressive potential. They call these transgressive practices hetero-doxical.

> To transgress is to wander from the norm, but perhaps without thinking, or without intending to drift. [… T]ransgressions are not inevitably pleasurable, although they admit the possibility of pleasure within heterosexuality and illustrate that it is composite, cracked, fissured. The light getting in, for us, illuminates the unexpected forms of pleasure to be found there. (Beasley et al., 2012, p. 5)

Beasley et al. seek out the enjoyment of heterosexual sex and intimacy as places of equity and non-normative potential. One important example in the book describes the thrills of intimate encounters experienced by people living apart together

(LAT). These people report that living apart may in fact heighten the intensity when they actually meet (cf. McCarthy, 2012).

Like queer theorists, the authors emphasise the need to broaden the analytical concept of heterosexuality to include more than sexual practices (Beasley et al., 2012). Only with an eye to *both* the sexual and non-sexual complexities involved in heterosexuality are researchers able to recognise the potential for change, they argue. Beasley et al. write that intimacy (being a much broader category than sexuality) is a particularly complex phenomenon that has led people to develop ways of being heterosexual that are suited to specific circumstances. It is this kind of fluidity that allows hetero-doxicality to flourish. The LAT example above would be one illustration of this.

The point I take from Beasley et al. is to separate heteronormativity from heterosexuality, and to search out the transgressive potential in the latter – particularly in non-sexual practices like intimacy. This point lends a critical thrust to my project, as I attempt to identify the hetero-doxicality singles activities might entail. Importantly, Beasley et al. do not associate transgression with individuals, but rather with events and situations. The question then is not whether singles *are* transgressive, but whether singles activities include situations that let participants *become* transgressive.

On the other hand, I also need to acknowledge instances where heteronormativity is reinforced as the ostensibly proper pattern of things. The singles activities I observed are exclusively for straight people. As such, all of the activities were clearly heteronormative in some sense, more so than, for example, American bachelor culture at the end of the 19th century, considering that bachelor boardinghouses were sometimes places for gay men to live together inconspicuously (Chudacoff, 2000). The question arises, what hetero-doxical possibilities emerge in singles activity practices?

Spaces of singles activities

The geography of sexuality is an established field of academic study. New areas of study are emerging within that field, including the geography of heterosexualities (in the plural) and spaces of intimacy (Hubbard, 2000, 2001, 2002; Knopp, 2004; Tan, 2013; Walsh, 2007). While my discipline is sociology, this dissertation's analysis and arguments do have relevance for these latter two areas of study.

As cultural geographers and sociologists find when they investigate the cultural and social meaning of space, space is as much relational as it is a measurable three-dimensional axis (Law, 2000; Lefebvre, 1991; Löw, 2008; D. B. Massey, 2005; D. Massey, 1991). Social agents never enter into a room without identifying what relations it consists of and which it makes possible. A living-room, a toilet, or a kitchen for example are not defined by their measurable dimensions; rather, such spaces are perhaps foremost defined by the relational practices they conventionally are meant to permit and/or prohibit (Jeyasingham, 2010; Morrison, 2010).

Still, the relational characteristics of a space often interplay with its material setup. Cultural geographers like David Harvey and sociologists like John Law argue that the material and relational aspects of space are two sides of the same coin (Harvey, 2006; Law, 2002). For example, as Carey-Ann Morrison has shown in an intriguing study on heterosexual couples and their homes, material home spaces organise the different ways in which inhabitants relate to each other (cf. Gorman-Murray, 2008; Morrison, 2010). At the same time, and for the same reasons, people change home spaces materially to manage their relations. Materiality and relationality connect through the use of space to organise social life.

One peculiar feature of space is that it can imply social relations between generic people who are not yet present. A new shopping mall, for example, is designed with particular types of interactions between future visitors in mind. The material side of space is never determinate of the relational one, and it can equally well be said to anticipate and thus be influenced by the latter. Nevertheless, space is an important organising tool in so far as it works as a coordinating practice that must nevertheless adapt to whatever local practices it ends up hosting.

I argued above that social gatherings use time and space to increase possibilities for encounters. As such, space is key to how singles activities are organised. One question then is how space is used to organise singles activities.

Cultural geographers often make a distinction between place and space (Hubbard, 2007). Place is defined by existing relations, particularly a community. To say, for example, that "this is our village", is to say something of a place. Place is something to which people feel themselves belonging. Space is a more open affair; it enables encounters between communities and individuals, a flow of people and things, movement and conflicts. For many people, the physical community where they live – for example, a city or a village – is both a place and a space. The road on which one lives can feel like home ("it's my road"), but it can also work as a drive-through where strangers go about their business.

So are singles activities places or spaces? I would argue they can be both. Singles activities are social gatherings, arranged for the potential relations that may result, more than for the relations that have already been forged. But there can be a communal element to these activities, exemplified historically by boardinghouses in Sweden or America. These houses would have been places inasmuch as their inhabitants felt a sense of community and belonging.

Singles activities, as I discussed above, have both communal and courtship characteristics; they are both countercultural and subcultural, as well as heteronormative and hetero-doxical. We could now add that they might be both places and spaces. The question then is what arrangement of place and space contemporary singles activities might entail.

A NOTE ON PRONOUNS

Throughout the book, I ask the reader to imagine some relation or relationship to an unspecified other. This could be as a way to illustrate or elaborate on concepts like

intimacy, personal life or relationality. Unspecified pronouns can signal gender stereotypes and gender power relations. Consistently writing "he" when actually meaning "anyone", for example signals that men are closer to the norm than women.

However, when I ask the reader to imagine relation/ships to unspecific others, using "he" does not necessarily position the reader as heterosexual or male. In fact, consistently "neutralising" the gender of unspecified others by e.g. writing s/he, might miss the opportunity to "interpellate" the reader in non-normative ways.

This is the reason why I have chosen to be consistently inconsistent gendering unspecific others in the book. In short, I sometimes write she, sometimes he. Sometimes I write she or he, and sometimes he or she. I would not advocate this as a universal writing practice, but I have found that it produces hesitation in readers (including myself) that I think is fruitful when considering close relations.

QUESTIONS AND DISPOSITION

Within the more general empirical and theoretical problem of situating singledom, I aim to explore singles activities as locales for various ways of being single. Showing the relevancy of this project within existing fields of research, I have posed a number of research questions, which can be summarised in the following list of four questions.

1. What is the role of intimacy in singles activities?
2. How are space and place used to organise singles activities?
3. What non-relationalities and relationalities are organised by the singles activities and how do singles in turn engage with those activities when organising non-relationality and relationality in their own personal lives?
4. What hetero-doxical possibilities emerge in singles activity practices?

These questions have been central to the organising of my research, as well as the interpretation and presentation of my data. The questions range from the organising of singles activities to their role in the institutions of heterosexuality more generally. They demand attention on both the organisers of these activities, as well as on their participants. In the next chapter, I will discuss the methods I have used to accommodate these demands. As I will show, questions of space and place, movement and community, have played into my methodological decisions.

In chapter 3, I will discuss the concepts of intimacy, personal life, relationality, and organising. The purpose of this discussion is to develop a theoretical framework in greater detail from which observations and interviews such as my own can be connected to more general concepts and arguments. The reason I focus on the concepts mentioned, rather than for example space, place, or social gathering, is that the latter concepts have been thoroughly discussed in this Introduction. In addition, all the concepts are related, and concepts like space and place will be brought into the discussion in chapter 3 and related to the main concepts there.

In chapters 4 to 7 I present the empirical data. The first three of these four chapters are devoted to one singles activity each. Chapter 7 then discusses the same activities from the point of view of participants' personal lives. The shift of perspective is related to question 3 above. While the first three empirical chapters present data directly from my observations and interviews at singles activities, chapter 7 analyses how singles themselves engage with these activities as part of their complex personal lives. Chapter 7 uses the concept of non-relationality to approach this personal engagement. In chapters 4-6 I foremost focus on conflicting understandings of the singles activities. The reason is that these conflicts give the best insight into the rich complexity of what is being organised, as people argue over the role of intimacy, space, courtship, singledom and so on.

The final chapter returns to the questions posed here and attempts to give answers based on the preceding discussions and data presentations. In that chapter, I will also discuss my results in relation to previous research and critically examine a number of ways to relate them to wider theories of society.

2. Examining Singles Activities

The previous chapter ended with the enumeration of four questions I pose in this dissertation. In this chapter, I will consider to what degree the methods I have used to answer these questions, and to pursue the overall purpose of the dissertation, live up to the criteria for validity, critical thinking, and reflexivity that the questions implicitly demand.

I would argue that the nature of the object examined, as well as the implicit demands of my research questions and aim, need to form the basis for the criteria by which we evaluate the methods employed (Maxwell, 2013, p. 39ff). Social phenomena are complex and can be understood in different ways. Depending on how we imagine the nature and configuration of these phenomena, we need to deploy different batteries of methods and methodologically relevant decisions to examine them. Furthermore, the questions we ask, and the aim we have, come with implicit demands on how to go about answering the questions. Do the questions ask for numbers? Are they asking for contextualisation or interpretation? These implicit demands have different methodological consequences.

Social scientific methodologies can offer models for how types of social phenomena can be examined and types of questions answered. However, these methodologies may need to be combined, modified, and given limited purposes (rather than used for the whole of the research project), to fit the research questions and examined phenomena. In other words, I would argue that the requirement of the specific research project takes precedence over given methodological philosophies. This is the strategy I have employed.

I will argue that singles activities are phenomena oscillating between place and space, community and courtship. I will also argue that my overall aim and research questions have three implicit demands: I need to produce valid accounts of these activities, contextualisation, and critical examination of taken-for-granted concepts. When developing these demands into coherent criteria for evaluating my methods, I have been inspired by three methodologies: multi-sited ethnography, mixed methods research, and ethnomethodology. Multi-sited ethnography helps me to evaluate my sampling, whereas the other two methodologies are used to analyse and evaluate the various investigative methods employed.

The point of this chapter is not to show how I have followed a strict methodology throughout my research process, resulting in answers to my research questions that have a certain predictable validity and generality. The point is rather to examine strengths and weaknesses that such methodologies can help identify after the fact, in order to determine the extent and limits of the claims I make.

That I do this evaluation after the fact is not to imply that I lacked methodological rigour during the research process itself. At the outset, most researchers have an initial impression and notion of the subject matter they are to study, and it is possible to fit methods and decisions to these initial impressions. During the research process, I have however given credence to data before and above preconceived

notions about phenomena researched. That prioritising results in a number of usually small but significant shifts in how the object matter is understood, and consequently how research questions are asked. In turn, some of the methods that seemed adequate at the outset can turn out to be less adequate later on. This is the reason why it is necessary to not only make the process transparent, but also to offer an evaluation *post factum*.

MULTI-SITED ETHNOGRAPHY AS SAMPLING METHODOLOGY

In the Introduction, I showed that singles activities historically have consisted of community-oriented activities and courtship. As I defined singles activities, the possibility of encounters is an important characteristic, and space – defined broadly – is an important method of creating such possibilities. I also referred to cultural geographers who make a distinction between place and space, suggesting that while the former is linked to community and belonging, the latter makes movement and encounters beyond belongings possible.

The ambiguous spatiality of singles activities has methodological relevance. When I started my research project, I theorised that I might find groups or communities of singles. By engaging with such a community and enmeshing myself in their activities, I would perhaps gain insight into something approximating a culture of heterosexual singles. What I did find was, however, much more loosely defined. Certain singles activities do engender some sense of belonging in their participants, but for the most part singles activities are characterised by disloyal participants, permeable boundaries, and shifting spaces.

So if we examine places and communities by enmeshing ourselves in the relative cultures – how do we examine mobility, shifts, permeability, and uncertain belongings?

In the 1980s, some anthropologists were challenging central tenets of their discipline (Geertz, 1993; Moore, 2001). Parts of these developments could be said to centre on Marcus and his multi-sited ethnography. George Marcus and his associates criticised notions of the local, whether it be in the form of local cultures, specific places, or situations (Marcus, 1998). Marcus suggests that we should abandon the bifurcation between local and global. He argues that concepts that anthropology had started to embrace in the 1980s, such as identities, were not associated with single, stable cultures, but instead were associated with phenomena emerging where different forces meet. The local, he argues, is not stable and bounded, and modern life is not lived merely locally, but is characterised by complex movements and encounters.

> Cultural difference or diversity arises here not from some local struggle for identity, but as a function of a complex process among all the sites in which the identity of someone of a group anywhere is defined in simultaneity. It is the burden of the modernist ethnography to capture distinctive identity formations in all their migrations and dispersions. This multi-locale, dispersed identity vision thus reconfigures and complexities the spatial plane on which ethnography has conceptually operated. (Marcus, 1998, p. 63)

As Marcus writes, researchers who use ethnography need to work to reimagine space in ways that allow ethnographies of movement and multi-sitedness. I would argue this multi-sited approach fits with the arguments I have been making about singles activities.

Instead of enmeshing myself in just one "singles culture", I therefore chose to visit several different singles activities; and in lieu of spending an extended period of time in each of these activities, I chose to experience them as many singles do, namely once. The result is that my focus has been on temporary involvement and movement, not on communities and places.

So how does one select cases on the basis of a multi-sited approach? Sociologist Bruno Latour's early work hinged in large part on George Marcus' methodological work. Latour added an important principle, however, when he urged sociologists to "follow the actors!" (Latour, 1987). For Latour, actors themselves organise the world by their movements. When researchers follow actors, these movements trace the phenomenon they are ultimately asked to interpret. Whether we accept this underlying ontological argument or not, we can take on Latour's methodological injunction. The consequence for my study was that I did not stop at identifying a number of different singles activities with varying versions of singledom; I also recognised that these activities were temporary locales for people in movement, and that the singles themselves often tried out various locales.

Initially, when I decided to study singles activities, I wanted to get some sense of the field. This was an area I had little knowledge or experience of and I felt the need to quickly read up on and get to know it better. In lack of better places to start, I searched the library for recent books for singles. My first interviews were therefore with two authors of books for singles. I did not have a particularly well-thought out interview guide when conducting these interviews, but rather wanted to make sure I was guided through what they saw as the current stock of singles activities.

These interviews made it clear to me that I was going to investigate a fairly diversified market with a lot of competition. Several actors competed for clients with rather different kinds of activities. The authors repeatedly mentioned the national and international dating sites, the specialised dating sites and the general, and the sites for collective dating and sites for traditional dating. They also mentioned the travel agencies with offers for singles, singles cruises, singles conferences, singles courses, and singles associations. In my initial interviews with the two authors, a female entrepreneur whom I will call Viktoria was mentioned as an important actor. She arranged offline activities for singles, and seemed to be well-connected in the world of singles activities. I felt that she might be an important person to know and asked her for an interview.

At this point in my initial studies, I had learnt something about the market for singles activities, but had only scratched the surface of the activities themselves. I felt that it was important to actually attend an activity. With some trepidation, I asked Viktoria if I could come to one of her singles conferences. As it turned out, she was

delighted to have me. I went to a three-day long conference with around 120 singles.

I already had a sense of singles activities being a diversified market. My goal was not to map the entirety of that market, but I felt that I could not do singles activities justice if I stayed with one singles activity only. Consequently, I went to Viktoria's singles conference and asked participants what other singles activities they were involved with. This led me to three additional places, namely a singles cruise, a singles association, and an online site for singles.

Let me introduce the main characters of these activities. Viktoria is an entrepreneur behind what I call *singles events* (in contrast to the more general category singles activities). These included singles conferences and singles cruises. Charlotte is the financier behind a new online site for singles, Monotopia. She hired a team of online programmers and designers, which I call Diktyon. Lastly, Filos is a singles association, founded years ago by Viktor, whom I also interviewed. The current coordinator for Filos is Gina, whom I interviewed before going to one of the association's weekend dinners.

The result of this selection of cases was that I not only could get a sense of locality, community, and place; but since some people participated at two or more of these activities, I could also get a sense of movement between them, of who choose what activity and what each activity might add to the whole experience of being a consumer of singles activities.

Other places were mentioned during my initial round of observations at the singles conference, and it is important to discuss the reasons why I did not include all of them in my research.

One category of places that did not make it into my study did not fit my rule of focusing only on activities exclusively for singles. These were dance and night-clubs, cafés and restaurants. While these venues would be interesting, I knew singledom would not be as conspicuous a theme there as it would be during activities arranged exclusively for singles.

A second group of excluded places would have fitted my research interest better: singles travels, singles after-work events, and Internet dating sites. Internet dating sites are fairly well researched and were less interesting for that reason (Arvidsson, 2006; Bailey, 1988; Bogle, 2007; Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2010; Henry-Waring & Barraket, 2008; Sautter, Tippett, & Morgan, 2010). As I later came to investigate Monotopia, I also discovered that that specific site had been designed in large part as a counter to Internet dating. Singles travels were a popular pastime among participants during the singles conference. To go on a voyage with a limited number of people and take part in their daily activities did however feel more problematic ethically than the large-scale and/or shorter activities I observed. It was also more expensive and practically difficult. Singles after-work events were described to me as shorter versions of the singles conference. I concluded that they were not necessary to investigate as such.

One problem with my selection method is that I have covered only singles activities frequented by participants at the observed singles conference. I have investigated people's movements and choices, but only among a limited population of singles. Even if my aim has not been to cover all singles activities, one could still reasonably ask if I should not have included a few activities that the singles at the conference did *not* mention, activities that in a sense constituted an "outside" of the cases investigated. I did in fact pursue this strategy for a while. The "seduction community" is an international network primarily of single men who teach each other so-called "techniques" to seduce women (Arvidson & Henriksson, 2010; Clift, 2007). For the last couple of years, it has had a growing presence in Sweden with online forums, commercial coaches, a number of translated and domestically authored books, and informal associations. I started a small research project on this community while working on my dissertation. When asking my informants at the singles conference, I was intrigued to find that no one had even heard of the community. I therefore considered including it as an example of the conference's "outside". While the seduction community may have informed elements in my interpretation of the data material I collected, I eventually found it more useful to focus exclusively on the activities that my main informants did know about.

While a multi-sited approach and resistance to the concept of culture were in all probability well-chosen in regard to most singles activities, I believe they captured one case less well: the singles association. The singles association consists of a fairly limited number of members that meet regularly and that develop friendships and other relationships over time. Much more than the other activities, I felt that the association could be characterised as something akin to a community and culture. As I visited only one of the association's activities, I had to rely on interviews to paint a picture of the association more broadly.

One could also question the relevance of Marcus' arguments in relation to online sites. While I think it would be difficult (or at least uninformative) to understand these sites as *cultures*, neither are they temporary in the way a singles cruise is, for example. Nevertheless, from the perspective of most members, they are temporary places and open for easy entry and exit.

Singles activities display ambiguities around the same concepts that interested Marcus; there are tensions here between temporary sites and establishment of cultures; between identity and movement; and between one identity and the many sites in which its varieties are played out. In this sense, using Marcus' approach started me thinking about precisely those complexities that face singles themselves, rather than for example having concerns over the length of time needed in a given culture to capture its "whole". Thus, even while I have reservations about the singles association and the online Monotopia and how these relate to culture, identity, and membership, these reservations simultaneously provided me with ideas and concepts to describe the activities themselves. I believe this process mirrors Marcus' success in adapting ethnography to a contemporary society, where space and movement, identity and difference belong together much more radically than might have been the case before.

One could ask how *representative* the investigated singles activities are for singles activities more generally. Let me answer this question for two different types of statements I make in the dissertation.

First, *statements about fact*: I carried out a survey among members of the Internet singles site Monotopia. If we accept that the survey captured the group of singles frequenting the kind of singles activities investigated here (I discuss this point below), we can look at how well that group fits with the single population overall. Among people who answered the survey (and thus at least were members of Monotopia), the median age was 53, and 68% were women. Among those that had gone at least once to at least one of a selection of offline singles activities,[17] the median age was 57 and 63% were women. This may sound like a high median age. We should however remember that the single population has changed considerably over the last decades with the rising number of divorcees. I have not found any statistics for singles in Sweden as a whole, but the median age for people living alone or with children in Sweden as a whole was 54 years of age in 2012 (49 for those with children and 59 for those living without).[18] These statistics can be interpreted as an approximation of the median age for singles in Sweden, and indicate that the group frequenting singles activities coincide age-wise with singles in Sweden generally.[19]

In the survey, one thing that differentiated those who had gone at least once to one offline singles activity from those who had never gone was the number of years they had been single. In the former group, 70% had been single for more than 5 years, while the same number was only 43% in the latter group.[20] Another difference between these groups was that among singles activity-goers, 70% had been married, while the same number was 51% among those who had never gone to an offline singles activity. This difference might indicate that offline singles activities attract people who have been single for a while, including divorcees. Again this assumption would fit with Chudacoff's appraisal of the American singles activity scene after the 1980s. It should be noted, however, that Chudacoff talks of people frequenting these singles activities as navigating the "rough seas of postdivorce life". The 70% who have been single for more than 5 years in my data however, are slightly at odds with this statement.

---

[17] The selection of offline singles activities that the survey asked respondents about, were: singles travel, singles cruises, singles conferences, singles association activities, and singles after-work events.

[18] My source for the statistics pertaining to the Swedish population at large, is an email conversation with Rikard Gard at Statistics Sweden (Statistiska Centralbyrån).

[19] It might seem strange to exclude singles who have not moved away from their families of origin – that population would in all likelihood lower the median age. If we compare with singles frequenting certain singles activities, however, many singles activities do not even allow entry to those under a certain age. In short, I believe singles activities for minors need to be kept to a side and investigated separately, not considered here. It therefore makes sense to use people living alone as an approximation when investigating singles activities for adults – although not for singles as a whole.

[20] Cramer's V=0.271; p=0.000.

These facts and numbers indicate (but do not prove) that the singles activities I studied represent international trends mirroring the rising number of divorcees. It means that my statements about fact have a good chance of fitting with singles activities elsewhere.

Different rules apply to my *theoretical statements*, as these have a generalisability that does not hinge on the representativity of my cases. For example, how intimacy, organising, and spatiality can go together, or how singledom may vary, are conclusions that have theoretical import beyond and above specific cases. Theory concerns how things *can* work, not how things *most often* work. It must be up to readers to figure out what relevance these statements have for the cases they study, work with, or otherwise relate to.

MIXED METHODS

In this second and in the following third section on ethnomethodology, I will develop frameworks to evaluate the methods I have employed to investigate singles activities. The actual evaluation is then carried out in a separate, fourth section.

Methods need to be fitted to the phenomenon studied. We also need to evaluate the validity of each of those methods. In the following discussion, I will take inspiration from Joseph A. Maxwell's book *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* (Maxwell, 2013). Maxwell's is an authoritative voice in the field of methodology. More importantly, his interactive approach allows for mixing methods in ways that are relevant for my study. Maxwell argues that research questions, methods, validity, overall aim, and theoretical framework should interact during the whole research process. This leads him to argue that the aim, concerns about validity, theoretical understanding of the phenomenon studied, and research questions should inform what battery of methods we use and how. He is also keen to point out that no method comes as a ready package, but must be adapted to specific research projects.

Maxwell suggests that multiple data types are much more often used to achieve a nuanced image of a phenomenon, or to allow for different aspects of that phenomenon to be observed, that is, for more pragmatic reasons. So what were the aspects of singles activities that I wanted to capture, and what were the methods I was well advised to use? My aim was to examine singles activities, which typically take place in specific locations over a specific time period. As such activities work as situations or contexts for people, I have mainly chosen to use methods allowing me access to context. Observation is the method that most directly lets researchers study events *in situ* (ten Have, 2004). Interviews are slightly less contextualising, as they usually involve creating an artificial situation – the interview – and (re)situating respondents into it. Interviewees can certainly supply contexts themselves through their answers, but this is less satisfactory than observations (if the research object is not the interview situation as such, of course). The survey method can involve a high degree of *decontextualisation*, as researchers should formulate survey questions in ways that minimize the influence of the various situations that respondents may find themselves in (Cicourel, 1982).

For these reasons, my preferred method has been observation. Observations on actors, however, have not always been possible. Much as is the purpose with this method of following, what eventually emerged as the end product of my investigations transcended specific situations. While I have analysed specific activities as eliciting ways of being single, I have also taken an interest in how people move between these activities. Practical and ethical considerations barring me from shadowing individual singles between activities, I had to interview and survey them instead.

There were other occasions when observations were not possible. While studying the online singles site Monotopia, I soon realized that it was difficult to see what members were doing on the site besides writing messages on public boards and messaging me. A great deal of the online activity simply was not public, and thus was not available to me. Interviews with members and surveying the members on the site regarding their activities allowed me better insight.

The research design that emerges from these considerations is illustrated in diagram 1. As is shown here, I have observed three types of activities. In connection with each type of activity, I interviewed organisers and participants. Additionally, I conducted a survey and some interviews to capture how people moved between the activities.

	Personal lives of singles (chapter 7) Interviews with three single women and one man. Survey of 416 members of Monotopia.		
	The singles events (chapter 4)	The online singles site Monotopia (chapter 5)	The singles association (chapter 6)
Arrangers	Interview with arranger	Interviews with entrepreneur and Internet design company	Interviews with founder and coordinator
Participants	Observations during two disparate events, interviews with participants	Survey among members, interviews and online observations	Observation at one event, two interviews with participants

Diagram 1. Research design for this study.

Mixing methods can lead to contradiction, since different methods may come with different underlying epistemological and ontological assumptions. Thus, even while the reason for mixing them are pragmatic (certain aspects of the studied phenomenon make the favoured method impracticable), these potential underlying contradictions need to be examined and averted. As the survey method is partly driven by decontextualisation, while the purpose of using observations and interviews as the main methods is to investigate contexts, the most obvious risk for con-

tradictions lies with the survey. This is the reason why I discuss the survey in relation to contexualisation below.

ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL CONTEXTUALISATION

Michel Foucault, Sasha Roseneil and Shelley Budgeon, and Leo Bersani have from rather different perspectives argued that a critical take on sexuality needs to acknowledge the multiplicity of relationalities and to investigate how these are suppressed by the seemingly monolithic character of normative heterosexuality (Bersani & Phillips, 2008; Foucault, 1990; Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). But this is difficult work, since what Judith Butler called the *heterosexual matrix*, or heterosexualised assumptions about the nature of relations, tends to reduce relationalities to some variation on a heterosexual theme (Butler, 1999). This tendency would be at work both in research and in how people understand themselves. This dissertation thus has a normative side in that it must uncover the underlying relationalities and hetero-doxicality of singles activities.

I would suggest that ways of uncovering "reduced" or hidden relationalities might be found in ethnomethodology. I am not alone in putting forward this suggestion. Annika Jonsson uses ethnomethodology both as method and theory in her dissertation on heterosexuality (Jonsson, 2009). Indeed, ethnomethodologists were early critics of the binary gender model (Garfinkel, 1984; Kessler, 1978).

Ethnomethodologists emphasize the local and the situational. Garfinkel argues that we need to bracket any conceptions of actors other than what they can be observed to contribute in a given situation (Garfinkel, 1967, 2006). Therefore, the notion of an individual as a locus for identities or other attributes that transcend a situation becomes suspect. References to other places and timelines in a given situation are understood to have meaning and function only as part of that latter situation. For example, when I give a self-presentation at a romantic date, that presentation is part of that ritual of dating, rather than an expression of an inherent quality that I perceive myself as having. In other words, it would be possible to make an ethnomethodological investigation of the styles of presentation in dating, but not of dating as an outcome of a match or mismatch between innate qualities of the two individuals in question.

This also leads Garfinkel and ethnomethodologists to the controversial position that all utterances are practices in a given context (Garfinkel, 1967). Thus, no description that informants give researchers can be taken at face value without considering what the utterance accomplishes in the situation, such as the interview itself. While some have interpreted this argument to be an injunction against interviewing as a method to gain insight into any other situation than the interview itself, I side with those who take this to have less severe implications (ten Have, 2004).

Garfinkel saw situations (rather than individuals) as ethnomethodology's subject matter. Each situation had to be carefully described in itself. This perspective could be understood as a call to respect the diversity of social reality and its inherent complexity, and a refusal to reduce that reality to given concepts.

By refusing concepts in both science and everyday life, and instead always asking about the practices in which those concepts are involved, we methodically help disclose the complexity of social life. This disclosure, I would argue, is an ambition that ethnomethodology shares with critical studies of heterosexuality. Rather than accept heterosexuality as a universal concept for all cross-gender intimate relations, such studies attempt to uncover the diversity of relationships, while at the same time keeping track of how that diversity is challenged by universalising practices (Beasley et al., 2012; Hockey et al., 2007; S. Seidman, 1994). Rather than partaking in the ethnomethods and ethnotheories of heterosexuality, critical studies challenge those methods in much the same empirical vein as do ethnomethodologists. My point then is that ethnomethodological discussions can contribute considerably to the critical examination of sexuality, if we adopt empirical complexity as a normative aim.

Ethnomethodology strives for contextualisation, where participants in any situation should be interpreted from the point of view of that situation only. This striving provides an excellent ground from which to criticise taken-for-granted notions of relationalities and heterosexuality, and to give valid accounts of context. That critical and contextualising pursuit fits well with the overall aim and questions of this dissertation. However, the topic of this dissertation, singles activities, transcends specific situations and can also be understood from the point of view of people moving between such activities. This latter perspective demands that I follow ethnomethodology only so far and embrace other modes of methodological evaluation.

It is also important to recognize that ethnomethodology does not have any definite criteria by which to evaluate a given method choice. Rather, I would suggest it opens up spaces for careful consideration of the choices we make. Nevertheless, the considered choices then need to be assessed in relation to values external to that space (such as the critical stance towards heterosexual normativity).

One important critical space is opened by the ethnomethodological insistence on situations. To go back to the situation where research data was produced allows us to uncover the political and ethical dimensions of research (Callon & Latour, 1981; Cicourel, 1982; Garfinkel, 1967; Latour, 1987). The argument is that we need to do away with the uncritical use of those methods that avoid engagement with the complexity of social reality. Again though, I would not argue that this point necessarily leads to the exclusion of any one specific method (such as surveys or interviews). Rather, it asks us to carefully examine each method used in relation to the values and aims we make reasonable in the context of our research.

EVALUATING THE USE OF METHODS

Inspired by the methodologies discussed above, I will now evaluate how I have observed, interviewed and surveyed singles activities and singles. As observations and interviews are contextualising methods, I have foremost used ethnomethodology to evaluate them. Arguments about mixing methods are important for understanding how I have used the survey and will be drawn on to evaluate my use of that method.

Observations

I made observations during a three-day singles conference, a two-day singles cruise, and a dinner with a singles association. Additionally, I was a member of and made some observations on the Monotopia online site. Let me first discuss the offline observations and return to the online site at the end of this section.

Ethnographers who stay at the same place for an extended period of time often get nervous about not being everywhere at once; in addition to which, the data material would swell to unpractical proportions if they wrote everything down (Law, 1994). As my observations took place during a much more modest amount of time, I went for a fairly rigorous mode of registering events. That is not to say that I could register everything everywhere during the singles activities; I still had the imposition of being limited to one body and one pair of eyes. Nevertheless, I tried to recount as much as possible in the resulting "observation protocols", although focusing especially on the following elements:

- Understandings of singledom;

- Intimate practices;

- Spaces and places; and

- Conflicts over arrangements, concepts, and so forth.

I kept notes throughout the day, recording conversions I had had and the observations I had made. This continual note-taking involved sometimes slipping into a toilet cabin to write, or retreating to my hotel room. Luckily, the events were mainly arranged around different activities (lunch, dance course, lecture, party…) with breaks in between, which allowed me a strategy of alternating between participation and retreating to write. Each night, I sat down to make a more extensive oral (recorded) or written account of the day. The dinner with the singles association lasted only three hours, after which I sat at my hotel room, writing down as much as I could possibly remember. All my notes, dictations, and memories were polished and collected in observation protocols in the week following each instance of observations.

After the singles conference, which was the first activity I observed, I summarised and started analysing the results. I had been surprised to observe few instances of overt sexuality and flirtation, and that relatively little alcohol had been consumed. Friends who were told these facts were also surprised and expressed suspicion. In Swedish, the term "single" is associated with a more Dionysian stance, that is, with people freely enjoying intimacy and sex without necessarily making binding promises to each other. In contradistinction to this prejudice, I had observed a rather ordered conference. Alcohol was certainly consumed, and dancing and some flirtation were involved. But I discovered that even those elements were "policed" by subtle and informal cues. Perhaps it would make sense to talk of an "Apollonian Dionysus", a disciplined party-mode. That apparent contradiction surprised some friends and myself, leading me to ask if something had perhaps gone awry with my

first observations? Had I been absent when the "real" singles activities started? Had my presence somehow affected my results?

It was these suspicions that led me to bring a colleague, Marit Grönberg-Eskel, with me to the singles cruise. She was not one of those who had voiced objections to my accounts from the first round of observations, but her participation neverthe-less turned out to be invaluable. Not only did she corroborate my findings about the tidiness of the event, but she also helped me to see things I had otherwise missed, and often took on the role of a second pair of sociologically informed eyes when I needed to be in two places at the same time. To include Marit's observations in my protocol, I recorded conversations with her four times during the cruise. These re-cordings were then transcribed (although abbreviated) and included in the protocol.

The protocols from the conference and the cruise were about 40-50 pages each; the singles association dinner protocol was about 15 pages. I structured these protocols chronologically and as a narrative, interspersed with citations directly from my notebook and from discussions with Marit. The language in the protocols is almost entirely structured around an "I", emphasizing that they are my journey through the activities rather than a view from nowhere (cf. Haraway, 1988).

At the conference, I recorded interviews with three individuals (two men and one woman) and one couple (man and woman). These interviews varied in length, but were never longer than 50 minutes. During the singles cruise, I interviewed a cou-ple (man and woman) and one individual (a woman). The couple interview lasted an hour and a half, while the other interview lasted for about 20 minutes.

Besides these recorded interviews, there were many interview-like and not so in-terview-like conversations I partook in or overheard during the observations. Need-less to say, I was not capable of remembering these conversations *verbatim*, but I tried to write down as much as I could remember in my protocol.

When I have interpreted these interviews and conversations, I have mainly read them as ways to make sense of the singles activities. This way, I read them as part of the activities observed, that is, as sense-making that is always part and parcel of any process of organising, whether it be a formal organisation or a temporary ar-rangement.

The interviewees and discussants nevertheless drew on experiences and events from outside these activities to frame the latter and to clarify and validate their points. As ethnomethodologists argue, there is no need to exclude utterances such as these, but we should treat them as belonging to the situation under scrutiny, ra-ther than accurately describing events elsewhere. This is also how I have treated them, namely as tools to make sense of the situation at hand.

During the interviews, I asked the singles for their experiences of other singles ac-tivities; and asked them to place the current activity in the context of their wider lives, as well. While I have analysed their answers to these questions as part of the singles activities I investigated, I have also viewed them as material on these sin-gles themselves, thus "reusing" them in chapter 7 where I interrogate the singles' movements between activities. Indeed, these interviews, and how experiences of

other activities informed the sense-making of the participants, helped me to realize the importance of movements between activities.

Excursion I – Questions during an *in situ* interview

During my interviews I have never used strict interview guides, but rather focused on a couple of themes, as well as trying out interpretations of previous data on new interviewees. If a lengthy and interesting narrative has emerged, I have often simply "let it happen" and reduced my role to keeping it going. To nevertheless give a sense of what questions I asked, I will make three excursions, one for each type of interview in my project: 1. *In situ*; 2. With entrepreneurs; and 3. With singles, about how the activities fitted into their single life more generally. This first excursion deals with the *in situ* type of interview.

For this particular interview, questions have been translated from Swedish and reworked to better fit a context of written words. The interview was conducted with a man and a woman who had met during the cruise.

All these questions can be read in appendix 1. I cite questions below when it is relevant for the discussion. I contextualise questions within parenthesis where necessary. Where I do not specify to whom the question was directed, it was meant for both interviewees.

The themes of the interview questions could be summarised in the following list: 1. General experiences of the singles cruise and some comparisons with other singles activities; 2. Thoughts on singledom more generally; 3. Practices involved in meeting a partner during the cruise; 4. The woman's experiences with Monotopia; and 5. Placing the singles cruise in the context of their everyday lives.

The theme that stands out most when considered in relation to ethnomethodology is the one about singledom (question 14): "How would you describe singledom in Sweden today? I mean to say, is it a sign of something in society so to speak?"

My question invited the couple to have opinions and general theories about singledom, rather than, for example, ask them what the concept meant in context (a question I nevertheless do pose later in the interview). The reason for this more general question was that I had discovered it as a fruitful method for making my interviewees "do singledom" in earlier interviews. My point was not to capture "contextless opinions", but rather see how the couple constructed singledom, particularly in relation to the singles activities. It must be said though that I took part in this construction by "elevating" the issue to some societal level in my question. Still, this "elevation" mirrored a certain discourse during the singles events themselves, where lecturers and participants alike often related singledom to society at large. I note my somewhat leading question about gender roles in this context (question 16), which was my attempt to have an interpretation of previous data discussed. In short, someone had suggested that

people divorce because women and men are too dissimilar, and I wanted to see how others would react to that view.

> Someone told me that one reason for the growing number of singles might be that the gender roles are not working…

There is an invitation to *evaluate* in some of my questions. "Does this activity fit you?", "Was the speed dating any good?", and so on. This phrasing of certain questions had to do with the *in situ* character of the interview, and reflected the fact that participants would often converse about different activities in terms of how "good" they were. The understanding of this "goodness" varied, however. In asking the questions in the way I did, I latched on to this existing method for getting people to talk about the activities, as well as about what they considered "good" in that context. In hindsight, it might have been prudent to at least first ask about the activities in a less evaluative mode, and use the "evaluative method" only if the former question did not elicit any interesting answers.

An attentive reader can recognize the woman's somewhat contradictory replies about "finding someone" even from just reading my questions:

> So you knew what you wanted even as you stepped on board this boat? […]

> I think I forgot to ask you how you felt about going on this singles cruise?

> [To woman] So you experience it as a release from everyday life, I take it?

> [To woman] Do I understand you correctly if I say you are still not sure why you went on the cruise?

On the one hand, the woman knows the characteristics she is looking for in a man ("even before going on board this boat?"). On the other hand, she admits she would not have gone on the cruise if the word "single" had not assured her that it would be more about friendship than finding someone. As I will discuss in the analysis of the data material, I believe there is complexity here that I might have suppressed by implicitly asking for *intentions*. The following extract from the interview following question 27 is telling:

> Andreas: [To woman] Do I understand you correctly if I say you are still not sure why you went on the cruise?

> Woman: No, I don't know myself, no, well, I don't really have an answer to that question, well, it wasn't to meet anyone in any case.

> Andreas: Right.

> Woman: That's the reply you wanted, right?

> Andreas: Oh, no, no, absolutely not, it's really interesting for me just to hear your thoughts on this…

As Max Weber argues, intentions are ideal constructs that we (might) extract from a reality that nevertheless is too complex to contain anything so "pure" (Weber, 1949). The woman tries to make sense of the cruise as part of her life.

Not recognizing that process, I ask her for her *intentions* in going on the cruise. As her reply shows, she (rightly) recognizes the reductive character of my question and tries to comply with my implicated instructions. My "no, no" at this is not supposed to signal that I wanted another answer, but that my questions should not at all be taken as eliciting a specific answer (but can have been interpreted either way).

While this passage shows some lack of interviewing skill on my part, it can also be read as a clue to the underlying complexity that I think can be gleaned if the woman's replies are read as part of the collective construct called the "singles cruise": participants even avoid having intentions for going, as they avoid disappointment. This intentionless attitude also plays into the temporal structure of the activities. I will return to this point in the analysis.

Towards the end of the interview, I start asking about the couple's "feelings" about going on the cruise. It could be that my occasional forages into the sociology of emotions prompted this wording. The question did have some success, however, in getting the woman and man to place the activity in the context of their everyday lives. Asking people how they "feel" about something is an everyday method for making people talk about that thing more personally. Still, the phrasing of the question might have prompted a certain "psychologisation" of the replies, placing the context for the cruise "inside" the woman and man, rather than in their everyday life, as would have been more fitting.

I note with some embarrassment that in asking the couple for additional information at the end of the interview, I inadvertently equated such comments with critique of my questions: "have I got it all, or do you want to add something?" Needless to say, the answer to such a question will almost always be "no", as few interviewees would be prepared to criticise a research interviewer, at least on the spur of the moment.

Observations *in situ* mean putting yourself in the same context as those you study. As a researcher, you constantly have reasons to be self-conscious, however much you try to keep yourself at a distance. I found that observations fairly quickly cure researchers from what Donna Haraway has called "the gaze from nowhere", the passive, detached attitude that has for centuries been problematically equated with scientific knowledge in Western societies (Haraway, 1988).

It becomes rather difficult to evaluate the observations without bringing myself into the equation. As a gay man interested in heterosexual singles activities, I found myself constantly having to negotiate my position with those I studied and with myself. For example, at a very early stage I had to decide whether to be open with my sexuality or not, as participants at the activities asked me if I was single (no) and how I met my girlfriend.

It was certainly a mark of my ethnographic naivety that I had not thought out a response to that question beforehand. I decided, for better or worse, to try and pass as straight. I suspect my research would have taken a different route if I had "come out" there and then. I believe it would have centred much more on my ascribed

position as gay and my attempts at negotiating some balance between my sexual and research identities. While this would certainly have been a valid and interesting project, I wanted to be less conspicuous in my research and look at how the participants positioned *each other*, not how they positioned *me*.

This is not to say that "going straight" allowed me to remain a "fly on the wall" that no one noticed or tried to position. For ethical reasons, but probably also to give myself an identity that allowed me to stand at a side during the activities, I tried to be as open as possible about my research intents. Throughout my observations, I had a sign on the chest with my name and academic affiliation. As often as possible, I carried a notebook and a pen to the activities, sometimes a digital recorder. I must have looked rather "off", and even so I was sometimes mistaken for a participant. On several occasions, for example, I did not have the opportunity to immediately introduce myself as "the researcher" (whom everyone had heard about from the organiser, as per my instructions). On these occasions I started out as a participant in the eyes of the others, to then introduce myself as a researcher a few minutes later. This transformation usually impacted the conversation, as people thinking themselves unobserved steered from disparate topics ("I remember getting much better food the last time", "my brother married recently") to my research and speculations about singledom ("Is everyone you interview as keen to talk to you as we are?", "I think we singles are a growing subset of the population"). In this way, I sometimes and for a limited period had the opportunity to listen in on conversations while being mistaken for a participant, and then observe how topics shifted when I "outed" myself as the researcher. What surprised me about these shifts was that while topics often suddenly centred on my research and singledom in general, participants' interactions with one another were basically unchanged. I would argue that having a researcher at the table at times allowed participants to relate to each other using new means. Here is an example from the dinner during the singles cruise:

> When I finally get the opportunity to tell them I am a researcher, the woman opposite me gets very interested. "It's beyond all expectations to have a researcher at the table", she says and invites me to ask her questions. For the rest of the dinner, she and I interact rather intensively, sometimes (inadvertently on my part) excluding the others from the conversation […] The woman tells me she has been single for 10 years. The man next to her asks how she became single, but the question makes her very upset and irritated. She refuses to answer. Later however, she relates openly, but in my general direction, how she had been unfaithful to her previous husband.

This passage shows that while my position as a researcher gave me some sort of authority, for example to ask questions, some participants would give me that authority as a means to create a situation for their own purposes. The researcher position is quite complex and it would be wrong to assume that it immediately and irrevocably makes a situation artificial and devoid of the characteristics it would have, had the researcher not been present. Just as the researcher identity can be a resource and a hindrance to researchers, those being researched and who ascribe the identity to the researcher can also experience it as both a resource and hindrance.

There were situations when I felt that my presence did not make much difference, even when I was recognised as researcher. If two participants or more had a conversation that did not involve me or my research, and I stood to one side and merely nodded, gave off sounds of agreement, and so forth, I was often ignored or alternatively included into the conversation without being addressed in my capacity as researcher.

At other times, participants would tease me by inviting me to participate more fully in their activities. "You should take a drink and relax", "Just go with the flow, have some fun", were two versions on a comment I heard from time to time. Of course, for many I must have been an ambiguous figure, both participating in most of the activities, while at the same time declining certain central elements (alcohol, speed dating, etc.) that most saw as central to participation. Also, I was actually (although implicitly) working and getting paid for taking part in the activities. The singles activities were usually (but not exclusively) framed as leisurely, which, I suspect, made my salaried participation difficult to frame.

On the other hand, during all the singles activities (but particularly during the singles cruise), there were always other people present who saw their participation as part of their job. One example was Viktoria, who arranged the singles events and who was always on site to give lectures and converse with participants. There was the photographer whom Viktoria had invited to take photos for marketing, and to offer her services to participants who wanted personal photos for Internet dating sites. Then there was the coordinator during the singles association dinner, who volunteered to coordinate the different activities and to see that they proceeded smoothly.

My position as someone who went to these activities as part of my work made me more part of this group of professionals than one of the participants. Thus, I was quite often made privy to information that could be characterised as belonging "backstage", away from the eyes of the participants. I learnt about the singles event that had gone awry a couple of weeks back. I learned how difficult it is to keep a speed dating event going, and what methods you can use to subtly discipline participants. I learned that singles associations have informal groups that do not invite all members to their secret activities. And I learned that there are romantically involved couples in such associations.

Online observation is a new method, which distinguishes itself from ordinary observations not least by the kind of space in which it takes place (Elm, Lövheim, & Bergquist, 2003). Online spaces do indeed have unusual properties. One unusual aspect is that although such spaces have a public character (anyone can join), a great deal of the interaction takes place privately and is invisible to the observer. Another such aspect is that although much of the interaction is available, it can be difficult or even impossible to inform the discussants about research and ask for their permission to use what they have written.

Instead of following interaction on the site (practically difficult) or analysing individual personal profiles (ethically problematic), I chose to use the online observations only to get a general "feel" for the site and investigate its spatial setup. As I

will discuss below, I also used it to inform members about and to discuss my research for ethical reasons. But information on members' use of the site I obtained foremost through interviews and my survey.

Interviews

Bruno Latour, who is influenced by Garfinkel,[21] may be right when he criticises ethnomethodologists for believing that rigorous methodology could somehow do away with the problem of representation: "No matter how scientific you are, you need constantly to move back and forth between A and B, from the knower to the known, always afraid of being interrupted, unfaithful or wrong" (Latour, 1988, p. 172).

I think it is this kind of criticism of ethnomethodology that has made researchers like Barbara Czarniawska, who would agree with some of the school's basic assumptions, allow that interviews may at times be accepted as sources for information about something other than themselves (Czarniawska, 2007).

Czarniawska first argues that, "while most talk is about something other than itself, it represents nothing but itself. But this is not little" (Czarniawska, 2007, p. 81). For example, Czarniawska is interested in organisations. Members' accounts of their organisations may not accurately represent those collective bodies. Nevertheless, how those accounts are constructed is important data on members' activities in the organisation. Or in other words, *how* people give account of things may be a central aspect of those things themselves. Saying so is not to confuse accounts and what is accounted for. Rather, it is to construct reports so that the interviewees' accounts in and of themselves are central aspects of the phenomenon we report about. In this vein, I argue that my interviews with singles can be read as displays of specific (non-) relationalities, and I will assume that they reflect the relationalities in the everyday lives of these singles.

Czarniawska also admits a second use of interviews. One chapter in her book on shadowing has the subtitle "Things to Do When You Cannot Be All Places at the Same Time". Her point is that we might actually use methods like interviews for describing some otherwise unknown situation when we have difficulties getting other kinds of data. But to accept such an account may require critical examinations of their descriptions, and ideally some combination with other methods. Czarniawska nevertheless argues that we can, in specific circumstances and with caution, accept the accounts of our interviewees as representing valuable observations from outside the interview, although entangled with elements that need a different mode of interpretation.

---

[21] One could perhaps more accurately argue that Latour was influenced by Garfinkel during the 1980s (after which he became less so). That, however, is the decade in which he wrote the article cited here.

In my dissertation project, I have done three types of interviews: interviews with participants, arrangers, and with singles who go to several different activities. The interviews are listed in table 1.

Table 1. A list of the interviews conducted.			
	Data item	**Method**	**Recording style**
1	Female author of book on dating	Interview over telephone	Recorded and transcribed
2	Female author of another book on dating	Interview over telephone	Recorded and transcribed
3	CEO of large Swedish Internet dating site	Interview over telephone	Recorded and transcribed
4	Coordinator of another Swedish Internet dating site	Interview over telephone	Recorded and transcribed
5	Two women during singles conference	*In situ* interview	Recorded and transcribed
6	Man during singles conference	*In situ* interview	Recorded and transcribed
7	Georg[22], during singles conference	*In situ* interview	Recorded and transcribed
8	Couple (man and woman) during singles conference	*In situ* interview	Recorded and transcribed
9	Woman during singles cruise	*In situ* interview	Recorded and transcribed
10	Couple (man and woman) during singles cruise	*In situ* interview	Recorded and transcribed
11	Viktoria, organiser of conference and cruise	Interview over telephone	Recorded and transcribed
12	Second interview with Viktoria	Interview face-to-face	Recorded and transcribed
13	Viktor, founder of Filos	Interview face-to-face	Recorded and transcribed
14	Gina, coordinator of Filos	Interview face-to-face	Recorded and transcribed
15	Petra, member of Filos	Interview face-to-face	Recorded and transcribed
16	Ellen, found through Monotopia	Interview over telephone	Recorded and transcribed
17	Naima, found through Monotopia	Interview over telephone	Recorded and transcribed

---

[22] I use (invented) proper names when referring to organisers, as well as to interviewees whose personal narratives I analyse in chapter 7.

18	Eva, found through Monotopia	Interview over telephone	Recorded and transcribed
19	Charlotte, founder of Monotopia	Interview face-to-face	Recorded and transcribed
20	Second interview with Charlotte	Interview face-to-face	Recorded and transcribed
21	Diktyon CEO and designer	Interview face-to-face	Reconstructed interview from memos after failure of recorder; the interviewees read and accepted the result
22	Second interview with Diktyon CEO and designer	Interview face-to-face	Recorded and transcribed

First, I conducted more or less informal interviews during observations to get the participants' perspective on what happened, and their on-going work with handling the events. I assessed these interviews above, in the section on observations.

Secondly, and more relevantly for the present discussion, I interviewed the arrangers behind the singles activities. These interviews had two purposes. I wanted to get a fuller understanding of the ways of thinking that had informed the way these activities were set up. Additionally, I wanted to hear how the activities were arranged as part of a commercial enterprise on a competitive market.

Initially, I had hoped that the arrangers would be experts on their own activities and thus able to complement my own observations, for example, with observations of their own or with informed interpretations. However (as an ethnomethodologist would not be surprised to learn), the arrangers were skilful marketers of their own businesses, and their accounts of the singles activities were often indistinguishable from the accounts I later heard them giving to would-be or actual participants for marketing purposes. Additionally, when I sought their confirmation or rejection of an interpretation of data I had done, I was often met with a non-committal "well, that's interesting".

I agree with Czarniawska however; hearing the narratives that inform the formation of activities "is not little". The arrangers I interviewed were all engaged in promulgating their views to participants. Additionally, I heard participants refer to the organisers' narratives at several occasions in their on-going work with making sense of the activities. Lastly, these narratives had informed the arrangement of the activities, thus becoming part of their setup. Rather than understanding the narratives as accounts of the actual activities then, I choose to treat them as part of the activities themselves. The interviews let me get at the narratives in a more elaborate way than I was allowed during the often-stressful observations.

Throughout my project, I have collected data on the commercial side of the activities I have studied. The point has been to probe the question of what import that market has on the formation of heterosexual singles activities. My primary source

of information here has been the interviews with arrangers. These interviews have not been my only source, however. The participants I talked to sometimes had opinions on the commercial side of the activity being discussed. Each arranger interviewed also had one or several Internet sites where I found material relating to their view of the market. Additionally, all the arrangers knew of each other, and provided me with (sometimes critical) comments on the other arrangers I interviewed.

The commercial side of the activities I observed is a theme I have chosen to downplay in this dissertation. One reason is that my knowledge is not first-hand, but relies on the entrepreneurs themselves. Nevertheless, I have discussed the topic in chapter 8, as it does play into the arrangement of the activities, and into the critical examination of singles activities that is the primary aim of this dissertation. And although my data on the market relies on second-hand sources, it should be noted that I only bring up circumstances that have been mentioned by at least two of those sources.

My reason for relying on second-hand reports is that there are few other sources of information on the market in question. In recent years, there have been surveys done on the Internet dating market in America (Sautter et al., 2010). Still, the market of singles activities in general is not well mapped, especially not in Sweden.

Excursion II – Interviewing Viktoria a second time

In this second excursion, I will discuss the questions I asked of one of the organisers. I chose the second of my two interviews with Viktoria, who arranged the singles events – that is, the singles conference and the singles cruise.

What is of particular interest here is that it is a second interview with the same individual, and includes follow-up questions on the first interview. It is also fairly long, lasting about 2.5 hours. As with most other interviews, I prepared themes and a few questions before the interview, but I then decided to give the interviewee large leeway in what topics to discuss. All questions can be read in appendix 2.

The interview took place at Viktoria's home; she picked me up at the train station where I arrived from Karlstad, so our discussion had been going on for a while by the time the recorder was finally put on.

My questions show to what an extent Viktoria is in the middle of arranging singles activities on a competitive market. She is informed about most competing projects, and there is a close connection between how she understands singledom and what she understands to be her unique "product". She perceives herself to have found the "right" understanding of what singles "need", and is more or less unique on the market in catering to those needs. She thus comes over as representing her own product, the singles events, and the specific notions of singledom that those entail. Her representation of herself also means that her view of competitors is often closely related to how she perceives their

notion of singles. This perspective makes it difficult to make a distinction be-tween her views of the market and her understanding of the singles events, a fact that in certain ways undermines the distinction between the two I made above. As a consequence, that distinction needs to be read as analytical only.

One aspect that distinguished interviews with organisers from other interviews was my feeling of arriving in the middle of their projects. It was not that I felt unwelcome (rather the opposite; these entrepreneurs were extremely friendly and open). Rather, my feeling was of not being in control of and able to create a consistent timeline in the interviews. Many different things and places tended to be remembered when the organisers talked. My sense was that these entre-preneurs were involved in many projects, and that rather than simply answering my questions, they saw the interview as an occasion to establish contact with a researcher, market their activities, think through their activities, and ask for ad-vice. I therefore on occasion had the sense of being led, rather than leading the interview, which undermined the control often associated with the interviewer position. This loss of control is mirrored in the fact that in listing my questions to Viktoria in the appendix, I found myself having to relate Viktoria's previous replies within parenthesis more often than when listing my questions for the other two excursions.

Interviews with the entrepreneurs thus involved my position shifting, which is mirrored in my questions to Viktoria. At times, my questions are those of a re-searcher "in control" of the situation, having the right to decide the topic of dis-cussion. At other times, I signal agreement with Viktoria and even imply that my research questions parallel her own inquiries (questions 48-49):

> You said before that some are critical of you because you want payment for your events. What are their arguments? Is that a common opinion?

> [Viktoria says it's a strange argument.] Yes, it is strange, you could speculate why they would hold that opinion. Last time we spoke, I think you said it's mostly something you hear from members of singles associations?

At one point Viktoria seems to turn to me for advice, giving me the position of an expert whom she can ask to solve some problem (32), something that un-dermines the leading position I try to assert elsewhere in the interview:

> [We talk a bit about whether the word single has "women connotations". Viktoria thinks there might be something to that idea. She asks if there is anything one can do about it.] You know, there is this whole thing about the "The Game" by Neil Strauss for men, you've probably heard about it.

In retrospect, this specific shift in my position can have been prompted by my perhaps unusual choice to relate an opinion of my supervisor (31):

> [More talk on the topic of men and how they relate to the events.] One of my supervisors said something interesting; she said the word "single" is more associated with women. Something about *Sex and the City*.

Towards the end of the interview (54), Viktoria and I start to share names of people we have been in contact with. At this point we could be said to "net-

work", sharing contacts in some sort of mutual fashion.

There is a fine line between "testing out" one's interpretation on an interviewee, and asking leading questions. In 38-39, I bring up an idea about a new community emerging among singles. What does it mean that Viktoria herself broadly agrees with my interpretation? While some methodologists (Joseph Maxwell among them) argue the importance of getting confirmation or at least input from informants on interpretations, this and other passages from my interviews gives me doubt about the validity of that practice. Not only is it difficult to know the exact meaning of an interviewee's opinion on an interpretation. The situation and the relation between the interviewer and interviewee shape the account I am able to give of my interpretation to Viktoria. In the interview reviewed here, the meaning of what I say about community hinges on how Viktoria was previously using the word community (she "thinks that people 'deep down' want someone, but that her singles events also offer another kind of community"). Are we giving the word the same meaning? If not, is Viktoria aware of the difference? In hindsight, I would probably have needed to be much more precise in clarifying what was at stake in Viktoria's response, in order to rely on the validity of her agreement.

As in "Excursion I", readers of my questions can easily spot a tendency to ask about intentions (e.g., questions 37-38). However, in this interview the tendency is less problematic than in "Excursion I". As a result, I ask Viktoria for the intentions she interprets her clients to have; thus, her response gives valuable information about her understanding of the events:

> I'm thinking, if I go to a singles event, don't you think I'm looking for someone?

> [Viktoria thinks that people "deep down" want someone, but that her singles events also offer another kind of community (Sw. gemenskap).] Yes, it's interesting, the word single gets another meaning in a sense, its not just about finding someone, but having a community with people going through the same experience.

At the time of the interview, however, I must admit that this was an instance when I wanted Viktoria to react to my interpretation. I had debated with myself whether singles could ever go to a singles event without the intention of "finding someone" (to have sex and/or partner up with). Question 37 was my attempt to voice my colleagues' interpretation and get Viktoria's reactions. At present, I am not sure her reaction says anything about the validity of the interpretation in question. Nevertheless, the question occasioned Viktoria to give her view of the singles coming to her events, a view and interpretation that is much more interesting than those of my colleagues, as Viktoria has an actual influence on the arrangements of those events.

There are several questions that are of the type "So you mean that…?" (e.g., questions 21-22). The function of these questions varies: some ask for a clarification of a word; others are more about asking for details on a fact or event. At other times still, I use them to seek confirmation of some *ad hoc* interpretation I make of Viktoria's utterances.

> The "So you mean that…?" questions can often be read as a means to assert some control over the interview, and to signal to Viktoria what I wanted her to focus on. But they also display the ambiguous relation I had acquired towards Viktoria; in a sense, I try to involve her in my interpretation process, even asking for her advice. Like the other entrepreneurs in my study, Viktoria had become what is often called a "gatekeeper", giving me access to her singles events. Our relation was therefore not reducible to one between interviewee and interviewer. I would even say that I might have felt indebted to Viktoria, a fact that I was perhaps not very good at handling. At a later point in the project, I actually decided to write a shorter article and pamphlet for Viktoria, which she could then use as a research-basis for a certain political stance she was taking at the time. This was a way for me to compensate her for the time, effort, and access she had provided me with.

The third group of interviews concerned singles that had gone to several different singles activities. In fact, this was not an actual group of people. Rather, the group should be understood as made up of interview segments. These are the segments in which I asked singles to place their participation at one or several singles activities in the larger context of their own single life. Some interviews focused almost entirely on this topic. There were other interviews, however, which broached the topic only briefly, in particular the interviews with singles during specific activities. I therefore count the latter interviews as part of two groups: firstly, as interviews during and about an observed activity; and secondly, as interviews where people framed that activity (and other activities) in terms of their single lives.

In other words, this third group can only be distinguished analytically and for the sake of the present discussion on methods. The analytical distinction between singles at specific activities and singles visiting several activities is one between different modes of interviewing, rather than one between persons. These different modes of interviewing demand different modes of analysis, and that is the reason I make this distinction.

The interviews with singles about their participation at several different activities were geared towards understanding how the singles took on the different activities as part of their non-relationalities. The interviews were therefore analysed as data on these practices.

As I have argued in the Introduction, and as I will continue to argue in the next chapters, non-relationality is a practice of constructing differences between having and not having a relationship. Practice is a slightly deceptive word to use, as it has different meanings in social science and in colloquial parlance. In everyday life, practice is often set against things like thinking and talking, as in "enough talk, let's go to practice!" However, in social science talking is also a practice; we "do things with words" as John Austin put it (Austin, 1975).

My point then is that utterances in interviews may be read not merely as *representing* non-relationalities, but as actually constitutive of such practice. That is the pri-

mary mode in which I analyse the interviews in this third group: I analyse them as non-relationalities in and of themselves.

This is not to deny that the non-relationalities during the interviews more often than not involved utterances about circumstances outside of the interview situation. Much like an ethnomethodologist would however, I have avoided determining whether those utterances are "true" or "false" outside the interview, and have instead focused on how they were invoked as part of a non-relationality during the interview.

There is still, however, a question about representation underlying my analysis as discussed here. The question is: To what extent does the understanding of non-relationality during the interviews also represent the non-relationality in the lives of the interviewees more generally? I will use evidence from other research, my own survey, and other interviews, to show that there are reasons to assume this kind of representativity: Non-relationality during interviews likely represented non-relationality in interviewees' personal lives. The points I make in chapter 7 then should be read as an investigation into how singles use singles activities in their non-relationalities.

Excursion III – Interviewing Naima

The last interview reviewed here is one with a woman I choose to call Naima. She was one of three women who agreed to do an interview after they had answered my survey.

In contrast to the other interviews, I chose to use a detailed interview guide for these interviews. The point was to be able to send the questions to the interviewees beforehand, thus giving them a chance to think through their replies and also consider more carefully if they wanted to participate. Furthermore, these interviews were made rather late in my research project, and at that point I had several different topics on which to question my interviewees. Preparing questions made much more sense than it had before, as I knew more clearly what I was investigating, and what aspect of the singles activities interested me. Still, I did ask some follow-up questions that were not included in the guide.

Like the other interviews following on from the survey, this interview was made over the telephone. The interviewee and I had decided a time and date when I would call, and Naima told me she sat at home, undisturbed, when she answered my questions. The questions can be read in appendix 3.

The questions in this interview mirror my growing interest in the singles themselves as moving between the different activities I investigated. I try to get at Naima's background and then situate her participation at different activities as part of that background.

One type of question that I did not pose to the singles cruise couple or to Viktoria focuses on contradictions in Naima's narrative (questions 30 and 33).

Rather than asking for intention (see "Excursion I"), at this point in my research I had opted for calling attention to contradictions. I believe this latter strategy is the more fruitful one, and rather than making Naima seek confirmation from me, she engages in what I would call relationality practices, namely talking about relationships in ways that resolve the contradiction:

> [Naima says that such an activity would be for meeting new people and making new friends.] But you also think it's a good way of finding a partner? [Naima has mentioned earlier in the interview that she prefers to meet potential partners at this kind of activity, rather than online.]

> [Naima says that some people might have an unconscious intention to meet someone, but that she has stopped thinking like that, she does not harbour any unconscious hopes of finding someone.] Still, you said before you did not want to continue living as a single?

This is not to say that I had entirely rid myself of notions of intentions. Questions 29-31 focus on intentions, again questioning why singles would attend singles activities if not to find a partner.

Overall, the questions I pose show me in a position of greater authority over the interview than, for example, my questions to Viktoria. While some questions follow on from what Naima says, most are dictated by my research interests. This control over my questioning certainly mirrors the fact that I have an interview guide, and that I have proceeded further in my research project than in earlier interviews. I also think it reflects a greater distance between the interviewee and myself – both in terms of relation (we have no relation outside of the interview) and geographically (the telephone only allows us to hear each other's voices).

From a strictly ethnomethodological standpoint, this distance may be said to make the interview situation less rich. The interviewee and I can only to refer to circumstances that are probably more or less unknown to one of us. Even if I have gone to some of the singles activities that Naima refers to, she and I will have had different experiences and will have different understandings. My questions are written not merely for Naima, but at a level of generality that allow them to be directed at several individuals.

In one particularly telling passage, this problematic distance comes to the fore. I ask Naima in what circumstances she feels most like a single, and in what circumstances she does not (18-21). This question elicits a series of responses from her that I had obviously not had in mind. We evidently understand the word "single" in different ways: I use it sociologically as a mark of identity, while Naima uses it to refer to a fact about herself and others, one which cannot be escaped without finding a partner.

> One thing I've thought about is in what circumstances you identify as single, and in what circumstances you do so less?

> [Naima asks if I mean on Monotopia.] No, I mean in life generally.

> [Naima says she hopes most members on Monotopia are singles, although it is difficult to verify.] Right. Well, I was perhaps thinking more about how you yourself sometimes

> think of yourself as single and sometimes perhaps as a [job title], a bit like an identity.
>
> [Naima says you always ask people for their jobs when contacting them on sites like Monotopia. She also thinks that some members use the site to promote their products, services, etc., but that is something she doesn't do.] Okay, right. So what would you say Monotopia is all about then?

Despite the geographical distance creating a few interview shortcomings, the distance also forces Naima to orally construct an image of herself and her circumstances. Rather than bringing me into her world, as it were, she needs to bring that world to me. I mean to say that whereas interviewees like Viktoria shared several experiences with me, thus being able to imply much of what she wanted to say, Naima needs to purvey much more to me and make sure I understand.

This need for oral construction of an image may help explain why her narratives are more structured than those of, for example, Viktoria. Being at a distance, and being asked generic questions, demand more structured and fuller accounts; these factors demand more work on the part of the interviewee. My point is not to say that Naima accounted for her reality and life more accurately than others. My claim is rather that I can read and interpret a certain work she is doing in her narratives, a work with creating meaningful order in her life, relationships, and practices. It is parts of this work that I have read as relationality practices.

To sum up, different ways of relating to the interviewee engages that person in different kinds of practices during the interview. Trying to assert some control over the interview by quoting general questions and creating distance is also a way of relating to the interviewee (not to escape that relation altogether). It is important to know what practices the interviewees engage in as a result of that relation, and how to situate those practices in the overall research.

Surveying singles

The survey serves two functions in the dissertation. First, I employ it to describe the use of Monotopia, something I had difficulties capturing in online observations alone. Secondly, the survey data is also used to describe what I call movements between singles activities. It is this latter function for the survey that needs to be critically examined further.

Differences between the assumptions underlying surveys and those underlying observations and interviews have been discussed in countless texts (Cicourel, 1982; Maynard & Schaeffer, 2000; D. L. Morgan, 2007).[23] So have attempts to bridge

---

[23] I have avoided the terms "qualitative" and "quantitative" when discussing methods in this dissertation. Recent years have brought a considerable amount of critique against that division (Burawoy, 1998; Danermark, 2002). I argue that while the survey method comes with arguments that challenge basic assumptions in ethnomethodology, these challenges can be embraced if they are explicitly directed against an existing situation-focused study. But this argument is more difficult to make if we pose the underlying assumptions of surveys as

those differences and include interviews/observations and surveys as part of the same research design. I will not try to brush off the important differences between these methods, but I will nevertheless argue that while my survey comes with a different understanding of singles activities than do my observations, that understanding can be allowed to add to and modify my overall interpretation of the data.

I am aware that while my reasons for using a survey rather than observations or interviews are pragmatic, this usage does destabilize my analysis of the specific singles activities undertaken in a more contextualising mode. I have chosen to embrace that destabilisation however, as it is partly in line with developments in multi-sited ethnography, and can be understood within a "follow the actors"-framework. Nevertheless, the survey can only be placed in that methodological framework if I clarify the specific assumptions that underlie its design. Also, it is important that the survey be allowed to challenge existing analysis only if and when it manages to bring out additional depth to contextualising understanding provided by the latter (cf. Witzel & Mey, 2004). The survey may only add to an existing picture then, but add in a way that nevertheless disturbs the existing interpretation.

To begin from basics, my pragmatic reason for employing a survey was my difficulties to otherwise obtain information about the manifold ways of engaging in the singles activities studied. My observations told me that while those activities were situations in their own right, participants also situated the activities as such in their wider lives and thus engaged in them differently depending on their background. In order to not lose sight of these diverse modes of engagement, I chose to include some way of accounting for them. The survey method presented itself as an excellent additional tool to account for this multiplicity of situations that participants brought to the activities.

It was the owner of Monotopia who gave me access to the site's database of names and email addresses. In total, the database as I got access to it had 2395 names in it, consisting of people that were or had been members on the site during its almost year-long existence. Many of these (about 70% of those who responded to the question) had only signed up for the two-week long free membership and then chosen not to pay to have it prolonged. Before giving me access, the owner removed the entries of those who had expressly asked for the site not to contact them again (I was not informed about the number of people thus removed).

As I had access only to the members' email addresses, it was inevitable that I would launch the survey online. To have full control over the layout and types of questions that could be asked, as well as to be able to guarantee the respondents

---

the *essential opposite* of the underlying assumptions of observations/interviews, for example by introducing the binary distinction quantitative/qualitative. Rather, I think (together with others) that the underlying assumptions of individual methods and their implementations need to be examined in turn and compared as such. In short, calling something qualitative or quantitative is simply to forego the empirical investigation of the specific implementations of methods (Cicourel, 1982; Witzel & Mey, 2004).

full confidentiality, I set up a private installation of the open source software Lime-survey on one of the University's servers (The Limesurvey Project Team, 2011).

Internet surveys are known for eliciting a low rate of responders (Cook, Heath, & Thompson, 2000; Fan & Yan, 2010). Response rates for Internet surveys were found to be between 12% to 56% in one study, with a mean rate of 34% (Shih & Fan, 2008). Reasons for these low figures are many. One can argue, however, that the most common reasons do not involve some systematic error, and that this lack of coherency is one argument for treating these relatively few responses as never-theless representative of the total population.[24]

As I expected a fairly low number of people to actually respond to my survey, and as the population was so small to begin with, I decided to invite all the people listed in the Monotopia database, rather than a smaller selection. That way, even if the response rate turned out to be low, the number of respondents would still be suffi-cient to allow some level of complexity in my statistical analysis.

Limesurvey itself sends emails to a listed population, avoiding the hazard of post-ing confidential invitations via a public email address. In Sweden, the public has the right to read all in- and outgoing traffic to any email account registered under a public domain (such as my university email account). As I wanted to correspond with respondents anonymously, I arranged to have a private email account at Monotopia, to which I also directed all replies to Limesurvey's invitation.

I will admit that having an email account at Monotopia might have been an ethical-ly ill-informed decision. While I have no reason to believe that my emails were read, I had no way of knowing whether the owner of the site or anyone else was able to access my inbox. Respondents who saw my address might also have con-cluded that my cooperation with Monotopia ran deeper than it actually did. It was a bad choice, albeit one with only slightly less bad alternatives; no email address is safe from hacking. It should be said that none of the messages received through the Monotopia account contained personal or otherwise sensitive information. It should also be mentioned that none of my invitations or reminders ever went through the Monotopia email account. It was only when informants responded to my invitation or reminders that that account was involved.

---

[24] One of the reasons why people do not respond to an Internet survey is that many change email addresses on a regular basis. As a result, databases of email addresses will almost inevitably contain obsolete entries. Presum-ably, these obsolete entries should not result in a systematic error (in so far as one is not interested in differ-ences between old and new entries in the register). The same would go for the second reason why people do not respond, namely that many automatic spam filters algorithmically sort out certain emails, and stop them from reaching the receiver. A third and potentially more problematic reason for non-responses is the amount of spam that despite spam filters regularly arrives in the average virtual inbox, and makes oversight fairly com-mon. As people often choose which emails to read based on sender and the title of the email, and as my name was almost certain to be unknown to them, I had to devise an email title that would be both accurate and mark the invitation out as more important than spam. For example, mentioning Monotopia in the title could have made potential critics of the site less likely to open the mail. My title "Invitation to a research survey" was both neutral and weighty enough ("research") to presumably avoid systematic errors. I could not avoid mentioning Monotopia in the email body (to explain where I had got hold of the receiver's address), which might have resulted in a number of dissatisfied site customers avoiding my survey.

To push up the number of respondents, I sent out weekly reminders via Limesurvey for 5 weeks after the survey launched. Limesurvey automatically chooses not to send reminders to those who have already replied to the survey. The invitation, as well as all the reminders, contained a link that allowed the receiver to decline further reminders or information about the survey.

In the end, 416 people *started* to reply to the survey. Of these, 319 completed the full questionnaire. Importantly though, among these 319, not all responded to all questions. Thus, the number of respondents varies with each question. For example, a full 394 stated their gender (the first question in the questionnaire), while only 240 answered a question about whether they had ever gone on a so-called "singles travel" abroad.

To get some measure of how well the respondents represented all Monotopia members, I asked the owner of the site to provide me with the mean age and the gender distribution drawn from the database as a whole. While the mean age among my respondents was 52, the same number for the population was 54. Among my respondents, 64% were women, while the same number was 67% in the population. These numbers are roughly the same for the respondents who answered the less replied-to questions in the survey. For example, among the 240 who gave an answer to the "singles travel" question mentioned above, the mean age was 51 and 70% were women.[25]

It is important to stress that while I can argue that the respondents roughly represent all Monotopia members, I cannot put a number on that likelihood. Such a number is only possible if the selection process is strictly random. Statistical analysis often presupposes such randomness. As I use common statistical analytical tools, the results of those analyses rely on the assumption of random selection. The numbers resulting from these analyses therefore need to be taken with a grain of salt; they indicate how well a given analysis is representative of the whole population, but only on the premise that there were no selection biases that excluded significant groups from responding to the survey. Rather than reading them as an exact measure, I suggest readers consider them as rough estimates.

I do not argue that the Monotopia members represent all singles in Sweden. That would be a very difficult standpoint to defend. Rather, I argue that these members roughly represent those singles that go to the kind of activities I have investigated. Let me give reasons for that assumption.

Monotopia had been online for almost a year when I undertook to launch my survey. It had been marketed foremost in the context of different singles activities. Also, one of its main attractions was its claim to list various singles activities around Sweden.

---

[25] It is important to mention the measures for these specific questions, as any statistics involving them will for obvious reasons be based only on those respondents who responded to those specific questions.

Needless to say, the survey respondents had been or were members of Monotopia. My survey shows that in addition, half had been members of at least three different dating sites, 30% had been or were members of a singles association, 35% had been to a "singles after-work event", while the same share of respondents had been to some activity arranged by a singles association. All in all, 57% had gone at least once to one or more of the following activities: singles cruise, singles after-work event, singles travel abroad, singles conference, and/or a singles association activity. This percentage does not fall radically if we look at how large a proportion had gone at least *twice* to at least one of the same singles activities – namely 41%.

My questionnaire was designed to survey participants regarding the kinds of singles activities I had already examined through observations. Additionally, its questions were formulated in light of the conclusions I had already drawn about those activities. While not eliminating the methodological differences between surveys and interviews/observations, this choice meant that I had the opportunity to as far as possible *not* interpellate the singles as decontextualised individuals, but instead use the survey to contextualise them further.

Maynard and Schaeffer's describe different ways of mixing surveys and observations/interviews (Maynard & Schaeffer, 2000). One of these they call *critical remediation*. Their argument is that the underlying problem for the survey method, that is, the problem it tries to circumvent, is context; and that context is an important object for ethnomethodologically inspired research (discussed further below). The validity and reliability of surveys rely on such things as respondents interpreting the questions in the same manner; all agreeing to answer truthfully; and having the same definition of truth. Difference in interpretation can be understood, "critical remediationists" argue, if we approach the context of respondents with interviews or observations. Thus, ethnomethodological methods get at the contextuality of social life. That contextuality potentially undermines the survey method at least in some of its implementations.

My position here can partly be understood as critical remediation. I argue that my survey adds to an already contextualised picture, and interpellates its respondents foremost as situated within and between a number of singles activities, rather than as decontextualized individuals (Cicourel, 1982; Maynard & Schaeffer, 2000; Witzel & Mey, 2004).

Michael Burowoy suggests that through interviews and observations, we accompany individuals and make sense of their actions in the context of their worlds (Burawoy, 1998). To embroider on that metaphor, let us imagine that all people left footprints wherever they went. Surveys would not follow individuals around, but would rather attempt to find the places where many people's footprints had formed pathways. These footprints and pathways themselves would not contain their own meaning. My point is that such "footprints" and "pathways" in real life nevertheless are not without significance in the context of a mainly observational or interview-driven study.

Let me give an example from my survey. After hearing several singles discuss whether other people's level of education or employment was important, I chose to

include a question about the importance of educational level among other singles activity participants in my survey. The results showed there was a significant difference between divorced men and women: divorced men tended to be less concerned over whether others at a singles activity had a level of education or career similar to their own, whereas divorced women tended to find that issue fairly important. In contrast, there was almost no difference between *unmarried* women and men on this issue.

This finding chimes with results from my interviews, where divorced women reported a great sense of freedom as singles, a freedom they would only be prepared to "give up" if they found the "perfect match". Similar findings have been reported elsewhere (Evertsson & Nyman, 2013). One interpretation says that the traditional form of marriage demands more adjustments on the part of women than of men. Divorced women would therefore feel less inclined to give up singledom than divorced men, as they have a worse experience of coupledom.

My survey can be read in its entirety in appendix 4. It was sectioned into six parts: background information, use of Monotopia, other sites and activities, attitudes, ideal dating, and request for a follow-up interview. As the survey was launched online, I constructed some questions to pop up once a certain answer was given to a previous question, thus allowing a complex structure without confounding the respondents.

As can be read in the appendix, I put considerable effort into identifying the different background variables that may define single life for people. My ambition was to ask respondents to give fairly extensive information about themselves and their circumstances. While this could not be called contextualisation in the sense of a "thick" description of circumstances, it at least gives information about which contexts respondents have found themselves in before.

Questions about how respondents used Monotopia and what offline singles activities they had visited relate closely to my two overall ambitions with the survey and need not be further discussed here.

I formulated some questions using data from my observations and interviews, and these may only make sense or have relevance in the context of the singles activities themselves. A majority of the attitude questions are actually revised versions of quotes from my material. This was a way to interrogate utterances I had found *in situ*; I wanted to know how common certain arguments were, and if they coincided with other arguments or patterns.

Other questions were formulated using literature. The section about an ideal date was partly formulated after reading Eva Illouz' book *Consuming Romantic Utopia* (Illouz, 1997). In it, she argues that two main attitudes to dating emerged in the 20th century: one centred on consumption, such as going to an expensive restaurant or traveling abroad; while the other resisted commercialism and sought romance in nature or other free (or apparently free) avenues. I wanted to see whether having one of these attitudes would make someone more or less willing to attend a certain singles activity.

All in all, I chose to create a fairly extensive survey to allow me to explore several different angles and possible connections I had hitherto discerned in my data. I believe lengthy surveys are an almost inescapable result if the survey method is used in conjunction with an ethnomethodologically inspired approach. Observations and interviews give much detail, and rather than translate those details into a few stringent hypotheses to test with a survey, I think it is also possible to keep up a certain level of detail in the survey and remain explorative. This route will certainly mean fewer respondents (not everyone has time or patience to answer an extensive survey), but I believe opting for fewer respondents and more depth is the wiser choice.

To sum up, I will use the survey to map the use of Monotopia, as well as the movements between activities and other situations in life. While the underlying assumptions of surveys are different from those underlying interviews and observations, I embrace the survey results as a challenge to a situation-focused interpretation of my data, a challenge much in line with recent developments in, for example, Actor-Network Theory and multi-sited ethnography.

VALIDITY

Maxwell understands validity as a research value that needs to be considered throughout a research process (Maxwell, 2013, p. 121ff). What is validity? There are many different definitions of this concept in the methodological literature, and the concept has been highly controversial in qualitative research. Here, I have simply adopted Maxwell's definition, which understands it as "the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 138). A strength of this definition lies in the fact that it relates validity directly to the accounts one is attempting to make. The accounts in turn hinge on the research questions asked. The other strength of the definition lies in that it does not make validity rely on more of a philosophical or ontological basis. Correctness or credibility are not absolutes or universals, but simply require that accounts stand up to reasonably critical scrutiny. The third strength is that Maxwell's definition of validity fits well with the implicit demands stemming from any serious research question: answers should be correct or credible. It is such implicit demands that have led me to adopt Maxwell's outlook on validity.

Maxwell asks the researcher to examine closely what threats to correctness or credibility may be generated when we try to answer each research question. The researcher should then find ways of avoiding these threats. Besides these targeted steps to raise validity, Maxwell also enumerates a number of more generic measures that may be brought in to make the case for validity more convincing. Let me begin with the specific measures.

Steps for validity specific to research questions

In the Introduction I enumerated four research questions. I have repeated these in table 2, below. For each question, I have specified methods used to answer these questions, as well as possible threats to validity, and how these were countered during research. As the table shows, my main strategy for ensuring validity has been to limit the claims I make in the dissertation.

Table 2. Potential validity problems relating to research questions, and measures taken to avoid them			
Research question	**Method**	**Validity problem**	**Ways of handling validity problem**
1. What is the role of intimacy in singles activities?	• (Theoretical discussion) • Observations • Interviews with organisers • Interviews with participants	While an observer might think himself observing intimacy, participants might experience the same situation differently.	I have talked to and interviewed participants about how they feel in different situations, and followed up on experiences that did not fit with my observations, not least by centring presentation of data on divergent experiences.
2. How are space and place used to organise singles activities?	• Observations • Interviews with organisers • Interviews with participants	Space has an experiential side. Observations might therefore not coincide with what participants experience concerning space, or with the thinking of organisers.	
3. What non-relationalities and relationalities are organised by the singles activities and how do singles in turn engage with those activities when organising non-relationality and relationality in their own personal lives?	• Observations • Interviews with organisers • Interview with participants • Survey among participants	Observations might miss how participants and organisers themselves experience the activities in terms of relationalities. People might not wish to talk of their personal life in detail, avoiding certain important topics. Sexual relations may not be visible or spoken of. People might not themselves know what types of relation they have initiated.	My findings make no claims to cover all of single people's personal life, but rather how they construct the singles activities in interviews using descriptions of their everyday life as a resource. The point I make concern relational types I can observe or that are mentioned, not all relational types available more generally.

4. What hetero-doxical possibilities emerge in singles activity practices?	• Observations • Interviews with partici-pants	Hetero-doxicality entails aspects that some would not discuss with a stranger, e.g. an interviewer, nor display in the public places observed.	I emphasize that my results show *examples* of trans-gressions and boundaries, rather than map the whole terrain of singles activity hetero-doxicality.
		People might not wish to talk of their personal life in detail, avoiding certain important topics. My short-term ob-servations might lead to me underes-timating to what an extent singe activi-ties create commu-nity among partici-pants.	See discussion outside table.

One of the more serious problems raised in the table concerns my short-term ob-servations. I did three rounds of observations: one three-day long singles confer-ence, a two-day long singles cruise and a few hours long dinner with a singles as-sociation. The brevity of these events, and the lack of repeated observations, mean that my data lack some of the "thickness" and detail of long-term observations. With long-term observations, a field researcher can establish relations and trust, and gain a familiarity with context that allows her to, for example, distinguish be-tween coincidences and more essential feature of a context.

However, it should be noted that with the exception of the singles association Filos, the places I observed have few long-term participants; they lack "natives". Going on several singles cruises might therefore have gained me a better sense for detail, for the common and the temporary, and might have led to stronger relations with the organisers. But it might not necessarily have led to closer relations with partici-pants. That said, it is not impossible that some participants do frequent these activi-ties regularly and that they form small groups that I would have learned to recog-nise had I made more extensive observations. Indeed, some interviewees hinted that they were part of such groups.

I have attempted to compensate for the low number and brevity of these observa-tions by aiming for greater detail in my notes and protocols from the event. It is true that one cannot be everywhere as an observer or even as two observers. One can however note down observations with varying diligence. In this regard, I did attempt to be as diligent as possible, constructing the protocols as coherent narra-

tives detailing the many situations I found myself in. Interviews also helped fill in details about important situations I might have missed.

First and foremost, my observational method might have led me to underestimate to what an extent some participants build community during singles activities, as I was unable to form any lasting relations with them or follow any individual participants after each event. Still, one fact makes it plausible to argue that such underestimation on my part would have been only slight. I describe the singles association as community. When I interviewed members there, they all talked of their relations to other members. In contrast, many (but not all) interviewees at activities like the singles cruise or the singles conference spoke about being there for the first time and not knowing any of the other participants. I think these interviews mirrored a difference, where the singles association was much more of a community than the other singles activities.

In any case, when I make points about community and non-community, I explicitly focus on how the activities were organised rather than on participants' experiences. That way my interpretation concerns a limited, but more valid set of data. To the extent I bring in participant experiences, I discuss those that went against my own observations. In this way, I hope to give as broad and complex picture as possible.

As shown in table 2, I tried to follow up on divergent experiences during my observations. Some of the concepts I use – intimacy and space – have both a more "objective" and a more experiential side to them. Intimacy for example has been described as an experience, but as I will show in the next chapter, it also involves ways to arrange people and things – creating more secluded and personal spaces, for example. This dual meaning of intimacy in itself has made it important both to observe and to interview people: to identify both "objective" arrangements and personal experiences that may or may not chime with the "objective" circumstances. In this context, talking to or interviewing people with diverging experiences have yielded important data.

Overall measures to increase validity

Maxwell argues that triangulation – mixing methods to examine the same phenomenon from different angles – often foregoes the fact that different methods construct phenomena differently. He nevertheless maintains that triangulation might raise validity in various ways. I have already discussed how using the survey allowed me to see beyond the specific singles activities and thus view them in the perspective of moving participants. To the extent that this has allowed me to understand singles activities both as specific contexts and as assemblages of moving people, it has added depth to my account and made it more correct.

My research on singles activities has been multi-sited. As Maxwell notes, this has allowed me to recognise differences and similarities that have added to the description of each case. To merely go on the singles cruise, for example, would have made me much less cognisant of the extent to which that singles activity downplays community among singles, and that other places like the singles association rather embrace community-building. If I had not investigated Internet dating and Mono-

topia, I would not have had the same level of understanding for the ways in which offline singles activities contain an implicit critique against online spatiality, or how space and place more generally are important for understanding these activities.

Observational and interview research sometimes make problematic quantitative claims ("many" did this…, or "few" said that…) that such methods have difficulties ensuring the validity of. As Maxwell writes, such claims may need surveys and other quantitative methods to become valid. Using a survey has increased the validity of claims about numbers in this dissertation.

INTERPRETING THE DATA

To produce data is one thing; to methodically interpret or analyse them is something slightly different. The two processes are of course not entirely separate. In producing data – writing observation protocols, selecting people for interviews, or formulating survey questions – one is also involved in different modes of analysis. But for better or worse, a number of interpretative methods have emerged, which specifically instruct researchers in the art of qualitative analysis.

Joseph Maxwell makes a distinction between similarity and contiguity in qualitative analysis (Maxwell, 2013). Searching for similarities can involve coding, for example. By coding a material, the analyst marks similar passages (in a document, interview transcript, etc.) with the same code. Codes, particularly if they are recurring, are then treated as themes representative of the data material. In contrast, contiguity-focused analysis examines the proximity of things (like words, rituals, or architecture) in space and time, and tries to work out what these proximities mean. A typical contiguity-based analytical method is narrative analysis, which attempts to figure out the temporal structure (what follows what and how) in given accounts.

Similarity-focused analytical methods tend more towards decontextualisation, while continuity-focused methods tend more towards contextualisation (Maxwell, 2013). This is no absolute rule, but coding, does tend to generate lists of coded passages, thereby downplaying (although seldom ignoring) what comes directly before or after those passages. Contiguity on the other hand is precisely about what comes before and after a certain object, person, event, and so forth.

Singles activities are contexts for participants. It may therefore seem appropriate to analyse my observations using a contiguity-based analysis method. There are complications, however. For one, my observation protocols can be read as narratives. In them, one thing follows another in a certain structured fashion. But these narratives are *my* stories, not those of participants or organisers. The protocols certainly contain others' stories and contiguities other than those created by me (for example, they describe dinners arranged by the organisers rather than by me). But to discern these other contiguities, they need to be separated from my own narrative – and here, some sort of coding may be helpful.

I agree with Adele Clarke, who writes that coding has a deconstructive streak:

> Open coding connotes just that – data are open multiple simultaneous readings/codes. Many different phenomena and many different properties can be named, tracked, and traced through reams of all different kinds of data (Clarke, 2005, p. 7f).

Clarke talks of open coding, that is, the procedure that creates codes out of the data, rather than determining codes beforehand. Her point is that the same text, if coded, can generate many different readings, allowing us to discern different actors, movements, and narratives within it. Using this method, I coded the protocol from my visit to the singles conference. Coding was a particularly useful technique at the start of my project. By employing it, I could deconstruct my own narrative and find important themes. An abbreviated version of the resulting list of codes can be read in table 3, below. I have used a method for sorting codes suggested by Clarke, which explains why I have employed titles like "discourse" and "emotions". To Clarke, these categories of codes tend to be important in most situations. The numbers in the list indicate the number of times a certain code has been used in the data (i.e., the singles conference protocol). I have abbreviated the list by removing all codes with only one occurrence, as well as codes with little relevance for other singles activities.

Table 3. List of codes for observation protocols and interviews from the singles conference (abbreviated)

The codes have been sorted under four titles: discourses, emotions, practices, and temporal-spatial arrangements. The first two of these have subtitles. The letter-number combination before each code tells which title and subtitle the code belongs to, as well as its number within its subtitled set. For example, E101 belongs to Emotions (E) and its first subtitle (1), and is the first code within that set (01). The number after each code indicates the number of occurrences of that code in the observation protocol and interviews. In addition, I have included some examples of the coded passages in the boxes below. Each box is an example of the code immediately above.

Discourses (D)

    The disappearance and return of intimacy (D1)
        D101. To meet another is about seeing, talking, touching   3

> "Many participants resist instrumentality and distance; they want real encounters and being able to look at the other, to touch him or her and "feel" attraction or lack of attraction. They don't like verbalisation, as words only go 'so far'."

        D102. Loneliness is lack of places to meet   2
        D103. You have to take care of/make use [Sw. *tillvarata*] of encounters   2
        D104. Internet dating is time consuming   2
        D105. City and the countryside   3
        D106. Sweden is a lonely place   2

> "Before we part company, the male participant says: We live in a lonely society. Things like the post office and the wash house are gone."

    Gender as problem and solution (D2)
        D201. The men have to change their mind-set   4

> "Many elderly men want younger women. There are examples of the opposite – but men have to change their mind-set, say both women and men at the table."

    Singledom as a lack (D3)
        D301. Singledom can be an excuse to escape relationships   3

> "As I have in other discussions, I ask him if he thinks that singles are becoming a group in society. He does; he argues that singles activities are often an excuse not to look for someone – many are simply satisfied with the kind of community

offered by the activities."

Singles as "their own species" (D4)

D401. Singles are like odd socks after washing	3
D402. Astrological star signs/singles are different	2

"The three women have ideas about star signs – some of the signs are not represented among singles, while other signs are overrepresented. They think this is interesting and that I ought to look into it."

Self-help discourse (D5)

D501. "Despite everything" is a common expression	2
D502. Experiences are a matter of attitudes	5

"The male participant emphasizes that one shouldn't be negative, one should take life as it comes, it is a matter of attitudes, he says."

D503. Claims it is important to put old relations behind you	2

Emotions (E)

Positive emotions mentioned by participants (E1)

E101. Lack of demands makes it more fun	2

"[At one lunch] they all agree they are here to have fun. And there are no other demands or obstacles either – so then it becomes fun."

E102. Having fun	5
E103. Happiness and joy	3
E104. Frolicsome [Sw. *sprallighet*]	3
E105. Exhilaration [Sw. *uppsluppenhet*]	2

Negative emotions among participants (E2)

E201. Disappointment	6
E202. Loneliness	4
E203. Anger	6
E204. Irritation about academic gender studies	2

"Viktoria thinks people hurt each other a lot on Internet dating sites. The reason is you can be anonymous and say what you like without consequences."

E205. Insecurity	3
E206. Singledom is sad – a failure	3

"After all, he says, singles conferences are a sign of something lacking in society. Participants have failed in one way or another."

E207. Shame	5

Self-help-related utterances on emotions (E3)

E301. Criticism is negativity	5
E302. Courage is important	4
E303. Positivity and negativity are palpable in others	2

Practices (P)

P01. Dancing provides status	3

"The dance teacher takes a turn on the dance floor. The lady I am dancing with says longingly that she would love to dance with him."

P02. Dancing provides clearer rules for courtship	7

"I ask him to tell me how dancing works. You ask a woman for a dance, almost never get a no. Then you always dance twice. During the dance you can easily feel if the woman likes you. If it feels right, you can ask if she wants to dance again. Then you dance another two dances and that means you have more or less decided to go home together. […]
[The last day, another man] tells me, somewhat disappointedly, that the rules he had heard people talk about, where you dance three times and then go home together, hadn't worked."

P03. Gender is a prominent topic of discussion	6
P04. Gender differences play into arrangements of people	4
P05. Games make some feel excluded	4
P06. Many participants are good dancers	2
P07. Couples are clearly demarcated	11

P08. Personal involvement by organiser	4
P09. Rituals	2

> "I feel awkward missing to comply with the following rituals at dinner: You should pull out the woman's chair as she gets ready to be seated. As a man, I should be responsible for not crashing into other couples on the dance floor. One should accompany the woman back to the table by offering one's arm after having danced. People make toasts often enough and everyone except me manages to have beverage left in their glasses afterwards. Heterosexuality is hard!"

P10. Late nights	2
P11. Organiser furnishes techniques to excuse proximity and interaction	10

> "Viktoria hands out a form on paper. Everyone will go for a walk and play a game. It's an idea Viktoria came up with yesterday evening. The game replaces the salmon-fishing that was cancelled.
> Women get a list of men and vice versa. For each name on the list, you should fill in place of birth, star sign, and girth, and get a signature. The girth should be approximate and measured using your arms. It'll be a kind of promenade speed dating."

P12. The excursion is said to take too much time	2

Temporal-spatial arrangements (TS)

TS01. Arranges disparate events without coherent connections	4

> "We're home after the surprise bus trip. We went to a wind turbine, an art exhibit, and to the home of a female artist."

As my research project has proceeded, my logic has been to use the overall themes that emerge from the coding above in analysing data from other singles activities. That way I have been better equipped to compare the cases. If each case is allowed to generate its own set of codes, the risk is that the different sets of codes become difficult to compare.

In using these overall themes, I have however not coded the material on the same level of detail as I did the first observation protocol. Rather, I have strived to code larger chunks of text, thereby making it possible to investigate contiguities within those larger chunks. In short, I have used the themes to select passages for a contiguity-based analysis. This mode of analysis has therefore taken over from coding as the project proceeded.

What kind of contiguities have I found? While temporal-spatial arrangements were a set of codes in their own right, I have found space and time useful for examining the juxtapositions of people, things, and events in my data. It is on this level of analysis then that space and time are used as analytical concepts.

Let me give an example. When do people feel "frolicsome"? Well, contiguity-based analysis of passages in which this concept is found reveals a very typical spatial arrangement: women are placed beside men, so that the genders are mixed. This is usually also accompanied by some temporal arrangement, like speed dating, where the women are asked to move to another man after a certain time has elapsed.

Through these kinds of spatial and temporal analyses, certain types of contiguities emerge. Some of these contiguities are found in most of the singles activities, while others are typical for only one of them.

As I have discussed above, part of my research consisted of looking at the place of singles activities in participants' personal lives. The interviews that form the basis for that analysis have primarily been analysed as narratives. This is not to say that I have made an extensive investigation into the formal structures of their stories. Rather, I have used what Irving Seidman called *vignettes*: editing of interviews to form continuous stories about a certain stretch of time (I. Seidman, 1998). I have made these vignettes to cover the interviewees' relationality, particularly before and after their divorce. I have then looked at the place of singles activities in that transition between coupledom and singledom. This format struck me as relevant, considering that all the interviewees started to refer to earlier relations when talking of the singles activities they frequented ("it is like a new family", or "but it can't replace weekends with a partner"). These vignettes make up the bulk of my results concerning singles activities in personal life.

As far as possible, my survey results have been treated as an addendum to the rest of my data. As a result, primarily quantitative questions, but also other questions that have arisen from my other analyses, have been the reasons for running statistical tests or subtracting descriptive measures. I have done some "data mining", that is, I have run many statistical correlation tests without theoretical foundation, to see if any hold water. For many statisticians this is an illicit method, as it sets aside important rules for probability. I would argue that in conjunction with qualitative research, which can help to substantiate or problematise such mined results, data mining might work as a creative process through which we might find unexpected results.

Presenting the results

Writing up results forces one to consider structure. Should I use themes from the coding process as subtitles? How many quotes from data should be included? Should the cases be presented separately or together? And so on.

To give reasonable answers to these questions, I have focused on the concept of organising. Singles activities are organised. At the very least, this fact means that an organising logic is required to handle many local practices and rival logics. Unsurprisingly, I have found that the moments when these local or alternative practices or logics make themselves known are most loaded with meaning. My analysis understands these moments to bring contestant understandings of singles activities, singledom, intimacy, relationality, sexuality, and space to the fore. To display the complex interplay of these themes, and to emphasise the organisational, heterogeneous nature of the singles activities, it is around these moments of contestation that I have chosen to centre my presentation of data.

It bears mentioning that the controversies discussed were not always between organiser and participants. For example, in the case of Monotopia there were several organisers involved who happened to have slightly different ways of organising the site. Some controversies also occurred between participants. However, I have understood the relevant controversies to be related to the organising process. In other words, the controversies ought to play out over some of the organising logics and not, for example, over some personal or otherwise unrelated matter. In each chap-

ter, I therefore identify one or several such logics in the process of discussing these controversies.

This choice means that my presentation of data has lost the kind of transparency that would have resulted from dividing it into themes (intimacy, space, sexuality, etc.). Such transparency would, for example, have meant that a reader interested in one theme only would have been able to easily locate data concerning that theme in this dissertation by finding the relevant title of a chapter or section. To nevertheless give the reader some of that kind of transparency, I have chosen to place a more theme-centred summary of the results in the final chapter, Conclusions.

As I have chosen to understand interviews foremost as part of organising the singles activities, I have presented them together with my observations and often in juxtaposition to other utterances that favour another way of organising. By centring the presentation on controversies, I have avoided analysing one interviewee as *describing* and others as merely "expressing opinions". All interviewees are presented as working – through material arrangements or discourse – to accomplish a certain version of the activities.

An organising process is complex and difficult to divide up into stringent sections. In order to not lose sight of this fact, I have chosen to present each case separately – one case for every chapter. This choice also followed naturally from my focus on controversies, as these controversies were fairly specific for each type of singles activity.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As far as possible, I have tried to inform my respondents about the research I conduct. I have asked their consent, kept data confidential, and only used data for my dissertation project. These are the ethical principles suggested by the Swedish *Vetenskapsrådet* [Science Council].

Ethics, however, are not only about principles. They is also practiced in specific situations and relations that complicate and necessitate compromises and may even elicit ethical mistakes. Let me take the three most obvious examples from my research.

1. It was difficult to inform and ask permission from 400 people on board a cruise ship during a singles cruise. It was even more difficult when some of those people started to move around on the boat and intermingle with the 600 regular passengers, some of whom were thus inadvertently drawn into the observations.

2. Nor was it particularly simple to make online observations on an online site and keep everyone informed when looking at their self-presentations or posts on the public board.

3. While the Swedish market for singles activities has become increasingly competitive, it still contains relatively few entrepreneurs. It was difficult to know how to keep the arrangers who were interviewed anonymous, while describing their activities.

None of these three ethical conundrums has been solved to completely satisfy all the above-mentioned ethical principles, while simultaneously avoiding limiting use of data. I have solved the conundrums in different ways, but only after some compromise.

During the singles cruise and the singles conference, I asked Viktoria, the arranger, to at least mention me at the initial gathering. I also had a badge with my name and academic affiliation, as well as some "researcher's gear", like a recorder and note-pad, at almost all times. These precautions did not result in everyone being informed, however. On more than one occasion, I found myself having to explain that I was not a participant, nor part of the enterprise arranging the event, but a researcher from a university. I tried to give this explanation as soon as I met up with new people, but did not always get the chance at the outset.

There have been discussions about research ethics online in recent years (Elm et al., 2003). I would agree with those who argue that researchers have to be particularly careful on "closed" Internet communities, for example, those that can be read by members only – like Monotopia. When including data from these forums, it seems advisable to ask permission before citing anything written by individual members. Instead of opting for getting permissions, I have chosen not to cite individual members' posts from Monotopia. My online observations will instead provide general impressions and data about the functioning of the site. Nevertheless, I did record some members' posts in my observation protocol. This protocol, like all my observation protocols, has not been shared in its entirety with anyone besides myself and my supervisors.

One of the most difficult ethical decisions I have been called to make during the research project concerns confidentiality. Some of the information I have produced about the entrepreneurs, as well as on some of the singles, makes it possible to identify them – particularly for a person who is familiar with singles activities in Sweden. It has indeed been virtually impossible to guarantee that the identities of all my respondents will be kept confidential from everyone reading my dissertation. Nevertheless, by changing a few non-essential details in their narratives and avoiding mentioning certain information, I think I have made them harder to identify for the average reader. This has meant, however, that I have tampered with data for the sake of ethics. Some will say that this is a problematic choice. While I can vouch that I have striven to modify only information not pertaining to my conclusions, it is difficult to *prove* as much without divulging the confidential information in question.

Lastly, I wish to mention the ethical considerations behind my overall interpretation of singles activities. As someone with an interest in queer theory and critical studies of heterosexuality, I might easily have described heterosexual singles activities as merely reproducing heteronormative stances. And in a sense, I might have been right. Singles activities such as those I have studied are exclusively for straight people, and do little to openly question coupledom.

But as French sociologist Luc Boltanski and others have pointed out, criticism from the outside is easy and often fruitless (Boltanski, 2011; Latour, 2004). That hetero-

sexual singles activities are exclusively for straight people, and may make a gay man like me feel awkward, goes without saying. Indeed, saying it accomplishes nothing as long as I am perceived as being an outsider. But showing that such exclusivity is historically specific and that many participants themselves have trouble fitting in – that method shows a contingency more inherent in singles activities themselves, a reason for change congruent with the activities as such.

I therefore agree with those who try to situate critique within whatever they criticise (cf. Illouz, 2007). And to do that, we must find and describe the unexpected, the transgressive, and the hetero-doxical within what we might otherwise have thought of as normative. This interpretative strategy, which also involves a certain ethical stance towards respondents, may challenge us as critical researchers. What we take to be "other", what is easily interpreted as normative and reifying, might indeed be in a state of constant change.

3. Intimacy and Relationality

In this chapter, I will elaborate a conceptual framework for understanding the organising of intimacy and relationality. The purpose is to adapt these theoretical notions to serve the situating of singledom generally and the exploration of singles activities in particular. The overall argument is that intimacy and relationality, which have in other contexts been associated with family relations, can in fact serve in a much broader set of circumstances, even as logics for organising.

I will begin the chapter by considering the organising concept. Central to my argument, this concept points us to the underlying logic of singles activities. Because it involves coordinating different practices, organising can involve temporal and spatial ordering, as well as narratives and technology to accomplish order. In this context, we can consider what logics inform the organising of singles activities.

I will continue by considering personal life and the associated relationality concept. By understanding relationality as a practice that plays out in a complex web of relations rather than within specific relationships, Carol Smart, who coined the concept *personal life*, inadvertently paves the way for considering the relationality of singledom (Smart, 2007). After discussing personal life, I introduce intimacy as a concept for specific forms of social interaction. As a type of situation, intimacy has interesting connections to personal life, which transcend specific situations.

One important discussion in this chapter concerns distinctions between intimacy as an experience and as an image. For example, while Paris and the Eiffel Tower are important images for romantic intimacy, travelling to have them as a backdrop for an encounter does not ensure that participants experience intimacy. This distinction is important for understanding how intimacy might be organised and how organising may both support and undermine the possibility of intimacy.

Lastly, I discuss the work of sociologist Eva Illouz as an example of how relationality and intimate experience/imagery can be integrated in empirical work. Her historical account of romantic and intimate practices in 20th century America shows how the combination of relationality, intimacy, and space has fluctuated (Illouz, 1997). Illouz introduces space, particularly intimacy, as an important theme.

ORGANISING

In one of the earliest books on organising, social-psychologist Karl Weick defined the concept in the following way.

> Organizing is like a grammar in the sense that it is a systematic account of some rules and conventions by which sets of interlocked behaviours are assembled to form social processes that are intelligible to actors. (Weick, 1979, p. 3)

This definition, presented in the 1979 book *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, still holds water with much of contemporary literature on the subject. What Weick attempted to do in his book was to shift attention away from organisations as

ready-made structures, and direct it to the process of creating organisation in the wider sense (Weick, 1979). But what does it mean to say that something is organised? For Weick, the answer lies in intelligibility. When different behaviours are brought together and interlocked in such a way that they create a whole that concerned parties conceive as intelligible, it counts as organising. Singles activities are an example of intelligible combinations, in that behaviours like speed dating, dancing, dinners, excursions, and so on are brought together and form a whole. Each of these behaviours does not inherently relate to the others, and we can easily imagine ways to combine them that do not make sense. Making a certain sense by their combinations is organising.

Weick argues that the organising of behaviours to create intelligibility relies on a kind of grammar. Intelligibility thus would arise out of an underlying logic or convention of how things are organised, which concerned parties can then read out of the specific combination of behaviours. On the most basic level, singles activities would organise speed dating, dinners, and excursions in a way that participants can understand – whether it be according to quotidian time conventions (you eat dinner at 18:00), to break with quotidian conventions (you eat dinner much later or earlier than 18:00) or in a spatial way congruent with, for example, festivals or conventions (different activities in different rooms that you can choose from). As these examples show, spatial and temporal orderings of behaviours are important modes of organising and creating intelligibility.

Over time, an organising logic (what Weick himself calls grammar) may need to incorporate new behaviours using the same underlying grammar. While an organisation, in the classical sense, has boundaries that provide a sense of coherence and stability, Weick's organising logic lacks such boundaries and necessarily encounters new situations over time. If the grammar fails at handling new situations, the result might be unintelligibility. Weick therefore argues that organising logics over time generally adopt certain strategies to better cope with unexpected situations and retain intelligible results. This is one reason why organising grammar changes.

Barabara Czarniawska provides a more recent example of a *Theory of Organising*, in a book by the same name (Czarniawska, 2008). She coins the phrase "action net" to denote an interconnected web of repeated actions (also see Czarniawska, 2004). To a large extent, action nets resemble Weick's organised behaviours. Actions are behaviours that are repeated over time and thus achieve some predictability. As seen by Czarniawska, organising works by adapting these actions to interconnect them and form some desired network.

I wish to add a note here about the words used for those units of human activity that organising organises. Weick called them *behaviour*, Czarniawska *actions*, while Law and Schatzki, whose works I will address below, call them *practices*. In principle, these differences in phrasing do not seem to mark any difference in meaning for the mentioned authors. These words can, however, denote different concepts in other academic contexts. For example, behaviour is associated with behaviourism in psychology, while Weberian sociology associates action with goal-oriented rationality. Practice is the word most commonly associated with current sociological theory; and by using that word myself (except when referring to

the thoughts of Czarniawska and Weick), I believe I might increase the readability of the text for a wider academic audience.

Czarniawska argues the importance of narratives and technology for organising. A narrative intimates temporal connections between different actions, and by creating and spreading a specific narrative in, for example, an organisation, those connections can be sustained over time. Technologies come with scripts for how to accomplish a certain task. Implementing them may help modify an existing action, thus making it more adapted to an action net.

Intelligibility is not as important for Czarniawska as it is for Weick, nor is the overarching logic or grammar. For her, organising is a localisable activity that often has its own, temporary, and local reasons for its activity. Writing in the wake of actor-network theory, Czarniawska writes that there is no position outside of actions from which an organising agency or logic could work (cf. Latour, 2005; Law, 1999). Organising actions takes its place in the action net it attempts to assemble. As a result, any grammar or logic emerges in an already existing network to operate within it. Like actor-network theory, Czarniawska understands the actor and/or its logic to be inexorably linked to networks.

A "middle position" between Weick and Czarniawska can be found in John Law's book *Organising Modernity,* in which Law introduces the concept modes of ordering (Law, 1994). Doing ethnographic work on a research laboratory, Law understands several different organising logics to be at play. They emerge as intelligible orderings of people and things; operate on a constant basis; are never complete; and can come into conflict over the ordering of specific events, people, or things. While Law is keen to understand these modes of ordering as emerging locally, he also admits that they can spread from one place to the next. While not dependent on ideas or planning, these modes of ordering gain agency as they take shape in local networks.

Law's account of organising is close to Weick's concept of intelligibility, but by identifying several competing modes of ordering, Law also shows how, for example, a research laboratory that can appear to be a coherent organisation in fact houses several different contradictory organising grammars, which in turn can give rise to disorder and conflict. Law is also close to Czarniawska's notion of local and networked agency, and acknowledges that modes of ordering can travel to various places and thus are not limited to local organising only.

The distinction between local and spreading practices features large in Theodore Schatzki's work (Schatzki, 1996, 2002). He coins the phrases *integrative* and *dispersed practices*. Integrative practices are those that integrate different practices into local and coherent wholes and are akin to organising logics in Weick. Integrative practices need to adapt practices to the local conditions and the specific local intelligibility it attempts to create. Dispersed practices on the other hand are those that have been divorced from a local context and made moveable. Their use in, for example, an organisation may necessitate their reintegration into some local assemblage of practices, but meanwhile they float around in the general "ether" of for

example popular culture, scientific literature, and/or public consciousness in a form that lends itself to many different locales.[26]

As this short exposé has shown, the concept of organising has both changed and retained important elements from Weick's original formulation. One could safely say that the main focus of the concept is the coordination of practices. Process, change, and events are central to understanding the concept. The disputes, on the other hand, concern the role of intelligibility and the characteristics of an overall organising logic.

I will treat debates over the concept of organising as I treat all other theoretical disputes in this dissertation, namely pragmatically. In other words, I adopt the position that fits best with the field of study, as well as with the other concepts adopted. The singles activities studied are commercial and organised by entrepreneurs or the like. These organisers have certain logic behind their activities. I contend that singles activities lend themselves to a more Weickian model of organising where an organising logic is central to, although not the sole determinant of the process. That said, the organisers do need to adapt to local circumstances, and modify different practices to each other. I have indeed registered a few changes in their organising logics, indicating that they need to adapt to the network of practices they are organising.

Singles activities are what Schatzki calls integrative practices, in that they integrate different dispersed practices like speed dating, dinners, and dancing. I have already considered the history behind some of these dispersed practices. Singles activities are not contained in the meaning of these dispersed practices, however, but in the logic of their modification and assemblage. Rather than focus on, for example, dancing or dining alone, my observations have therefore concentrated on the spatial and temporal ordering of these activities, as well as the meaning of their specific local adaptions, particularly when and where they have involved technologies or narratives (taken in the broad sense of those terms).

An underlying assumption behind this mode of analysis is that organising creates intelligibility. Still, I maintain that the singles activities themselves have been assembled using slightly varying logics that give them slightly different meaning. This focus means that I might have less to say about the organisers themselves and their motives. This focus does allow me, however, to look at singles activities as a process that occurs and has meaning for the participants partly independently of those motives.

---

[26] For Schatzki, practices serve another theoretical purpose (Schatzki, 1996). He argues that we may leave the problematic distinction between individuals and structures to one side, if we instead focus on practices as the dispersed and integrated ways that people act together. These practices must adapt to local circumstances, that is, to the level of individuals, but they also work to structure people's social behaviour. They incorporate the qualities that are elsewhere ascribed to individuals and social structures respectively. While I would hesitate to adopt Schatzki's overall ontology, his point about the dual nature of practices can serve as an argument for focusing on singles activities as a site for the construction of singledom – rather than looking at singles as a group of individuals being ordered by general societal structures.

Below, I will describe personal life and intimacy that can both serve as organising logics. Personal life means that a person takes on and incorporates new relations based on his or her existing relations, while intimacy ranks relations based on a certain type of situational and personally felt experience. As I argue, these two logics are interconnected in various ways that can be usefully drawn on to understand singles activities.

PERSONAL LIFE AND (NON-)RELATIONALITY

Carol Smart launches what some have called the *embeddedness hypothesis* (Bruce, 2012; Smart, 2007). It should be understood as challenging two important paradigms in sociology. On the one hand, it opens the field of close relations up for empirical work that forgoes preconceived ideas like family. Smart wants to investigate the character of people's embeddedness empirically, rather than assume that it takes theoretically preconceived shapes. On the other hand, her hypothesis also challenges theoreticians like Anthony Giddens, who claims that the family is giving way to disembedded and reflective individuals freed to choose their relationships (Giddens, 1992). Smart writes that people outside families – singles are an interesting example – are also embedded, only in different ways.[27]

Smart's concept of personal life, she points out, should be read as a toolbox for empirical studies, not as an overarching theory. Nevertheless, this toolbox comes with some corrective counterbalances both to the biased concept of family and to the notion of reflexive individuals.

Smart argues the importance of *memory*. Persons can have memories of their own, for example, of earlier relationships or of childhood, that inform their current relations. Everyone is also carrying collective personal memories, such as the stories our parents tell about their childhoods, the family tree, the story of some important decision taken by an ancestor (immigrating or converting to a new religion). While memories often change to fit current situations better, they also influence our image of ourselves, even when we dissociate ourselves from them.

Another important concept is *relationality*. Smart argues that what we take a relationship to mean varies. It varies over time and between cultures, but one person can also have differently organized relationships to different kinds of persons. We take our relationship to our mothers to mean one thing, while friendships mean another. Relationality is a cultural construct by which we think and practice our relationships. This is the concept I have picked up most on, as I discussed in the Introduction.

Imaginary is another concept Smart adds to the toolbox. Relationships are not merely something we do through practice. They are also partly imagined. Our im-

---

[27] Arguments for looking at the embeddedness of people outside of the family are not new, even in the sociology of the family. Rita Liljeström, for example, examined the distinction between kinship and family in similar terms (Liljeström, 1988).

aginings of relationships are ways to bridge gaps between any concept we might have of relationships and our actual practice. And because we can imagine things differently, the inclusion of the imaginary in Smart's toolbox emphasizes the possibility of change.

Smart also includes the concept of *biography*. Our memories often take material form, such as a written diary, memorabilia, a house, or other things that anchor us to the past and present us narratively. Lastly, Smart argues the importance of the *embeddedness* concept. People are not free-floating individuals, regardless of what theoreticians of individualism or anomie might say. Rather, they have roots that go beyond their individuality and situate them personally in time as well as in space.

What we can glean from this toolbox of concepts is that personal life is about embeddedness in time and place. It situates us in histories of our cultures and families and it gives us agency to negotiate the future. As such, personal life branches out from the present and transcends specific situations. It is also a way to organise things that happen, whether that be, for example, death in the family, divorce, or joining a singles association. Personal life can in this perspective be understood as a logic for organising.

Smart's book *Personal life* presents its readers with a multitude of empirical studies. Smart shows how memories and biographies need to be negotiated when parents from different religious traditions discuss how their children should be raised. She shows how the arrangements of homes mirror people's relationalities and biographies. She discusses how both gay and straight marriage ceremonies are constructed to embed the couple in the community of parents, friends, and families.

One implication of Smart's embeddedness argument is that a couple is always much more than two persons and their relationship. To have a relationship is to be embedded in histories and networks, to negotiate biographies and relationalities.[28] That argument might also apply to people without monogamous relationships, such as singles. What distinguishes singles from couples is that the former are not engaged in monogamous relationships. That non-engagement does not by necessity cut them loose from a personal life, or a network of relations to family, history, culture, and friends.

So what does it mean to live personal life as a single? If the personal life of couples involves their marriage rituals, home decoration, and the raising of children, what involvement do singles have *as* singles? This is not a question I can ask in a more general fashion in this dissertation. But I will touch on it, as singles activities are

---

[28] Smart's argument that the couple is always embedded in a matrix of relations past and present suggests an interesting critique of Georg Simmel's classical social arithmetic. While Simmel is prepared to admit the embeddedness of apparently free and isolated individuals (Simmel & Wolff, 1950, p. 118), he treats the couple as a disentangled dyad (Simmel & Wolff, 1950, pp. 122ff). I do not argue that recognising personal life negates Simmel's analysis. There are, however, subtle differences between Smart's embedded couple and Simmel's disentangled dyad. That difference could be elaborated, and it suggests a possibly fruitful problematisation of both concepts. I will not however take on that analytical task here.

occasions when singles are drawn into relational constellations in the capacity of singles.

That Smart's conceptual toolbox allows us to pose the same type of questions regarding singledom as those we ask about coupledom can be most clearly shown by turning to the concept of relationality. Smart writes that she picks up relationality from anthropology. In recent years, anthropology has sought to open up several sociologically relevant concepts. I have already mentioned George Marcus' work on culture and space in chapter 2. It also bears mentioning that a number of anthropologists have recently argued that sociality needs to be opened up and varied (Long & Moore, 2013; Moore, 2001). Smart argues that we should give priority to empirical detail rather than determine a single, unitary model of how relationships work. She argues that people themselves work out what relationships entail and how to practice them – although certainly not without influences from the societies and cultures in which they are embedded. I would call this the *how* and *what* of relationships. It should be distinguished from a relationship itself, not least because it is practiced in myriad ways other than two people being together.

This discussion of relationality leads us to the concept of non-relationality, which I coin in this dissertation. I emphasised in the Introduction that the purpose of the concept is not to set it in contradistinction to relationality. Rather, insofar as non-relationality is the *how* and *what* of not having a certain relationship, it actually entails determining the character of a specific or non-specific relationship. A divorcee for example must determine what it means to no longer be married to a specific person. A single longing for a relationship with a non-specific other must determine what it means to not have that relationship. If and where singledom is defined as not being engaged in a monogamous relationship, non-relationality is involved.

Anthony Giddens argues that late modern individuals have gained reflexivity in part because they are no longer as relationally attached as that they once were (Giddens, 1992). A marriage in traditional societies was for life, and most children followed in the footsteps of their parents. In late modern society, divorces are commonplace and children embark on their own individualist projects, or so the late modern theorists like Giddens argue. In this perspective singledom, or not being engaged in monogamous relationships, may be an important identity and experience in this age of weak ties.

But arguing that non-relationality is a relational practice in this context is not to negate Giddens' theory. The concept of non-relationality nevertheless introduces nuance by emphasising that there are many and equally embedded alternatives to traditional families – and that we may miss those alternatives if we merely look for less attached individuals outside of marriage. Non-relationality thus builds on Smart's embeddedness argument, which says that neither people in couples nor singles are free-floating individuals. People are attached, but in different ways. Reflexivity demands different kinds of attachment, not necessarily fewer. Not having a monogamous relationship entails a background of embeddedness.

One example of non-relationality I mentioned above was divorce. Practicing the *how* and *what* of not having a relationship to an ex-husband or ex-wife may mean that a person draws parallels to pre-divorce life. What has become different? What is the same? Is there something that ought to be *more* the same or *more* different? Regardless of the truthfulness of these biographical narratives, their telling can itself be understood as the practice of non-relationality. In such cases, non-relationality might entail determining continuities and discontinuities of biographical narratives.

That non-relationality can be narrative means that the concept can be used in the methodological context described in the previous chapter. As I argued there, critical and valid analysis of interviews may need to bracket the question of whether the interviewees tell the truth about something outside of the interview situation. If non-relationality may be a narrative practice, it can be treated as something practiced within the interview situation itself. Additionally, narratives can be understood as an organising activity, making non-relationality an organising logic. This narrative aspect will be explored in chapter 7.

Singles activities may sometimes seem to isolate participants from their personal lives. Dating, for example, derives some of its historical meaning from the fact that it dislodged dating couples from the home and parents, within the realm of which previous courtship practices had taken place. Is it meaningful to engage with concepts such as personal life and non-relationality, which hinge on the embeddedness argument, if the object of study is a set of activities that in some sense disengage people from their personal lives?

There are several reasons why singles activities and embeddedness belong together. First, not all singles activities have been or are a disengagement from personal lives. Some have built community in ways that go beyond family formation in precisely the kind of ways that Carol Smart's notions help us to examine. Second, even when singles activities do disconnect participants from their personal lives, other tendencies might also be at work. Third, disconnection itself might be interpreted as part of a certain embeddedness, or a partial restructuring of such embeddedness. Bachelors in Chudacoff's American study, for example, were undergoing a period of rapid urbanisation at the end of the 19th century, which disconnected them from their families of origin. At the same time, they were finding new relations, new ways of being embedded in the cities to which they were moving. Personal life was changing through disengagement, but that did not necessarily bring isolation and individualism.

I argued above that non-relationality might take on a narrative character. This point seems less relevant when investigating singles activities as such, that is, as organised social gatherings (rather than events in participants' lives). So what might it entail to say that singles activities have a non-relational logic?

Singles activities are social gatherings, defined by the heightened potential for encounters they represent. Spatial and temporal arrangements are partly responsible for this potential and its characteristics. Dating, for example, facilitates a certain kind of encounter that is marked by the absence of parental control and chaperones.

In turn, high society balls during the mid-19th century allowed young singles to meet, but such encounters were formed by the presence of chaperones, the formal style of dancing, and the homogeneous social class composition of the ball arrangements.

The manner in which singles activities are set up thus influences the encounters they foster. In the case of courtship activities, we might surmise that arrangements are influenced by notions about the relationships that singles are not engaged in, that is, by a certain non-relationality. Similar considerations might influence the formation of singles communities, at least when they are set up to compensate for the monogamous relationships that their participants are not engaged in. It is as a general logic behind singles activities then that certain non-relationalities might be discerned. This general logic might, for example, be discerned in the spatial and temporal setup of an activity, or the technologies and narratives that help organise it.

Singles activities are organised, which means that they coordinate and integrate certain practices. Importantly, however, any organiser must adapt to local circumstances. This adaptation means that any non-relationality involved in arranging an activity is never synonymous with the thoughts or ideas of an organiser. The general logic of an organised practice is in fact never synonymous with an idea or notion (Schatzki, 2002). Whatever notion of singledom and relationships an organiser might have, it must undergo some adjustment and compromise with practices of, for example, participants, and thus plays out differently than the pure idea might have given reason to predict.

The non-relationality of a given singles activity can thus be related to an organising logic and pertain to the characteristics of the monogamous relationship that single participants are not engaged in. This organising logic cannot be surmised only from interviews with individual organisers (even if such interviews might contribute to understanding), but rather must be derived and interpreted from the practices themselves. This is how I examine non-relationalities in chapters 4-6.

The point I want to make is that I investigate non-relationality as both a narrative and spatial-temporal organising logic in this dissertation. Singles who discuss the how and what of not being engaged in relationships present narratives that are interpreted as such. The singles activities in turn are organised practices, which are interpreted as having non-relational spatial and temporal logics.

As discussed above, some singles activities can entail a certain dislodging of participants from their personal lives. Dating traditionally takes people outside the home, as must singles cruises, for example. Historically, the emergence of "escapist" singles activities is parallel to the growing importance of romance and intimacy as relational experiences. How might the flight from personal life be connected to intimacy, and what might the intimacy concept bring to the study of contemporary singles activities?

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF INTIMACY

Intimacy is a concept with growing importance for understanding contemporary close relations. I discussed the work of Anthony Giddens in the Introduction, relaying his argument that intimacy emerges as a central experience in a context where tradition and community give way to individual judgement in matters of relationships (Giddens, 1992). Giddens argues that intimacy is experienced as a shared moment that is unperturbed by any external parties. As such, it has a kind of emblematic status in relationships as the most direct experience of the other. For Giddens, this status helps to explain the growing importance of intimacy for individuals when they arbitrate on relational matters.

One thing that characterises intimacy is its importance for many different kinds of close relations – from friendships to marriage. Giddens and other thinkers argue that this makes intimacy an ambiguous experience in a context that (still) retains distinctions between these different types of relations. One may have a shared moment of intimacy, but still remain unclear about which relation to have with the other person – if any.

Giddens' overall argument concerns wider tendencies in society. As these claims have been heavily criticised, and as they are largely irrelevant for the arguments in this dissertation, I have chosen to leave them to one side. What makes Giddens relevant for studying singles activities is his examination of the social meaning of intimacy. As my historical account in the Introduction showed, singles activities include courtship and community where individual arbitration on relational matters is important. In addition, there is a tendency for encounters at singles activities to become increasingly ambiguous, not least because they may be interpreted both as deeply personal and part of building community.

This ambiguity might be analysed from the perspective of intimacy. Giddens' notion of intimacy concerns a macro-perspective on society. To understand intimacy on the level of for example singles activities, let me pose a few questions with the purpose of clarifying the concept of intimacy on a phenomenological level. What makes intimacy feel like a more immediate and unperturbed experience of others than other kinds of experience? Why does it transcend different types of relationships and become relationally ambiguous? As singles activities are organised social gatherings, I also need to ask: Does the immediacy of intimate experience preclude it from being organised in any meaningful way? Lastly, if intimacy is the basis for individual arbitration in matters of relationships, does it stand in contradiction to Carol Smart's embeddedness argument, according to which arbitrating individuals are always already part of a network of unarticulated relations, which their judgements presuppose rather than operate upon?

I wish to emphasise that my discussion below does not include the claim that my description of intimacy is an essential description of a real phenomenon. As with many other concepts in social science, I merely attempt to identify a pattern or logic that in reality is varied, mixed with other phenomena, eroded, disrupted, and so on. As Max Weber argues concerning what he calls "ideal types" in social science, one of the few things we can ascertain before empirical studies is that our concepts

are logically coherent (Weber, 1949). This argument is why the questions I pose here concern possible contradictions in formulating a useful concept for intimacy, rather than some "true" nature. Another thing that we can ascertain before empirical studies begin is that our concepts are both relevant for the specific cases considered, and relatively compatible with how these cases are used in other studies. In this way, we allow for comparisons and thus greater validity and generality of claims. This focus on comparison and validity is why I draw on earlier theoretical and empirical studies of intimacy.

In formulating a concept of intimacy, I argue that we should make use of phenomenology. This school of thought has come up with important characterisations of the immediacy of intimacy and its relational ambiguity. I also show how the phenomenological account can allow for the notion of organised intimacy. Lastly, I examine how an account of embedded persons can be combined with notions of arbitrating, intimacy, and individuals.

Schutz on imagining intimate relationships

Alfred Schutz may be one of the most important phenomenological sociologists. Like several other early proponents of the discipline, he investigated the meaning of intimacy (Schutz, 1964). For Schutz, intimacy was experienced in proximity to the other, when we inhabit the same space and time, and the same intentional focus. That we share a situation and, in addition, focus on the same thing, allows us a better insight into the other. Her or his world coincides with ours in a way it does not do otherwise.

The problem of other minds is central to Schutz, as it is more widely in the phenomenological tradition of Edmund Husserl, to which Schutz could be said to belong (Husserl, 1977). A central dilemma of the social world, according to Schutz, is that others' minds are inaccessible. He argues that we engage with other people depending on the degree to which we feel ourselves to have gained some insight into their ways of thinking. People that we have never met are certainly part of the world we think of ourselves as inhabiting, but we usually assume that they will not concern us personally. Others are known to us, but engaged in unknown activities. We may feel ourselves deeply knowledgeable about an author whose personal biography we have read, although not having a mutual relationship forbids us from making personal contact; and so on. For Schutz, intimacy represents an extreme on this continuum of little to some insight into the minds of others; sharing a focus on attention is the closest we come to direct access.

Often, we imagine our relationships to be continuous in the sense that they retain an intimate character even when we are not present for each other. But Schutz argues correctly that relationships are never anything more than a series of situations:

> Closer scrutiny resolves the pretended unity of a marriage or a friendship into a manifold sequence of situations. In some of these situations, "marriage" or "friendship" was a face-to-face social relation, in others it was a social relation among mere contemporaries [Schutz' word for actors when we relate to them without interacting with them face-to-face]. Taking the terms in their precise sense, these social relations are indeed not continuous – but they are recurrent (Schutz, 1976, p. 39).

I would argue that Schutz' point here is that intimacy is situational, while relationships are often thought of as something above and beyond such specific instances in time and space. Relationships may therefore be thought of as a series of situations, only some of which may be intimate. Indeed, relationships *must* contain instances when we relate to the other as absent and irrelevant – at least if we define relationships as extending beyond specific situations. The other in a relationship must at one point in time leave the intimate presence by which one has gained some insight into his mind, and instead become – in my experience – someone into whom one has much less insight.[29]

> [The other] was present in person, with a maximum of symptoms by which I could apprehend his conscious life. In the community of space and time we were attuned to one another; his Self reflected mine; his experiences and my experiences formed a common stream, *our* experience; we grew old together. As soon as my fellow man leaves, however, my experience of him undergoes a transformation. I know that he is in some Here and Now of his own. (Schutz, 1964, p. 38)

In a very specific sense, this means that intimacy is not relational. Intimacy can be included in a series of situations that together are called a relationship. But no relationship is ever only intimate, and no intimate situation is by itself a relationship.

As the quotes above show, Schutz seems to imply that people in general may think of relationships as being more intimate than they really are. Or in other words, many couples seem to think that they have a closer insight into the mind of the other than they actually have. Here we arrive at a historical rather than phenomenological circumstance. In contemporary culture, relationships are often associated with intimate experience of the other (Giddens, 1992; Illouz, 1997), a certain attunement between people that can in fact only occur in specific situations according to Schutz' phenomenology. This association is the reason why, if we follow Schutz, we arrive at the same conclusion as Carol Smart: Relationships often have an imaginary component. Or put more generally, as long as someone *thinks* that their relationship is sustained or characterised by something that can in fact only be situational (e.g., intimacy), they must imagine away Schutz' "manifold sequence of situations" and describe the relationship as more coherent than it actually is.

All this discussion means is that insofar as intimacy emerges as an experience through which someone judges the quality of a relationship more generally, it follows that this someone uses a standard for relations that is not relational. I would argue that the phenomenological distinction between intimacy and relationship that underpins this conclusion could help make sense of the relational ambiguity of intimacy. The key is that intimacy contains nothing that is relational, despite it being so closely associated with relationships in contemporary culture. Intimacy is merely a situation that can be followed by any other situation. Only by imagining things

---

[29] There are cases where the other's absence may lead to a greater sense of closeness than does proximity. A number of studies of distance relationships and widowhood show that absence of a partner may actually work to retain people's notions of their relationships, while being together may disperse such illusions (McCarthy, 2012). These cases do not negate Schutz's insight, since Schutz recognises the importance of imaginary elements in relationships, as I shall explore below.

differently, by instituting rules, mutual agreement, and so on, that is, by non-intimate steps and measures, can we follow up an intimate moment with a series of situations we might call a relationship. Nor can the exact character of these follow-up situations be determined using only the intimate moment as a standard. Friendship, a sexual affair, marriage, a tragic love-story, or a series of emails can all follow from the same intimate moment – and the reason for this ambiguity is that intimacy is not relational.

Schutz' intimacy concept can in certain ways be read as a more sophisticated version of Giddens' take on the same phenomenon. For Giddens, intimacy means that we come to know something "hidden" in the other – he seems to think that talking, that is, purveying information about oneself to the other, is the most important mode of this experience (cf. Jamieson, 1988). Like Giddens, Schutz also has a primarily cognitive notion of intimacy, understanding it as the perceived access to the other's mind. Nevertheless, his is a much more sophisticated understanding of this access, as he takes the shared experience, not shared information, as its most basic form. While Giddens and Schutz have the cognitive understanding of intimacy in common, they have very different notions of the basic means of this cognition.

Intimacy has in some sociological literature been an epithet for certain kinds of relationship (usually friendship, coupledom, and parents/children). A growing number of authors have, however, come to take Schutz's position that intimacy is *situational*. I will discuss one of these authors in the next section, and show how her phenomenological investigation into the nature of intimacy can help us elaborate the structure of the concept.

Structure of intimate experience

In a recent doctoral dissertation, Jessica Mjöberg points out an awkward lacuna in research on intimacy: Few have given a definition of the field's main concept, intimacy, and existing definitions are vague and contradictory (Mjöberg, 2011). The research field is fairly new and Mjöberg suggests that this might be a cause of the oversight. She maps a trend in sociology, where the intimacy concept has moved away from denoting a specific societal sphere (the family and private life) or kinds of relationships, to referring to a certain kind of interaction, often, but not always found within close relations. While this trend has meant that the concept of intimacy can be used to highlight phenomena outside the family, it makes the lack of an analytical definition even more problematic.

Mjöberg goes on to give intimacy a clearer definition. She suggests that we should use phenomenology to analyse situations that are generally accepted as intimate in order to arrive at a general account. Mjöberg chooses to analyse cases like the mother-child relationship and romantic passion to delineate the central characteristics of intimacy. She argues that these examples "are often described as intimate. [However a]s such these are examples which are already interpreted and not pure phenomena which would have been appropriate for an analysis on phenomenological grounds" (Mjöberg, 2011). She argues, however, that the analysis will still allow her to point out important notions [Sw. *föreställningar*] of intimacy.

What is striking about Mjöberg's account of intimacy when compared to Schutz' concept is her insistence that intimacy means that people are fully directed towards each other. In contrast, Schutz argues that people merely need a common focus. Mjöberg defines intimacy as an on-going spontaneous interaction between people that allows them to feel integrated and thus extended beyond themselves. One's every action receives a direct, unrehearsed response by the other. This is the reason why we must have each other in constant focus, according to Mjöberg's theory. It is not a matter of being in control of the other, but rather of acting in unison or in harmony, much like musicians in an improvisation orchestra respond to each other. As Howard Becker describes the latter example:

> The players thus develop a collective direction that characteristically—as though the participants had all read Emile Durkheim—feels larger than any of them, as though it had a life of its own. It feels as though, instead of them playing the music, the music, Zen-like, is playing them, (Becker, 2000, p. 172).

This emphasis on full directedness and spontaneity means that Mjöberg resists the notion that intimacy might be organised. Anything that removes one's attention from the other or introduces an element of non-spontaneous response must by definition fall outside of the intimate moment. Organising would make intimacy planned and thus impossible.

I am sympathetic to Mjöberg's emphasis on emotive experience. As discussed above, Alfred Schutz understands intimacy ultimately as cognitive, as some perceived access to the mind of the other. The problem for me is that Mjöberg dismisses the possibility of *organising* intimacy. It is a problem because organising intimacy is an important part of courtship rituals and other singles activities that I investigate here.

This is not to deny that there may be tensions between organising and intimacy, as for example Eva Illouz shows in her research, which will be discussed below. But *tensions* are not the same thing as *impossibility* of connection. So what can we adopt from Mjöberg's reasoning without simultaneously throwing organising away?

One of the strengths of Mjöberg's account is that she does not rely exclusively on a cognitive model of intimacy. Intimate experience is not necessarily to get access to the other, but merely to share a specific experience. This understanding of intimacy means that Mjöberg escapes the inner/outer distinction that has been so heavily criticised and that underpins notions of intimacy as access to the (inner) minds of others (cf. Glendinning, 1998). This rejection of the inner/outer distinction is not to deny that some people might interpret an intimate experience as a certain type of knowledge, but merely to point out that the underlying experience does not hinge on that cognitive operation.

So what is the shared experience of intimacy? I think it might be useful to return to classical sociologists like Schutz and Erving Goffman here, to emphasise a concept that was important to them: The other person we perceive ourselves as knowing is in fact only a conglomerate of impressions from various situations where they have figured. Although people have lives beyond our own, they appear to us only

through our experience (Goffman, 1990; Schutz, 1964). In an absolute sense there is of course no necessary distinction between people I know and people I don't, but from my relative perspective these are two very important and distinct categories. It is this insight that allows Schutz to distinguish between intimates and mere contemporaries, and Goffman to discern the importance of impression management in society.

This important and fundamental point in the sociology of interaction makes it possible to ask: If intimacy is experience, in what capacity does it allow the other to appear? By asking this question, I return to Schutz as it were, but at the same time avoid the inner/outer distinction that plays such an important role in his work. Instead, I assume that the situation in which we find the other – not the other's mind – is also what determines how s/he appears. I come close to Erving Goffman's theory of impression management. Goffman argues that we continuously try to impact what impression we give to others, not least through the kind of situation we allow ourselves to be encountered in (Goffman, 1990). However, in contrast to Goffman I focus not so much on people's concerns about how they appear to others, but rather on what experiences are induced in those people by how others appear to them.

There is one argument in Mjöberg that I wish to retain and adopt. Mjöberg underscores the importance of the present and of being undisturbed in intimacy. She also points to the importance of spontaneity. The central argument is that to be intimate together, people need to bracket any role, position, or persona they have outside the specific situation, in order to instead respond unconditionally to the other. There are, so to speak, no hidden motives in the other's responses to one or one's responses to him. Intimacy happens outside of rehearsed social positions.

So how to take on this argument about unrehearsed responsiveness and still allow for organising? Mjöberg's definition of intimacy focuses on the self's emotively coloured experience of expanding. Such an experience requires a very intensive interaction between oneself and the other. One's own actions must feel as prolongations of the other's actions and vice versa. One single round of action and reaction does not suffice. In contrast, if we focus on the other's appearance, his or her spontaneous reaction might be an isolated event. A fleeting smile or gentle touch would be enough to make the other *appear* intimately to us. If intimacy no longer requires prolonged and intensive interaction, and if single actions might suffice, then we can drop out of and back into intimacy; for example, in order to plan ahead, or to consider the perception that we have had of the other. This argument is an important theoretical move to make, if we intend to allow that intimacy may be organised.

If only a single round of action/reaction is required, the other's response to one need not be spontaneous, but only appear to be. As long as intimacy involves a long series of responses, it becomes more and more difficult to uphold the impression of spontaneity when there is none. But if it is only a matter of one or two responses, one might be more easily convinced that the other is not playing a role, and does not have ulterior motives, but is replying personally to one's own self.

This last point allows us to pay more attention to intimacy's context. Do certain settings signal that people respond spontaneously, and to oneself alone? I would say yes; if isolated and apparently free from obligations, it makes more sense to assume that the other acts thus. In no way would I argue that certain contexts are necessary for intimacy to occur, nor that such contexts make intimacy inescapable. My point is merely that such contexts make it reasonable to expect replies, and to reply oneself, without concerns that are external to the situation.

I have still not determined exactly what perception of the other intimacy induces. To discuss that, I will now turn to a recent book on sadomasochism that draws on Georg Simmel's notion of intimacy.

Uniqueness as intimacy

Ever since reading Staci Newmahr's book on heterosexual sadomasochism, *Playing on the Edge*, it has haunted my thinking about intimacy (Newmahr, 2011). Controversially, Newmahr suggests that violence can constitute an intimate moment (Newmahr, 2011, p. 176). She bases her argument on Georg Simmel's analysis of secrets (Newmahr, 2011, pp. 170ff). Intimacy to her is experiencing something with another individual that feels unique to that situation. As such, intimacy can rely on some actual, imaginary, or symbolic boundary that is breached in the intimate moment; that way, we feel that we have gained access to something not experienced by others. At the same time, intimacy might also entail other boundaries to keep others from joining in. An intimate moment is not something that is shared widely, but something that retains its uniqueness by being experienced within a closed circle of participants.

Like Schutz and Mjöberg, Newmahr's concept of intimacy makes it situational rather than relational. She writes that intimacy "lies not necessarily in marriage, disclosure, or sex, but anywhere that people experience each other differently enough than other people experience them" (Newmahr, 2011, p. 172). In other words, she argues that intimacy is an experience of others – a notion I embraced above. Additionally, when we share an intimate moment, the uniqueness of the impression of each other makes it ours. It does not belong (yet) to our connected personal lives where it would be part of several storylines. In this intimate moment, it is something that only you and I share, like a secret that is being forged in the moment of its sharing.

Above all, intimacy means that one receives an impression of the other that he does not share with others. Let us say, for example, that we share knowing smiles with a waiter at a coffee shop over another customer who appears to us both to be poorly dressed. If we perceive the moment as intimate, it might be because we feel that we have broken through the waiter's official role and perceived in him something that others do not – a personal taste, for example. This situation is exclusive to us. It is not something shared with the other guests (or so we hope).

It is important to note that uniqueness is by necessity situationally determined. For whom is the impression of the other unique? How far outside the current situation does the uniqueness carry? For how long a time must an impression remain

unique? These are all questions that are determined *in situ*. These questions indicate that intimacy is not merely an inference about uniqueness, but also a semantic and emotional issue. In other words, there are always, in any intimate situation, reasons to doubt its uniqueness as well as reasons to affirm it; it all depends on basic assumptions that can vary between situations and people.

This semantic and emotional dimension to whether people experience a moment as intimate or not is by definition open to influences from images of intimacy. A situation that corresponds to the feel of intimate imagery may be more likely to entice intimate experiences in people (see Arvidson, 2007, p. 106ff for an illuminating discussion on how con men can evoke emotions in others by playing on conventional imagery). Eva Illouz has investigated the empirical connection between images and intimate experience in people (below). A classic example involves travelling to Paris and having a romantic dinner in the Eiffel Tower. On the other hand, directly copying imagery may diminish the sense of uniqueness of a situation, as imagery is by definition not unique. Defining intimacy as the unique impression of the other thus captures interesting tensions that may exist between images and experience.

The smile shared with a waiter is merely shielded from the other customers and to find it intimate, we cannot demand that it should be unique for all times and places. The waiter has presumably shared smiles with other customers. What may determine the moment as intimate is that we have breached his public façade, which is all that most other customers ever see. Imagery may also play a role here; smiles are often featured in various cultural artefacts to signify personal attraction or affection. If we interpret the waiter's smile to have such connotations, it would be directed as a reaction to us alone and therefore be more unique. The smile can certainly be experienced as intimate unilaterally – for example, if the waiter shares knowing smiles with many customers and see it as part of his job obligations. Intimacy may become a question of power – for example, if one makes contact with the waiter and enforces one's interpretation of the situation by chatting familiarly with him.

We live in a society where close relations are understood to exist between individuals, rather than, for example, between social roles or functions. To get a unique glimpse of someone may count as getting a glimpse of her or his individuality, and may be central in a relationship built on the concept of unique individuals. This is *not* to say that intimacy is relational; as Schutz remarks, intimacy is a situation, whereas relationships are a series of different situations. Regardless of how important intimacy becomes as a relational value, it must remain relationally ambiguous in so far as that any series of situations following the intimate moment must be decided outside of the latter.

My data does not give me reason to adopt Newmahr's more radical ideas on intimacy.[30] However, I do think that her reasoning about sharing something unique

---

[30] Practices such as sadomasochism – she uses the example of anal fisting in this context (cf. Bersani & Phillips, 2008) – while having *sexual* connotations, are more often described as *intimate* by practitioners. It

articulates a structural trait in the concept. That intimacy is a unique impression of the other captures and includes Mjöberg's suggestion that intimacy should be spontaneous.[31] If they are discovered to be rehearsed, the other's reactions cannot be perceived as unique. This view of intimacy as a unique impression of the other also captures Mjöberg's notion that intimate situations should in some sense be at a remove from other situations and other people; if the impression we get of the other is to remain unique, it must be shared in a limited fashion only.

Gender and class must be suspect in the intimate situation, in so far as they represent rehearsed and rigid roles that leave little room for unique interaction (Bailey, 1988; cf. Illouz, 1997). There is a tension here however. What may disturb intimacy is the *acknowledgement* of class or gender structured actions in the situation by the participants involved. Successful gender performance is often understood to make gender invisible, and interaction between people of the same class can render class unobtrusive. Therefore successful intimate moments may demand very specific gender- and class-related configurations of the situations in order to create a sense of spontaneity and uniqueness.

To conclude my discussion on intimacy, I have investigated definitions proposed by Anthony Giddens, Alfred Schutz, Jessica Mjöberg, and Staci Newmahr (who draws on Georg Simmel). My own suggestion relies most heavily on Newmahr, but is supposed to address and capture important aspects in the other definitions. I argue that intimate situations occur when someone has a unique experience of another, which that other does not share more widely. Who these excluded "others" are may vary; they may be the general public, restaurant-goers, a family, or everyone who has ever lived, for example. Spontaneous, situational interaction is an important mode of intimacy.

Intimate situations may have particular spatial and temporal characteristics, and these can be organised. To retain the impression of uniqueness, some kind of boundary may be broken and another boundary erected to shield the experience from others. Isolation, both temporal and spatial, may work to make people less likely to draw on official roles, rehearsed reactions, and so on, and instead focus exclusively on the other and the specifics of the situation.

---

means pushing through some boundary of the other that culture or the individual usually keeps closed, permitting moments of boundlessness and radical being-together (this argument reminds me of Butler's argument about bodily orifices (Butler, 1999). Certainly, this reasoning introduces intimacy to power-play, where the question of who may break whose boundaries becomes something to be fought over. Newmahr even toys with the disturbing, but possibly fruitful, notion that murder may be a deeply intimate experience.

[31] One could argue that the kind of interaction investigated by Newmahr is far from spontaneous – that the ritualistic character of certain S/M-practices seems geared to *remove* the impression of spontaneity. Newmahr herself however argues that the ritualistic setup of S/M works as a contrast to *emphasise* the spontaneous interaction going on between the involved parties. Comparing S/M to improvisation theatre, she argues that " participants enter into play from a similar perspective; negotiation and consent set the parameters for a scene, and participants regard their interaction within those constraints as spontaneous, pure and authentic", (Newmahr, 2011, p. 61). The connection between ritual and spontaneity certainly needs examining further.

An important point is that intimacy is not relational. It is a situation, while relationships are a series of situations of varying type. This clarification of intimacy helps to explain why intimacy can be relationally ambiguous: The kinds of situations that will follow an intimate moment must be determined outside of that specific situation.

ORGANISING INTIMACY

By arguing that intimacy is uniqueness, and that such uniqueness is inferred, meant, and/or felt, I have intimated how imagery may play into the experience. If the meaning of uniqueness varies, different semiotic tools may be used to signal uniqueness or a specific notion of uniqueness. Images of intimate moments can play an important role when people read a situation as unique or not. They help to determine what actually needs to be unique, for whom, and how.

I have argued that we should understand intimacy as the unique experience of the other, making this my accepted definition of the experience, taking priority over the other possible definitions. However, accepting this argument still keeps the possibility open that alternative understandings of intimacy may shape images of the phenomenon. Jessica Mjöberg, for example, builds her argument on her analysis of culturally accepted images or notions of intimacy. One of the images Mjöberg discusses is the couple in love (Mjöberg, 2011). The couple seems to disappear into each other in a way that blurs the boundaries of their individuality. An even more common image situates the couple in isolated places and/or in leisurely milieus (Illouz, 1997). Free to focus on each other, these couples enjoy a shared experience of mutual attentiveness.

Although these images are both anchored in the motif of a unique experience of the other, they vary this theme in significant ways, and make certain non-vital aspects of intimate situations central – such as mutuality or consumerism.

Some readers might question why I have favoured a certain definition at all. Would it not be enough to say that different people understand intimacy differently? This is certainly an attractive option. If I observe some singles slipping away from a singles activity to experience a moment alone, I might say that their flight to personal space constitutes an interpretation of intimacy, in that they have chosen a certain spatial isolation. But a total openness to various interpretations would make it difficult to say if intimacy (or images thereof) was involved at all. If my data had consisted of people's attempts to interpret certain experiences, this might not have been a problem. But my data also includes observations of people having unspoken experiences. Without any defined pattern to look out for, these experiences would be very difficult to identify. As I wrote above, this choice of definition does not mean that I argue that intimacy is some primordial, self-sustained experience that all people have. I merely consistently describe a pattern that then allows me to identify certain behaviours, reactions, and so on, as intimate.

This definition of intimacy does not preclude an analysis of the interpretations people themselves make of their experiences, both before and after having them. Where some might interpret intimacy as giving them information of other people,

others might understand it as being "touched by destiny", and so on. But even here, favouring a certain definition is crucial to identifying what experience people are actually interpreting. If that identification were not possible, it would make sense to ask if I had any reason to understand one interpretation of intimacy as a variation on another interpretation. Is "being touched by destiny" not simply a different experience than "getting information of others"? An analysis arguing such difference is certainly possible, but my predefined notion of intimacy allows me to understand these notions as interpretations of the same pattern of experience.

When it comes to organising intimacy, an organising logic is needed. I would argue that such organising could draw on various images, notions, and interpretations of intimacy. An example would be the newlywed couple that goes to Paris to be more intimate. The organising of such a honeymoon follows a given logic of intimacy, which the couple may have picked up from existing imagery.

As intimacy concerns the unique, while organising follows existing logics and rehearsed images, there may be tension when intimacy is organised. It is difficult or impossible to organise the unique, and as a consequence organisers may have to try out different techniques to make such encounters more likely. Here we may find that the organising logic comes with a certain imagery of intimacy, but has accommodated a high degree of spontaneity to allow for the unique to arrive. Speed dating, for example, hinges on (repeated) exchange of information. Organisers of speed dating may need to play around with and bend the rules a little to allow participants to improvise and interact in more attentive way.

INTIMACY WITH AND AGAINST PERSONAL LIFE

How are intimacy and personal life related? Obviously, people relate them all the time; intimate encounters develop into relationships that then have to be integrated into the relation networks of personal lives.

On the other hand, there is circumstantial evidence from the world of coupledom that suggests that intimacy may be used to dislodge people from the personal. Sometimes, couples engage in some intimate activity, for example, dating each other or going abroad together, with the expectation that they will renew the relationship. In such cases, being intimate means leaving personal histories behind. One could say the couple has a short refreshing "affair" within the confines of monogamy.

This latter example implies that intimacy and personal life may be opposites under certain circumstances. As argued above, intimate situations are relationally ambiguous. They may happen in a series of situations that together form a relationship, but they say nothing in and by themselves about those other situations. Nevertheless, intimate situations are often used as standards to evaluate relationships and determine whether they should continue or not. Personal life, on the other hand, embeds people in relational matrices that form a background for their judgements. Herein lies the possible tension between personal life and intimacy. If one judges others from the point of view of the same relational matrix, or from within the same personal life, unique experiences become difficult or impossible. This is

where intimate situations may demand that we tread slightly outside of personal life and look at others differently than we would from the perspective of existing relations.

For example, let us say that my religious upbringing embeds me in a number of obligations that forbid me from marrying outside of my faith. Or, that my parents expect me to find someone of a certain class background. These personal considerations may interfere when I encounter others, leading me to see a religion or class where I would otherwise be able to experience a unique other.

In these and other cases, intimacy may demand that I put personal life to one side. This is an important point. What we have here is a comparison between embeddedness and what some would call individualism. Instead of treating these as opposites, I suggest that we examine their complex interplay. In some cases, this means that we should understand tensions between them.

I would argue that these arguments about personal life and intimacy give us reason to make a distinction between person and individual. A person is embedded in complex histories that branch out from any given present and place the person in a temporal network of overlapping stories. An individual, in contrast, is recognised as unique in a situation. Like a relationship, persons encompass many situations, while individuals are often recognised as such in a single situation. [32]

Let me dwell on what it means to recognise another as individual. When I recognise the other as individual, that individual loses the anonymity s/he might have had for me before. Anonymity here would mean that I do not immediately see the distinguishing characteristics that I would otherwise ascribe to the other. For example, let us say that as I buy tickets from a ticket seller, the seller makes some flirtatious remarks. I will hence be able to recognize that individual as "the ticket seller who flirted with me". Intimate situations break off from routine or repetition and individualise participants through their uniqueness.

But even while I recognise the other as *individual* in intimacy, I do not necessarily recognise her as *person*. As person, the other should present herself as embedded in a past and future. Intimacy necessarily does not introduce me to the relations that surround a person – although such introduction may occur.

We can therefore draw up a list of three forms in which the other might appear to us: the anonymous, the individual, and the person. If the other is anonymous to me, I cannot recognise her or him from one situation to the next. If individual, that recognition does occur – perhaps because of an intimate encounter. Lastly, if she or

---

[32] Carol Smart compares the distinction individual/person to George Herbert Mead's distinction between I and me (Smart, 2007). The person is the "me", that is, the socially defined and embedded aspect of what I am. The "I" is the agentic subject, the subjectivity posited in excess of the social, to which is ascribed the ability to make rational decisions. I would argue that Smart, through this comparison with Mead, implies that the concept of individuals could potentially complement and inform the concept of personhood – although she herself never makes that argument.

he is a person to me, I know something of the other's relation matrix, the personal life in which she operates.

Some scholars have taken to calling Giddens' reflective individuals and Smart's embedded persons two mutually exclusive theories (Bruce, 2012; McDonnell, 2012; Pahl & Spencer, 2010; Quah, 2010). These theories are then pitted against one another, and evidence given in support of one or the other. My position takes me to another place altogether. Instead of viewing Giddens and Smart as presenting two mutually exclusive theories, I understand them to rely on two important structural features of relationality. That there is evidence in support of both is unsurprising from this perspective, as both personal life and intimacy are drawn upon and enacted in different situations.

My point is that personal life and intimacy are not mutually exclusive. It is simple to imagine cases where they would be mutually supportive. Relating stories from personal life can be what makes someone unique and thus intimate in a specific situation, for example. Intimacy often must be integrated into and form a meaningful part of personal life. As I described above, judging and determining how to go on from an intimate moment is something that happens outside of such a situation. As a result, while personal life may have to be bracketed for intimacy to occur, it may also form the backdrop for determining how to go on from that situation and form a relationship. In these ways, intimacy and personal life may form a coherent whole, despite the fact that some situations demand that people forgo one or the other.

Non-relationality is the *how* and *what* of not being engaged in a relationship. I argued that we might understand it as a relational practice. Can we deduce anything about the connection between non-relationality and intimacy? I would argue that intimacy and images of intimacy might indeed figure in non-relationality. For example, to not have a relationship by not being intimate with a specific person is non-relationality. As with personal life, one can imagine non-relationalities that hinder intimacy and non-relationalities that do not. These are conceptual relations for empirical investigation rather than theoretical speculation.

ILLOUZ AND THE INTIMATE 20TH CENTURY

The forgoing discussion has the problem of being abstract and complex. I will therefore end this chapter by discussing the work of Eva Illouz, who to my mind combines several of the points made above and does empirical analysis. Her research has the virtue of making concepts like intimacy and relationality more concrete, and shows how they might be related. In addition, Illouz introduces liminality as an important way to organise intimate space.

To discuss Eva Illouz's contribution to the field of intimacy studies, I will focus on an early work, *Consuming Romantic Utopia* (Illouz, 1997). Her overarching argument, which she bases on classical sociological thinkers (Weber and Durkheim first among them), is that intimacy has been rationalized in the West, and that the experience has emerged as a central normative model for our relations. However, she also argues that the exact mechanics and effects of that rationalization are complex

and varied, and need to be investigated empirically. Thus, she does not limit her research to families or private lives but understands the rationalization of intimacy to impact a broad range of social relations.

In *Consuming Romantic Utopia*, Illouz takes on the intimate[33] practices of the American working and middle classes. Basing the study on detailed analysis of interviews, she also makes extensive use of historical material to outline the genealogy of her findings.

One of Illouz' main concerns is to understand the relation between the romantic experience and its imagery. As she notes, Americans (and Europeans) have been and remain drenched in romantic imagery. In this flood of images, people try to enact intimate relations. What then are the connections between images, organising, and experience?

Illouz starts her book *Consuming Romantic Utopia* by analysing romantic imagery in historical American advertisement. One thing that stands out for her in these images is how intimacy began to be connected to specific form of consumption from the 1920s onwards. In these images, American young couples go to the cinema, the restaurant, buy each other expensive presents, drink wine, or travel together. Illouz contrasts these scenes of consumption with earlier advertisements, in which conspicuously married couples used products in a domestic setting.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Illouz (along with several other social scientists and historians) sees intimacy being increasingly associated with the adventures of dating. This new development was far from being without its critics. Dating, it was said, was synonymous with situational or momentary excitement and adventure; how could that ephemeral source of romantic affections ever serve as the basis of lasting marriage?

Making much the same point as writers like Schutz and Mjöberg make about the distinction between intimacy and relationships, Illouz argues that this controversy over dating found its basis in the fact that "dating and marriage are phenomenologically different" (Illouz, 1997). Having a relationship is different from having an intimate moment. Illouz is able to supply us with the historical background to how these two different phenomena have intermingled and clashed historically. Furthermore, she shows that the difference was not merely one of academic interest

---

[33] Illouz is one of the authors that could be used to illustrate Jessica Mjöberg's point about intimacy research not defining or outlining its primary concept, intimacy. It is in her book *Cold Intimacies* from 2007 (which is based on a series of lectures) that intimacy starts to emerge as the overarching theme for her studies. In *Consuming Romantic Utopia*, the central concept was romance and the word intimacy was (in a problematic way) reserved for long-term relationships and historical Victorian ideals of life-long commitments. I will disregard these conceptual developments in Illouz and use intimacy as I have defined it above. Though I think they overlap, I will not argue that romance and intimacy are synonyms. Rather, I think it is reasonable to say that by *romance*, Illouz refers to the intimate part of a cultural construct that also includes sexuality and relationality. Romance then is an intimate experience and construct, but a specific intimate experience that belongs to a larger construct and is not compatible with, for example, friendship. For the sake of clarity and in order not to introduce another concept (romance) into the theoretical setup of the dissertation, I will substitute the word romance for intimacy where applicable where I discuss Illouz's contribution.

(although sociologists were early commentators on the problem [Bailey, 1988]). The increasing demand on marriages to supply not merely economic and emotional security, but adventure and spontaneity as well, was widely debated and indeed led many to postpone marriage or demand divorce because their marriages lacked novelty and excitement. In response, some argued that if situational experiences were what kept relationships together, perhaps marriage practices needed to change to accommodate the new relationship styles. This is the point at which a new experience-based market niche came to have an important function.

Like Giddens, Illouz argues that when intimacy becomes a central part of relationships, it provides people with a plateau from which to reflect on and evaluate their relationships. Unlike Giddens, however, she does not argue that this development leads to the development of pure relationships, that is, that relations were sustained on individual choice only. Again, her arguments are historically based and show how the increasing importance and commercialisation of intimacy led to complex and varied outcomes.

Illouz argues that as the interwar period was a time when the hot, passionate moments of dating were most frequently contrasted with the cool and slow-moving married life, it was also the time when the market started to supply both married and dating couples with intimate experiences. These were the early days of the service and experience sector in the economy, which has since grown exponentially. It is in the context of this emerging experience economy that we need to place the commercial imagery of the 1920s, according to Illouz.

To summarise, Illouz argues that the dating practices emerging in the early 20th century were taken up in commercial advertising. In turn, these advertisements added consumption to the practices through their imagery of dating. In addition, dating was an important element in the emerging experience market, which among other things offered itself as a solution to the lack of entertainment and excitement in family life. The emergence of that market indicated that businesses had developed techniques for organising intimate experiences.

These techniques for organising intimacy developed out of the peculiar position afforded to intimacy during the Victorian era and the new meaning of that position crystallising under modernism. Illouz follows a Durkheimian line of argument, suggesting that intimacy took over some of the functions that religion had for the Victorians. Intimacy had the shimmer of holiness around it for the romantics. While this "holiness" remained in place throughout the 19th century, this holiness itself was rearticulated as a temporary experience without further, life-changing implications. Illouz takes this holiness as a clue to the techniques of experience, which she then goes on to uncover.

Liminality and the experience economy

Émile Durkheim argued that the core characteristic of religion was the division between the sacred and the profane (Durkheim, 1995, p. 34). According to Illouz, the sanctification of romance had already happened in Victorian times, but took on different characteristics in the modern era. Emotions of intense attraction led both

literary and real Victorians to conclusions of life-changing proportions. In contrast, dating and the marketisation of romance, in tandem with psychoanalysis' suspicion of elevated notions of love, led 20th-century Americans to enjoy their romantic afflictions as temporary and situational experiences. But even though the implications were different for moderns than for Victorians, intimacy still held something of a sacred, though temporary, quality for these men and women. It might be suggested that romance became what, for example, foreign cultural religious services might be for the modern Western tourist: emotional experience that provides a contrast to the everyday non-exotic life in the West (which in the process may come to seem even duller). Importantly, such touristic sights do not lead to conversions or life changes, nor even to lasting interest in the subject-matter of foreign cultures, but is limited rather to a perplexing and seductive bite-sized consumable experience.

Durkheim wrote that the sacred is marked out as specific times and places (Durkheim, 1995). It has its place at the margins of society and outside of profane time. It is the time and place of, for example, festivals, vacation, or the forest grove outside a village.

Anthropologist Victor Turner coined the term liminality for these peripheral but sacred spaces and times (John, 2001). According to Turner, most societies have liminal rituals during which the order of everyday life is temporarily set aside. He argued that the liminal provided a site for social transition in traditional societies. If social order is defined as unchanging, transitions need to be enacted at the periphery. In many societies, the shift from childhood to adulthood, for example, brings important changes in an individual's social status and responsibility. Turner therefore argued that liminality was crucial for rites of passage in that it allowed the individual to shift from one role to the other without challenging social order. Such rites of passage could, for example, bring a group of young people to a specific cave or forest outside of the village where they underwent mind-expanding (e.g., excruciating or hallucinatory) experiences.

Turner argued that Western modern society also has liminal spaces and times.[34] Many social thinkers have picked up on this argument, among them Illouz (Illouz, 1997). Much like Illouz, I find the concept usable, but am not interested in investing liminality with transhistorical and structuralist implications. In other words, I am not making the structuralist argument that society is necessarily grounded on a division between necessity and change. I am, however, suggesting that such a division might be useful for organising certain situations and experiences. Liminality, to my mind, can be employed in research to point out how the construction of time and space plays into and informs practices and experiences.

---

[34] As Illouz points out, Turner makes a distinction between the liminal spaces of traditional societies and *liminoid* spaces of modern ones. As that distinction is not always picked up on in contemporary literature, I will take the liberty to neglect it here as well.

The temporal and spatial structure of liminality can be read as a way to organise an event. Different means are used to differentiate a place from everyday life. These means must, in other words, signal that explicit or implicit quotidian rules are temporarily suspended. Everyday rules or customs, which are said to hold people in place, are lifted. It matters little if there are actual everyday rules and customs that are being suspended; liminal spaces are simply organised as though there were.

The concept of liminality provides us with an understanding of how one kind of organisation of space/time is linked to experience (cf. Hetherington, 1996, 1998). In liminality, the present arrangement is contrasted with the repeated and circular time of everydayness. Consequently, people feel released from the rules and boundaries that they associate with everyday life. In liminality, everydayness is associated with constancy, with the grinding monotony of repetition. People wake up, make breakfast, go to work, and so on. The constancy of everydayness is connected to its rules. If we are constantly submitted to implicit or explicit rules about what we should and should not do, nothing will ever change. The present moment is obliterated by the demands of the past and future.

In contrast, the liminal space and time is arranged as being exempt from monotony. It is clearly marked off from everyday life. Instead of thinking of past and future, liminality entails a focus on the present as a source of change.

As discussed above, intimacy is the unique experience of the other. It necessarily brackets generalising notions of that other to instead respond to the immediate situation. Similarly, liminality implies the bracketing of past and future and acceptance of the now. Thus, is it not a coincident that some have described liminal settings as intimate, or even suggested that some kind of intimacy may be a core element of liminality itself (Pritchard & Morgan, 2006; Shields, 1990)? While I think it prudent to keep the concepts analytically separate, I note that liminality and intimacy share structural qualities on a phenomenological level.

Illouz argues that liminality became an effective tool in the hands of the experience market. Providing people with escapes from home, it took the form of mass-tourism, the packaging of nature as adventurous experience, and the entertainment industry. All of these venues, singles activities among them, were also sold as sites for intimacy. Illouz describes how intimate imagery shifted to depict couples in foreign countries (the Eiffel tower is the quintessential mark of liminal intimacy), in nature, and at such entertainment venues as the theatre or restaurants. Thus, the marketisation of intimacy did not only take the route of changed imagery. It also organised and sold access to sites of sacredness, places organised as distinct from everydayness and focused on the now.

IN CLOSING

This chapter has introduced concepts of personal life, relationality, and intimacy. I have shown that personal life is relational, intimacy situational, and that the growing importance of intimacy in relationships introduces relational ambiguity. I have argued that intimacy can be experienced, imagined, and organised, but that the connections between these three modes of intimacy should be investigated empiri-

cally. Eva Illouz is a writer who successfully combines these various elements in her research. She also shows the importance of space, demonstrating how liminality has been used to foster intimacy.

As I will show in the next four chapters, singles activities contain various types of relations between people. It is to make sense of this complex and varying set of relations that I have introduced the concepts of this chapter. They also allow me to map differences between the singles activities, and to show that specific relational types dominate at different activities, ultimately enabling different versions of singledom.

4. Singles Events: Negotiating Liminality

In this chapter, I present data relating to the singles cruise and the singles conference. As discussed in chapter 2, this chapter will focus on a number of instances where controversies over organising logics came to the fore. I identify liminality and speed dating as two such important organising logics, and it is around these and their spatio-temporal arrangements that I have looked for diverging experiences and practices.

LEAVE EVERYTHING BEHIND

As part of my research, I took part in two singles events arranged by Viktoria, an entrepreneur in the singles activity business. When I write about singles activities arranged by Viktoria, I call them singles *events* for the sake of brevity. The first event was a three days long "singles conference" at a hotel in a middle-sized Swedish city. The second event was a "singles cruise" of two days. Viktoria had rented parts of a large cruise ship where participants were invited to mingle, listen to lectures, speed date, take part in games, and so on. There were many similarities between how the conference and the cruise had been arranged, as well as differences. One difference was that the cruise happened on a boat where a lot of other unrelated festivities were taking place simultaneously. That allowed participants to wander to and fro between the singles-part of the cruise (for which they had paid extra) and the rest of the boat, or the regular cruise. As mentioned in chapter 2, I went by myself to the conference, but brought a second researcher with me to the cruise, Marit Eskel-Grönberg. Viktoria arranges singles conferences and cruises regularly – at least once a year.

As we boarded the cruise ship, Marit and I noticed a sign telling us to "put everyday life behind". It was a permanent installation that greeted all passengers on this particular boat line, and not merely the singles cruise passengers. Nevertheless, to us it clarified the nature of the site that had been chosen for the singles event. Cruise ships cut people off both physically and mentally from their everyday lives. The ships let passengers enter an alternative world with alternative social rules. They even leave Swedish national waters and so exit Swedish jurisdiction. It is a temporary reprieve from everyday life that frees people for alternative ways of being.

Similar arguments can be made for the singles conference. That conference centred on a hotel, more precisely a hall adjacent to the hotel lobby; a hall that could easily serve as dance floor, dinner saloon, and lecture hall. German culture theorist Siegfried Kracauer once reflected:

> In the hotel lobby […] [h]ere, in the space of unrelatedness, the change of environments does not leave purposive activity behind but brackets it for the sake of a freedom that can refer only to itself and therefore sinks into relaxation and indifference (Kracauer, 1995, p. 179).

A hotel is a place to live away from home. Unlike the home, which demands all kinds of involvement, the hotel only demands a monetary compensation from its inhabitants. It is an example of how commercialising access to a given space makes it both exclusive and liberating: While access is limited to paying participants, their right to the space does not hinge on complex and unarticulated human relations, but on a set price. The payment of that set price frees them from the social obligations that usually adhere to access to private homes or work places.

Liminality is a well-known trope in Western culture, and certain symbolic cues (pictures of the Eiffel tower or of sunny beaches) are probably enough to "put people in the mood". But liminality can also be seen as a spatial feature that creates distance and freedom from everyday relations. Eva Illouz has shown that romantic intimacy was liminally arranged throughout the 20th century. It has been associated with places such as boats, forests, restaurants, cinemas, and foreign cities. In 20th century romantic imagery, this liminality gave romantic intimacy a certain style associated with the extraordinary and quasi-sacred. Importantly, Illouz argues that the connection between intimacy and liminality is not simply arbitrary, but that they share an important phenomenological structure (Illouz, 1997, p. 144).

Liminality can be articulated in relational terms. Carol Smart argues that relations are always embedded in personal life. As a result, any new relationship will have to be negotiated within that complex web of pre-existing relations. I argue that liminality temporarily, and in relative terms, frees the individual from personal life – from his or her obligation to the web of life's relations.

But the freedom from personal life that liminality offers is always relative. As we were about to board the ship, Marit overheard a group of passengers on the regular cruise who had just realised that they were going on the same cruise as four hundred explicitly single persons. Some members of the group called their partners at home to assure them they were not going on the singles cruise. Supposedly, they feared that their partners would find out about the events some other way, perhaps through the media (journalists are eager to report from events like the singles cruise, although this particular cruise went unreported). The episode illustrates the complex position liminality can have in people's personal lives. Going on a cruise without your partner will allow you freedom from the restrains of your relationship. But that liminal freedom is always relative, as rumours of your activities, both true and false, can spread. Liminality involves secrecy, and secrecy may always look suspicious in a culture where couples are supposed to be open with each other.

It is difficult to imagine a spatial arrangement that would entirely free the individuals within it from their everyday personal relations. The advent of easy and cheap communications has probably made it more difficult to break away from personal life, since the everyday relations of personal life keep making themselves reminded through mobile phones, email, and so on.

I overheard participants talk of an event that had not gone according to plan. Viktoria had allowed a television crew access to film the singles and their activities. The singles, who had not been informed about the crew's presence, protested loudly. According to the narratives I heard, these singles had threatened to demand

their money back and go home; they ultimately forced the organiser to reconsider the television crew's presence.

Some activities during singles events required participants to give out their names to others. There were a few I talked to who refused to participate in these on the grounds that they wished to remain anonymous. Viktoria was often critical of singles that demanded anonymity. While she understood that singles have personal lives, children, parents, ex-spouses, and friends from whom they might wish to hide participation at events like the singles cruise, she was adamant that the singles events were occasions to "leave things behind". That motto had two layers of meaning.

On the one hand, "leave things behind" is a slogan for liminality. It prompts participants to temporarily forget their personal lives and become free-floating individuals. On the other hand, "leave things behind" can also be understood as a slogan for singledom lifestyle more generally. Singles who have lost spouses through death or divorce, were understood, not least by Viktoria (as I will discuss below) to "live in the past", to miss chances for future couple happiness because they are too bound up with lost arrangements. This was an attitude I heard repeatedly during my observations. The motto "leave things behind" in this context is not merely a call to *temporary* liminality; it is a call to live in a liminal way more generally.

The concept of liminality shows the intricate connections between space, understandings of singledom, relationality, and personal life. As I have shown, it is not merely a matter of analysing the singles events as liminal. The boundaries of liminal spaces are negotiated in details like media presence and giving out names. In turn, how those boundaries were understood and sustained was an important aspect of the construction of singledom during the singles events. Some singles refused to partake in any activities that might break the liminal boundaries and make their participation known to people at home. For other participants, and for Viktoria herself, the liminality of the singles events was instructive and even therapeutic; it was understood to show singles how to "leave things behind" in their lives more generally, and embrace a more liberated lifestyle that their personal lives and obligations threatened to make impossible.

CROWDS AND SPEED DATING LOGICS

In this section, I will develop the analysis of how liminality was arranged during the singles events. I will argue that crowds were used to foster an attitude of liminal intimacy. Importantly however, the crowds also made participants anonymous to each other, which undermined intimacy. I will furthermore demonstrate how the crowd became the scene for negotiation over heterosexuality.

As Marit and I boarded the ship, we were soon invited to a welcome ceremony for the singles cruise passengers. The roughly 400 participants had gathered in the ship's largest locale, which would serve as a large dance floor with adjoining pubs later that night. Everyone was served one free drink each and mingled for perhaps 20 minutes before Viktoria took centre-stage by addressing the gathering via microphone from what would later become the centre of a dance floor. She was

dressed in a yellow, rather conspicuous gown (which diverged in style from the clothes I remembered her wearing during our interviews). The audience showed some diffidence, and Viktoria asked everyone to come closer. One of Viktoria's employees, a younger and less extravagantly dressed woman named Lena, had joined her on the dance floor with a microphone of her own.

"Many of you are probably nervous," Viktoria started. "In fact, I hope you are nervous, perhaps excited. But we can ever only live in this moment, at this place. Isn't that right, Lena?" The last question was addressed at Viktoria's employee who, obviously nervous and unprepared, drew sympathetic laughter from the audience with an awkward "Precisely".

Viktoria was very keen throughout her events to stress the point about leaving the past behind and focusing on the present moment. I heard several participants reiterate that notion. As I argued in the previous section, I understand this slogan both to be part of organising liminality and a hint at Viktoria's understanding of singledom more generally.

Viktoria went on to present the speakers whose lectures the participants were invited to attend at leisure during the cruise. After this round of introductions, Viktoria left the microphone and stage to a man she presented as a professional actor. He would guide us through a sort of game or exercise. This game was often used to make actors feel more secure with each other before starting rehearsals, the actor explained. In my field notes I wrote:

> The game leader […] asks us to start out with an easy exercise. Everybody must walk around and say hello to everyone they encounter. Just "hello", no body contact. It's all about saying hello to as many as possible; "undemanding encounters" he calls them. […] Next, people should shake hands while saying hello. After this, the actor asks us to form lines. […] He tells us that many describe encounters as important. Unfortunately, encounters often mean that one person holds a monologue and the other person listens – and that doesn't add up to an encounter. The next exercise will change that. People are arranged so that they form two lines facing each other. Now, one person in each couple facing each other will tell the other what he or she looks forward to during the evening. Then they swap roles. […] The last element to be added to this exercise is hugs.

This series of events could to my mind be read as creation and handling of a crowd. As the participants gathered around the scene and focused on Viktoria, they started to form a crowd that then was ready to be directed in specific ways.

Going on a singles cruise means identifying as single together with all the other passengers. While some would perhaps find this situation awkward, many singles cruise participants found it exhilarating. Viktoria referred to it when explaining the "vibe" she perceived at singles events:

> Andreas: How would you explain that vibe?
>
> Viktoria: That everybody is on the same level [Sw. *är på samma nivå*].
>
> Andreas: But wouldn't it be the same if you went out to a pub one night?

> Viktoria: Oh no, at the pub there's a mix of people. You know, if you go out in Stockholm one night, you don't meet any people, they always sit in groups like that, they don't open up to you. I create activities that make people meet. Salsa courses, people have to touch. Or some kind of speed dating… [she goes on to enumerate some examples of recent activities she has helped to organise].

Viktoria argues that many people form exclusive groups when they go out. As a result, singles lacking social networks would need to make new acquaintances in order to feel included in given situations. Viktoria paints a picture where group formations are the spatial expression of obdurate social networks that may exclude non-members.

Obdurate social networks, like personal life more generally, branch out in time and space in ways that transcend a given situation. If I drink beers at the pub with friends, we form a spatial cluster that represents relations that were formed before we arrived at the pub. These are the kind of spatial formations Viktoria says we will encounter in Stockholm nightlife. More than merely groups of people, these situations contain what Erving Goffman called "tie-signs", that is, how people's "conduct while in each other's presence can contain evidence about their relationship" (Goffman, 1971, p. 195). Thus their group formations carry messages about their internal ties, which in turn can inform others about the appropriateness of seeking contact.

So what is the spatial formation that represents the opposite of obdurate social networks, that is, relations that do not transcend the specific situation? What would an *open* gathering of people look like? I would argue that the crowd is an example of such openness and lack of the obduracy of social relationships. A crowd is different from a group at a pub, in that the latter kind of group represents people's personal lives, their circle of friends and family. In contrast, a crowd represents the temporary erasure of such belongings. It is plastic and lacks strict boundaries. In particular, if people in a crowd move around to face different people all the time, and if the crowd is arranged to quickly include new participants, such crowds free participants from the relations of their personal lives. Therefore, such formations can be understood as part of liminal arrangements. Liminal spaces are defined by being shielded from everyday concerns. Involving people in crowds involve them in an amorphous constellation where everyday rules and relations lack relevancy.

The game described above, where participants are asked to hug, can be read as skilful management of a crowd. It is an instant when the crowd's liminality is connected to and used to organise intimacy. Any pre-existing groups (if there are any) are dissolved into the crowd, which in turn is not bound by any relations or rules from before. Instead, the crowd allows its rules to be dictated by the actor, who prescribes a level of direct intimacy that would not have been allowed outside of the game. This intimacy is set up liminally, in a situation of inclusion and forgetting of personal concerns. Asked to turn to each other, participants are prepared to encounter the other without personal prejudices.

There is a complication however. During the game, people are asked to tell others what they look forward to during the evening and then hug. But they have to do it in a series of one-to-one encounters, an arrangement that must involve repetition.

The game in other words encourages repetition, an element that does not exactly elicit unique situations or intimacy.

In a crowd, people tend to become anonymous. If encounters are experienced as repetitious, that means others will appear to be indistinct and non-individuated. Games like the one discussed here can support liminality, but may at the same time make others appear anonymous and thus non-intimate. While the encounters it produces can seem intimate from the outside, its repetitious nature can undermine the intimacy people inside the game may experience.

The game is a good example of a very common arrangement during the singles events I observed. Time and time again, participants were asked to "shift partners" and acquaint themselves with new people. This happened at speed dating, games, lunches and dinners, dances, and so on. As one of my informants put it, speed dating was not limited to the activities expressly presented as speed dating. Rather, the term could characterise the temporal-spatial arrangements during each event as a whole. More generally, the singles events were composed of encounters that were both liminal and repetitious, both supporting individuality and reducing others to anonymity. This section therefore concerns a spatial-temporal organisational logic for the singles events that could be called *speed dating logic*.

The evening after the game was an evening of speed dating. Formal speed dating is basically an arrangement of people, chairs, and tables that is regulated in time and is used to match people for further dating. When speed dating is heterosexual, it means that each woman is seated opposite a man and vice versa. The number of participating women thus must be equal to the number of participating men. The idea is that every couple gets a certain number of minutes in which to acquaint themselves with each other. Everyone should then decide whether they want to meet the other person again, and mark the decision down on a paper, without showing the other. Then everyone changes partners and repeats the exercise. When the whole event is over (usually after one or two hours), the papers on which people indicated their decisions are handed to the organisers. The papers are compared and the couples for which both parties wanted to meet again are noted down. Each person in a couple is then given contact information for the other person.

Speed dating, like the actor's game, involves crowd management as well as repetition. It can therefore be interpreted as supporting liminality, linking it to intimacy, and nevertheless undermining that intimacy through repetition and anonymity.

When I interviewed participants, I came to understand that what made people feel intimate was not the repeated self-presentations during the game or speed dating. Rather, intimacy resulted from recognition and deviation from prescribed rules. In other words, when participants recognised each other from before, or when something unexpected happened that made a moment unique (in a series of otherwise repeated self-presentations), it was these deviations that might constitute an intimate moment. What follows is an extract from my interview with a man and woman who had met during the cruise and who retell how they came to be attracted to each other:

Man: The first time we saw each other was at the welcome ceremony, with the drinks. I saw you when the crowd approached Viktoria, when she welcomed us. And you happened to stand next to me.

Woman: But I didn't see you.

Man: No, but I saw you, I looked at you from the corner of my eye and thought, "This woman attracts me, how she is, how she looks, what she radiates; I am happy when I see her". After that, I don't know when I saw you next…

Woman: Yes, it was during the game, when we were asked to hug.

Man: Right, precisely. We met there as well, though we didn't have much time to talk.

Woman: I think we talked and hugged twice at the game. […]

Man: We were a group of people that went from the buffet to the speed dating event. And you sat on one of the rows. So I said to myself, well, let's sit at that table so at least I have the chance to talk to her [the woman] again. I didn't know how many people would be coming, so I couldn't risk sitting at some other table and perhaps never getting to her.

Woman: [laughs] Admit that you waited for us to sit down first so that you would know where to sit!

Man: Well, I did.

Andreas: Aha! [laughs]

Man: You have to be able to plan [laughs], to see the opportunities. And well, then we talked and here perhaps you should fill in, because at that point you had started to feel something as well, I mean when we got opposite each other during the speed dating?

Woman: Yes, didn't it start with us writing down each other's mail addresses? Well, at that point I said, I don't need to write down anyone else's address, I'll just write yours. I joked with him, and then I said, I'll write YES over all the paper [laughs].

In their conversation, the woman and man attempt to establish when who "saw" whom. This notion of "seeing" is interesting. To have "seen" the other could be interpreted to mean having *recognised* him or her at a given point in time. It describes the experience of recognition. This in turn could be understood as the experience of having the other emerging out of anonymity and taking on an individuality that remains constant over disparate situations. Erving Goffman captures this very well when he writes that:

> …the readiness exhibited by two individuals to transform an incidental social encounter into the beginning of an anchored relationship can depend upon the memory each has of having seen the other before in a context that implies for each a relevant social identity for the other. And yet if the second contact does not occur, there may well never be an awareness on either side that the other is someone who has been seen (Goffman, 1971, p. 191).

As the interview with the couple shows, the intimate experience also seems to hinge on some resistance to repetition. One aspect is recognition of the other. Another aspect is breaching the rules of speed dating and thereby forgoing repetition. The couple showed each other what they wrote, and the woman had written a "yes"

across the entire sheet, something that certainly would not have been acceptable if speed dating rules had been followed strictly.

It is in this light that we might understand the couple as describing how their intimate moments sprang from their mutual individuation. I wish to emphasize that individuation is not the same as recognising the other as a person with a personal life (in the sense I have given for that concept in this dissertation). To become an individual, someone needs to be recognised from before rather than remain an unknown face in the crowd. That is not the same as recognising her or his embeddedness in a matrix of personal relations.

I have previously introduced three concepts for categorising how others appear to me in a given situation: anonymity, individuality, and personhood. Depending on which of these configurations people find others in, they will understand these others as differently embedded in time. Or in other words, anonymity, individuality, and personhood have different temporal figurations. As anonymous, I remain unrecognised from moment to moment, thus never transcending the specific situation. As an individual, I am recognised (or will be recognised next time), which means my identity "survives" the present. As a person, something of my independent and specific past and future is known and recognised as such in the present situation.

With these three concepts and their temporal-spatial configurations clarified, I can further my analysis of the couple's discussion. The singles events had a liminal spatial structure, so individuals were relatively isolated from their personal lives. Liminality therefore presents others as individuals to me: they appear in my presence without a past and future in which I can understand them to be embedded. However, some of the means by which the events arranged this liminality and linked it to intimacy, such as the use of the crowd in speed dating-like activities, risked others' individuality and made them anonymous: as members of the crowd, many become unrecognisable to others from one moment to the next. Participants therefore used strategies to individuate themselves for others and create unique moments, thus making intimacy possible despite the repetitious situations in which they were asked to participate.

My analysis is that, crudely put, following rules during the singles events could create an image of intimacy, but not an intimate experience. To create an intimate experience, people had to individuate themselves and break the rules. One could speculate that this allowed people who did not want intimate encounters with a particular person to "save face" by following the rules, giving all the external signs of intimacy, but remaining experientially neutral.

There is a further dimension to the arranged encounters and their meaning. As argued, repetition made intimate experience less likely during the singles event activities. But that did not stop the arranged encounters from being symbols for intimate tête-à-têtes. Encounters need not be experienced as intimate for them to be understood as intimate. As such, they became objects of the controversy over the heterosexual nature of intimacy.

Let me return to my observations. During the game, hugs had been arranged without consideration of gender, meaning that everyone talked to and hugged somebody of the same sex approximately half of the time. Afterwards, some participants started to debate whether it had been appropriate to mix men and women together as had been done. I would argue that the encounters became an object over which the participants negotiated the nature of their (potential or actual) intimacy. The questions they asked were: whether intimacy is always geared towards (heterosexual) relationships; whether it has value in and of itself; and if it can be used to forge friendships. In the following extract from my interview with the couple during the singles cruise, the man ventilates his critique of the game:

> Man: You know, there wasn't one line for women and one line for men. It was all mixed together, so suddenly I stood there talking to a man and we had to hug. Okay, in one sense there was nothing wrong with that, though it doesn't appeal to me much. Then somebody said: "I won't hug this guy, we'll shake hands instead."

> Andreas: Yeah, I see. But I imagine it's very complicated to get an arrangement that works for everybody…

> Man: Well, it was fun, it got people going and I guess that was the purpose.

> Woman: Exactly, people laughed, everyone became a bit more easy-going.

I would interpret this excerpt as two different framings of intimacy. The man starts off by suggesting that the game should have been heterosexually organised, with one line for women and one for men. He also mentions how one man renegotiated the game in a heterosexual direction by shaking hands with other men (and presumably hugging women).

Next, however, he reinterprets the situation and argues that it was more about having fun and loosening up. For that purpose, hugs between men may even have been desirable, as it "got people going". I would suggest these same-sex hugs opened up the game for multiple interpretations. Writers like Beth Bailey and Eva Illouz argue that all intimate encounters are fraught with multiple cultural meanings, which make them ambiguous (Bailey, 1988; Illouz, 1997). The game shows how arrangements surrounding these encounters can increase or decrease their ambiguity. By hugging women and shaking hands with other men, some men practiced the hugs as unambiguously heterosexual. Other men continued to hug, thus apparently doing it "for fun".

The game and speed dating logics more generally show the centrality of intimate encounters both as sites of experience and as meaningful symbols during the events. It was in such encounters that participants were meant to meet as individuals, released from personal lives. But it was also here that the ambiguity of the events could be negotiated and regulated. Was intimacy organised as a form of heterosexual courtship only, or as a way to foster community among singles, for example? Each alternative required a different arrangement, or different integrative practices, to use Theodore Schatzski's concept (Schatzski, 1996). Not least, they entailed gender to be allocated differently in space, as I will discuss further below.

Seen as an organisational logic, speed dating is focused on the repetitious image of intimacy rather than on actual intimate experience. Viktoria was keen to emphasise that her speed dating activities were rather loosely regulated. She wanted them to proceed "spontaneously". Marit and I were witnesses to one speed dating event on the boat, and could confirm that Viktoria did bend rules. People came and went at will; they addressed the crowd instead of their temporary partner, and quarrelled openly. Viktoria's employees ran back and forth, complaining to us observers backstage that "arranging speed dating is a dirty job". I would interpret this loosely controlled event to be an organisational adaption to people's desire to have intimate experiences, that is, to get (relatively) unique impressions of the other beyond repeated presentations.

In this playful, liminal individualism, we should also recognise a non-relationality. This speed dating logic is an answer to the how and what of not being engaged in a relationship. It repeatedly shifts partners, and never takes an encounter too seriously, thereby enacting non-relations to others. It is easy to see how this logic might contain hetero-doxical potential, taking enjoyment from intimate but non-binding encounters. It is also easy to see how it might reproduce heteronormativity, if the intensity of each intimate encounter is interpreted as a measure of the level of closeness one might have with the other *if* one became a couple.

In the next section, I will discuss an important facet of intimacy and liminality, namely the relative ubiquity of gender and class differences. Such differences finding their way into the events, despite organisers' efforts to the contrary, raised questions central to the nature of singledom.

DOWNPLAYING DIFFERENCE

If we understand liminality to separate people from their everyday lives, it also makes sense to say it allows them to put their ordinary social positions and roles to one side. Liminality should therefore either involve a degree of equality, or make social distinctions unobtrusive.

Sociological studies tend to find that while people sometimes downplay the importance of differences like gender and social class as social determinants (much like people often deny the influence of social factors generally, e.g., to emphasize their individuality), such social differentiations are important for understanding how social life is organised (cf. Bauman, 2001). In the case of the singles events, I would argue that the downplaying or undoing of gender and class was central to the arrangement of the events as liminal. As such, that notion also became an object of resistance, as some participants openly argued that class and gender instead should be central to understanding singles activities generally.

At the singles conference dinners, men and women would be matched together randomly, each couple sitting opposite each other at the tables. This arrangement could be read as a typical way of emphasizing peoples' genders and their hetero-sexuality. At the same time, and paradoxically, it also counteracted the homosocial tendency that sometimes emerges when the men converse with men and women with women. I was reminded of how at my school, our teachers would sometimes

place a girl at an all-boys' table to dampen boyish high spirits. During the dinners and other mixed-gender activities, pronounced male and female antics were absent. To be sure, men dressed differently from women. But few tended towards the typically masculine or typically female in their behaviour (or gave me occasion to interpret them as such, at any rate).

I suppose that what I am trying to describe is the absence of any masculine or feminine clichés. I did hear some people emphasise how important it was to avoid trite, exaggerated, or implausible gender stereotypes at singles events. However, perhaps philosopher and queer theorist Judith Butler is right to suggest that gender is always already repeated clichés, and that what needs explaining is not how gender becomes trite but how it can so often appear authentic (Butler, 1999). From that perspective, the genderlessness that I try to describe here should be interpreted as the successful performance of gender, making it seem part of peoples' authentic selves and thus invisible.

Viktoria applies one rule very strictly to her singles events: the number of men and women must be equal. To that end, she keeps rigorous lists over who registered for a event first, saying no to those of a particular gender (usually women) that is in excess of the number of registered participants of the other sex (usually men). This rule explains why men and women could be so evenly matched at dinners.

Keeping count of gender could be said to reduce people to their sex. At the same time, being a number on a list is a very empty sex to be reduced to. I would argue that talking about gender in those numerical terms also signals a certain way of being man and woman.

Beth Bailey argues that the number of ways in which an encounter between men and women can be understood has grown in modern society (Bailey, 1988). People therefore must negotiate what logic pervades their encounter and whether they are, for example, being intimate, measuring each other up, befriending, or playing the game of seduction. In this negotiation, various gender performances are important cues, as each organisational logic presupposes a certain way of being male and female (e.g., "melting" into each other, the seducer and the seduced, or the friends-despite-being-different-genders).

Illouz argues that intimacy is connected to genderlessness. She describes how gender difference was downplayed in American advertising from the 1920s onward (Illouz, 1997). Before the 1920s, advertisements often featured married couples engaged in very gendered practices (e.g., the woman cleaning, the man reading a newspaper). As dating culture was taken on by the market and incorporated into its imagery, couples were no longer visibly married and were never seen at home. Instead, they were mostly seen engaged in the same, ungendered activities.

To this historical (although American-centred) explanation, I would add a phenomenological one. If intimacy is about unique impressions of the other, then using well-rehearsed gender roles will potentially undermine an intimate experience. That would be a reason why intimacy is so closely associated with making gender invisible and an antipathy towards gender clichés. But as my reference to Butler

helps explain, downplaying gender is also a specific form of gender performance, namely one that goes unnoticed as such. One should recognise the difficulties some people might have in living up to these complex gender norms. By centring on the uniqueness of the situation and the bracketing of everyday life respectively, organising intimacy and liminality might therefore inadvertently raise these gender norms up as prerequisites and in the process uphold heteronormative ideals.

At the same time, reducing gender to a number also allows people to play. A degree of anonymity might allow a degree of spontaneity. For example, if I am represented by a number on a list or a shoe in a barrel, I can be randomly matched or picked out. Before a dinner at the singles conference, for example, each woman had to place a shoe in a barrel, from which the men then randomly drew a partner for the evening. These and other technologies (in the broad sense) were employed to sustain the speed dating logic of the events. And people enjoyed themselves. There is a certain excitement and pleasure in not knowing with whom you will socialise next. These games also play and have fun with heterosexuality. One might call this play hetero-doxical, although it also on another level helps to sustain normative gender models.

Let me present a number of scenes relating to the issue of class. One image that remains with me from my observations is of a man sitting on his imposing black motorcycle just after the end of the singles conference. I had talked to him on several occasions during the conference, and he had always been dressed in an inconspicuous suit, making his appearance more or less indistinguishable from most other men (although I am sure that a sociologist with a better eye for spotting fashionable clothing would have been able to point out the less expensive and the more expensive suits among the participants). Now seeing him on his bike however, dressed in a black leather overall with somewhat clichéd emblems (of skeletons and roses), I realized to what an extent wearing a suit must have felt like a charade to him, even though going in his motorbike attire might have made him even more uncomfortable. It showed me how much inconspicuous clothing had been part of downplaying class at the conference.

Scene number two: some of the women I talked to at the singles conference complained that many participating men were a bit low-brow.[35] Viktoria herself admitted that many men coming to her events found the women there "out of reach" in terms of social status and education. She had worked hard to advertise her events in places where men of higher status would notice, like engineering and hunting journals. Overall though, she thought that the price of her events ensures that only "certain kinds" of people come. The cost for going on the singles cruise or the singles conference, the two kinds of events I observed, could add up to several hundred euros.

---

[35] The Swedish word used was *bönder*, that is, "farmers". That word should be read in light of the longstanding differences between urban and rural parts of Sweden. I would argue, with some hesitation, that "farmer" when used in a derogatory way to describe somebody in Swedish, does not necessarily say something about that person's home address, but more about his (or possibly her) level of culture, class, and status.

Scene three: a couple interviewed during the singles conference argued that the singles events should be able to attract much larger audiences than they currently did. There are so many single people in Sweden, this couple said, and so few show up when someone like Viktoria finally arrange activities for them. The whole hotel should be packed with people. This man and woman were convinced that the main reason single people stayed home was because they were afraid to meet up with others. They adamantly rebuffed my suggestion that some people lacked the funds. By choosing a less expensive hotel, the couple had themselves been able to reduce their costs to around 150 euros each. Food, entertainment, lectures, courses, and living (they excluded the cost for traveling to and from the conference) were included. All in all, they concluded, one has to compare those expenses to the fact that a visit to McDonalds might cost around 10 euros.

In these three scenes – the motorcyclist, Viktoria's advertisement and fee strategies, and the argumentative couple – we have three different understandings of class: first, a somewhat laboured enactment of classlessness; second, a frank affirmation of the importance of class; and lastly, a straightforward denial of class. Is there a way to join these stories into an overall account of the (un)importance of class during the events?

I believe there is. My suggestion rests on two analytic moves. First, I think we should acknowledge that there are two rather distinct strategies for achieving the appearance of classlessness. One strategy is to hide actual differences. That could be accomplished by having the same kind of clothing and prescribing the same activities for everyone. It could also be accomplished by talking about people as though there were no class difference. A second strategy, however, involves reducing actual class difference between participants by advertising in certain places, asking for a fee that only certain strata can afford, and so on. Of course, this last strategy would necessitate talking openly about class, which could seem counter to the first strategy. However, if only mentioning class as part of *arranging* the events *beforehand*, but not as part of the events themselves, then the semblance of classlessness could be sustained.

However, a second analytical move is necessary. That people did not talk about class during the events is, strictly speaking, not true. I mentioned the women above, who were very frank about wanting men with the same level of education and culture. They were not alone in voicing preferences based on social status and class. The analytical move I am suggesting is based on the distinction between intimacy and relationality.

Intimacy, as Illouz argues, has historically been associated with classlessness. This association may be connected to modern courtship practices emerging together with the mainstreaming of democratic national cultures in countries like Sweden and America. Historically, singles activities varied between the classes, whereas modern varieties were supposed to be held in common within a nation.

But intimacy during the singles events sometimes led to relationships. We arrive at an important point about the events as a whole. While liminal, these events could also affect personal life in radical ways, when people found new friends or part-

ners. As liminal intimacy thus could affect personal life, personal considerations had to be taken into account during the events.

This is how I would understand why some women in particular openly ventilated their disappointment with the men's social status. They took on a personal or relational logic when scrutinising their encounters, reflecting on how well or badly certain men would fit their lives. Whether encounters during singles events are enacted or understood as liminally individualistic or relationally personal thus involved issues of social class.

We have identified two ways in which encounters were organised and understood during the singles events, both invested with class-related meaning. One of the organisational logics defended liminality and intimacy and understood encounters as a chance to look beyond class. The other challenged the notion of classlessness and involved looking for people to fit personal lives. The first one was an intimate individuating logic, the second a logic involving a more personal outlook.

As I have argued, Viktoria arranged the singles events as liminal, and fostered an intimate approach to encounters. In my interview with her, Viktoria made her position on the two organisational logics (personal and intimate) clear:

> Andreas: Let me test a theory on you that I have thought about. Do you think that single people today have become more conscious about what they want in another person?
>
> Viktoria: They think they have, but for Christ's sake, love is not about that. Love is still about sudden emotions [Sw. *kärlek är fortfarande att det ska tända till*]. Today, there's some sort of awful classification system going on, like "he shouldn't have children", "he shouldn't…" You know, I talked to a woman who said: "Isn't it strange", she said, "I date so many men and when I sit there and tell them I have a large house, that I travel the world and have a lot of money – they never call back!" Well of course, I thought to myself. You're just sitting there talking about yourself! But really, people have these lists of criteria. And no one will ever fit! And often they don't see their own faults – it's really annoying. They've become so egotistical.

This quote illustrates how class and gender plays into the argument about singles event encounters being liminal or not. Viktoria argues that women should leave their personal lives behind. Only by abandoning oneself to the moment and the other person, can there be the "sudden emotions" required to love another. She defends intimacy over and against what she perceives as a contemporary tendency to make lists of what you want in another person.

Viktoria arranges her events as liminal. That involves downplaying gender and class during the events (although Viktoria herself takes those categories into consideration when she, for example, advertises in ways that attract certain classes). But that spatial strategy invokes resistance. People want to consider others from the perspective of their personal lives. Therefore, they abandon liminal classlessness and speak directly of their class-related preferences.

INTIMACY AS THERAPY: LIBERATING THE CALCULATING MIND

One of the characteristics of the singles events was their therapeutic streak. A lecture about couple competence during the singles cruise may be the most striking example of these therapeutic intentions. Importantly, this tendency spoke directly to the issues of intimacy, non-relationality, and singledom. I attended the lecture together with what must have been a majority of the singles cruise passengers; let me give a short résumé.

The lecturers were a couple, Bjarne and Lisa. They gave a very structured talk of about an hour and a half, during which they presented us with a couple of models mainly based on Attachment Theory, or AT. AT is an academic theory used mainly in psychology to understand child-parent interaction and romantic love (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Illouz, 2007). It borrows several features from psychoanalysis and assumes that relational patterns from childhood usually repeat themselves in people's romantic affairs. Like psychoanalysis, AT has been the basis for many pop-psychological self-help books. In what follows, I will treat Bjarne and Lisa's version of AT as a first-order theory, or a theory "from the field": It will be analysed as data, rather than treated as scientific theory.

Bjarne and Lisa drew a step-based model according to which, they argued, relationships are usually formed. At the peak of this model, we have an attachment to someone, involving mutual obligations and trust. At its base, we lack attachments. Most singles are found at the base of the pyramid. On our way to the top of the model, we start to date, fall in love, and meet regularly, after which we have reached the "top" and have a fully-fledged relationship, usually involving cohabitation.

The lecturers were very clear about the step-based model being a model; few relationships follow a straight line to the top of the attachment-ladder and then stay there. Importantly though, each step of the model has its own specific "trap" that can keep certain people stuck so that they never reach higher levels. At its base where we lack attachments, we can develop the habit of avoiding social contacts. But the behaviour patterns we have inherited from childhood have no sway over us at this stage, as we lack the relationships in which they could play themselves out. The influence of these patterns becomes most prevalent when we start dating and going out regularly. Once a loving, long-term relationship is formed, the patterns again lose their influence on our behaviour.

While some people in the audience questioned whether one can rationalise and make a science of relationships, no one questioned the basic assumption behind the lecture: Singles need to learn how to attach to others. In contrast, my colleague Marit, who also attended the lecture, was quite upset when romantic love became a central theme on a cruise for *singles*. She had thought that Bjarne and Lisa would teach how to live single lives. But when Marit ventilated her qualms with some of the other attendants after the lecture, she was met with incomprehension. For other passengers, it was an unproblematic assumption that singles needed a lecture on how to attach.

As a non-relationality, the lecture presented an inward-looking understanding of the how and what of not being engaged in a relationship. To not have a monogamous attachment is not merely a fact of life, but might signify a certain psychological resistance. While this theory does not purport to speak about all singles, it nevertheless gives new significance to not having a relationship.

Research on the media and on social attitudes usually identifies two common stereotypes of singles (Cargan, 1981; Kaufmann, 2008). The first stereotype centres on a person whose sexual or emotional appetites or habits lead him or her to rationally abstain from monogamy as impracticable. The second stereotype is of the sad loner who wants, but remains unable to form stable relationships. These images are far from new. French historian Jean-Claude Bologne looks at European culture's understanding of singledom historically and writes that

> …singles are understood as those who do not want to or cannot marry. Someone uncivil or weak-willed. [… The people who did not marry before a certain age] could not be anything but either leftover (inexperienced, timid, inhibited, spinster…) or perverse (don Juan or Messaline, closeted or openly homosexual…) (Bologne, 2004, p. 9 my translation).

Similarly, sociologist Jean-Claude Kaufmann, who writes about single women, discusses how 19th century single women had to dress and behave to avoid being taken for prostitutes or sad spinsters (Kaufmann, 2008). In a modern setting, Kaufmann argues, suspicions of prostitution have been replaced by images of autonomous, self-determined women who reject marriage for the sake of independence.

Interestingly, it is difficult to formulate the mentioned stereotypes without gendering them. The libertine, the spinster, the sorry loner, the courtesan and the prostitute are all associated with gender-typical behaviour. At the same time, each male version has its female counterpart. Thus, paradoxically, one and the same behaviour can be used to describe something "inherently" female and male. As we go on, I will argue that this flexible gendering makes the stereotypes particularly useful for seemingly making sense of single behaviour.

While the two singledom stereotypes vary, they seem to coincide on one point: the notion that singles have some inbuilt resistance to attachments. This concept, that singles lack and are unwilling or unable to form attachments, is approximately the notion that Bjarne and Lisa reproduced in their lecture.

My analysis of Bjarne and Lisa should not be read as a criticism of their particular therapeutic model. My comments say nothing of its therapeutic value (cf. Illouz's reasoning on internal critique in Illouz, 2007). My point is rather to say that their model works as a map to one particular imagery about singledom, intimacy, and relationships. It is an imagery I found expressed rather frequently in my data. But that imagery, although treated as real by many, is also based on historically traceable stereotypes.

Viktoria, who organized the singles events, used this imagery quite extensively to reflect on her activities. What follows is a long extract from an interview I had with

her, in which she uses the singledom stereotypes to make points about the thera-peutic value of liminality and intimacy.

> Viktoria: A woman called about the upcoming singles conference. I've had problems finding enough men, so she wanted to know if it'll be cancelled. Everyone's saying the same thing: The men are lazy, they just sit there. It's almost like in the cartoons, right? […] Men, they don't want to come, they're like the roosters, wanting the hunt and well, probably there's something old and deeply rooted there.

> [We talk a bit about men "hunting" women. I mention Neil Strauss' book *The Game*, which Viktoria has never heard of. It is a book about a community of so-called male pick-up artists, who have made "the game" into a lifestyle and quasi-scientific philos-ophy.]

> Andreas: So what patterns do you observe in how singles act?

> Viktoria: I never observe any patterns, because it's so natural, it all becomes simple. For example, you could end up with some gentleman at the dinner table and it may take off from there, if you're lucky. You know, some start flirting just after the dinner. And you know, it doesn't matter if it's just for the weekend or forever or whatever, but when you get close from the start this whole "hunt" thing is peeled away – that's what happens when there's just single people gathered.

> [We start discussing how singles are discriminated against in society.]

> Andreas: But don't you think that some people *choose* to live alone?

> Viktoria: Yes, especially if they have had a long relationship previously. [Then they choose to live alone] until they've matured again and returned to being themselves. Because you'll be imprinted [with habits] when you live with somebody. Well, I speak from experience. When a relationship ends, you should probably begin by getting a more mature look at who you are, your real self, and then go back to being and re-specting yourself, feeling good about yourself. It's when you've reached that goal, ac-cepting yourself as an individual, that you open up to others. I think that's very funda-mental, really. If you have a stable sense of self, a respect for who you are, then you don't accept everything from others, you don't get beaten. Don't you think?

> Andreas: Oh, I really couldn't say, but it could be true.

> Viktoria: I don't believe in hunting for love, that's when things go wrong, when you end up in a fantasy world. But I do think it's incredibly important – now I'm saying this again [laughs] – that you socialize with people. Because if you just sit there, well [ironically] somebody *could* of course come knocking on your door; no, you need to get social skills; if you sit at home those skills dissipate and you become scared.

> Andreas: But don't you think people come to your singles events to find somebody? I mean you say they shouldn't actively search for…

> Viktoria: Oh, of course you want to meet somebody, deep down you do. But you can go there [to a singles event] to have a nice time and meet other women, you know woman to woman, for a lot of people that's the first step into social life. Being able to feel closer to other people than when going out dancing and just standing there in a corner. This thing provides you with community.

> Andreas: That's interesting, that gives the word *single* something of a new meaning; it's not just about looking for somebody, but having a common experience with others somehow.

Viktoria: That's exactly right. When I open my conferences and welcome everybody, I always try to tell them not to speak about all their miseries, to drop those and throw themselves in [name of local lake].[36] So be here and now, think ahead [instead of the past] and then enjoy each other, learn to know each other as you really are. Don't judge people on their appearance, I also tell them, but wait till people smile, because that always gets things going. If you just sit down with people and talk, converse, almost everything [they say] becomes interesting. Well, if they're not boasting and going on about themselves of course, that's something else. But human to human.

The reason why I have cited this passage from my interviews with Viktoria at length is that it shows her negotiating the basis for her reasoning around her events, namely a certain understanding of singledom, intimacy, and relationality. She is very critical of the hunting metaphor, which she associates with male behaviour. This is not the only practice she genders, however. Like "hunting", she understands Internet dating to trap people in a fantasy world where they never meet real people. According to her, male singles in particular have a tendency to get stuck behind a computer and "the four walls" of their own apartments.

The "hunting" metaphor, like Internet dating, fosters a calculating mind-set according to Viktoria. With calculation, I refer to the attitude of planning for the future based on present preferences. Viktoria could be read to argue that such a calculating attitude contrasts with intimacy. Calculation means to focus on rules and predictions, whereas intimacy is focused on the unique. She wants the participants to focus on each other "as human beings" – and thereby she describes what I interpret to be the basic phenomenological structure of intimacy.

Viktoria's rejection of "the hunting" as well as the apparently lonely life of the Internet dater could be read as implicitly using the singledom stereotypes discussed above. The libertine goes on a hunt, which takes him further away from the attachments he therefore implicitly rejects. Internet dating and the fantasies of relationships work as a parable for the sorry loner, whose relationships always turn out to be castles in the air.

As I discussed above, these stereotypes are particularly useful because of their simultaneously flexible and determinate gendering. Viktoria can use them to say something meaningful about male behaviour in general. Then she implicitly shifts their meaning to refer to single people generally. At the end of the long quotation, I would interpret her to use the stereotypes as an argument for the therapeutic value of intimacy for all singles regardless of gender.

Illouz argues that popular culture in the West has picked up a therapeutic model for intimacy and romance from psychoanalysis (Illouz, 2007). But she also usefully shows that the resulting self-help literature has shifted responsibility away from the psychotherapist to the individual. This therapy involves self-knowledge, not least by reflecting on one's childhood. I would argue that the same basic model of inti-

---

[36] To "throw oneself into [name of local lake]" is to my knowledge not a standard Swedish expression, but it could be a local one. I think, however, that the meaning is quite intuitive, especially in the context given here. It is analogous to the expression "throwing oneself into the thick of things".

mate therapy is found in Viktoria's singles events. Here, individuals are also made to take on the responsibility of becoming more intimate. As a man told me during the singles conference:

> I've a lot of the loner in me. I've been away working a lot in my life and then you lose a lot of contact, and now it's difficult to get back into society, everyone's got their [families], right? But I think that if you just do something about it yourself and try to make the situation better, it's possible to change things. I really do. Yes.

To return to the longer passage from the interview with Viktoria above, Viktoria understands intimate encounters as therapeutic; they offer singles a model for how to relate to others. Viktoria does *not* make a clear distinction between friendship and relationships in this therapeutic setting. For her, friendships can be as intimate and as important for an individual's therapy as relationships.

By framing her events as models for behaviour, Viktoria divorces the question of their benefit from what participants actually experience. Participants need not *experience* intimacy to become more social by participating in her activities. From that therapeutic perspective, the repetitious nature of the encounters may even have a pedagogic function.

As shown in a previous section, Viktoria understood the detached individual as a model for singles; she wanted singles to "leave the past behind". I took this to mean that singles should bracket past relationships and ways of living, and live more liminally and less "trapped" in present personal life. I would interpret this as a directive to downplay the importance of personal considerations for relational decisions. In this section, I have shown that Viktoria rejects attitudes that she associates with calculation. Underlying her rejection of relational considerations is an image of singles as too bound up with the matrix of relations that embeds them in the past. When she criticises the calculating mind-set, she conjures an image of singles as having difficulty establishing their personal lives more broadly.

The images of singles as either too attached to the past, or with no attachments at all, play important roles in the arrangement of Viktoria's singles events. These images also figure in the Attachment Theory models. Not least, they underpin the arranger's understanding of liminality at the events and the arrangement of intimate encounters.

MEN WHO LOOK AT WOMEN AND A TALE OF TWO BOATS

Viktoria could be understood to argue that intimacy works as a therapy against a certain calculating mind-set. According to her, that mind-set leads singles into further isolation. Intimacy is a basic ability that singles in some way have had diminished and therefore need to (re)learn.

Viktoria also genders this calculating mind-set, arguing that it is men who usually possess it. In this section, I will argue that the calculating mind-set can be connected to a sexual organising of situations. I will also show how some men actually used a sexual organising logic during the events, and thus challenged the liminal organising of intimacy.

As part of the conference, all participants were invited on a "surprise bus trip". As it happened, the bus stopped at two art galleries and a wind turbine. At each stop, a guide enthusiastically lectured us about art or the mechanics of wind turbines.

At first, the stops of this surprise trip perplexed me. I was unable to place it in the context of the singles events. Whatever has singledom to do with wind turbines?

As it happened though, a conversation between two male participants began to make things clearer for me. This conversation took place at the last stop, which was an art exhibit. I listened to and eventually joined the two men debating whether to appreciate the bus trip or not. One of the men was disappointed. He had difficulty understanding or relating to the art. Besides, and perhaps more importantly, none of the female participants attracted him.

The response to these two objections, which came from the other man, gave me the first clues to what the surprise trip was all about. This man argued that nothing should be predicted by our likes or dislikes. If you are open to what happens in the present, it can lead you to places that are not available to your current imagination. Through this attitude, you can start to enjoy life more fully. He agreed that the art was rather incomprehensible, but what mattered was that any situation could take you in unexpected directions and should be enjoyed as such.

Two other men eventually joined the conversation and supplied us with anecdotes about unexpected outcomes of earlier singles conferences. They had both been featured in the local newspaper because of their attendance. One of these men argued that to decide what one likes and dislikes and then stick to such premature judgements will ruin any situation.

This debate elegantly encapsulates how the structure of time and space can vary between a liminal/intimate and a calculating organising logic, and how the setting of this particular conference encouraged one above the other. It also shows that a calculating mind-set in this case is connected to a sexual framing of the situation.

Let me present my interpretation of the men's discussion. The first man voiced complaints, which suggested that one's own clearly defined preferences should be the basis for an assessment of the present situation. In his case, a heterosexual assessment of the women was involved in his depreciation of the bus trip. Sexuality here is understood as a rational decision model, where an evaluation sets goals, which are then striven for through rationally devised means.

That calculating, sexual mind-set stands in opposition to the liminality of the surprise trip. To go on a surprise trip cuts you off from past and future, as neither memory nor plans can determine where you go. It also cuts you off from context, as you find yourself at sites that you have no possibility of acquainting yourself with beforehand. One could argue that such trips are intelligible as liminal. Seen from that perspective, each "surprise site" along the bus route – the wind turbine and the art exhibits – acquired that phenomenological structure which makes liminality likely to result in intimacy: without a context or stable categories for each stop on the trip, situations have a tendency to become unique. A wind turbine, which was entirely unrelated to the theme of the conference (singledom), then be-

came a site in which to reinforce an intimate logic precisely because it was unrelated.

As an organising of liminal intimacy, the bus trip also became a focal point for the negotiation among participants. I believe this was the reason to why it was as a challenge to the bus trip that I found the sexual and calculating mind-set asserted.

During my singles events observations more generally, I found that sexual framing of social interactions was seen with suspicion. I would argue that suspicion operated on several levels. Firstly, sexuality was associated with a calculating mind-set, which came into conflict with the liminal space being organised. Secondly, it was associated with a certain working-class masculinity, which the liminal "classless" setting could not tolerate. Thirdly, this suspicion of sexuality also demonstrated a peculiarity of the singles events' liminality, which I will articulate below.

It is important to note that sexuality was not an illicit topic of discussion; in fact, many people openly discussed it. Besides, during the singles cruise Viktoria had arranged for a sex shop to display and sell sex toys in a locale with direct access from the singles cruise's main area. As a theme for discussion then, sex was quite acceptable. It was as an implicit or explicit motivation behind social interaction that it was seen as a problem. Of course, at times the difference between theme for discussion and motivation behind action was a bit difficult to ascertain.

Let me give one example. At my dinner table during the singles cruise, one of the men referred to a lecture he had attended. The female lecturer had gone on at length about female orgasms and how infrequently some women have them. The man at our table was quite perplexed by the low numbers. He orated for a minute or two about the injustice of men experiencing orgasm much more frequently than women.

Everyone present seemed to accept female orgasms as a topic for dinner discussion. Some of the women made replies and the topic stirred some remarks around the table. But there was also some unease – not, I would argue, because of the topic as such, but because of potential reasons behind the man's bringing it up. Was talk of female orgasms a sexual innuendo? Was this a way of saying that the man at our table would always give women orgasms? Perhaps I over-interpreted the situation, but these were the qualms I saw playing themselves out on some of the faces around me.

Illouz argues that the 19th century Victorian culture saw sexuality and intimacy as more or less synonymous – both were situational elements of relationship (Illouz, 1997). It was first during the modern period and the sexual revolution that sexuality and intimacy went in two distinct directions. Sexuality could be had without relationships. Intimacy, on the other hand, was more and more made the sole basis of long-term, heterosexual relationships. I would argue it is this difference that played itself out during Viktoria's singles events.

The Swedish word *raggning* is particularly difficult to translate, not least because of its many connotations. The English concept that comes closest is probably "picking up". Thus, the English "pick up-artist" is sometimes translated

raggningsexpert. *Raggning* has sexual connotations. Additionally though, it is also associated with low-brow culture and is most often associated with men, although its meaning is plastic enough to, for example, allow female "pick up-artists" to use it for their activities (Arvidson & Henriksson, 2010).

Just before the singles cruise, a few women told my colleague Marit that they hoped the voyage would not turn out to be a "*raggning* cruise". I would interpret them to say three things in one word: they hoped that sexuality would not frame the interactions between women and men, they would like for the cruise to be more "middle-" or "high-brow" than "cheap", and they directed these concerns mainly towards male passengers.

These women were not given reason to complain. Indeed, the singles events I observed did exclude sexual overtures, and instead included lectures, the arts, popular folk music, and tango dancing. There was surprisingly little alcohol consumed, contributing to the events feeling a bit (but not overly) classy.

As I argued in the previous section, intimate liminality seems to preclude both marked class and gender differences. Practices around picking up or *raggning*, apart from being associated with low-brow culture, are also associated with gender differences, where men are more likely to pick up women than vice versa. Precluding sexuality may therefore also be interpreted as constituting that (temporary) gender equality (or image of gender equality) that marks liminal intimacy.

This is not to say that sexuality is always disassociated from liminality. Indeed, sites of "unrestrained" sexuality have sometimes been interpreted as liminal in research and have been known to attract a middle-class clientele (Andriotis, 2010; Shields, 1990). What characterizes those liminal spaces, however, is the total isolation from personal life: Ideally, nothing that goes on within such liminal spaces finds its way outside. Under such circumstances, sexuality can be free because it does not impact personal life.

The disapproval of sexual intentions during the singles events mirrors a therapeutic ambition that had certain implications for liminality. As Viktoria herself argues, the events should have meaning in people's lives generally. This meaning could involve greater social skills, friends, a renewed feeling for intimacy, or a partner. In short, the liminality of Viktoria's events does not mean complete *isolation* from personal life, but rather a space in which to be free from that life in order to change it.

Viktor Turner, who coined the concept of liminality, wanted to show how traditional societies sustain tradition by situating changes in society outside of normal space and time. Those peripheral space-times were not isolated from society, however. Their meaning rather derived from the fact that their inhabitants were to be reintegrated into society, albeit with new roles and identities. Viktoria's version of liminality, which takes people outside everyday life to change it, is therefore close

to Victor Turner's original concept. It is in fact closer to that original than the version of liminality that cuts itself off entirely from the everyday.[37]

At the beginning of the singles cruise, when the lecturers presented themselves and their chosen topic, a group of three young men were causing some commotion with inappropriate laughter at the back of the locale. They were obviously drunk, and made fun at the expense of some lecturers. While the rest of the auditorium seemed irritated by their behaviour, their deviance naturally piqued my interest. As the game of crowd hugs approached its end, the three men started to walk towards the exit. I approached them and asked if I could accompany them for a while and ask them some questions. Agreeing, they took me to a pub outside of the singles cruise area, all the while expressing their disappointment with the arrangements.

The three men, who were around 35-40 years of age, had expected something quite different than intimate experiences. Their openly stated goal of the evening was to get "one night stands", which, they reckoned, was not going to happen, given the singles cruise arrangements.

The three young men continued to stay outside the singles cruise spaces. The boat was equipped with restaurants, bars, and nightclubs and as on several other cruise ships, these areas are known for binge drinking, sleazy dancing, and some sexual adventurism. Some individuals I talked to expected the singles cruise to simply take those elements to the next extreme. The much more subdued truth about the singles cruise says something important about the version of liminality its organising was supposed to accomplish.

In a sense, the divided cruise ship could be seen as embodying the division between sexuality and intimacy. By implication, and in light of my reasoning above, the regular cruise and the singles cruise could be read as a liminal space isolated from personal life, and a liminal space with personal implications respectively. While they were arranged in parallel, it seems that they needed to be kept apart spatially, so that even if some people moved between the two spaces, they knew which kind of liminality was dominant at their current location.

I do not argue that the singles cruise represents the only way to construct singledom, and that the rest of the boat cannot be called a singles activity. The regular cruise is an important venue for singles, although it does not use the label "single". My point is rather to say that different ways of arranging space, in this case its liminal traits, are connected to different ways of constructing singledom. The singles cruise thus represented two mutually exclusive, parallel spaces of singles activities.

---

[37] Perhaps it is inappropriate to call spaces entirely isolated from society, a facet often characterising sites for sexual promiscuity, liminal. The isolation they exemplify may perhaps better be called heterotopic, a word coined by Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1986).

CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of the singles events gives occasion to closely examine liminality. The nuances of liminal space are key to understanding how these events constructed ways of being single, not least through their relational setup. Meanwhile, it was the symbolic and actual intimate encounters that gave participants occasion to resist liminality and negotiate alternative understandings of the situations.

I have shown that liminality can be understood as a temporary release from personal life, which liberates the individual to engage in potentially life-changing practices. However, I have also differentiated between "total" and "partial" liminality. The "total" liminality is entirely cut off from personal life, and activities in those liminal spaces are not allowed to reverberate outside its boundaries. This kind of liminal space is exemplified by the regular cruise discussed above.

"Partial" liminality is a space cut off from personal life, but where the activities are meant to have repercussions in that matrix of relations. This type of space is exemplified by the singles cruise. With Viktoria's therapeutic ambitions, her events were constructed to teach singles lessons for their personal lives in relative (not absolute) isolation from the latter.

Liminality was organised in various ways. The spaces themselves (a cruise ship and a hotel) were chosen to isolate individuals from everyday life and its rules. Games and other activities during the events involved crowd management, which is experientially connected to liminality. Crowds were used, for example, in speed dating, to link liminality with intimate encounters. Thirdly, liminality involves some kind of equality or unobtrusiveness of social differences. Fourthly, liminality can be achieved through movements between unspecified places, such as during a surprise bus trip. That spatio-temporal arrangement again distanced participants from their personal lives, and introduced them to situations without contexts.

Liminality is a way to accomplish certain experiences in people, but also to arrange meaningful scenes. As I argued in chapter 3, there is no necessary relation between arrangement and experience. The question, though, is what the contingent relation nevertheless might be.

I have made a distinction between intimate encounters as image, and intimacy as experience. To follow the instructions for the different games and activities during the singles events resulted in a series of encounters that *looked* intimate. The experience of intimacy seemed, however, to require some infraction against those instructions. I have argued that at the heart of this distinction lie the repetitious character of speed dating-like activities and the management of crowds. While liminality and intimacy both engage people as individuals rather than persons, crowds and repetition can make people anonymous to each other. Some participants therefore broke rules and avoided repetition in order to recognise each other and become individuals.

Some resistance took the form of introducing non-liminal elements into the events, not least as part of encounters. Calculation and the expression of sexual interest

involve people in planning their future, thus thwarting the logics of both liminality and intimacy according to which the present situation is self-contained. Some participants were vocal about their class- and status-based interests in a partner, thus introducing personal life into the mix. There was also some resistance to the notion that liminality and intimacy helped singles find not only partners, but also friends and social contacts more generally. This resistance framed intimate encounters as heterosexual, whereas the organiser sometimes allowed a more open understanding and organising (asking men to hug men and so on).

All in all, my observations display a complex set of arrangements and points of resistance. To sum these up, I would argue that they show how spatial arrangements linked directly to how people related to or disengaged from their personal lives, and were related to intimate experience and images, as well as to the perceived nature of singledom.

In the next chapter, I will go online and investigate how a new site for singles attempted to individuate its members and also link liminal sites together.

5. Monotopia: Reconstructing Internet Dating

During my work with this dissertation, I had the opportunity to follow the creation and launch of a new Internet site for singles, Monotopia. I hesitate to call it an Internet *dating* site; the point of Monotopia was to offer singles an alternative model for meeting as singles online. I twice interviewed the entrepreneur behind the site, Charlotte. She held an interest in singles activities generally, but had no experience with computer programming. Therefore, she had turned to an Internet design company, Diktyon, whose designer and CEO allowed me to interview them twice. I had access to and followed the site, Monotopia, for the first few months of its existence. Charlotte gave me permission to send a survey to the people in her database, who were or had been members on Monotopia. These included people who had only tried the one month-long free trial membership.

Charlotte and the Diktyon representatives all consistently described Monotopia as an alternative to ordinary Internet dating. They had rather critical things to say about the latter. Importantly, though, their ideas on exactly where Internet dating had failed, and how those problems should be remedied on Monotopia, varied. I interpret their differing arguments as a negotiation over online spatiality, singledom, and intimacy. As in the other empirical chapter, I will centre the analysis on conflicts. The Monotopia project itself was a challenge to the mainstream dating sites and therefore one of the conflicts analysed is the difference between this singles site and dating sites more generally.

CONSTRICTING GAZES

I have little data of my own concerning Internet dating in general. There is, however, a growing body of sociological studies on the subject, which I draw on to make comparisons with Monotopia. Internet dating is often described by users and researchers alike as a market (Arvidsson, 2006; Heino et al., 2010; Merkle & Richardson, 2000). It is a metaphor the technology has inherited from offline dating in early 20th century America, which was also characterised as a market, as explored by Beth Bailey (Bailey, 1988). In markets, information that participants can get about the offered goods in general counts as an asset (Aspers, 2011; Callon, 1998). To, for example, buy a certain chair for a given price, without knowing the quality and price of comparable chairs, might mean that I pay comparatively more for comparatively lower quality. Of course, this is a problem only if the quality of chairs is important to me. If in contrast I have for personal reasons settled for one chair only without wishing to compare it with others – then the price might be more difficult to evaluate.

One difference between qualities of chairs and personal preference for one specific chair is that the former makes chairs comparable, while the other does not. If everyone – buyers and sellers alike – was guided by personal preference, that state of affairs would make all goods incomparable, and markets would be difficult or im-

possible to sustain. To some extent, markets therefore require that people share preferences for qualities that make goods comparable.

Here we are plunged into the heart of an Internet dating quandary: If constructed like markets, Internet dating sites must make their own members possible to compare, and they must ensure that at least some users desire qualities in others that make comparisons between members possible (Arvidsson, 2006). Market-sociologist Michel Callon would say that the sites must make their members *commensurate*, that is, possible to compare, sort and/or quantify in some way (Callon, 1998).

Several thinkers have interpreted a typical dating site layout as accomplishing this kind of commensuration (Badiou, 2012; Heino et al., 2010; Mongeau, Serewicz, & Therrien, 2004). Becoming a member involves describing oneself using a set number of alternatives. Quantitative measures are commonly asked for, such as height, weight, monthly salary, and Likert-measured opinions. Registered members' information becomes searchable by other members, and your profile can be listed with and compared to other profiles with similar characteristics. One could say that these features give each user an eagle-eye view of the site from which they can "measure" and compare potential partners. Many sites have a so-called "matching function", where some algorithm with largely secret logics but purported effectiveness matches people with "compatible" characteristics.

Some researchers have noted that this market-style, technical understanding of Internet dating is often paired with rather romantic notions on the sites about "finding Mr./Miss Right" (Arvidsson, 2006; Illouz, 2007). Honesty, taking one's feelings seriously, and being responsive to others, are attitudes that the companies try to promote on their sites. One reason for promoting these ideals might be that the attractiveness of a dating site is measured by the attractiveness of its members, meaning that the companies have an interest in keeping users courteous and welcoming. But in addition, this romantic, emotional tone can be interpreted to mean that Internet dating comes with a certain notion of intimacy. As Adam Arvidsson writes about Internet dating, "when a distinct environment has been constructed, a certain *savoir* (to use Foucault's term) as to what love and intimacy is about has been elaborated" (Arvidsson, 2006, p. 685). Eva Illouz writes that Internet dating is not merely understood by users as a useful tool to find a partner, but is a "supremely psychological technology" (Illouz, 2007, p. 107), inherently focused on the inner self (of both myself and the other). One could argue that embedded in Internet dating practices is a notion of intimacy as matching personal qualities.

The idea of intimacy as perceiving something of the other's "innermost" is old. So is the notion that such insight can be achieved through introspection, where recognising something inner in the other requires recognising that same quality within oneself. From the perspective of such a concept of intimacy, being matched would mean recognising myself in the other. As Illouz has argued, this and other notions of intimacy have lent themselves to an increasing rationalisation throughout the 20th century. People have come to understand matching, and consequently intimacy, as a process amendable by science and technology.

This understanding of intimacy would help explain how dating sites can be *both* crassly technological and market-oriented "matching machines", and deeply intimate and personal places. Internet dating companies make claims about being able to accurately match people and often contrast their services to the "haphazard" rituals of seduction at the pub or bar. These claims and their underlying notions of intimacy can be gleaned from the many "success stories" that the sites are prone to present to would-be customers. An example is the following narrative from a large Swedish dating site:

> If [name of dating site] hadn't existed, we would have never met. Neither of us likes to go out and meet people. We share an interest in animals and nature […]. We both like to do things together even if it's just cooking food. We laugh and cry together, and neither of us wants to live without the other for a day. We feel like we are meant for each other.

In this narrative, Internet dating is seen as a less social, but potentially more effective means of finding a partner. The couple's success is also measured in matching interests and tastes. The short story therefore effectively sums up what the industry is offering singles, and the notion of intimacy that helps organise the online sites. This is not to say that all members use the sites according to this organising logic. There are alternative ways to date via the Internet, and indeed alternative sites where alternative organising logics prevails, as I will explore.

Charlotte and the Diktyon representatives had a common understanding of how personal pages on Monotopia should be structured. They entirely excluded such quantitative information as weight and height. To a large extent they also avoided giving users ready alternatives when describing themselves. On Monotopia, most of the presentation on someone's page is provided by her or his answers to a few open questions (e.g., "What do you love about life?") and then by a text that the user has written. Additionally, the user can submit a photo of him- or herself, but Monotopia is constructed so that someone with the adequate digital permissions (like Charlotte) has to accept each photo before it is published on a user's page. The criteria for the photos are that they should focus on the person, and that that person must look into the camera. One should also be able to see the whole face. Charlotte says that she want the photos to give a "personal" impression.

Apart from the personal presentation on a user's page, each member can also write a blog and participate on message boards covering various topics. All these texts will be available from the user's page, thus becoming part of her or his personal presentation.

This means that in contrast to most dating sites, Monotopia deliberately lacks an extensive search engine that allows members to make lists of other users using various different but comparable criteria. There is a smaller search engine, which allows users to search for others using their nickname, age, or city. In comparison to the typical dating site, that is a very limited search capacity. Besides, the search engine is somewhat difficult to find on the site and requires several clicks after having logged in.

All this results in the fact that when a member has found her way to a personal page on Monotopia, she lacks the possibility to compare that person's profile to other members'. She may find people through the search engine, but more probably it is through the various message boards or blogs. On the personal page, the member is referred to other user's own words and to a photo that has been deemed "personal" by an external controller.

I would argue this setup does two things. First, instead of knowing the other as a "match" of a number of isolated qualities, which is the case on most dating sites, the member arriving at a Monotopia profile begins by reading the other's own formulations. When she imagines the other, she works from a "personal" photo. Secondly, Monotopia interrupts online gazes as it were. As explored above, Internet dating sites give users an "eagle-eye view" of the other members. This would be similar to commensuration on markets more generally. One of the Diktyon designers in contrast argued that when Monotopia was built they wanted to avoid the "delicatessen counter" feeling (see the whole quote below). As a user I am referred to the nitty-gritty of blogs, discussion boards, and personally written presentations. That makes people less commensurate, less possible to compare.

The Monotopia space can therefore be interpreted as organised around different images of intimacy than the typical Internet dating site. I would argue that Charlotte and Diktyon's project is an attempt to restructure the organising logic of Internet dating. That restructuring engaged them in reworking details, from the welcoming image, to the strength of the search engine. However, their resulting alternative notion of intimacy was not entirely clear. It turned out that Diktyon and Charlotte had slightly different ideas about what intimacy entailed, as I will explore below.

SINGLES THERAPEUTICS ONLINE

Charlotte and Diktyon had several meetings where they discussed the purpose and structure of Monotopia. I would hear about these meetings in my interviews with them. I could tell from my interviews that these discussions had sometimes shifted into debates, and that what had been decided during one meeting could have been invalidated until the next.

Diktyon is a company with a philosophy. It does not believe in absolute boundaries between technology and what it calls "ideas". I can see why someone like Charlotte, who is deeply critical of Internet dating, would be attracted to such a philosophy. Internet dating companies are invested in the distinction between technology and ideas. I interviewed the CEO of one of Sweden's largest Internet dating companies early on as a PhD student. He told me that:

> The company is not about what users do – we only provide the possibility to have contact. We provide a good product that is easy to use. It's all about *context*, not *content* [the words "context" and "content" are English in the untranslated transcript].

This distinction between context and content is one of the things Charlotte is critical of. To her, dating sites are like surfaces behind which the companies hide. Like Viktoria in the previous chapter, she has worked with some singles activities offli-

ne, although on a smaller scale. She wants a close relation with her clients, which to her mind distinguishes her from the dating site companies:

> They would never show themselves, they're computer nerds you know. They don't want to meet people. I do. I'm out and about, meeting people and talking to them. […] Their [Internet dating companies'] business idea is that everything should happen online, in your computer. They never go to singles activities. So there's nothing personal between the singles and [name of large dating site]. They have spaces in the computer; I want to have spaces in reality, in real life.

Given Charlotte's critique of how Internet dating companies hide behind online technology, the philosophy of Diktyon must have been attractive to her. The Diktyon CEO is adamant that their job is not only to write code and make things look nice graphically. Their job is also to articulate the clients' ideas, make them more precise and practicable. Perhaps the relation between the company and a client should be likened to the relation between an artist and his patron: the patron may suggest some theme or structure for a new composition, but it is the artist who gives it expression. I believe that is the context in which the following passage from an interview with the Diktyon CEO should be understood:

> CEO: We coined the phrase "Happily single" [Sw. *Nöjd singel*], which is one of the categories you can use when you register with Monotopia.
>
> Andreas: So "Happily single" wasn't a concept Charlotte suggested?
>
> CEO: She did, she used it in passing, but it was I who grabbed the word and made it into a caption. I actually think she would have preferred some other categorisation on the site like "Widow", "Newly divorced" and so on. You know, there've been some tensions in the group working with Monotopia.

The first thing Diktyon and Charlotte wanted to establish was a close relation between prospective users and people working with the site. In contrast to the dating sites, people should see and interact with Charlotte and future co-workers or volunteers. One rather big move in the direction of establishing personal relations was to have Charlotte's photo greet everyone surfing on the new site.

> Diktyon designer: The dating sites are impersonal […] you feel they're after your money, not helping you. And their sites are full of pictures of members, it's like a delicatessen counter – who'll I choose today? Monotopia should be personal; we have an image of Charlotte on the first page. You should feel personally welcome. I would hardly think that any of the dating sites have images of their CEOs.

Overall, the style of the Monotopia site could be summarised as *personal*. I choose the word with a nod to the complexities associated with it in previous chapters. Although Charlotte promotes singles activities on the site that must be labelled liminal, and that engage participants foremost as individuals, she also wishes to engage personally with members. The reason, I would argue, is that like Viktoria, Charlotte has a therapeutic understanding of singles that allows her to connect their singledom to a wider problem in their lives.

According to both Charlotte and the Diktyon representatives, the site should be a place for single people to recover and become more outgoing. The group talked about singles as having difficulties with intimate relations. The site was a place

where they could talk about their problems, get support, and read tips. To accomplish that, they needed to have confidence in the people they confided in.

But it is here that I could sense an underlying conflict between Diktyon and Charlotte. In a previous project, Diktyon had been involved in developing an online site for sport coaching, Gymnastes, where people were able to write diaries and enter daily results, while getting comments and help from online coaches. The purpose of the site was to help members on a journey towards greater sports accomplishments. Diktyon's CEO explained the analogies he drew between Gymnastes and Monotopia:

> Many singles feel excluded and lonely. But Charlotte and many others have discovered that the problem is really within these people themselves. Singles put up obstacles for themselves. So in that sense, Monotopia is much like Gymnastes; it would give single people support, knowledge, and help them build relations. In the end this entails giving them confidence and the ability to act. It wouldn't necessarily entail them looking for a relationship.

These parallels between the two projects allowed Diktyon's programmers to reuse some of the modules from the earlier project in working with Monotopia. Monotopia supports blogging, chats, and forums. If the parallel with Gymnastes would be followed through to its logical end, these functions should be part of therapeutic ambitions, giving online sports or singles coaches the opportunity to comment on and advise the users personally.

The Gymnastes/Montopia connection is an example of an organising logic that has had constancy between two projects. Diktyon was keen to reuse their Gymnastes modules. Here we see the importance of technologies and monetary resources for why a certain organising logic might be retained over time. I mentioned in the Introduction that Karl Weick argues that organising is always supposed to produce intelligibility, but that it does not always succeed (Weick, 1979). Reusing the Gymnastes modules might have resulted in intelligibility for Diktyon, but not necessarily for Charlotte, who told me:

> …this is a community, not a workout. They [Diktyon] always go on about that workout site, I am so tired of that, because singles are a special group – it sounds terrible, but it's true. They have this hope or expectation [Sw. *förhoppning*], they don't want to be alone. They are looking for someone, or searching, they use the singles site to look for someone to go out with.

The Gymnastes logic means that members become progressively better at being single. One can register one's results online, get feedback, and then perform again. As Charlotte told me in an interview, however, this is not the way in which singles find a partner. According to her, it is true that some singles need coaching. And it is true that they need to boast their confidence by going out more. But the different social activities on the site and the offline singles activities all contain one element that you cannot coach people into, and that does not happen gradually: encountering a potential mate. For Charlotte, this moment comes or not independent of any training. What coaching and training can accomplish is to give singles self-esteem to better make use of the opportunity.

Nevertheless, Charlotte was quite an active coach on the site. Like Diktyon, she had a therapeutic notion of singledom, where many singles needed some help to overcome a wider problem with relations in their lives. For example, she told me she read most of the blogs that members produced on the site. At one point, a woman had complained that none of the users she contacted on Monotopia wrote her back. Charlotte called her up on telephone.

> They get so surprised when you call them! But I do that sometimes. And I told her: Perhaps you could help me. [She talks about the woman's personal circumstances and establishes that she had the means to arrange some activities for singles herself.] Couldn't you arrange a meeting for singles where you live? There are no activities over there. […] So at least I showed interest, right? I tried to do something. I saw they [the users] wrote some nice things about that telephone call later.

This quote shows the therapeutic ambitions Charlotte had with Monotopia. Rather than simply offering a better chance of finding a matching mate as many Internet dating sites do, Charlotte sought to challenge and change the members themselves. As Charlotte implied in the quote, this might be contrary to some members' expectations. While mainstream dating site members register personal information and get personal responses from other members, the dating companies themselves keep to a professional, non-personal tone of address. That companies behind a site for singles take a personal interest in their members might therefore seem strange.

To coax Monotopia members to engage with and consider their personal lives, the site offered them opportunities to blog and chat, read advice from various "experts" (although no "expert accreditation" was ever presented on the site, making these claims to expertise slightly dubious), and to arrange their own get-togethers. One can interpret all these site functions to fill therapeutic needs: blogs and chat for reflections and feedback, advice to change oneself, and get-togethers to make members engage with others. Charlotte told me:

> I think it's important to find yourself first [when you're single] and you do that through social contact with other people, when you feel accepted and can contribute and so on. Then, when you feel relaxed and feel accepted, I think you might be open for love. Really. I think it's a process.
>
> Andreas: But in which part of this process does Monotopia come in?
>
> Charlotte: It's at the beginning really. Or at both ends. I see women talking, blogging, and on the discussion boards, and I see this kind of reasoning. The discussions can get really long-winded.

But the devil is in the details. The Diktyon team had wanted the blogs to be more like diaries, analogous to training diaries on Gymnastes. They also wanted the "experts" to be engaged in reading and commenting on those diaries, giving personal advice on how to improve as singles. The Diktyon CEO did not think that Monotopia should be a site for courtship; to him, the site was meant to improve singles – perhaps with the goal of creating "happily single" people. For Charlotte, on the other hand, blogging was a facet of the general personal engagement that she wished to see in people, and which would allow the members to be part of the wider singles community and give them chances to meet a partner. Charlotte was not too keen on having many expert commentators on the site: "It's nice to have ex-

perts writing articles and giving advice, but there has to be a purpose behind it all". For Charlotte then, community itself was a sort of courtship, one in which people could meet as *persons*.

But the interplay of personhood and individuality is complex in online milieus. I will analyse and elaborate this interplay in the next section.

PERSONS AND INDIVIDUALS ONLINE

Charlotte was well acquainted with singles activities in Sweden. For her, Monotopia was a way to connect these activities and allow organisers to advertise them to a specific audience (namely her members). Members of the site would then be active in offline activities and primarily use Monotopia to stay in touch with people frequenting these offline milieus. On the site, each advertised activity had a small message board connected to it for discussions before and after the event. Monotopia was thus set up to connect singles activities and to facilitate various sorts of relationships to crystallise from them.

In previous chapters, I argued that personhood and individuality are two distinct ways in which others are presented to us. Intimacy is a unique experience of the other and as such affirms his or her individuality. In contrast, a person is present to us as embedded in a network of personal relations. Although these modes of presentation can oppose each other in different situations, they are not mutually exclusive by necessity.

When we analyse how others are presented to us on an online dating or singles site, we must take several circumstances into consideration. Firstly, the person is never physically present, but is introduced through various media – images and text are most commonly used. Secondly, as long as we do not meet the other, we have no fool-proof way to know whether a profile and private messages are written by the person they purport to be written by. Thirdly, the other's presentation can be written for potentially all members on the site (his profile is usually thus authored), for a certain subset of members (on a message board) or to us individually (private message). It might not always be clear who he is writing to: the same "private message" might be sent to several members, a public profile might be authored with a certain subset of members in mind and so on. Fourthly, the dating company itself might advise us to understand the others in certain ways (as potential partner, friend, fellow single, with or without suspicion, and so on).

Taking all these various circumstances into account, what might it mean that Monotopia only lets members present themselves with text and photos that are incommensurate, that is, that the site avoids portraying people in comparable ways? And what might it mean that Charlotte focuses on offline singles activities, advertising Monotopia as a site to connect with others between such events?

That people use Monotopia to communicate about offline activities might mean that I learn about these people from discussions where they write in the capacity of having been present as such activities. Those discussions might entail replies from other members who were present at the same activities. Under such circumstances,

I become a third party to a conversation between people who have presumably met offline. This is a different kind of presentation from online profiles on mainstream dating sites, which address unknown others who have presumably never met the person being presented.

Monotopia emphasises becoming part of a community as a way to know others and court them. As a result, we come to know these others as bound up in various relations off- and online. I would argue that we come to know them in a *personal* mode. But this is not to say that we come to know their *whole* personal lives. We do not immediately and by necessity come to know the other's life outside of the singles activities. The relational network within which we encounter her or him is limited to the world of those activities. From the perspective of how we encounter the other in situations, it would still make sense to say that she is encountered as person when she is engaged in relational networks.[38]

In consequence, we encounter the other as a *person* in those situations when we perceive him or her as engaged in relational networks that do not include us. In situations where she or he intentionally informs us of such relational networks, that information is still part of a situation that individuates her or him to me and could rather be interpreted as individuation.

Courtship rituals like dating often mean that we encounter the other directly. That might rob us of the opportunity to observe the other engaged in some task that does not entail ourselves, a situation that can give us important impressions. This lack of context may be particularly true of liminal and intimate situations, where participants are cut off from everyday life and from relationships that do not involve other participants. But it is also true of Internet dating; where all information about the other's personal life comes from him- or herself and is directed, with or without ulterior motives, at us. Charlotte told me that:

> A lot of people write to me and appreciate that Monotopia is not just about parties, but that there are many different activities to choose from. We have gone to the harness racing in [name of city], it's really nice. So it contributes something more [than just parties].

What Monotopia does (as do singles associations to an even larger extent, as I will show in the next chapter) is to facilitate personal networks, or community, within the realm of singles activities. This facilitation has therapeutic ambitions, as I discussed above. But it also allows us, in the capacity of interested participants, to

---

[38] This is not to deny that people might present us with personal information on mainstream dating sites as well – even as part of their online profiles. But the personal information presented on such sites concerns mostly relational networks outside the world of Internet dating or singles activities more generally (number of children, background, education, and so on). And even more importantly, it is the other who purposefully gives us that information and thus intends for us to have that information. What Monotopia makes available to me by way of presenting others is the activities of those others as part of relational networks that include *other* online members. In other words, on Monotopia I access the other's relational networks through her or his responsive activities *within* the networks, not through her or his *account of* them. Whereas an *account* of personal life is directed and may be intentionally directed towards me, the other's activities *in* personal networks are presumably directed towards some other person, thus being less likely to contain some intention vis-à-vis myself.

encounter others as engaged in relational networks that do not include us, thus giving us an impression that is not available in liminal spaces or in dating. This is a point at which community and courtship might sometimes merge. Community could become a site for encountering others in personal ways.

I am not arguing that Monotopia always allowed a personal impression of the other. Not all members were active in offline singles activities. Many professed to be using the site for "traditional" Internet dating. But Charlotte could be interpreted to design the site around the notion of singles community as a mode of courtship.[39]

One can speculate that what Monotopia does, insofar as the site succeeds in bridging various singles activities, is to undermine the liminality that some of those activities attempt to arrange. Singles activities like Viktoria's singles cruise or conference, for example, presuppose that participants' relational networks are left behind when they enter into the singles scene. Monotopia is part of creating networks within and between singles activities, potentially undermining that unattached attitude that participants are meant to have. Instead, singles activities might become part of a series of locales that various networks of people move between and which they use for socialising.

I would not argue that by undermining liminality, Monotopia is also undermining the possibility for intimacy at various singles activities. But there might be a connection. If many participants have relational networks including other participants at singles activities, what someone does towards us will also have been done towards others. In short, a space with people who have personal relations make tête-à-tête encounters more difficult – although not impossible. People will appear more as persons than as individuals to each other; they will appear more relationally than intimately, more relating to others than to another alone and uniquely. It may therefore be the case that Monotopia to some degree makes intimacy less probable in singles activities like Viktoria's liminal events.

In this section I have shown the complex interrelations of intimacy and personhood that Monotopia engages with. In the next section I will approach this issue from another angle, namely by asking about Monotopia as a space and place.

INTERLINKING SPACES AND PLACES

In the Introduction, I discussed the concepts of space and place (Hubbard, 2007). In space, people are potentially able to meet over and above community belonging, distances, or boundaries. Examples of spaces might be cities, air flight terminals,

---

[39] I am not arguing that to have a *personal* impression of someone always excludes the possibility of simultaneously or later having an *intimate* impression of that individual. For example, to overhear another talking secrets with a third person might give me what I perceive to be a unique insight into that other, making the moment seem intimate. But simultaneously having a personal and intimate impression of another is more difficult online, where the other's messages often have a public character. As they are written for many others, that negates any uniqueness such messages might otherwise have possessed. But while it seems difficult to simultaneously have a personal and an intimate impression of another online, there is room for having intimate moments *after* experiencing someone as embedded in a personal network online.

Internet news groups, or singles cruises. Places on the other hand are sites that people identify with, build communities around, live and position themselves within. Example might be the village, the local barbershop, Internet communities, and family homes. Of course, many places are also spaces and vice versa. The concepts rest on an analytical distinction and should be used in conjunction, rather than as categories for mutually exclusive phenomena.

Charlotte explained that one of the guiding ideas behind Monotopia was to reverse the Internet dating spatial logic:

> The fundamental idea is that you start off with real encounters. […] I've turned it on its head, you know [compared to Internet dating]. First the singles activities and then they log on to the site, perhaps they have met someone and they can look him up on the Internet.

The singles activities Charlotte has in mind are singles cruises, after-work events, singles associations, singles conferences and so on. Some of these are foremost liminal spaces. Arranged at purposefully versatile, ambiguous sites that are cut off from everyday life, the focus is on encounters between individuals. As such, these singles events lend themselves to spatial analysis, rather than to analysis as places. This is not to say that they may also feel like places for communities, for example, for the middle classes and for heterosexual singles who might feel less "at home" in other locales. It is in fact this sense of community that Monotopia elaborates on and develops.

As mentioned above, Charlotte wanted groups to form around various singles activities advertised on the site, so that those activities could more easily be included in chains of situations entailed in relationships. Monotopia was therefore thought to link spaces together, but itself remain more of a link than a fully-fledged place or space. Nevertheless, by providing such links, Monotopia was thought to make it easier for people to create new spaces and places.

However, from my interviewees' comments and replies to open questions in my survey, I surmise that Monotopia did not overcome a certain sense of belonging that many members have. A common complaint was that Monotopia did not have enough members from a specific geographical region or city. Here are comments from three different respondents to the survey:

> I want more focus on geographical proximity, so you can meet more new friends and socialise.

> The site does not reach those of us who live in small cities.

> I would love to see more local activities.

To meet up regularly, people need to live close together. As Monotopia was meant to forge places as well as spaces for singles, Charlotte and Diktyon may have underestimated the importance of existing places of belonging.

The Internet is host to both spaces and places. There are spaces for people to meet, places that they belong to, as well as websites that are something in between (Face-

book is an example of an in-between site, as it allows people to meet others, but also restricts their networks to friends and families). Monotopia was supposed to combine several different spaces. But Charlotte also wanted members themselves to form communities, and in the process forge places. A place can exist entirely online, but Charlotte wanted Monotopia members to form and connect various offline places. The site thus allowed members to start networks around common interests and try to arrange get-togethers:

> There will be networks around the country and then it'll be like – well, this is my vision anyway – people who love jazz put up a network on the site and get other jazz-loving singles to go out with, they'll do their own things.

But what is described here is actually complex spatial work, not least because people have to take into consideration where others live and to what communities they already belong. Charlotte, for example, reported that she had to help members arrange their own events:

> It doesn't get so clear [when they write about an event] on their own blogs; "let's meet there", but it doesn't get very clear. So I help them by adding their events to the calendar.

Sweden could be said to have three larger cities: Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö. According to the results of my survey, singles activities are either concentrated in these three cities or are more dispersed. People from the cities were *not*, for example, more inclined than others to have gone to singles cruises or singles conferences. They were, however, more likely to have gone on singles travels and to singles after-work events. Two mainstream online dating sites were more favoured by inhabitants of the three larger cities, while a third drew more people from smaller cities, villages, and the countryside (I will not mention the sites' names here for ethical reasons). Monotopia did *not* in general seem to be favoured by respondents in the larger cities or outside; neither of the groups was more inclined than the other to pay for a future membership. However, people from outside the cities were more inclined to describe the site as "full of activity".

One question in the survey asked respondents to what degree they agreed or disagreed that singles activities risk locking participants in singledom (see diagram 2, below). The question was meant to measure people's resistance to the notion of community among singles, as well as the importance they attached to coupledom. People's responses to this question correlated to what uses they put Monotopia to. People who disagreed, and were thus more affirming of singles community, were also less inclined to use Monotopia for Internet dating[40] and more likely to look for and keep up with singles activities through the site.[41] Congruently, they were also less likely to agree that "Internet dating is the best way to find a mate".[42]

---

[40] Cramer's V=0.182. P=0.046.

[41] Cramer's V=0.188. P=0.026.

[42] Cramer's V=0.188. P=0.007.
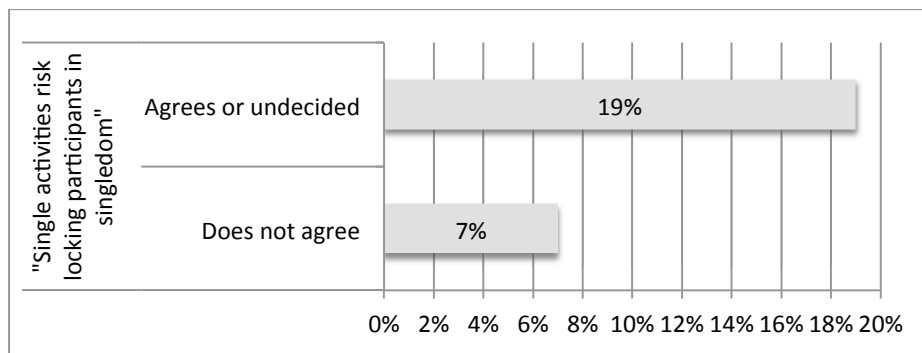
Diagram 2. Agreement among those using Monotopia for Internet dating on whether singles activities risk locking participants in singledom.

These data show the complex ways in which online and offline places and spaces are interlinked. Certain singles activities are more readily available in larger cities, while others – particularly liminal spaces – draw participants from outside the cities in equal measures. The size of one's place of living also seems to impact which Internet dating site one joins. In addition, people from outside the larger cities might have lower expectations of online sites, as they were more inclined to describe Monotopia as "full of activity". They were not more inclined to pay for membership however. It does seem that certain singles activities and online sites are more spaces than places, in that they allow people from various parts of the country to participate.

One interesting finding is that people who resist building or joining singles communities are more prone to use Internet dating. They were even more likely to use Monotopia to date, even though the site was not designed specifically for Internet dating. They were also less likely to look for singles activities on the site. I think this indicates that resisting community among singles entails using online sites as spaces rather than places. [43]

Charlotte argued that she has turned Internet dating on its head, in the sense that people on Monotopia are meant to have met offline before they continue their relationship online. As we have seen, the interplay of online and offline spaces and places on Monotopia is more complex than Charlotte implies. To clarify this point, I have created table 4, with four boxes representing four different kinds of sites: offline spaces and places, as well as online spaces and places. For each of these, I have added an example.

---

[43] Nevertheless, people who reject singles communities are no less or more willing to pay for future membership on Monotopia. This might be explained by the fact that the site lent itself to Internet dating despite Charlotte's intentions to the contrary, thus meeting the requirement of this group of members. That this explanation might be correct is further indicated by the fact that while those who were critical of communities among singles and who lived in the large cities were equally as prone as others to pay for future membership on Monotopia, people with the same attitude living *outside* the larger cities were actually less prone to make that payment. The reason might namely be that Monotopia lent itself to Internet dating more readily in the larger cities where there was a larger concentration of members and thus more people to date.

Table 4. Different kinds of sites		
	Offline	**Online**
Space	1. E.g., Singles cruises	2. E.g., Internet dating sites
Place	3. E.g., Communities of singles	4. E.g., Monotopia discussion groups

Charlotte's idea about turning Internet dating on its head suggests that people move from box 1 to box 4, for example from a singles cruise to Monotopia's discussion board. It is the movement between these two boxes that forms the basis for how she envisions the Monotopia spatiality. But in doing so, she does not take into consideration that some activities in box 1 are tied to certain offline places (the larger cities in particular) in box 3. Also, Charlotte did not specify which offline spaces she wanted to associate Monotopia with; while some liminal spaces did gather people from all over Sweden, other singles activity spaces (like after-work events, associations, and travels) were more specific to certain geographical locales (box 3). Nor did Charlotte's idea take into account the fact that many members used Monotopia as online dating, placing it within box 2. Charlotte furthermore gave the Monotopia discussion groups in box 4 an ambiguous status. The question was whether she understood them as actual places for people to meet online, or merely as an adjunct to offline places, that is, box 3. In the latter case, Monotopia would become dependent on having members from various places in Sweden, rather than offer an online place for people to meet likeminded people beyond an easily reached geographical distance.

WHAT DID THE MEMBERS DO?

In Diagram 3, I show the functions that respondents of my survey reported using on the Monotopia site.
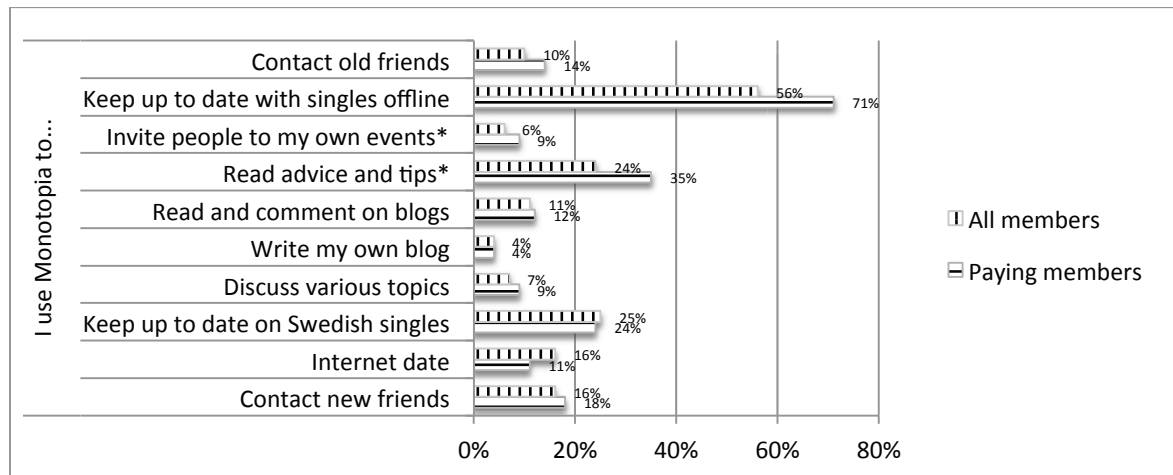
Diagram 3. Monotopia functions that respondents reported using, and percentage of users who reported using a specific function. I have included data for paying members, showing that the results were not biased by restrictions to trial memberships.

I have argued that the Monotopia project could be described as a reconstruction of Internet dating and of online interaction between singles. So did Monotopia work? I think that question is a bit premature given that the site is still up and running when I am writing this. However, when I interviewed the designer a couple of months after the launch, he was somewhat disappointed.

> To be honest there are many more people than I thought who are interested in looking at other members' photos and trying to find someone. I thought the need to just social-ise and find somebody was – I thought that need was bigger [than it turned out to be]. Somehow, I believe the large dating sites have set the agenda.

My survey to some extent confirmed his impression. As part of my survey, I asked respondents to mark which sites they had been members of, from a list of the largest online dating sites in Sweden. From this data I constructed an index, where each respondent could get one of two values: they had either been a member of three or more sites on the list, or fewer. It turned out that there was a correlation between this index and whether people used Monotopia for Internet dating, where people who were used to Internet dating were also prone to use Monotopia that way.[44] The index also correlated this statistic with whether people were willing to pay for membership on Monotopia.[45] People who had been members on three or more sites were less willing to pay for such membership. This correlation is shown in table 5.

---

[44] Cramer's V=0.129. P=0.070.

[45] Cramer's V=0.120. P=0.064.

Table 5. Correlation between membership of different dating sites, and willingness to pay for Monotopia membership			
	Would you consider paying for membership on Monotopia in the future?		
	Yes	No	Total
Been member of less than three dating sites[46]	48.6%	51.4%	100.0%
Been member of three dating sites or more	36.7%	63.3%	100.0%
Total	42.2.%	57.8%	100.0%

These results indicate that Internet dating sites do indeed "set the agenda", meaning that those accustomed to Internet dating were more likely to find Monotopia, with its alternative practices, less attractive. In contrast, those less familiar with Internet dating were more positive towards the site.

In diagram 3, I displayed results from the survey pertaining to how members used Monotopia. These results can be read to show that Diktyon's design of the site helped promulgate practices that Charlotte invested in with her organising logics. Rather than doing Internet dating, people were most prone to use the site to keep up to date with singles activities offline and read advice. However, very few arranged their own events, and few were active in discussions or blogging. This might mirror the complex spatial work that Monotopia required of its members, given that it was not to be thought of as an online space, but rather as a hub of offline activities.

Diagram 4 shows how people's practices on Monotopia correlated with their willingness to pay for future membership. As can be seen, it was the members whose use of the site corresponded most clearly with Charlotte's organising logic (reading therapeutic advice and linking together offline singles activities) who seemed to value it most.

Lastly, diagram 5 shows how members understood Monotopia and how they would want the site to look in the future. Although only 16% used Monotopia to Internet date (above), a full 36% said they understood it mainly as a dating site. Even more, a majority, *wished* that Monotopia would be more of a dating site in the future.

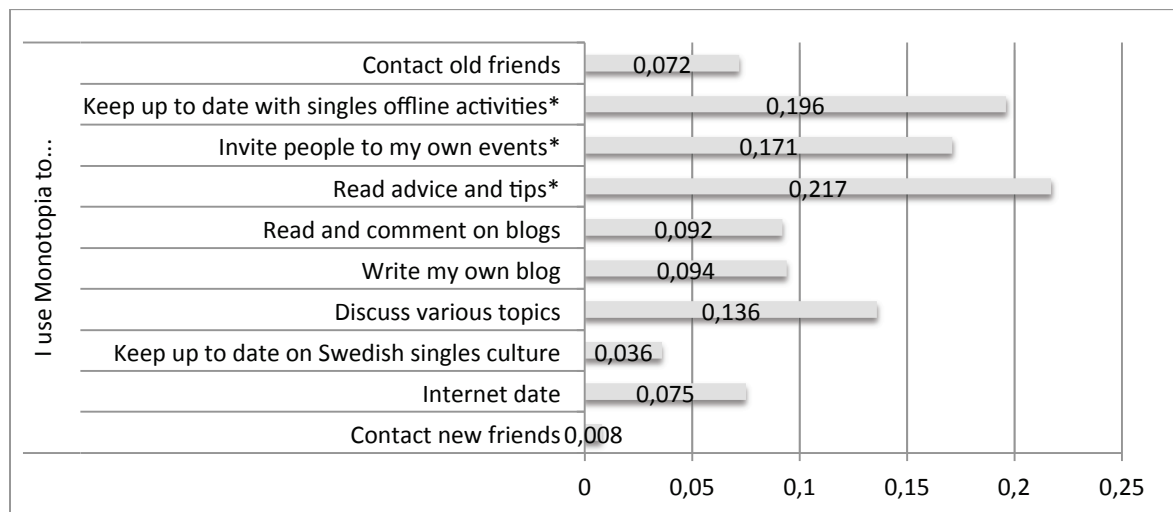[46] The sites were chosen from a given list of 12 large Swedish dating sites.

*Diagram 4. Correlations between usage of certain functions on Monotopia and willingness to pay for future membership on the same site. The numbers are Cramer's V. * P-value less than 0.05.*

This last diagram most clearly demonstrates the power of the Internet dating model. Of those 39% who thought of Monotopia as a friendship site today, 30 respondents (or 13% of all respondents) indicated that they would rather have Monotopia as a dating site. Only slightly more than half of the 21% who saw the site as a place for tips and advice wished that it would remain that way.
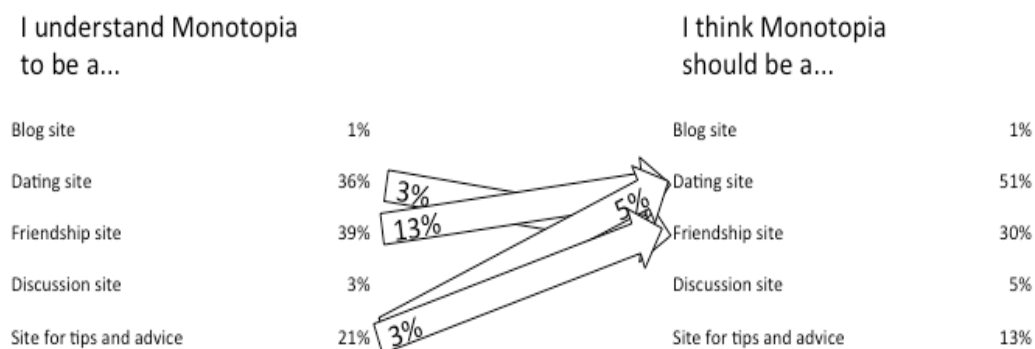
Diagram 5. How respondents reported understanding Monotopia, what they thought Monotopia should be, and changes between the two. Changes are percentages of total number of respondents to the first question ("I understand Monotopia to be a...."). I have only included changes equal or larger than 3%.

While the site design steered people away from dating on Monotopia, these same people were still prone to view it as a dating site. It does seem that the integral organising logic of the site was not entirely intelligible to its users. Again, this lack of intelligibility might indicate the spatial complexities that the site implicates in its arrangements. One logic that nevertheless seems to have reached people's understanding of Monotopia is the notion of friendship site. This notion was also part of Charlotte original vision for the site: giving singles an opportunity to meet friends. Few seem to question why a friendship site should be for singles alone, which may display the strength of the therapeutic notion, according to which singledom signi-

fies a broader lack of relations. Such a therapeutic notion would make a friendship site exclusively for singles more understandable.

CONCLUSIONS

Monotopia was launched as an alternative to Internet dating. The idea was to provide singles with community and to focus on offline singles activities, rather than on online dating. Underlying this design were ideas about singles needing some help to re-enter into social relations. The idea and its practical application in Monotopia constitute a non-relationality: Not being engaged in a monogamous relationship was constructed as a lack of ability or willingness to have relations more generally.

While traditional Internet dating allows members to have tête-à-têtes, Monotopia's focus on community made it possible to encounter others as active in relational networks not involving oneself. I have argued that this type of encounter should be understood as encountering them in a personal mode. This argument does not mean that one encounters others as involved in personal life more generally, but merely in the networks of singles communities. For Charlotte, singles communities allowed people to encounter each other personally, and could therefore be used as sites for courtship.

Its spatial arrangement was an important part of Monotopia. Charlotte, the entrepreneur, wanted members to meet offline and then continue their relations online. She also wanted Monotopia to spur the development of smaller communities of singles around common interests. Because it included the facts that people live in different parts of Sweden, and that many members used Monotopia as a traditional dating site, the site's spatial arrangement was rather complex, involving many moves between online and offline milieus.

Data from my survey concerning people's use of Monotopia shows that while the site's organising logic succeeded in steering members' practices away from dating towards tips, advice, and offline activities, many still expected it to be a dating site. My conclusion is that the organising logic did not produce an entirely intelligible result for these members. I speculate that this may be because the site has few counterparts, and because of its implicit spatial complexity.

6. Filos: Singles With Relationships

The singles association Filos has existed for about twenty years. I interviewed its founder, Viktor, who has also been an active member over the years. Gina, who coordinates the association's events, was also interviewed. The association has a varied selection of activities for members, including weekend dinners, Wednesday pubs, and forest walks; as well as visits to museums, the opera, theatres, and so on. The association does not have locales of its own, but always utilises venues in the city where it is active. I went to one of the weekend dinners to observe and talk to members.

As I will explore below, Filos has two kinds of activities. The first kind is the officially announced activities to which all members are invited. At these activities, smaller subgroups can emerge, which then go to secondary, more informal activities. The impression I had is that Filos is like a Russian doll, where subgroups are nestled in groups, and so on.

So what is the organising logic of Filos? Depending on whom I asked, I got slightly different answers. I will start this chapter by exploring these differences. Next, I will turn to varying understandings of singledom in the association, and to the ambiguous position of informal subgroups.

THERAPY AND HETERO-DOXICAL POSSIBILITIES

When I interviewed Viktor, the founder of Filos, he repeatedly returned to a therapeutic notion of singledom. As he described it, he started the association because "I want to mend people, help those who've got stuck. Filos is a bit like therapy."[47] So what is it about singles that needs mending? Viktor has a rather elaborate answer to that question. He seems to have thought and read about the issue a great deal, and cites certain scientific theories, not least arguments adjacant to Abraham Maslow's hiearchy of needs (although the specific needs Viktor mentions are more social than Maslow's). To achieve "life quality", Viktor suggests,

> …we first of all need love and community, that's the nourishment of the soul. Love is not just sex, it's about confirmation, experiencing generosity, humaneness, and positivity in others. Then you need a job, a family, an acceptable income, good health, leisure, friends. If you lose one piece of this puzzle – as you do in a divorce – other things can start to go wrong. Your health deteriorates, you perform worse at work, your salary plummets – it's a vicious circle. […] If you join Filos, you get a programme [for what to do in your spare time], you get community and friends. And

---

[47] Viktor also quotes personal reasons for having started the association: He wanted to meet friends after a divorce. In this dissertation, I am, however, foremost interested in organising logics. Wanting friends may have been the direct, intentional reason why Viktor started Filos. His contemporary ideas about why he and other singles want friends, and what these ideas may accomplish, are much more important for organising the association, however (although the organising logic is not equivalent to those ideas, as I will discuss later in the chapter).

> then your boss might think you've done a good job and give you a raise. So you can
> turn the vicious circle around.

These ideas about needs constitute a non-relationality in the sense that Viktor uses them to elaborate the meaning and consequences of divorce. It is significant that Viktor focuses on divorcees. Filos calls itself a singles association, not a divorcee association, and at their weekend dinner I met divorcees as well as widows and people who had never had a long-term monogamous relationship. Nevertheless, Viktor's non-relationality applies foremost to those who have gone through divorce. Chudacoff includes singles association in his list of American singles activities that have emerged as a result of the rising number of divorcees after the 1970s (Chudacoff, 2000).

It might be that singles associations more generally lend themselves to post-divorce therapy, a possibility that finds resonance in the results from my survey, where 36% of Monotopia members who had gone through divorce were or had been members of a singles association, whereas only 24% of those who were not divorcees were or had been members[48]. Of course, these numbers only mirrors singles who have been members on Monotopia and who tend to be fairly active in singles activities – probably more active than the average single person in Sweden. The statistics do not mean that all members of Filos have gone through divorce, or that aspects suitable to divorcees exclude all other organising logics in the association. But it does suggest that associations such as Filos fit the divorcee group slightly better.

Both Viktoria's singles events and Charlotte's Monotopia had therapeutic ambitions. But Viktor's notion of therapy is different from the others. While Viktoria, in particular, had more of an inward-looking understanding of not being engaged in a monogamous relationship as a sign of inner shortcomings, Viktor frames non-relationality in terms of interrelated needs. He focuses on supplying singles with a community that they purportedly lack; and this difference between his and Viktoria's two distinct non-relationalities is mirrored in how her singles events and his singles association are set up. Viktoria's singles cruises and singles conferences are liminal, and focused on temporary intimate encounters, whereas Viktor arranges a community centred on continuing relational networks.

For Viktor, coupledom is important. He takes a sceptical view of new forms of relationships, like living apart together. As we talk of the statistics, which show that a large proportion of Swedish households has only one adult each, Viktor says:

> I think a lot of the singles are actually couples. They are "joyhabiting" [Sw. *kulbo*] as
> Juholt[49] said, or they are living apart together [Sw. *särbo*], or take turns living at each

---

[48] Cramer's V=0.133; p=0,023.

[49] Håkan Juholt was leader for the Swedish Social Democratic party between 2011 and 2012. In interviews following his election as a leader, he told journalists that he was *kulbo* with his girlfriend. The word is a humorous contraction of joy [Sw. *kul*] and cohabiting [Sw. *sambo*]. Juholt's point was that the couple, living apart together, saw each other when they felt they would enjoy it.

> other's places [Sw. *turbo*]. Well, it's a shame. People need more coaching about building nuclear families [Sw. *kärnfamiljer*]. Nuclear families are good for society.

This shows that Viktor is not a friend to alternative forms of close relations. While he tolerates them to some extent, and on other occasions says that he favours divorce when marriage becomes insupportable, he thinks that "society" fares better when people commit to each other. Nevertheless, Viktor does not understand Filos to be a form of courtship. Couples may and indeed have met at the association's activities. But he still understands the association mainly as supplying people with community when they need it.

But in fact, Filos itself may be interpreted to support alternative forms of close relations. For certain members, Filos not merely gives temporary reprieve from a sense of lacking community, but could to some extent mitigate the need for family. I interviewed the member Petra and asked if she thought some members felt satisfied with being single.

> Andreas: Do some people say, "No, I'll just stay single for the rest of my life"?
>
> Petra: I think very few do. But a lot of women feel that they don't have to meet someone immediately, although many think that it would be nice. But a lot of them would still like to be part of this group [Filos], at least among the women. And not just have coupledom – they wish to continue having this [community]…
>
> Andreas: Also after having found a partner?
>
> Petra: Yes. […] You know, you get used to single life. And you have family, of course, most of us have family. Children and grandchildren. You're not alone in the world. Brothers and sisters, many have their parents. And you have this community.

Here we dive into the conundrum of Filos: if it satisfies the need for community, it may to some extent lessen the need for family. And even if one finds a partner, members may feel a need to stay in the association. At each of these two junctures – offering an alternative to family and a complement to coupledom – Filos opens up alternative venues to traditional close relations. Either the association replaces the need to find a partner, or it creates a need to remain "single" even after having found a partner. My point is not to say that Viktor's theory of social need is necessarily correct and that Filos satisfies inherent needs. The point is rather to say that the association offers a relational network that for some may mimic what they seek in a relationship. Or, put differently, Filos enacts a relationality that some members may associate with coupledom. I will return to and elaborate this point in the next chapter, where I will explore the non-relationality of individual singles and how they relate to their participation in singles activities.

Petra's argument that people get used to single life is striking, if interpreted from the perspective of relationality and non-relationality. As I have argued, singledom entails relational networks. Most relevant to the current discussion are those networks that people have as an expression or consequence of not having a certain relationship, such as relations to ex-spouses, friends, and singles associations. To enter into a monogamous relationship may mean important changes to those networks people have as singles. Membership in Filos is one relational nexus that

would need to be abandoned, given that it is exclusively for singles. With the singles association, we therefore approach questions of what it means to be single; of where the boundary between singledom and coupledom lies; and of what must be sacrificed to pass from one to the other. As Petra says, these questions are also actualised in relation to children, sisters, and brothers, and parents. In all these cases, singledom entails certain arrangements that may need to change when people enter into coupledom. If people enjoy their personal lives as singles, coupledom may not seem so enticing – at least in its traditional form.

Viktor's idea about creating a temporary community for singles as they seek new partners may, as I have shown, inadvertently result in hetero-doxical possibilities. In particular, it forces members to reconsider what it means to be single and part of a couple, and to search out possibilities between the two.

REMAINING SINGLE IN THE FACE OF COUPLEDOM

As I sit and talk with people during the Filos dinner, I am surprised to learn that several of my interlocutors can point out at least three long-term heterosexual couples among the members. People explain that as the focus is on building friendships, the association for some members has transformed into an important nexus in their lives. When they find a partner, the connection to that nexus risks being severed. Some have therefore chosen to keep their romantic relationships secret within the association and thus retain their membership. That secrecy does not keep the rumours from spreading however, especially since several relationships have developed within the association.

Petra is pointed out to me as part of one of the couples. Two and a half years ago, she started dating a man outside the association. As they started seeing each other on a more regular basis, she asked him to become a member of the association. That way, he would become part of her weekly activities. More recently, Petra has become more open about having a relationship.

> Andreas: Did I understand you correctly; you kept your partner secret in the association?
>
> Petra: Yeah, a bit. I've been more open about it towards the end though.
>
> Andreas: Since your partner became a member as well?
>
> Petra: No, later than that [laughs].
>
> Andreas: Has it been a taboo, seen as a big problem?
>
> Petra: No, perhaps not that big of a problem. Some people have been annoyed when couples have kept their memberships. Even when the relationships are weak. Perhaps they're a bit jealous.
>
> Andreas: Okay. So when people have talked indignantly about couples, you've sat there and thought [laughs] "I'm like that".
>
> Petra: Yeah… [laughs]. Yeah, I've kept quiet.

Secrecy was one strategy that people employed to remain "single" after having found a partner. Additionally, as Petra indicates in the interview extract, being in a relationship or not has partly to do with how "weak" the relationship is. Or put differently, being in a relationship depends on what notion of relationality people have, and how one's relationship lives up to those criteria. But even when relations have been weak, she complains, they have irritated other members. I will borrow and use her concept of "weak relations" below to further examine what such "weakness" might entail.

One peculiarity that I only came across in the association is the notion that the word single [Sw. *singel*] denotes somebody who lives alone. According to that definition, Petra, who has had a relation for almost three years but has not cohabited, should still count herself as single. Three members presented me with that definition at three separate occasions, but it is a definition I have not encountered outside Filos. I would argue that the notion was bound up with negotiations over relationality and singledom within the association itself. Petra was a bit uncertain as to whether she was single.

> Andreas: So what is it to be single?
>
> Petra: What you lack as a single… so-called "single" or *ensamstående* [lit. "standing alone", one of the older Swedish words for single; has connotations about living alone] … is that you have no one to share your life with, or everyday life at least. All the small decisions that need to be taken, you have no one to discuss them with. And it's quite an economic burden. But yeah, it's mainly the absence of somebody to share your daily life with.
>
> Andreas: What about your present relationship?
>
> Petra: Well, he wants to live alone. He's a bit of a loner [Sw. *ensamvarg*]. He works a lot and doesn't want to move in with me. Well, it's true, though, he is committed to my children [Petra has three children] and my other relatives [Sw. *min släkt*]. He's with us at Christmas and Easter. Sure, I know he's always there and there's some safety in that. But still. Like now for example, I've been making some renovations around the house and those have been my decisions entirely, and I've not involved him at all. I didn't even tell him about it before it was all finished.

This passage shows Petra's hesitations about the definition of single and her own relationship. I understand her to want to legitimise her membership in the association by passing as single. As a result, she tries to show that she is not really as bound to her partner as it might seem she is. Her explanation in turn hinges on seemingly small details, such as whether he participates in her house renovations, or celebrates Easter with her. I would argue that Petra is negotiating non-relationality here, suggesting ways in which her not having a monogamous relationship is practiced, despite her having a partner.

Petra wants to show that the relationship she fosters within the confines of the association is really not that strong. In the process, she negotiates the meaning of "strong" and therefore also the meaning of family and the possibility of having personal life outside of that normative model. Her conclusion is that celebrating Christmas and Easter (the two most important Swedish family-centred holidays)

together does not constitute a strong relationship. It does not invalidate her singledom.

Interestingly, Petra's definition of what a single person is comes close to a conservative notion of family life. Her reasoning is that one is single until the point where one lives with somebody and shares his or her daily life. Her strategy is to adhere to a traditional, restrictive notion of family, but her goal is to take part in an extended family of choice, that is, the singles association.

I would argue that the question of weak or strong relations is imperative for the singles association. One female member told me that her married friends sometimes envied her for the social activities that her singledom allowed her. The implication is that there is some freedom outside of family life that singles can enjoy. I would argue however that that *freedom* is also a *limitation*: it implies that strong, monogamous relations are not allowed outside of family. I would also argue that it is such strong relations that "threaten" to emerge in the singles association setting.

I did not meet members who explicitly opposed allowing people with "weak" relationships into the association. One can however glean from Petra's defensive tone above, that such critique existed. Such members would presumably have a wider, more "liberal" definition of singledom than Petra. Interestingly, it seems to be the more conservative notion of coupledom – a conservative relationality – that allows members the greatest freedom to try out various possibilities between singledom and coupledom, possibilities that could be called hetero-doxical. Perhaps this is because such possibilities occur *between* rather than *within* strict categories like singledom and coupledom. One might speculate that accepting more "liberal" variants of coupledom might entail pushing out intermediate forms.

More than the other singles activities discussed in this dissertation, Filos actualises the question of what singledom entails. Despite having singledom as a strict criterion for participation, Viktoria's singles events and Charlotte's Monotopia did not occasion elaborate discussions on the exact nature of that boundary, in the same way that Filos does. The reason might be that those singles activities did not build community to the same extent as the association. When people were denied access to those activities, it did not amount to excluding them from a community and a sense of belonging. Being excluded from a liminal or online milieu might not matter as much to people as it would if they were being excluded from an association. However, Charlotte had ambitions to build communities within Monotopia, and so that site might run into boundary problems in the future.

In the case of Filos, I think we have a clear example of a singles activity that influences the non-relationality of its participants. Petra was, for example, invested in keeping her relationship "weak" to retain membership in the association. In other words, she organised her personal life according to a certain model of non-relationality partly to fit into the association. The non-relationality that Filos made Petra adopt did not, however, correspond to the founder Viktor's intention with the association. Instead, its non-relationality emerged out of members' personal engagement with the association and their joint negotiations over the meaning of their activities.

GROUPS WITHIN GROUPS

When it comes to the level of relationship strength, Filos is like a Russian doll: It contains couples, within groups, within larger groups, within the association. At the official meetings, everyone is invited. But then there are less official gatherings, as well as gatherings among members that are secret to others within the association. The coordinator Gina tried to guide me through this complex constellation of overlapping groups.

Andreas: We have talked about the social support that the association provides. But could it also work as a practical support? For example, if you had economical problems, could you call someone in the association?

Gina: Well yes, but that wouldn't be within the framework of the association, you see, but more if you had established a personal relation with somebody.

Andreas: Do those kinds of relations emerge?

Gina: Oh, yes they do. There are a lot of personal relations in the association. We have many different … *groups* in the association. There is a group of women that travel together one weekend each year. And there're other groups as well. Some have dinners exclusively for those that they themselves invite – but only members in the association. And there are several groups that travel abroad together. Two and two, or three, or four, and so on. You know, it's like meeting new friends; you do these kinds of things.

Andreas: Would I be able to tell which ones are parts of a group if I went to a meeting?

Gina: You could, yes. But it's not always that obvious.

Andreas: So how many groups are there?

Gina: I really don't know. I'm part of several groups. A lot of people are, it's this way or that [*sic*] depending on what they like to do. Then there are the couples; they see each other in pairs, obviously. But they're still in the association, because they're not cohabiting. And then there are the open groups, like when somebody asks: "I've read about this trip to Germany. It costs so and so much, we go that weekend – so who wants to come?"

Andreas: Okay. In what circumstances do they say that? In your monthly email? [The association emails its members a list with the official activities every month.]

Gina: Oh, no. It's at the gatherings. You know, a lot happens at the gatherings, like "Who wants to come to this film or this theatre show?" It's often something about theatre, that's difficult to have in the monthly programme, people have to decide to come pretty much directly – the tickets have to be paid well in advance. […] But again, a lot of the groups meet without informing everyone at a meeting. You know, that's what happens when you become friends. And that's an important principle, that members should be able to socialize outside of the association.

Andreas: Well, I suppose that relations in the association have become rather complicated at this point, am I right?

Gina: Quite. Well, if a group of us went to a museum we would often say, "A couple of us went to this museum" [at an official meeting]. But we won't mention it all of the time. Sometimes you keep it secret.

> Andreas: Yes, that's what I suspected. Because it could be sensitive, I presume?
>
> Gina: Certainly. "Why wasn't I invited" and so on…
>
> Andreas: When do you talk about it at a meeting, and when don't you?
>
> Gina: It's difficult to say. I guess we keep it secret when we feel it's nobody's business. When it's private.

As with the definition of singledom, this interview extract concerns where the boundaries of the association should be drawn. Gina suggests that some of the groups, particularly those that do not proclaim their activities at meetings, are outside of the association ("it wouldn't be within the framework of the association, you see"). At the same time, however, the association is not only the origin of those groups, but the place at which they meet up regularly, and where they can decide to include more people and become more or less open to other members.

Overall, it seems that at the official meetings, members try to downplay their increasingly specific and personal positions in the association for the benefit of new members, who must be welcomed on the same terms as everyone else. But there are groups that have disconnected from the public kernel of the association, and that tend, to different degrees, towards the private.

Nevertheless, I would argue that as long as these private groups are somehow connected to the public kernel of the association, they are more flexible than they would be without that connection. With their presence at the official gatherings, these groups can change; members can come and go, the groups can disperse or be reorganised in a different form, they can become more open or less open, more or less private.

In this context, it is significant that Gina talks about the couples in the association as though their tête-à-têtes would be comparable to group activities ("they see each other in pairs, obviously"). This comparison also ties in with the arguments I made above about how members define singledom. We saw how Petra had invited her partner into the association (and then kept their relation secret from other members for a while). I would argue that by tying relationships to the association, people might feel that their relationships become more open to negotiation and change. As Gina suggests, couples can become part of a group configuration, decide to meet alone, or discuss their activities together at the official meetings.

I would argue that the association is a way to organise what Petra called weak relations. By tying different groups and relations back to the less personal meetings of the association, members can have more flexible friendships and romantic relationships. In that way, members also avoid destabilising the family norm, according to which "strong" relations belong exclusively to the family. Nevertheless, the association activities and the relations that are created there are sometimes threatening to become more family-like and strong, thus challenging rather than reinforcing the family as the exclusive model of strongly tied relationships.

Some members favour a more anonymous involvement. Viktor argues that:

> One advantage [with Filos] is that you don't need to provide your identity. You can be anonymous. A first name suffices: When you come [to a meeting] you might just be Andreas. You don't need to tell the others how many kids you have or how many times you've been married. But when you come to know people here who you want to meet privately, then you maybe start to provide personal information.

But Gina tells me that some long-term members only go to the public meetings and never become part of a private group. She also mentions that some men become members only to pick up women. These individuals usually participate only once, however. Filos lends itself to various ways to arrange single life – most significantly a network of weaker relations – but resists being a site for courtship only.

That is not to say that the Filos community never lends itself to courtship. Charlotte's Monotopia had a strong streak of courtship mixed in with community building. Using the distinction between individual and personal, I argued in the previous chapter that encountering others in the context of a community allows people personal impressions of others that would not be possible in face-to-face encounters. Viktor had similar ideas about encounters in Filos when we discussed what different impressions of others mean in different contexts:

> So what you see above the surface is only a tenth of the iceberg. The rest is underneath. And then you realise what it means to look at the appearances, hearing a voice, and clothing… We may feel some energy and smells. But underneath that, that's what's Filos is about. When you meet, you notice the charm of people, how generous they are, how nice and positive. A lot of people look better in that environment, because you notice how they are as people – then their value rises so to speak. […] It's so nice, you can sit and look from a distance and study them.

Viktor describes the impressions we might have of others when they are active in relational networks and not focused on us (as in dating). He also says that impressions over time might be different than the impressions we have at a first encounter. Talking of people's hidden dimensions – the iceberg beneath the surface – Viktor could be said to speculate about the nature of intimacy. For him, intimacy is relational; it is an experience of the other as engaged in relations. It is a gradual getting-to-know another as s/he acts in stable relations, which must by definition entail various situations.

This is a different notion of intimacy than the one proponed by Viktoria. For Viktoria, we get an intimate impression of the other in the off-chance encounter, when we see something surprising and unexpected in other people. Viktor is critical of such notions. He argues that women in general want to take time learning to know other:

> The difference between men and women is that women take time. They want to get to know… to feel comfortable. They don't want the man to flirt immediately, because they don't know him. Of course, they can think he looks nice and seems okay, but most women get scared. They want to know what they are signing up for. That's why Filos is perect for women, you can take your time and you meet *again*. I try to get the men to realise this as well, "Take it slowly guys, ask her if she'll come to the party next Saturday… Then you'll know she'll come and you have something to look forward to. So Filos is about knowing other people calmly and slowly. People show respect and are polite. That's how you get to know others, and then you decide yourself how often you wish to go.

Viktor was very keen to argue the risks of courtship, particularly for women. People might not be what they appear to be and only long-term involvement with them will reveal their true identity, according to him.

The organising logic proponded by Viktor connects community and courtship together tightly. As people develop relationships, connecting various situations of relatedness, they also get impressions of others that these others do not display in public. From that perspective, Filos needs to allow groups, where people develop more personal connections at the periphery of the association. At the same time, these groups remain attached to the association, allowing people some flexibility moving into, out of, and between groups. As long as a relationship develops within the framework of Filos, it is easier to break than if it had been arranged outside the association. Consequently, the arrangements of groups within groups allow for community and courtship, personal and intimate, to exist simultaneously.

Importantly, Viktor's understanding of the association may have influenced its basic structure, but people use it in alternative ways. While Viktor seems to argue that developing relations within the association might help people (especially women) to find a better-suited companion, the context also lends itself to hetero-doxical relational constellations. Groups within groups allow for relational flexibility, rather than lead to greater attachments, which is Viktor's ideal.

That subgroups within Filos can be more or less secretive, opens up the possibility of intimacy as the unique impression of others within the association. But this intimacy would not be limited to couples, but might work as the basis for various kinds of relations between members. While Viktor imagines intimacy as the result of long-term relationships, the arrangement of the association thus emphasises secrecy and ways of being intimate without a relationship.

CONCLUSIONS

The founder of Filos, Viktor, has therapeutic ambitions. Drawing on notions of inherently human interrelated needs, he argues that many singles lack community. By supplying it, he believes people without monogamous relations may turn their lives "back up again" and eventually meet a partner. Viktor's arguments concern foremost divorcees, reinforcing the hypothesis that singles associations are con-nected to the rising number of divorces in the last 50 or 60 years.

Despite Viktor's scepticism about looser forms of relations, some Filos members understand the association to either mitigate their need for a partner, or to encour-age "weak" relationships that allow them to pass as singles even when having a partner.

Filos consists of many overlapping groups, which have varying ties to the main organisation. Some are secret to other members, while others are announced at open meetings or in the association newsletter. There is evidence to suggest that couples may also be viewed as partly attached to Filos. I argue that by tying groups and relationships to the association, people are allowed greater flexibility in enter-ing, existing, and creating new relational networks.

Viktor thinks that singles communities like Filos are a safe way to court. People have sides that they keep hidden from the public, but which often come to the fore in relationships, according to him. By meeting up regularly in Filos, people have the chance to develop "weaker" versions of such relationships and watch others as they engage in relational networks. Viktor thus connects community and courtship, relationality and intimacy, in very intricate ways. Although Viktor himself imagines intimacy to result from long-term relationships, intimate experience also comes into the equation through the secrecy that subgroups within the association make possible,.

Despite Viktor's emphasis on attachment, Filos does lend itself to alternative forms of close relations. By allowing and even demanding "weak" relationships of its members, while offering an alternative to family, the association itself may be seen as a hetero-doxical alternative to traditional coupledom.

7. Single Life and Non-Relationality

In previous chapters, I have examined specific singles activities using data from direct observations and interviews with participants. In this chapter, I shift the perspective. Here I focus instead on how individual singles understand and use the activities in their personal lives.

Why is this perspective important in a dissertation that explores singles activities? First, it provides insight into how the different activities examined were interrelated. Participants themselves often frequented several of the activities and used them in tandem. Secondly, and more important, my observations indicated that some observed phenomena were difficult to understand exclusively from within the framework of specific singles activities. They seemed to mirror ways in which certain singles and groups of singles came to and inhabited the spaces and places I examined. I for noticed differences between divorcees and people who had never been married; between women and men; and between young and old participants. These were differences in how they understood the activities, which other activities they reported visiting and how they understood singledom more generally.

If singles activities are not merely a result of an organiser's idea, but also result from the participants' various understandings and practices, I needed to take the latter into account as well. I need to understand how participants approached singles activities and situate it within their personal lives.

My analysis will show that how participants approach singles activities, can be understood from the perspective of their non-relationalities. This chapter therefore elaborates on, applies the concept non-relationality and shows its relevance to the present project.

First a short reminder of what non-relationality entails. What separates coupledom from singledom is a monogamous relationship. But what are relationships? As I have discussed in the Introduction and chapter 3, Carol Smart and other writers suggest that a relationship is always something more than the sum of two persons and their mind-sets (Smart, 2007). It involves a personal life: the myriad different relations that embed us in personal histories and places; our relations to a culture, our family history, promises about the future, mortgages, and job relations.

Now, if we include these various relations to people and things to describe a monogamous relationship, we must concede that relationships vary considerably. Such a move leads us to the conclusion that a single person could have a personal life that is very similar to a couple's lives. Counter-intuitively, I would suggest that a couple could hypothetically have personal lives less akin to those of other couples' than a single person might have. If we follow these notions to their logical conclusion, few people are entirely single or entirely in a couple, but somewhere in between. This point is illustrated well by the Filos case; the singles association allows members to pass as singles as long as they do not cohabit with their partners. Although these members are not without partners, they still count as singles. The con-

cept of personal life helps us see that the distinction between coupledom and singledom is open to negotiation.

Single persons I have interviewed often make arrangements in expectations of relationships, and have retained some of the arrangements from earlier relationships. These arrangements make people "more than" single and at the same time "less than" a couple. Actually, from the perspective of the myriad relations, few people would count as entirely single or entirely in a couple. When we meet, a great deal of our potential relationship is already in place: we have our furniture, families, homes, and so on. As singles, we surround ourselves with things that could also be included in couple life. Thus, if people announce a clear-cut distinction between single and couple, we must understand it as a specific, situational practice rather than a generally valid definition.

I have coined a phrase for how people talk, act, and think – their *practices* – about not having a relationship: non-relationality. When a single person for example goes on a date, she or he engages in non-relationality. Is that single a single at the moment she or he sits down with someone and shares thoughts and experiences? Such things must be decided through practices like talking, organising, thinking, and negotiating (cf. Krause & Kowalski, 2013). Or to take another example, is a single person single when s/he decides that s/he does not need a partner, and that friendship is sufficient to live a fulfilled life? Again, this is a question for practice and something we researchers need to examine empirically, rather than decide through *a priori* definitions.

Non-relationality is a certain form of relationality, not something that falls outside of the latter. Relationality in turn is defined as the *how* and *what* of relationships. As non-relationality entails an understanding of the how and what of a relationship – although it is a relationship that is missing – it might also play an important role in how people imagine former and future relationships, as well as how they enact new relationships. In such circumstances it becomes more evident that non-relationality is actually a kind of relationality. As I discuss non-relationalities below, I will sometimes call them relationalities when it might fit the context better.

The chapter consists of a close analysis of interviews with four different singles, followed by an analysis of the survey results. Besides direct quotes from the interviews, my analysis will rely on summaries or vignettes based on those interviews (cf. I. Seidman, 1998). As summaries and analysis are interspersed, I have italicised the summaries to clarify which is which.

SUBSTITUTING FAMILY

Ellen divorced her husband a couple of years back and now lives with her adult son from a previous marriage. They live in the house that she and her former husband bought together. During the interview, Ellen often repeats that the worst part of being single is the weekends. As she puts it, when she lived with her husband, they shared the weekends by watching television, going out, or passing time together. She did not have to choose having his company; he was usually there for her. It was only if she wanted to be alone that she actively chose to be so. Now that

is all reversed, and she needs to make an active choice to have some company dur-
ing those weekends when her son is away (which he is, more often than not).

Ellen says that her life has had two components: the community at work and the
community she had with her family at home. She still goes to the same workplace
as when she was married. Now, when the latter community is no longer there, work
has tended to dominate her life more and more. She thinks of her life as two com-
peting communities; since one of them (family) broke apart, the other (work) has
achieved something of a monopoly over her.

As we see, many of the circumstances in which Ellen found herself before the di-
vorce are still in place a couple of years after. She lives at the same house, goes to
the same job, lives with her son, and so on. There seems to be a connection be-
tween this continuity and her sense that what she misses is some community rituals
during weekends.

Ellen discusses relationships as reassuringly repeated rituals of community. Re-
peated rituals means that the community (when established) is not something she
chooses from one instant to the next. A family is quite simply there during week-
ends – and even if there are exceptions, those are exactly that: exceptions to a re-
assuring rule. A relationship therefore means choosing when not to take part. Be-
ing with others is the default value when in this kind of relationship – it is the thing
that "just is" without there being any choice or planned action.

I could not say whether Ellen's marriage, as she suggests, actually was centred on
weekend rituals or not. But I would say two things. First, the notion of the absence
of repeated rituals is her understanding of when a relationship is missing; it is part
of her non-relationality. Important elements that take on meaning for her in the
context of that non-relationality are her week schedule, her work, and the house.
The weeks are repetitious, work is a competing community, and the house is like a
shell of vanished family life. These elements and her understand of them are her
way of marking out the boundary between single and couple. Second, when dis-
cussing her former marriage in the light of her present predicament, she interprets
it as focused on precisely those characteristics that her present non-relationality
says coupledom should involve: repeated rituals of community. What she interprets
as lacking in her single life is projected as present in coupledom.

Interestingly, Ellen has found a way to enact community relationship on weekends
outside of marriage. She discovered it through the local newspaper, where she
read about people setting up an association for singles. The newspaper article said
that some of the members felt so at home in the association that they had stopped
looking for a partner. Intrigued, Ellen searched out the association and became a
member (it is not Filos, but another singles association in another city). This asso-
ciation has changed her life considerably:

> It was such a positive experience even that first time I went. It was an overwhelming
> sense that a big part of the puzzle just fell into place. To meet people that are my age
> or somewhat older that come for the same reasons as I do, but I don't have to make an
> effort. You know, if you have a date with someone you met online – well, it's as if

everything comes to a head, you have to live up to so many expectations. Well, it's not the same in this kind of association, you go there to be yourself and do nice things.

An association for singles gives Ellen a new community that meets regularly around common rituals – visits to the pub, eating dinner, going to the cinema, and so on. As in her marriage, this is a group that meets regularly and does not demand more of her than her participation. Or more to the point: Ellen is welcome and can participate in a capacity that she deems to be her own.

This story about finding a new community illustrates the volatility of relationality – what we could term its hetero-doxical potential: If my theoretical reasoning is correct, that is, that personal life makes a relationship into more than two people, and that singles and couples may have these other arrangements in common, then perhaps at times no partner is needed to have something like a relationship. Ellen's present non-relationality tells her that a couple should involve repeated rituals of community. A singles association can provide that – and significantly, some other members seem to think that the association fills the need for a partner.

Ellen, however, who looks back at marriage as a time when community during weekends demanded no effort, realizes that the association does require some effort of her: She needs to travel to the city centre where most of the activities take place. Oftentimes, she needs to book tickets (e.g., to the theatre) in advance. While membership in the association means that she has the comfort of a community to fall back on when she needs one, the default situation is still her being alone at home. The association is there when she chooses, but when she does not choose she remains on her own. While the association thus makes it possible to substitute elements of what her non-relationality understands relationships to entail, she still discerns elements that do not fit.

Ellen lives in a village some miles out of town, in a house she bought with her former husband. She plans on moving to a more central location in the city. She reasons that with more people around, the chances are that some of the other members in the association will live close by. She longs to have friends she can just go home to without prior planning. In fact, she has noticed that two other female members in the association live in the same small village as she does, but she has not felt close enough to them to invite them over. I interpret Ellen's efforts to bring community closer to home as examples of her trying to fit the association to her current understanding of what relationships are about; to her relationality.

In a sense, Ellen talks about the singles association as a substitution for family life, so that its value is measured by its proximity to the how and what of relationships. The concept of relationality helps us understand Ellen's narrative. It is quite obvious that she does not view her former family life primarily as the sum of two people and their feelings for each other. For her, family life involves home, work, theatres, talk, and a sense of belonging. What Ellen and the case of singles associations show is that much of this can be achieved outside of coupledom's vows of monogamy and cohabitation. What she tries to accomplish, then, is a relationship without a partner. While a singles association is somewhat different from a marriage, Ellen works to minimize those differences by moving into the city centre and being closer to the other members.

Her time in the association has also shown Ellen certain aspects of relationships that a marriage cannot offer, such as openness for new members and a variety of activities. She is therefore convinced that she would keep going to the association even if she met a partner. Luckily for Ellen, the regulations of the association allow members to keep their membership in case of a relationship (which is not the case with all such associations, Filos being a more restrictive example).

As I have shown, Ellen's non-relationality is open to enacting relationships with something other than a partner. Therefore, the distinctions it draws between coupledom and singledom (having or not having repeated rituals of community) lend themselves to a reimagining of relationships that blurs the distinctions. For Ellen, having a relationship seems to have become a question of degrees rather than a yes or no question. This perception is not least suggested by her mentioning the fact that the association can make some people stop looking for a partner.

I should point out that Ellen does not count herself among those singles association members who are no longer interested in a partner. Nevertheless, her time in the association has led her to the conclusion that one should not form a relationship merely to flee singledom. Instead of having such ulterior motives in dating, she wants to evaluate any relationship on its own merits. As a result, she must first feel secure as a single before really being able to appreciate a partner for his own sake. That security is something she achieves through the singles association, she argues. Her reasoning is similar to the organising ideas Viktoria, Charlotte, and Viktor had behind their singles activities.

By arguing in this way, I would say, Ellen avoids the conclusion that the association has replaced any interest in a partner, even when she admits that it has made her happy being single. In fact, she implies that becoming satisfied with singledom may in fact be necessary for having good relationships in the future. The consequence of that reasoning would be that singledom is not the opposite of coupledom. She is arguing that singledom should lack nothing that is present in a relationship, other than a relationship to a specific person – which she would lack in another relationship as well.

This reasoning means then that there is a second non-relationality emerging from Ellen's interview. I understand Ellen's first non-relationality as centred on repeated rituals of community. Now, when she has found a way to have such rituals outside of marriage, she has come up with an additional understanding of relationships. With this second non-relationality, every relationship is unique and coupledom cannot be determined as distinct from singledom in general terms. How does Ellen set this new notion of relationships into practice?

Ellen is hesitant about using Internet dating. While she feels, like other women I talked to, that ageing has made her more knowledgeable about what traits to look for in a man, and while Internet dating lets her browse and compare men with those traits in mind, Ellen feels that Internet dating almost forces ulterior motives on her. She notices how she always forms images of a happy, intimate future with the men she dates, images that the men are often unable to live up to. Internet da-

ting is too focused on fantasized coupledom, not on cultivating the individual relationship, according to Ellen.

Lately, Ellen has been able to solve her dilemma with a man she is seeing. They met on the Internet. However, in their online discussions she convinced him to take part in some upcoming events in the singles association. That means that they met and have stayed in contact through that community.

> Well, the guy I'm seeing right now, that was more like a … hybrid thing [Sw. *mellanting*] between Internet dating and the singles association. […] We met physically for the first time on a Friday a couple of weeks back when we met up at one of the singles association's events. A lot of other people participated. And it actually was more relaxed [than a dating tête-à-tête].

Presumably, what Ellen wants is a way of dating men without simultaneously enacting some general distinction between singledom and coupledom. Quite simply, she wants to meet and have a nice time, and she wants that niceness to be the criterion that makes her want to meet again, not some preconception about what coupledom entails. She acknowledges that certain notions of singledom – that is, certain non-relationalities – are emphasised in singles activities and dating sites. What she tries to do then, is *combine* them in a way that cancels out the non-relationalities she dislikes, and emphasizes those non-relationalities she takes as elements of her own practice.

When Ellen practices her two non-relationalities, they involve dating services and singles activities in different ways. The first takes the singles association as substituting for a lack that defines her singledom (and therefore constitutes a relationship). With the second non-relationality, Ellen uses different singles activities to have specific impressions of the men she encounters - while trying to avoid the specific non-relationality the singles activities encapsulate.

Ellen's use of singles activities could be described homogeneously. What she tries to do is enact encounters and relational networks in a way that makes sense from the perspective of her non-relationalities. In the case of the singles association, that process is straightforward: Ellen uses it to enact repeated rituals of community, which she understands as constituting a relationship. In the case of dating sites and inviting her date to the singles association, the process is more intricate. First, Ellen may not want to have a relationship with whomever. She wants someone with whom she feels at ease and has fun. To know that that is the case, however, she must not feel tempted to view the relationship as an escape from singledom. I would characterize this as an "epistemological" dilemma: She wants to experience encounters with men from a certain point of view, and not have other irrelevant elements interfere with that process. Ellen is trying to set up means of encounter that are compatible with her relationality.

> Andreas: You spoke about being disappointed when you dated men online. Do you mean that you get disappointed when you meet them for the first time offline, or is it later?
>
> Ellen: No, for me I've been disappointed later. I've thought, "Yeah, he is really nice and everything, but I wouldn't want a relationship with him". […] You know, with the

guy I'm dating now [whom she met online and who became a singles association member] I've tried to be very clear that I want to meet up as friends first, it's really hard to decide from just meeting a few times. You should quote me on this: I think you have to know each other for some time before you can decide to enter into a relationship.

Dating sites are means of measurement in themselves. Log on to one, and you will soon find yourself able to compare single people's height, weight, occupation, hobbies, hair colour, and so on. Ellen wants to use some of that measuring power, but has also realized that some ways of measuring on the sites depend on certain notions of what a relationship is – notions that do not fit with hers. Hence her restructuring of the measuring process by inviting her date to the singles association, where she can come to know him in ways that are more pertinent to her relationality.

But why does she need to get specific kinds of impressions of these men? I would suggest that the following answer follows closest the theoretical and empirical base I have hitherto built up: because different individual partners (or other elements, such as a singles associations) fit differently into Ellen's relationality. Much as Ellen configures her membership in the singles association to fit more neatly with her wanting a reassuringly repeated ritual of community, she wants to find a man with whom to have a secure and fun relationship. Thus, both the association and having impressions of prospective partners are about successfully enacting a relationship according to a given non-relationality, which is the same thing as relationality. With the singles association however, the dilemma of having impressions is removed; it is a community with many different people, and she can choose to strengthen or weaken her relations to other members more or less at will. In her use of Internet dating it remains the overarching theme: finding a man in a way that fits her relationality.

AVOIDING FUTURE ADJUSTMENTS

Naima immigrated to Sweden a couple of decades ago and has been divorced from her Swedish husband for four years. Naima argues that being in a couple is very different from living single. In a couple, your own life is subsumed under the shared life. For example, every new friend you meet becomes a friend of the couple rather than your personal friend – which is why couples usually only befriend other couples. Naima thinks that socializing with other men while in a couple would be seen with suspicion, because of its association with infidelity. Travelling when you are in a couple always means travelling together, and never experiencing what it really means to take personal responsibility for booking a flight, a hotel, and so on. In a marriage, all decisions need to be negotiated together. Where you live and work needs to be decided by both parties and cannot be up to one individual. To get married, therefore, means to forsake some of your own aspirations and wishes. One could say that for Naima, coupledom is the opposite of singledom. In other words, singledom's friendships, aspirations, and choices constitute what you give up in a couple.

When she was young, Naima mostly wanted to have children and form a family. She primarily chose her husband because of his good looks and because he was

available and willing. To be with him, she gave up a university education, her plans to move to a larger city, and her preferences for a career.

After some decades in a marriage, with its endless conflicts and compromises, she has come to the conclusion that men and women in couples need to share similar opinions and aspirations in order to have a good relationship. They need to be able to communicate everything, their innermost thoughts and desires. Only then can they minimize the amount of individuality that each person needs to forsake, and avoid conflicts when making decisions. If people who form a couple are more alike, she reasons, then there will be fewer sacrifices to make when they work to accommodate each other.

Therefore, Naima knows what qualities she looks for in a man. He should have the same interests and goals in life as she does, and he should be a good communicator. She wants for her and him to be close, mentally as well as physically. Closeness is central to having a good relationship.

Some of these qualities are things that you can check in a man only when you meet him face-to-face, according to Naima. That someone is good at communicating and wants to share their inner thoughts and feelings is difficult to assess if you cannot meet them. This reasoning is why Naima has been hesitant about using Internet dating. When her friends pushed her into it (one male friend even created an online profile for her), she reluctantly gave it a try. It turned out that the dating sites were a good way of getting an overview and selecting men with educations and jobs that matched her own. She learned to "delete" men who did not live up to her criteria, that is, make them unable to contact her again. To meet up with everyone would be a waste of time if you know, as Naima does, what you want in a partner.

When a recent series of dates with a man who seemed to fit all the criteria online turned out to be a disappointment, however, that experience reinforced Naima's view that you need to meet people face-to-face to decide if they live up to your standards. As Internet dating only gives you so much information about the other person, it will inevitably lead to time being spent on disappointing dates.

When I ask Naima what an online ideal dating service would look like for her, she describes a dating site with many different networks organized around a common title, such as "Golf" or "Entrepreneurs", networks that then meet up offline. There would have to be an organiser responsible for each network, someone that takes the responsibility of emailing people about upcoming events, and deciding on places to meet, activities to do, and so on.

Naima's ideal dating service fits neatly with the lessons she has drawn from her marriage and from her time in the world of Internet dating. Naima is adamant about the characteristics of prospective partners; they need to be like her and be good communicators. While some of these characteristics can be determined online, others need to be judged face-to-face. Thus, Naima wants an ideal dating site to have designated networks where the designations would presumably attract men with the right characteristics. Actual group meetings offline would then make

it possible to assess them further, but without having to spend time making excuses for not wanting to meet again and then making contact with a new person.

Another singles activity format that makes it possible to interact with men without necessarily having to make excuses is speed dating. Sure enough, Naima has indeed been to a speed dating event and liked the experience.

Unlike Ellen, Naima understands coupledom as a lifestyle entirely distinct from singledom. For her, to be in a couple is to give up individuality and accept joint decisions. In the perspective of that relationality, being single is to emphasize one's individuality and make one's own decisions. Which is what Naima did after the divorce. She moved to a new city, got a new job, and found new hobbies. She met new friends that are her own. She has male friends, which would be difficult if she was still married.

If Naima found a partner, by the logic of her non-relationality she would have to change her life again. After all, a relationship means giving up the individuality of singledom for a life of accommodation. But Naima is much less willing to make compromises than she was when younger (or so she says in the interview). This unwillingness to give away her single life creates quite a tension in her narrative, since she is still determined to understand relationships to be about accommodation. Naima's solution is to talk about similarity and communication as central to relationships. She says that she wants a relationship where she must compromise, but where the compromises and the sacrifices need not be so great because the couple already has so much in common.

I would interpret Naima's solution as a way to retain her current non-relationality. Let us look closer at what that relationality entails. In contrast to Ellen, who has continued to live in the house she bought with her husband, Naima practices divorce as a radical break with the past. I would interpret that break as coherent with her notion of there being a clear distinction between singledom and coupledom, where coupledom means sacrifice of individuality. In a sense, Naima's radical break with her husband can be seen not as a shift to some new relationality, but constitutive of the non-relationality from which she now remembers and understands her marriage.

Rather than talking of her divorce as a way to justify a shift of relationality, one could say that Naima's more radical break with married life is meant to display continuity in her understanding of relationships. Instead of questioning her relationality in the light of her problematic marriage, she argues that it would work well with a better man. Perhaps this willingness to defend it could be interpreted as following from the fact that her (non-)relationality not only underpins her notions of coupledom but also sustains her notion of singledom.

> Andreas: Are there circumstances under which you would prefer to life as single?
>
> Naima: It [a relationship] should be close to perfect you know.
>
> Andreas: [laughs] Aha, okay, so you have a lot of qualifications for men to live up to then.

Ellen: Yes, absolutely [laugh]. And I'm pretty contented with having those demands on men.

Andreas: Aha, okay. I understand. But just to be clear, you're saying that you're pretty okay with being single?

Naima: Oh yes, under the condition [laugh] that I don't find what I'm looking for, then I'd want to live this way [as single].

It is the more traditional forms of femininity that are most often associated with a readiness to adjust to men, accept joint decisions, and give up individual freedom and aspirations (cf. de Beauvoir, 2011). Naima gave up educational and professional aspirations to live with her ex-husband, and she gave up plans to move to a larger city. This relationality could be understood as part of a specific femininity. While Naima nowadays finds her previous sacrifices unacceptable and premature, her solution is to search for a more compatible man – not to question the relationality itself.

Practicing relationality comprises more than merely two people. Ellen and Naima show that it is also about houses, place, associations, education, interests, friends (and the gender of friends), travelling, public entertainment, and so on. I would argue that we can find a common trend in Ellen's and Naima's narratives: They want relationships where a partner is less important, either by being replaceable by an association, or by making less of a change to the current non-relational arrangement of things. Coupledom should not *negate* singledom, but complement it. I would argue that different singles activities play an important role in letting Ellen and Naima pursue these (non-)relationalities to different degrees.

This move to make men less central in their relationships could be seen as a challenge to femininity, although that challenge is never realised. Ellen and Naima articulate their moves differently. Ellen wants to live a single life where the constructed absence of a relationship could be remedied by other means than by a partner. Naima still wants to accommodate a man, but has some distinctive demands on the men she would date; she wants a man that would minimise her accommodation. It could therefore be argued that their current attempts to achieve less partner-centred relationships, retains their understanding of relationships and allows them alternatives within the confines of traditional femininity.

For Naima, making a partner less central is particularly difficult. She understands relationship to be the opposite of singledom: a situation in which each individual has to accommodate the other. As her solution is to search for a man with whom she would already share many interests and goals in life, I would argue that her relationality might come to rely on singles activities that allow that kind of matchmaking. At the same time, though, her experiences from dating sites are negative in that the men she dated have not lived up to her expectations. Speed dating seems to be her preferred alternative, although she had not been to more than one speed dating event at the time of the interview.

What do these singles activities offer Naima? As in the case of Ellen, I would argue that they offer her specific kinds of impressions of others. How can she know that someone is like herself and good at communicating? The dating sites seem to

promise the tools to find the right man, but Naima notices that they cannot tell her everything. For example, one man she dated was a communication consultant, which made her think that he would be able to communicate everything.

> But I soon realized the opposite was true. I was almost shocked because after merely two or three weeks we couldn't discuss anything; I failed to come up with one subject where the discussion would run smoothly between us. […] That was a really tough experience for me, but eventually I felt that he can be a communication consultant all he wants, have a good job and social status and everything, but he is not for me.

So for Naima, her relationality turns on a problem of getting the right impression: what tools to use to know whether a person would allow her to sustain a specific notion of relationships but not give up the kind of individuality she currently enjoys as a single?

To sum up, there are points to be made about Naima's case that add to the discussion about the relationality and non-relationality concepts. I would argue that this case shows us how changing one's environment, for example, moving to a new city, getting new friends, and so on, are not necessarily equivalent to changing relationality. Rather than a person being caught up in certain things and people, relationality should be understood to concern a person's interaction with that context. That interaction is constitutive of the relationships the person may have. Changing that circumstance marks a shift, but not necessarily a shift in relationality as such. Rather, radically shifting place and social network in the case of a divorce may merely reinforce the difference between coupledom and singledom that was inscribed in the relationality to begin with. A less radical shift, on the other hand, could mark an actual shift in relationality, where the difference between coupledom and singledom is played down. Thus, relationality is in part played out in the interaction between people and their milieus.

This point about changes could be expressed in terms of continuities and discontinuities. As I argued in chapter 3, relationships are continuous in that they bridge different situations. Relationalities and non-relationalities, insofar as they concern the how and what of relationships, are about constructing continuities and discontinuities, that is, practicing relationships as continuous and the break-up of relationships as a discontinuity.

How we construct (e.g., arrange, narrate, or depict) a divorce is important for constructing our non-relationality. Ellen has let most things remain the same after her divorce; for her then, the divorce, and therefore relationships, are about those things that did not remain the same, those that emerge as lacunas in her everyday life – the repeated rituals of community. Naima, on the other hand, has changed most things around her after the divorce. For her, divorce has been about reclaiming individuality, while relationships emerge as the sacrifice of individuality.

At this point in time, both Ellen and Naima are determined not to let any new relationships bring discontinuities into their lives. They want singledom and coupledom to be more alike. This desire does suggest some conscious effort in trying to change how their relationships are practiced. To bring these changes about, the women work skillfully with their personal lives to include or exclude certain ele-

ments, such as singles associations, Internet dating, cities, houses, jobs, and children. As I will discuss in the next section, these efforts and the relationalities themselves intersect with other important ways in which people organize their environments.

CONCERNED WITH HEALTH

Eva worked in health care before retiring a couple of years back. She is a widow of several years, and has dated from time to time since the death of her husband, but has mainly tried to lead what she calls as active a single life as possible. Like Ellen and Naima, Eva argues that ageing and being married have made her more knowledgeable about what characteristics a potential partner would need to have in order to her to have a relationship with him. That knowledge has made her more choosey and less likely to find a suitable man, and so she prefers singles activities that have a broader purpose than merely finding a partner. Above all, she is actively engaged in a local singles association and tries to be sociable with people around her more generally.

There are advantages to being a widow rather than a divorcee, Eva maintains. People would never dare to suggest that a widow should hurry up to find a new husband. That makes life a little less complicated: she never gets "well-meaning" advice from friends and family. She misses her husband. But she can see that some of her divorced friends are in the right when they argue that at least she does not "have to encounter his corpse in the street".

During the interview, I am a bit surprised and perhaps somewhat impressed by Eva's distanced and self-deprecating views on life. She has an ability to reflect on herself as an example of broader phenomena, even when that mode of thinking reveals less flattering sides of herself. Therefore, I am not surprised when she, at the end of our interview, reveals that she kept a diary after the death of her husband to help her get through the years of grieving. While the diary is not something she has shared with others, the act of writing has helped her reshape her perspectives on grief and being lonely. I gather that it has also helped her to get perspective on her loneliness and given her an ability to reflect on it in general terms.

Eva often argues that there is a connection between relationships and well-being. The following passage from the interview is typical, not least because it shows Eva taking my perspective as a researcher.

> Eva: Your research is interesting, not least from an economical perspective. People really shouldn't live on their own very long… Well, you are up-to-date on that debate I would think.

> Andreas: Mm.

> Eva: Research shows we're much healthier if we live with a partner, and if we have a social network more generally.

Eva's taking a health perspective on singledom could be interpreted as stemming from her work as a nurse and her diary practice: While health care has provided her with the health discourse, her diary practice has made her more reflective on single

life and able to take a bird's view on loneliness. These perspectives would illuminate both her distance to herself and singledom more generally, and her concern to make broad connections between loneliness and health.

Current research on loneliness and health tends to focus on the subjectively felt emotions of loneliness and belonging. Therefore, a person's number of relations and the level of closeness of specific relations are not considered to be important for health; only if those factors make a person *feel* lonely will she or he experience deteriorating health (Cacioppo et al., 2006).

Eva is more focused on the depth of closeness in a relationship and the number of relationships a person has than current research is, however. It is rather difficult, though, to determine which of those two – intimacy or quantity – she takes to be most important. At the beginning of the interview, she is rather adamant that what all singles really want and need are long-term relationships. Later on, though, she understands general sociability and broad social networks as indicators of active singledom, which she seems to equate with well-being.

> So many singles lead such miserable lives today. I see that as regrettable, not least because I have a happy life. I've done something positive with my singledom; I've chosen not to feel bad about it. Of course, I was devastated to begin with [when her husband died] but then I had to handle it. That's why I find it so sad that these singles are miserable, that they can't accept their situation. Well, I think it's tragic and of course there is so much to be done about it – so very much.

To live an active single life, Eva is involved in the local singles association. She goes to its dinners, festivities, and other events. Sometimes she pays to go on one of the "singles travels" abroad that different businesses and associations offer. While the single travellers get very close on these trips, Eva has decided to always book her own room at the hotels. Even though women never share rooms with men, Eva knows that a lot of the women who share rooms with each other get on each other's nerves. She loves socialising, but she knows where to draw the line for a social relation not to ruin a good vacation.

Eva and I talk about differences between female and male singles. It is a topic that she and her female friends often discuss. Her theory is that men generally have smaller social networks, which makes them more vulnerable to the negative aspects of singledom. As a result, men are much more motivated to find a partner, making them behave differently from women in the context of singles activities. Rather than being open to living a more fulfilled single life through the activities, men focus exclusively on finding a partner. That focus makes them much less prone to be long-term members of singles associations and more prone to use Internet dating.

Eva tells me she has never used Internet dating sites. She has surfed some of them to see what they are about, but she finds the Internet services tedious and devoid of real social relations. Therefore, I am surprised when she comes out as an enthusiastic supporter of one Internet site in particular, a site that others would label a dating site, at least in part. It is the site I followed from its inception, Monotopia.

Monotopia is not about dating, Eva argues. Or at least the first thing you see when logging on is not a set of photos of beautiful and youthful members. Rather, the site

is about announcing different offline singles activities. Eva is prepared to pay for that kind of information, in contrast to membership on the usual online dating venues.

It is time to focus in on one theme that has surfaced not only in the interview with Eva, but in those with Ellen and Naima as well: ageing. As we have seen, Ellen, Naima, and Eva all connect ageing to being knowledgeable about what to look for in men. They claim that they have developed a matrix of experience that they use to evaluate prospective partners. To equate age with experience is a rather common cultural practice in the West. In this context, though, it underpins a very specific strategy.

In my field studies, I often came across the argument that older people have built up a life with a house, children, hobbies, and so on, which are difficult to change to accommodate a partner. While I would not subscribe to the argument that old people have less flexible arrangements around them than young people, these statements can be analysed as social conventions. Old age then would be enacted in terms of less flexible personal arrangements. These arrangements are, so to speak, representative of a life and its experiences, which are so intrinsically associated with age. Therefore, to give up one's relational networks and material environments would be to refuse one's ageing and one's past.

As my interviews show, age itself is no longer a hindrance to encouraging women to find new partners after a divorce (Bildtgård, 2012). If certain relationalities entail giving up single life to accommodate a partner, and if old single people are increasingly pressed to find partners, then they will have to negotiate between age and materialized experience on the one hand, and demands for closeness on the other.

As we have seen, however, Ellen, Naima, and Eva work towards reducing the difference between singledom and coupledom. To that end, they have found ways to utilise singles activities and dating services. What they seem to strive for is a material arrangement that allows them to have relationships without changing their material circumstances.

Eva is not exactly happy to be a widow, but she prefers it to being a divorcee. One argument I heard often when doing field studies was that divorcees needed to put their past lives behind them. Naima, who made large changes in her life after the divorce, for example, tells me: "I'm not one hundred per cent free from the old life yet, though I try to liberate myself as much as possible". On the other hand, she adds that "of course you use your past experiences from the life you lived, especially when it comes to coupledom". Divorcing then seems to entail a movement forwards, where the old life is forgotten and experiences are legitimate only if used in new encounters.

Being a widow, however, means looking back in time. Enacting widowhood is therefore difficult to combine with a relationship, if such a relationship would demand changes that negate the old life. It may be in this perspective that Eva's sense of not being pressured to find a new husband should be understood.

> I also know that a lot of people living on their own find it a convenient lifestyle. They appreciate being alone. You know, if I met a new partner, I wouldn't want to live with him, I would prefer to be living along together [Sw. *särbo*] with him, I would really prefer that because… Well, I'm 63 years old and I don't want to move in with somebody.

One could argue that Ellen, Naima, and Eva also negotiate femininity through their relationalities. If femininity is conventionally associated with accommodating men, to refuse accommodation could be seen as unfeminine. But what if that refusal is done in the name of age? Age may be seen as an extenuating circumstance. The three women I interviewed utilise the argument that age affords them experience to explain why they are more choosey: They know what kind of relationships to expect from different types of men. And they want relationships where they sacrifice as little as possible.

Eva's relationality differs from those of Ellen and Naima in that she does not construct a narrative where her current non-relationality is continuous with her relationality during marriage. In the narratives of Ellen and Naima, both women's non-relationality could be tied to their marriage and divorce. In contrast, Eva's current practice seems informed by research on loneliness, and her reflections on herself in her diary.

Could it be that widowhood signifies that not only a specific relationship is over, but also that a specific way of life must be left behind? Perhaps a widow conventionally lives to remember, but not to repeat, the old life. Divorcees on the other hand seem encouraged to forget the past, but not the relationality itself. In that perspective, they live to repeat and practice their relationships better.

It is important that my speculations on ageing, femininity, divorce, and widowhood are not read as inferences about certain populations. Rather, they should be understood as interpretations of images my interviewees use to justify themselves. I will examine below whether these images pertain in any way to my statistical data. It is at this point that I will, if possible, make inferences.

Eva has reinvented her relationality by picking it up from elsewhere and using writing to reflect on herself. What does the new relationality entail? As discussed above, Eva argues that social relations are important for a healthy life. In a sense then, she has made relationships into a question of her own well-being. Health and well-being become an art, something she would like more people to learn.

Eva makes it very clear in the interview that the year after her husband's passing was a year of sorrow and loneliness. During that year she often fantasized about and tried to find a new man with whom she could live the rest of her life. She also had some short relationships. Then,

> I didn't decide at some point that I was to live the rest of my life on my own […] but you learn to appreciate the life you have and I do so many things. […] I had my time of grief and then I decided, "No, I've decided to live, and I know a lot and I will do a lot of good and nice things", both as a single but also on my own – you learn to live on your own.

What she tries to describe here, I would argue, is a transition between two relationalities. Indeed, what she decides after her year of grief is *not* to live her life alone. Rather, it is to think of future relationships differently than before. She decides not to want a new life-long engagement, not a relationship on the model of her previous marriage. Rather, she starts to go to a singles association, to go abroad with other singles, and to be more open to others in general. She has had some short relationships since then, but always stayed in the association. She warns that some people are "careless [Sw. *slarva*]" with their social networks when in a relation, and as a result come out of them lonelier than before. In short, her current relationality is focused on living better and healthier.

Today, Eva seems to be rather open about relationships. She talks about a female friend of the same age who uses the Internet to find sex: Sex is the only thing the friend cannot have from her active single life, and so it is what she pursues online. Eva does not share that sentiment, and prefers to have closer relationships with men. But she would never live with them, nor care for them. In sum, Eva's relationality could be described as an art, an activity she engages in to live better (rather than worse or not at all).

Relationships for Eva are about having a better life. She shows us that relationality does not need to entail a difference between coupledom and singledom, but could equally well be a refusal of that difference. Eva practices this refusal by not using Internet dating. She does enjoy *Monotopia* though, as she interprets that site as more than a dating site:

> *Monotopia* is more…it's more of an activity…a social network. Not just for dating, but there're also a lot of events. Some people want to go and dance, some seek golf partners, others look for travel companions, and so on and so forth. That's why I find it so inviting. It's not like those other what I call pure dating sites. On *Monotopia*, women can seek female friends and you can find male friends as well, so it's not just for a future partner.

Again then, we see dating sites and singles activities described as entailing certain relationalities. In this case though, Eva uses certain singles activities in order *not* to acknowledge a significant difference between coupledom and singledom. As we have seen, that does not mean a refusal to have any relationships, merely that they should not be cast as marking some boundary between two fundamentally different ways of life. And as in the cases of Ellen and Naima, there is a concern with how to get impressions of others involved in Eva's use of the singles activities. She tells me she is very apt at spotting men who focus exclusively on finding a partner. She talks about them as though they belonged to a different group of people than herself.

> Some single men get stuck in front of the television with a bear can or a glass of whiskey. Some get out [and go to the singles association], but then they are generally more target-oriented. And a lot of women look for a partner and want to take care of these men. [Laughter] So these men seldom live alone for long, they often find a partner.

Eva talks about the singles association as a scene where people play conventional roles. Most men never get out on the scene to begin with, while those who do are usually focused on finding a partner. As Eva wants to enact relationships different-

ly, she presumably looks for men who take on alternative roles. The association becomes her means of getting to know how neatly men would fit both her relationality and her current personal life.

SEXUAL DIFFERENCE AS INTIMACY

Georg is one of the men I met and interviewed during my observations at the singles conference. He was a divorcee who had moved around a bit in Sweden and abroad. Georg had been to several different singles activities and was active on Internet dating sites, but had not found a format that suited him.

For Georg, relationships and families are important. Their importance is a fairly recent discovery for him, however. Georg says that he neglected his former family, not least when he decided to work abroad. One needs to tend to one's relationships, Georg argues. And there are no quick fixes.

According to Georg, men and women are different kinds of creatures. He has read Women are from Venus and Men are from Mars, *and other books on the same theme. The point he takes from them is that we need to know how people of the opposite sex differ from us. Only then will we be ready to engage in what a relationship is really about: accommodating the needs of each other. Thus, much like Naima, Georg emphasizes that relationships are about fulfilling the needs of the other. In contrast to Naima, though, he adds the twist that we need to realize that the other is very different from ourselves. For example, women communicate their needs differently from men.*

> I mean, in my world, when you say no that means no. But a woman implies a lot more when she says that. She often says things and then assumes that you understand all her implications. Like, "I said almost no, not no exactly". And I don't get that; I'm more of a stick without ornaments. But I think there's a system, of course there is! But you have to teach yourself the variations of it.

In a sense, Georg is talking about learning a new language. Only with that knowledge will he (and other men) be able to know what women want. At that point, they will also be ready to have a relationship, as Georg understands it: namely, a mutual accommodation in which you strive to fulfil each other's needs. Georg talks about how difficult such an accommodation can be: It's predominantly about giving up your own habits, interests, and goals. He has no illusion that such sacrifice comes without conflict. Indeed, he talks about an everyday life together as a constant negotiation between individuality and sacrifice. He argues that this is a life that many people in today's world no longer want. He gives several examples of what he sees as a decline in close relations.

A friend of Georg's has chosen to marry a woman from Thailand. Georg is critical of this situation, and bases his critique on his notion of relationships. Besides the language barrier making it even more difficult to communicate (it is already difficult because of gender differences), Georg seems to argue that the wife in question is all too accommodating. He argues that "Thai wives" are dependent on their husbands, as they would be sent back to an economically worse situation if there were a divorce. The friend's wife, Georg tells me, does not dare to have opinions of

her own. If her husband asks which wallpaper colour she would prefer, she refuses to decide for him. In Georg's eyes, there is no real relationship here; his friend has not accommodated anyone; having a wife from Thailand means continuing being a bachelor, only with a woman living in one's bachelor's den.

Georg has a similar critique of singles associations. He has been to some activities in his local association and realized that these are not really about finding a partner. Instead, he is worried that today's growing market of singles activities is, as he puts it, "making singledom permanent".

> Often it's about becoming friends. They ask each other "Are you coming next time?" and at that moment they have become friends. Suddenly they are a group that goes out and does things together. And sure, if you like that kind of stuff it's okay. You don't have to become a couple; indeed perhaps a group of friends is what gives these people their daily thrill. Many people are satisfied to merely break their loneliness. That way they don't risk anything, moving in together and taking the hurly-burly of everyday life. Me, I have a problem with that kind of attitude.

For Georg, the growing number of single households reflects a larger pattern in society: People are no longer willing to risk anything to be with each other. Besides, if relationships are about long-term and slow accommodation, they fit badly in a society he describes as obsessed with self and with instant satisfaction.

As we have seen with the other singles described here, Georg prefers singles activities that work to enact his notion of relationships. He is critical of Internet dating, seeing as he does that words and images can lie. To really know a person, Georg argues, you have to sit beside them, see them move and react, tense and relax. You have to talk to them directly and hear them tell their story, rather than writing about it in some public profile. Georg is active on online dating sites, but finds them something of a nuisance. He prefers singles activities that allow him to meet and talk to real women in a quasi-private setting. He does not like a singles event to include a lot of friend groups around with which he would have to negotiate for a woman's attention. He likes singles dinners, where men and women are randomly seated next to each other. That scenario allows him time and space to learn to know his dinner partner for the evening.

I would argue that Georg is critical of relationalities that lack reciprocity. One example, as we have seen, is the relationship between his friend and the friend's wife from Thailand. We might presume that Georg thinks that partners in such a relationship have difficulty communicating their needs to each other. In addition, one partner is dependent on the other, which means that there is no need for reciprocity to make the relationship work. The implication is that Georg understands reciprocity to rely on communication and on some level of equality. Both parties in a couple should accommodate each other, according to Georg.

Now, I would not argue that Georg understands a relationship as a purely interpersonal affair. He talks about the hurly-burly of everyday life, the arrangements of typical dating, the increasing inability of contemporary people to enact intimacy, and the interpretative process of living together. In other words, despite his insistence on powerless reciprocity, Georg does not have a naïve notion of a relationship as the perfect coming-together of two souls.

Like Eva, Georg has found his notions on relationship practices outside of marriage, by reading books. He has had disappointing experiences from earlier relations and marriage. Being certain that there must have been logic to those failures, Georg read up on the literature to find out what that logic might be.

In particular, he has picked up the idea that women have something of their own language. Almost like an archaeologist who tries to decipher a newly found script, Georg reassures himself that there must be a system to this complex language – although he has current difficulties cracking it. He describes himself like a "stick without ornaments".

Georg gives the example of an ex-girlfriend who wanted him to bring her roses every weekend. She usually said it casually, and he did not take it seriously: Who would want flowers every week? But when she broke up with him, she made him understand that his refusal to give her flowers when they met was a contributory factor to her decision. Georg admits that he cannot get his head around the notion that someone would break up a relationship just because they did not get roses – but he has grown to accept it as part of women's nature.

Importantly, Georg is not saying that women and men should be different, but that they necessarily are. He has come to the realization that relationships work better if you enact sexual differences through reciprocity. Importantly, it is a realization he has come to after several disappointments. In a sense, he feels fooled by a society that he thinks has not taught him the rules for engaging with women or for caring for relationships.

Masculinity researchers like to argue that masculinity has always been in crisis, that it is in fact enacted through crisis (T. Edwards, 2005). Perhaps Georg enacts masculinity by proclaiming a reciprocity crisis. Men no longer know how to approach women as women, that is, to come to know their deeper needs and wants. Instead, they befriend women, as is done in singles associations.

The contrast between friendship and coupledom, which Georg conjures up, is central to his reasoning. It ties in with his usage of singles activities and dating services. Friends, Georg seems to be saying, never share each other's homes and never have to accommodate each other. Friends only meet up in public spaces when it suits them. Male and female friends therefore never have to worry about sexual difference. Sexual difference is a deep dimension in a society that has become too focused on individuals and their friendships.

This argument about friendship ties in with Georg's critique of singledom. To him, singles are friends who lack the skill or effort to penetrate the sexless surface of individualism. The reality of sexual difference, however, will ensure that there is a gulf between friendship and intimacy, between singledom and coupledom. I would presume Georg allows that some people may confuse these two, and think that you can have a friendship and a romantic relationship at the same time. But that is never true romance: Romantic relationships are something different and distinct.

Like Ellen, Naima, and Eva, Georg is determined to enact his relationality when he utilises singles activities and dating services. For example, he is critical of Internet

dating that merely raises new surfaces when he wants to reach towards the depth of people. He dislikes singles associations because they confuse friendship and romance. For Georg, the ideal dating service would allow him to sit alone with a woman to decide whether he likes her or not. He needs to ask the woman important questions and have the opportunity to understand her. They must get through the surfaces of friendship.

When I compare Ellen, Naima, and Eva's arguments about singles activities and dating services with those of Georg, I do discern a potential source of conflict around femininity and masculinity. Different singles activities encapsulate different relationship practices. These practices intersect with gender (and age). The women I have interviewed want to challenge a traditional version of femininity as being accommodating. Naima's case is particularly interesting, as she upholds the notion of relationships as accommodation, while hoping to find a man that shares enough of her interests and habits to not make the relationship too much of a sacrifice. In short, the women want to reduce the difference between singledom and coupledom and enact a relationship practice that take its expression in certain combinations of different single and dating activities. Georg, on the other hand, wants to enact sexual difference as reciprocity, where men and women strive to know each other deeply and accommodate each other on that level. This enactment of masculinity and femininity proceeds via a different set of dating activities than the enactments propounded by the women.

Apart from contributing to our understanding of how relationalities intersect with gender, Georg's interview also displays connections between how people understand romantic relationships and friendship. This is not to say that friendships are the same as romantic relations. But friendships are relationships that need to be practiced in a certain way. As Georg would have it, singles have a tendency to confuse friendships with romantic relations. He wants them to be arranged as distinct forms of relationships. As we have seen, for example, Ellen's relationalities do not make an important distinction between the two. In short, practicing friendship is a way of doing relationality, regardless of whether one keeps friendships and romantic relationships separate or not.

AGE, WIDOWHOOD, AND DIVORCEES

While my interviewees used images of age, widowhood, and divorce to justify their (non-)relationalities, there were few indications from the survey that such factors did in fact contribute to how people understood relationships and singledom. In the survey, I asked a number of questions concerning practices and opinions that could be interpreted to encapsulate various relationalities. Let me clarify how I understood these questions to measure relationalities.

One question concerned explanations of the fact that the number of singles is comparatively high in Sweden. I asked to what degree respondents thought that "Women and men are too much alike instead of complementing each other", was a good explanation. I would argue that responses showed to what degree respondents agreed with Georg, that women and men who are too alike are not able to have deep and real relationships.

I also asked if respondents thought that "Singles activities risk making singledom permanent, since they put too little emphasize on coupledom". This is also a formulation I borrowed from my interview with Georg. In this context, I interpret the question to measure to what extent respondents imagined singledom as a phase, and what importance they ascribed to coupledom.

The survey also contained a question about the extent to which respondents thought "People focus too much on coupledom in Sweden today". This was my way of finding out whether people would agree with a person like Eva, who I interpreted to not make a clear-cut distinction between coupledom and singledom.

"The level of education or occupation among other participants is similar to my own" was one factor I asked respondents to rate in importance in regard to why they enjoyed a given singles activity. I think this question measures to what degree people had relationalities that made them prone to seek *matching* partners, like Naima.

A few questions concerning various singles activities were included. I asked about respondents' membership on 12 large Swedish dating sites. I also asked about their membership in singles associations and participation at other singles activities. I described above that various singles activities come with different non-relationalities. I interpreted membership on several dating sites as indicating a pre-occupation with matching; that is, finding a partner with specific characteristics. I measured how many people had participated in at least two of the following singles activities: singles cruise, singles conference, singles after-work event, and singles travel. I interpret these activities to be focused on liminal and intimate encounters – repeated participation would therefore indicate a relationality that, like Naima's and Ellen's, favours encountering people face-to-face.

The questions are far from perfect measures of various relationalities. They are nevertheless indications of tendencies, particularly concerning relationalities found and examined in the interviews above.

As table 6 shows, age, widowhood, and divorce did not explain particularly well the variation in the various indicators of relationalities. That said, divorcees and older people were more likely to have gone to more than one type of offline singles activity. If we interpret that variable as I have suggested above, those correlations suggest that older and divorced people[50] were more interested in meeting people face-to-face, and in liminal milieus. This preference might be connected to the notion that divorcees need to leave their old life behind; the offline, liminal singles activities like Viktoria's singles events, would in that respect be better places to enact the divorced status. That older people search these venues out to a higher degree than younger fits with my observations and interviews: Singles events were

---

[50] Divorcees tend to be older than singles who have not been married. I have, however, controlled for age in the "divorced" row in table 7 above. Results therefore indicate that divorcees were more likely to have gone to two or more different singles activities than non-divorcees *of the same age*.

presented as a replacement for the disappearing dance halls (frequented by earlier generations) and as an alternative to urban youth-centred nightlife. That said, the median age among participants at these activities was close to the national median age among people in single-adult households.

Table 6. Correlation between age, widowhood, divorce and gender, and relationality indicators

Note: Except age, all the correlation tests were made using Cramer's V. Age was tested against the five variables using multinomial logistics. The category of people most likely to agree with or live up to the criteria of each variable is indicated. I have indicated such differences even where the correlation is not "statistically significant" (p ≤ 0.05). "None" indicates that there were too small differences between the categories to matter. * P-value less than 0.05. ** P-value less than 0.01.

	"Women and men are too much alike instead of complementing each other" explains the many singles in Sweden[51]	"Singles activities risk making singledom permanent, since they put too little emphasize on coupledom"[52]	"People focus too much on coupledom in Sweden today"[53]	Been a member of three or more different dating sites	Enjoy singles activities because "the level of education or occupation among other participants is similar to my own"[54]	Have been to two or more offline, liminal singles activities at least once
Age[55]	None	None	None	Younger	Older	Older**
Widowed	Not widowed	None	None	Not widowed	None	None
Divorced	None	None	None	None	Divorcees	Divorcees**
Gender	Men**	Men**	Women**	Men*	Women**	Men*

The strong correlations from table 6 all concern gender. For example, it turns out that men in my sample are much more likely than women to agree that "Women and men are too much alike instead of complementing each other" represents a good explanation of why the number of singles is so high in Sweden (see table 7).

A very similar gendered pattern emerged in the respondents' attitudes to the claim that "Singles activities risk making singledom permanent, since they put too little emphasize on coupledom". In contrast, women were more likely to agree that coupledom is overemphasised in Sweden. These results fit neatly with my analysis of the interviews above. Men tend to emphasize gender differences and make clear distinction between friendship and romance. That also leads them to favour singles

---

[51] When this question was tested against the various background variables, I had first dichotomised it, that is, reduced the five possible alternatives to two categories: agree/undecided, or disagree.

[52] When this question was tested against the various background variables, I had first reduced the five possible alternatives to three categories: agree, undecided or disagree.

[53] When this question was tested against the various background variables, I had first dichotomised it, that is, reduced the five possible alternatives to two categories: agree/undecided, or disagree.

[54] When this question was tested against the various background variables, I had first dichotomised it, that is, reduced the five possible alternatives to two categories: agree/undecided, or disagree.

[55] I categorised age to six categories: -1940, then one category for each decade up till 1981-.

activities with a clear courtship character, thus resisting the community-building that some activities also entail. Women like Ellen, Eva, and Naima are more open to singles communities – not least because they want to retain some of their single life if and when they enter into coupledom. They are also interested in finding partners with matching educational and job qualifications.

Table 7. Gender correlation regarding the perceived reason for the high number of singles in Sweden						
	"Women and men are too much alike instead of complementing each other" is a good explanation of why the number of singles is so high in Sweden.					
	1 – Agree completely	2	3	4	5 – Completely disagree	Total
Women	2.8%	8.5%	24.9%	24.9%	39.0%	100.0%
Men	11.4%	28.4%	18.2%	21.6%	20.5%	100.0%
Total	5.7%	15.1%	22.6%	23.8%	32.8%	100.0%

This interpretation fits with a recent study of single women in Sweden. Lars Evertsson and Charlott Nyman interviewed 12 Swedish women and found that many are hesitant to enter into a relationship, since they perceive an expectation that women need to give up more than men in a couple (Evertsson & Nyman, 2013). Living apart together, LAT, is mentioned as a possible strategy by these women.

My results show similarly gendered attitudes as those found in Evertsson and Nyman's study. But I can add that men tend to be more critical of precisely the community-building that more women favour. I can also add that women (Naima being an illustration) tend to search for men with matching qualifications as a strategy to avoid too much accommodation when forming a couple. The latter interpretation is reinforced by the fact that women's preference for men with similar educational or job qualifications is only found among divorcees (i.e., the correlation is absent among people who have not been married). This suggests that women who have experienced marriage are more likely to know what is expected of them in coupledom, thus becoming reluctant to settle for a man that does not match them.

I can also add that singles' attitudes translate into preferences for certain types of singles activities. An increasing number of such activities are mixing community and courtship in various ways, a tendency of which men are critical, while women are more affirming. The survey also shows these attitudes play out in practice. Men tended to have gone to two or more offline, liminal singles activities, as well as having been a member on three or more different online dating sites. These are courtship-centred spaces with rather little room for community. Men and women did not differ much when it came to membership in singles associations and willingness to pay for membership on Monotopia. These are more community-centred spaces/places.[56]

---

[56] One might expect women to prefer singles activities that are more community-centred. Such activities, like the singles association, are on the other hand ambiguous, allowing courtship to take place as part of building community. This might explain why men and women are equally likely to have gone to this kind of activity.

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have revisited singles activities from the perspective of participants. My aim has been to show that singles activities are understood and used differently by different individuals and groups. Examining these activities as organised, or as accommodating local practices, these voices and numbers have needed to be heard.

Personal life and non-relationality have been two important concepts in the chapter. By applying them throughout, I have shown that participants tend to favour singles activities that fit their understanding of how single life and coupledom are distinct and/or need to be related. Some downplay the difference and seek to find ways of living that combine elements from both. Others separate the two clearly and tend to understand singledom in opposition to coupledom. Additionally, the interviewees interpret, combine and use singles activities to search for and encounter others in ways that fit with how they perceive relationships. To generalise, some appreciate, others depreciate singledom as a valid lifestyle, and downplays or highpoints coupledom accordingly.

A very simplified overview of this analysis can be had from table 8. That table shows that I have not encountered a non-relationality that downplays difference between singledom and coupledom, but depreciate singledom as a valid lifestyle (box number 2) – that combination seems very unlikely.

Table 8. Summary of interview analysis, chapter 7. Rows: downplay or emphasise difference between coupledom and singledom. Columns: Appreciate or depreciate singledom as a valid lifestyle.

	Appreciate singledom	*Depreciate singledom*
Downplay difference	1. Ellen & Eva	2.
Emphasise difference	3. Naima	4. Georg

To elaborate on this analysis, non-relationalities may clash with other non-relationalities. Internet dating may come with *its* notion of what a relationship is and what singles lack. Also, non-relationalities may intersect with other ways of ordering things in life, which in turn are determined by social conventions. Women may conventionally be ascribed certain roles in relationships. Age, as we have seen, may intersect with (non-)relationalities in significant ways.

Different views on how to enact gender may be a potential source for conflict around singles activities. Women who have been married seem less inclined towards traditional monogamous relationships. These women seek out arrangements

---

Additionally, the survey respondents were selected because they had been members on Monotopia, which focuses on singles activities. The gender differences might have been more pronounced if I had surveyed the Swedish single population as a whole. Several Filos members, for example, told me that female members were much more common than male ones.

that make the transition between singledom and coupledom less steep – finding a matching partner is one such strategy.

Relationality involves friendship relations. It seems that under certain circumstances, friendship is not done independently of romantic relationships. As my interview with Georg shows, the distinction between friendship and romance is central to a specific gendered relationality, where the depth of romance and intimacy is based on recognised gender differences.

All in all, what emerges is a rather complex picture of singles using singles activities in their personal lives. As we have seen, while they have some leeway to innovate and enact relationship differently, they have to juggle with many different conventions that make up and intersect with their non-relationalities.

8. Conclusions

This book has explored heterosexual singledoms at various Swedish singles activities. The overall backdrop of the project is the problem of situating of contemporary singledom. Relating the project to contemporary research, I have posed four central questions: 1. What is the role of intimacy in singles activities?; 2. How are space and place used to organise singles activities?; 3. What non-relationalities and relationalities are organised by the singles activities and how do singles in turn engage with those activities when organising non-relationality and relationality in their own personal lives? And; 4. What hetero-doxical possibilities emerge in singles activity practices?

The project of situating singledom must be both empirical and theoretical. I would emphasise three central contributions that I make in the book, two of which are theoretical. By defining intimacy as the unique experience of the other, I have added to its generalisation and given the concept analytical traction in the case of singledom. Secondly, coining the notion of non-relationality, I have extended arguments about relationality and personal life to singles. My third contribution is empirical and consists of showing how singles activities oscillate between community and courtship, and how this is tied in with different ways of organising space, intimacy and personal life. Gender, age and sexuality are also involved.

Below, I will return to and answer my research questions. This will involve some elaboration of the main contributions just enumerated. I will furthermore relate results to previous research, trying out alternative ways of understanding the findings and put them in a wider perspective.

ORGANISING INTIMACY

I have argued that what gives the intimacy concept its analytical power in contemporary sociology is that it is no longer associated with a specific domain of relational life, but rather has come to denote a type of situation with ascribed relational implications (cf. Mjöberg, 2011). When I have investigated how intimacy might be organised, I have therefore not done so in terms of the organisation of ready models for relationships such as family life, coupledom, or friendship. Instead, I have investigated ways in which organising shapes how people can and cannot appear to each other. In this context, I have argued that intimacy is one or more situations of unique impressions of other people (cf. Newmahr, 2011). Such impressions individuate other people for us, meaning that we recognise them from one situation to the next. The intimate situation has emotional, semiotic, and cognitive dimensions. To have a unique impression of the other can, for example, entail a symbolic or actual breaking of boundaries, but can also entail keeping the impressions away from other people. What counts as unique and what does not is ultimately decided in the situation itself.

Uniqueness can in part be organised, particularly such aspects as shielding the impressions from others. Nevertheless, organising can also disrupt our sense of hav-

ing unique impressions of others insofar as it relies on predetermined logics that take away from the specificity of the situation.

Various images of intimacy – distinct from, but related to experiences of intimacy – are involved when singles events are organised. One image understands intimacy as separate from everyday life, always pregnant with new possibilities. This image of liminal intimacy was enacted at Viktoria's events. Another image comes from the singles association Filos. Viktor, who founded the organisation, talked of people as having hidden sides that became available to others only through relationships. The interviewee Georg had a notion of gender differences holding the key to intimacy. For him, men and women would always be different from each other. Finding ways to bridge that difference was central to building lasting relationships. Entailed here was an understanding of gender difference as a surface that needed to be breached; Georg understood friendship as keeping that surface intact. For him, intimate coupledom was a highly gendered practice that differed from friendship.

Beyond these images however, intimacy was also an important experience at the singles activities. I have suggested, based on Staci Newmahr's argument (2011), that intimate experiences are characterised by unique impressions of others. As we saw in the case of Viktoria's singles events, organised activities like speed dating can counteract such uniqueness by eliciting repeated self-presentations and anonymous crowds. In such instances, people who wish for intimate experiences might need to tamper with the rules and find ways to individuate themselves and others.

In this regard, Filos is an interesting example. Organised as groups within groups, the association allowed members to meet in more private settings while still being part of the official organisation that had public and more formal meetings. The existence of some of the more private groups was secret to other members of Filos. I have argued that the groups formed within Filos were probably more flexible than if they had not had this connection to the formal settings. The reason for this flexibility is that they were never entirely private, but could at any time be made more or less open to the rest of the organisation. The effect of these smaller groups can also be understood from the perspective of intimate experience. Holding activities secret from other members made the private groups more intimate in the sense that people had experiences of others that were not shared with the rest of the membership. At the same time, the intimacy had by these group members was predicated on keeping the groups' internal affairs separate from the association. Given how well-known the various "secret" couples were in the association at large, this kind of distinction might have been difficult to sustain.

Filos is a therefore a complex case, where an image of intimacy – understanding intimacy as synonymous with relationships – was part of the organising, but where the experience of intimacy involved people in elaborate games of secrecy. As in the case of Viktoria's singles events, there is a point to be made about organising having to accommodate a degree of spontaneity where intimacy is involved. The possibilities of responding in an unrehearsed way to another, and of partly shielding a social exchange from other participants, were available at both Filos and the singles events.

Monotopia was launched as an alternative to Internet dating. Where mainstream Internet dating sites are organised around the concept of matchmaking, the Monotopia creators purposefully downplayed functions that would allow comparisons of members and searches based on specific criteria. Instead, freely formulated texts were encouraged, particularly when written by members involved in some community. This setup might have had the purpose of fostering intimacy online; the dilemma, however, is that messages sent within networks in an online milieu are often public and not secret. I have therefore suggested that the impressions of others on Monotopia are more of a personal nature, in that the site allowed members to experience others as active in networks that did not necessarily involve themselves, that is, seeing them as involved in a personal network. Monotopia was presented as a juncture for Swedish offline singles activities. Many of these activities were intimate in various ways (Viktoria's singles events, for example). I speculate that Monotopia, insofar as it fostered networks or groups to form between such activities, may inadvertently contribute towards downplaying the role of intimacy in these milieus: it is more difficult to keep things secret in a setting where people know each other from before and regularly interact online.

I have observed a rather strict separation of intimacy and sexuality. Eva Illouz makes a point about the history of that separation in her study of American romance (Illouz, 1997). Sexuality can certainly be part of monogamous relationships and may underpin intimate situations. But having discernable sexual intentions towards others was taboo at the singles activities studied. Not only were such intentions unambiguous in a context where intimacy allowed a large degree of equivocality; some versions of these intentions were also associated with stereotypical masculine behaviour and low-brow culture, and were problematic in an intimate setting where predictable stereotypes were downplayed.

My data indicates that intimate experience is achieved when perceived role-playing is absent in interaction. Role-playing can be perceived to occur when people notice class or gender in others, for example. Milieus for intimate encounters may therefore be marked by absence of class markers or gender clichés. But such absence may be predicated on class homogeneity and specific gender performances, rather than any actual absence. Homogeneity, which may be important in the organising of intimacy, can clash with participants' different identities and their concerns with finding a matching partner. In such circumstances it conflicts with people's willingness to engage with the personal lives of others. Intimacy therefore comes with certain homogenising presuppositions that may clash with other relationalities.

SPACE AND PLACE

Intimacy and liminal space have gone together throughout the 20th century. By providing a sheltered workshop where people can meet outside of everyday life's rules and norms, liminality has been associated with opportunities to meet a partner – and also with opportunities to experiment with relations without committing (Illouz, 1997; Shields, 1990).

Liminal spaces can be more or less isolated from participants' everyday lives. Total isolation may allow a higher degree of freedom from everyday regulations. In con-

trast, if actions within liminal space are allowed to have consequences in other situations, that freedom is diminished. The former kind of liminality may be more associated with relational experimentation, whereas the latter is better suited to host various forms of courtship.

I have shown that participants at Viktoria's singles events were involved in negotiating the boundaries of liminal space. I have interpreted some arrangement details to elicit such negotiations, particularly those challenging participants' anonymity. I argue that these arrangements are also negotiations over the nature of the events themselves, and what version of singledom they sustain. Anonymity lowers the risk that information regarding one's behaviour might leak to concerned parties on the outside, thereby narrowing the scope of liminal freedom.

In this context, forming networks of singles – as Monotopia does, for example – can be interpreted as undermining liminality. The reason is that such networks make people known to each other as persons, undermining the sense of freedom that liminal space otherwise can bestow.

Spaces are both material and social, as several cultural geographers have argued. In analysing singles activities, I believe that the relative isolation from personal relations is paramount to consider. Such isolation is accomplished in part through material arrangements, such as going on a cruise, keeping personal information confidential from other participants, and so on. But it is also a matter of social relations, insofar as liminality is accomplished when people feel that their detachment from life outside the liminal space give their relations to other participants a certain intimate and unregulated flavour.

As discussed in the fourth chapter, liminality and intimacy are also accomplished through decontextualisation. Decontextualised spaces do not have a straightforward meaning, but allow participants to play around with different understandings of the situation. To inhabit various unrelated spaces in succession might accomplish that effect, as was the case with the surprise bus trip discussed in chapter 4.

The bus trip example, mentioned above, speaks to a wider point I wish to make in this context. The singles activities discussed in this dissertation can all to some extent be analysed as disconnecting or connecting various spaces. The meaning of one space is connected to its dis/connection from/to other spaces that are relevant to the participants. Monotopia was, for example, meant to connect various spaces by advertising them on one online site, but also by allowing participants at those various spaces to connect afterwards and form relations.

So what is the significance of spatial dis/connections? First, I would argue that access to certain spaces is part of non-relationality and relationality. In chapter 7, for example, I mentioned Ellen, who would never go to the theatre or opera on her own, which had stopped her from going to those places after her divorce. On the other hand, access to the singles association and Viktoria's singles events were premised on one's lack of a cohabiting or monogamous relationship. Going to certain spaces, therefore, hinges on having or not having certain types of relationships.

This in itself means that such spaces must have some sort of boundaries that make them accessible only to the specified groups.

But I would speculate that singles activities have an added dimension to those boundaries. Exclusive boundaries are often used to police various communities. But community among singles is engrained with value-laden meanings. The reason is that such communities might transgress against the normative status of coupledom. Filos is an interesting example of the complexities involved when singles decide to form a community; such a formation does impact on members understanding of coupledom, not least because members who meet a partner still wish to be part of the association. Boundaries around a space for singles are therefore not merely about keeping others out, but may also mark the limits to the community that could emerge there. If coupledom is to sustain its normative status, singledom may only be allowed well-defined, delimited, and temporary spaces. I believe that these limits are one reason why the dis/connection of spaces has such significance in the context of singles activities: It is part of determining the boundary of community. Each time a space (or place) is added to a singles activity, it adds geographical scope to the relevancy of the single identity. A walk in the forest may seem unrelated, for example, but as part of Filos it becomes a site for the enactment of singles community.

There are surprisingly few *places* to be found in my data, if we define place as a site that people identify with and build community around. Singles activities tend to be arranged at temporary locales with more generic character – that is, *spaces*.

That said, place does play into the arrangement of singles activities in various ways. While the more liminal spaces like the singles conference or cruise seemed to attract participants from all around Sweden, many activities are tied to certain cities or geographical regions. Ellen from chapter 7 talked about finding singles association members in her own village as a way to connect more closely to that community.

Monotopia could be interpreted as an online place, arranged to provide some sense of community among singles. At the same time, the entrepreneur behind the site argued that it provided, foremost, a link between various offline singles activities. From that perspective, the site was more of a parvenu of various other spaces and places. The site nevertheless has several functions typical of online communities, like blogs, forums, and discussion groups.

Among the singles activities investigated, Filos was perhaps most clearly associated with a geographical place, namely the city where it was active. The association nevertheless had no specifically designated locale for its activities, but met up at various places around the city. My understanding was that these sites were mostly chosen as spaces, such as homely restaurants, high-brow entertainment, nature outings, and so on, rather than as places, such as being close to home, and a house owned by a member.

It is significant that the places most clearly associated with singles are situated in the past – like the dance palaces mentioned with some nostalgia by several inform-

ants – or in the imagined future – such as a locale specifically designated for a singles association. This lack of contemporary places for singledom might partly be interpreted as characteristic of a certain kind of non-relationality. Within the framework of that non-relationality, singles are not a community but a phase. As such a "non-community", singles can meet up in specific temporary spaces, but not be associated with a more permanent place.

I should nevertheless acknowledge that certain geographical places in larger Swedish cities are known for or otherwise perceived as having large proportion of single households. Kungsholmen in Stockholm is one example. Irene Artaeus shows that such urban singles places in Sweden are not new (Artaeus, 1992). She mentions peripheral areas of boardinghouses during the 19th century, which were known to house communities of single women. Future research of these and other connections between singledom and place, as well as society's perception of them, might yield interesting results.

RELATIONALITIES

Non-relationality is the how and what of *not* having a relationship. My data shows with surprising consistency that the organisers behind the analysed singles activities thought of singles as lacking a wider social network. Their understanding of the reasons behind this lack varied. I have, for example, identified the use of attachment theory to suggest that not having a monogamous relationship might show underlying psychological problems with relationships more generally. Another way to understand singles' alleged lack of relationships was to talk of it as an effect of divorce; people might feel less trusting of others after such an experience.

Connected to this image of singles is a therapeutic notion, according to which singles activities can help people gain or regain an ability and willingness to connect to others. In this context, organisers generally understood friendships and similar types of relations as a therapeutic precursor to monogamous relationships.

These images of singles are related, but not entirely identical to the two singles stereotypes most prevalently found in historiographical and contemporary research (Bologne, 2004; Cargan, 1981; Kaufmann, 2008). These stereotypes are the sad loner and the wilful pervert. I have shown that Viktoria at times departed from these culturally shared images. Nevertheless, the understanding of singles conjured by organisers like herself was more about people who had once had, but then lost trust in other people. One can speculate that images like the sad loner and the wilful pervert predate societies with a high number of divorcees. Today, images of singles are modelled more on divorce than on a lifelong abstention from relationships.

The participants themselves have other understandings of the meaning of not having a monogamous relationship. As I showed in chapter 7, my interviewees are prone to account for their singledom by contrasting it to earlier relationships. In that perspective, singledom is understood as narrative continuity and discontinuity. The divorcees in particular think of future relationships as more or less equivalent to earlier relationships. This attitude allows the interviewees to draw on past experiences to decide what to look for in a future partner, how to look for it, and how to

approach that person when they find her or him. This perspective leads some of the interviewed women towards the notion of matching partners, which underpins the organising of Internet dating sites.

One interesting finding is that both the interviewee Ellen and one of the Filos members reported that singles associations can fulfil some of the criteria these respondents understood as characteristics of a relationship. I have suggested that we need to understand relationalities as involving much more than two people. That way, we can better grasp how an association can accommodate much of what my respondents think of as relationships. One could speculate that this composite nature of relationships could mean that people may even come to understand themselves to have relationships without a specific partner (post-humanist studies with its interests in robots and other non-human agency might be an interesting context for that question – see Cerulo (2009) and McCarthy (2012)).

The non-relationality of several Filos members, on the other hand, meant that they could have a partner without losing their status as singles. They argued that people remain single as long as they do not cohabit. This definition was meaningful in the context of the association, given that singledom was a criterion for being a member. Filos is an example of a singles activity that arguably impacts the non-relationality of its participants. The resulting non-relationality is not, however, the one intended by the founder, who saw Filos in the therapeutic terms discussed above. Rather, the non-relationality followed from on-going organising by the association members.

I have generally found that single women search for ways to reduce the differences between life as a single and life as part of a couple. Men, on the other hand, tend to use singles activities that emphasise this difference. It seems that singles activities are involved when different cohorts of singles negotiate non-relationality.

One interesting aspect of singles activities that emerges in the data involves the various forms of relationships available to participants. Admittedly, in some circumstances coupledom is given a normative, exceptional status. But as the organisers view all forms of relations as therapeutic for singles on the way to forming a monogamous relationship, the activities often encouraged people to socialise more broadly. The organising of the activities can be analysed in terms of allowing relational types that would be difficult to form in other circumstances. I am particularly thinking of how members in Filos could create semi-private subgroups with varying degrees of openness towards the rest of the association. Monotopia, which connects various spaces around Sweden by allowing participants to form groups online, allows a similar variety of relational types.

Friendship was an important model by which to understand relations at the singles activities. Of the Monotopia membership surveyed, 39% thought of the site as a friendship site. Many participants told me that they looked for friends at Viktoria's singles events; and the Filos founder and coordinator were adamant that the association was, foremost, about friendship (rather than romance). At the same time, the activities were advertised as exclusively for singles, making a focus on friendship appear to be slightly nonsensical: Why would a couple, for example, not be wel-

come to find new friends? Filos may be the clearest example of this semantic tension; focusing on friendship, some members continued going to activities after having met a partner. In chapter 7, I discussed Ellen, whose singles association officially allowed members with partners, if those couples formed after the member(s) started going to the association's activities.

Singles activities allow people to meet and socialise without promising each other any commitments. Only 16% of my survey respondents disagreed that they evaluated singles activities based on to what degree the activities allowed socialising without commitment (62% agreed and 23% were undecided). My question did not mention romance or friendship specifically, and presumably covered both. I believe that singles activities allow romantic, sexual, and friend relations to emerge outside of everyday life's commitments and accommodations. This is not to describe the activities as in any way promiscuous. As I have already discussed, overt sexual intentions were frowned upon in these milieus. My point is rather to say that people were allowed to stage or enact various aspects of relationships without necessarily committing to other aspects. Ellen's use of her singles association, giving her some community outside of work and something to do on the weekends, might be one example. Another example might be the enactment of intimate encounters that Viktoria's singles events repeatedly arranged between participants – the games, dinners, speed dating, and surprise trips.

If relationships are conglomerates of various practices, the singles activities I studied might be understood to "deconstruct" such conglomerates, and stage various aspects and parts. This deconstruction and staging might be understood in connection to participants' personal lives, which some talked of as difficult to fit with a new relationship. By performing certain relationship practices within singles activities, this tension with personal life might have been more easily overcome.

That singles activities furnish people with bits and pieces of relationships makes sense from the organisers' point of view; they would understand it as a kind of social therapy and a way to slowly ease participants back into monogamous relationships. The participants themselves might nevertheless understand it as a more permanent arrangement.

Filos gave people the opportunity to have more or less private relations, all the while keeping those relations connected to the public association. I understood that these subgroups, for example, met to go to the theatre, for regular promenades, to fish, and so on. These Filos members thus had the opportunity to enact specific aspects of relationships without committing to the whole.

I am sure that participants sometimes had to negotiate the terms and nature of these partial relationships. Very little of that negotiation is present in my data, however. On the other hand, negotiations over the nature of on-going practices and the spaces of their enactment are very present in the data. For example, I observed men negotiating over whether Viktoria's surprise bus trip was an occasion for flirtation or merely a nice time with unplanned-for relational opportunities. I surveyed singles that had varying ideas about the nature of Monotopia: Was it a site for Internet dating, friendships, information on offline singles activities, discussions, or blog-

ging? In both these cases, the nature of relationships and the meaning of inhabited spaces were negotiated simultaneously. This simultaneity might be understood in light of the argument that the singles activities staged *aspects* of relationships by arranging spaces for them, rather than tying people up in communities or relationships associated with a sense of place. My point is to say that if we understand the singles activities to provide certain relationship practices, these would be enacted in specific kinds of spaces rather than tied to place – and that this might explain why members negotiated the nature of the spaces, rather than the terms of their relationships. The partial relationships were spatially arranged and spatially negotiated.

My data gives no basis to talk about causal relations between singles activities and single lives. In other words, I cannot talk about differences between people who go to singles activities and those who do not. I can, however, discuss how some singles use different singles activities in their lives.

I have found that the interviewed singles tend to understand singles activities in terms of what I have called their non-relationalities – that is, how they understand the relationships they are not engaged in. Ellen, for example, considers to what an extent her singles association can provide aspects of the relationship she misses from her earlier marriage. Naima wants to find a partner who would allow her to retain some of the life she lives as a single – and she tries out various singles activities to see which ones allow her to identify such a partner. The reason is that she understands relationships to entail mutual adaptation between partners and the giving-up of individuality; a matching partner would make it feasible to give up less. Some more general trends emerge in the survey results. I find that men tend to favour singles activities tending towards courtship, whereas women tend to think that coupledom is overrated.

The singles activities investigated are offered as spaces for the enactment of specific versions of singledom, community/courtship, intimacy, and personal life. They evidently cause reflection among my respondents, pushing them to consider how they want to live single life and which activities fit into that pattern.

But this is not to say that singles activities are the basis for reflective individuals fashioning their own lives after their own minds. In this dissertation, I have tried to investigate part of the landscape within which singles and their choices are situated. I have shown that the landscape is limited and wrought with tensions. Singles activities are limited by heteronormativity, for example, when community is connected to courtship. Different groups negotiate the nature of singledom, for example, when asking whether not being engaged in monogamous relations is also a sign of larger relational problems, or when determining when and where it is legitimate *not* to look for a partner.

An important finding concerns the relative absence of places in the data. One can make the point that organising singles activities as spaces rather than as places is an important condition for the market-like array of choices presented to singles, but that the same spatiality of contemporary singles activities undermines the possibility of community, and limits the availability of relational forms outside of the fami-

ly. This, then, would be an instance where the conditions necessary to make choices available also circumscribe and restrict those choices.

This argument is not to say that communities are entirely absent from the data. Filos is a singles community that offers a relational network to members and thereby challenges the importance of coupledom in their lives. I have also noted that dissatisfaction with Internet dating – particularly with its strong focus on courtship – was voiced as a background to Monotopia. It is clear that many of my respondents – both organisers and participants – seek out communal forms of singles activities as an alternative or corrective to courtship. It remains to be seen if these communities will still be viewed as scenes for courting, or whether communal singles activities will make new relationalities and ways of living singledom available in the future.

HETERO-DOXICALITY AND SINGLES ACTIVITIES

Hetero-doxicality is the word I have used throughout this dissertation to refer to situational transgressions against heteronormativity that nevertheless are difficult to place outside of heterosexuality. These are sometimes subtle and temporary journeys outside of the many boundaries of heteronormativity, such as monogamy, coupledom, and so on.

Some authors have speculated whether singledom itself might be placed outside heteronormativity. Of course, this talk of "outside" and "inside" always depends on where you place the boundary, and indeed what the boundary is supposed to consist of to begin with. I believe that one of the most fruitful ways to interrogate the heteronormativity and hetero-doxicality of singles activities is to look at the validation of singledom as a lifestyle of its own, independent of coupledom. As several authors have shown, singledom has long been defined negatively in relation to what it means to be a couple: Singles are simply understood as being without a partner. As I hope to have shown in this dissertation, this is a very limited, and indeed ambiguous, way to define the phenomenon. Singles need to be understood in relation to the situations where they enact their singledom, and singles activities are one kind of site for that enactment. As a result, singles activities can both reproduce the negative definition of singledom (lacking a relationship) and take its participants in other directions. Looking for other directions would therefore potentially reveal hetero-doxicality and heteronormative limits.

Again I want to begin with the heteronormative understanding of singles activities that were given vent to by the organisers. According to their discourses, singles are helped by such activities to dare, build skills, or learn the right attitudes to form a monogamous relationship. Any friendships, community, or personal life inside the world of singles activities would simply amount to a kind of therapy on the road to coupledom.

I hesitate to simply categorise the organisers' understanding as exclusively heteronormative. After all, their therapeutic notions and the activities they organised allowed for various forms of relations between participants, and various forms of singledom. From that perspective, their heteronormative discourses might have been a strategy to placate people who would otherwise have been critical of the

singles activities. My reading of the precise intentions behind their utterances is speculation on my part, of course, but I think we need to allow that such utterances were practices in a wider practical context that included hetero-doxical possibilities.

What did emerge in my observations and interviews is an impression of singles activities as sites for the enactment of various practices of relationship, as partial substitutes for relationships, and as communities outside the family. These activities did downplay the importance of coupledom and gave singles alternative models for relationships.

Such alternatives were circumscribed in certain milieus. Viktoria's singles events were certainly organised around apparently intimate encounters between single women and men, and she provided lectures on how to form couples and escape singledom. This organisation did not stop several participants from saying that they went to Viktoria's events mainly to have a good time and find friends. In addition, several male participants expressed a sexual intent and wanted to "pick up" women for "one night stands". Although these men were quickly ostracised, they did show that alternative understandings of the events were possible.

The clearest example of hetero-doxical singledom is found in the case of Filos. Organised as a community of singles, the association provided members with a relational network that they went to some length to retain if they found a partner. Members negotiated over the meaning of singledom and had decided that partners not cohabiting were still singles. Some couples could, therefore, still remain members of the associations. This is an example of singledom taking on meaning and value beyond being the opposite of coupledom. Filos had developed into a singles activity that could even be combined with having a partner.

I have suggested that the hetero-doxical potential of singledom varies with age and types of singledom. One of my interviewees, Eva, argued that being a widow made her singledom more legitimate in the eyes of others, whereas divorcees often felt pressured to find a new partner. Research suggests that attitudes to coupledom in later life are changing, which might create pressures for older singles to find a partner (Bildtgård, 2012). Being a widow, however, still seems to retain connotations of "leaving family life behind". These connotations allowed Eva to engage with singles activities as someone mainly interested in leading an active social life, rather than as someone looking for a partner. Her activities might nevertheless fit with heteronormativity, insofar as her contemporaries understand her to have already been through family life. On the other hand, being widowed and actively engaged in singles associations might provide a threat to coupledom by showing valid alternatives outside of the family. Age, widowhood, and hetero-doxicality might be a fruitful field of study in the future.

Ageing might be construed in terms of personal life becoming less flexible. For my interviewees, being old and single meant being less interested in mainstream coupledom. This disinterest was because a monogamous relationship was seen as undermining existing personal arrangements. This perspective might indicate that singles search for alternatives to coupledom when they grow older. My survey re-

sults showed that older respondents tended to be members in singles associations more often than younger respondents,[57] confirming this impression.

Hetero-doxical singledom was more embraced by women than by men. Female singles seem more interested in downplaying the difference between singledom and coupledom. Most of the women I interviewed had been married; they found that singledom gave them a sense of freedom that marriage could not. Not prepared to give up on the positive aspects of singledom, women were more likely to be choosey when looking for men. They either wanted men with whom they could retain a sense of freedom, or preferred to remain single. These preferences led them to a certain use of singles activities, such as combining the matching algorithms of Internet dating with the flexible relations of singles associations. While these women were still interested in finding a partner, I would argue that they were more open to hetero-doxical singledom, or singledom for its own sake.

Men tended more towards emphasising the difference between singledom and coupledom. Georg, whom I discussed in chapter 7, thought that friendships and communities among singles kept singles from the kind of commitments that define monogamous relationships and give them value. Such thinking would lend itself to the defence of heteronormativity over and above the hetero-doxical possibilities of singles activities. This perspective is an interesting historical development; writers like Chudacoff point out that critique against marriage and the arguments for single individualism were found among and became synonymous with bachelors in early 20th century America. One can speculate whether the contemporary reversal of gender stereotypes among Swedish singles can be attributed to changed population numbers. This at least is the argument recently propounded by Eva Illouz, who argues that single men have lower educational and job qualifications than single women in the West (Illouz, 2014). As a result, single women have reasons to be choosey, whereas men have reasons to push for quicker courtship rituals, Illouz argues. Whether this macro-sociological historical difference is the real cause of the observed gender differences cannot be established from my data.

The historical exposé in the introductory chapter showed that singles activities have evolved in several important respects since the 1800s. In particular, with the informalisation of female-male interaction, the community forms of singles activities may have become less homosocial. Chudacoff, for example, describes the gradual disappearance of male-only singles milieus in 20th century America. I have theorised that such a development might have brought community and courtship together, as informal female-male interaction would lend itself to both community and courtship.

My data supports this view. The singles activities I investigated can all be analysed as underpinning a melange of courtship and community – although each activity tends more towards one than the other. Viktoria's singles events are mostly about courtship. The organiser took active steps to undermine the formation of communi-

---

[57] I used binary logistics to test this correlation. Nagelkerke R square = 0.124. P=0.001.

ty at her events. She regularly asked participants to shift discussion partners, engaged them as a crowd, and arranged her spaces liminally to emphasise the participants' freedom from everyday relations. Nevertheless, Viktoria herself acknowledged that her events helped people to socialise and place trust in others. Some participants told me that they went as a group to Viktoria's events and to other singles activities. One of Monotopia's functions was to build community among people going to activities like those Viktoria offered. Thus, even courtship-oriented activities like the singles cruise and conference opened possibilities for community.

Charlotte, who came up with the idea for and financed the Monotopia project, talked of community as a place to meet a partner. Viktor, the founder of Filos, voiced similar ideas. For these organisers, community offered alternative impressions of others than those obtained through, for example, Internet dating. I have suggested that these differences might be understood as equivalent to seeing the other as an individual on the one hand, and as a person on the other. Encountering another person engaged in a community that does not necessarily include oneself means encountering her as a person – that is, as part of a personal network. This type of encounter is different from an intimate encounter of the other, in which he or she is encountered as intentionally focused on oneself. From this perspective, community could be an alternative form of courtship.

As we see, community and courtship should not be understood as two separate categories, but rather as poles on a continuum (see diagram 6). While Viktoria's singles events are more oriented towards the courtship pole and Filos more towards community, neither can be placed squarely within one category.
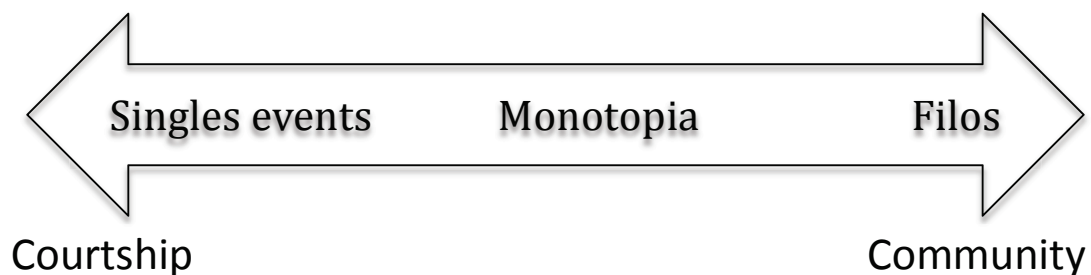
Diagram 6. The continuum of singles activities, from courtship to community.

In one view, community is a social arrangement with particular opportunities for courtship. As described above, community among singles can be seen as heterodoxical, because it potentially undermines the normative status of coupledom. Making connections between community and courtship might therefore be interpreted as a way to fit such communities into heteronormativity. From a historical perspective, the direct connection between community and courtship is fairly new. It might be safe to say that the homosocial communities of the past have disappeared, but that communities including both women and men have replaced them – communities that have also become places for heterosexual courtship. Given that the homosocial singles milieus of the past were also places for lesbian and gay rela-

tions, this shift entailed the emergence of more strictly policed heterosexual spaces for singles.

Community is also described as therapeutic. The idea is that singles, for various reasons, not only are not engaged in a monogamous relationship, but also have problems with relations more generally. Becoming part of a community could, in this perspective, be seen as a temporary means to become more outgoing, social, and trusting, in order to then get a partner. Again, this could be seen as a way to "hetero-legitimise" singles communities. It also shows how thin the boundary between community and courtship is among organisers.

The consequences these developments might have for single life more generally are difficult to ascertain from my data. The singles activities I observed show ambiguities inherent in contemporary singledom and some of the alternatives that become available as a consequence of those ambiguities. One aspect of the ambiguities concerns the difference or identity of community and courtship, and the hetero-doxical potential of singles communities. I would argue that singles today have the opportunity to move between alternatives – not least because they are proffered as relatively open spaces, rather than associated with specific places. On the other hand, the equation of courtship and community and the relative absence of places of community nevertheless undermine hetero-doxical possibilities outside of the family, and thus limit the choices available to singles in contemporary Sweden.

RESEARCH ON COURTSHIP AND SINGLES

Previous research on courtship has highlighted the equivocality of cross-gender interaction in contemporary society. Researchers like Beth Bailey, Eva Illouz and Cas Wouters disagree over the nature of and reasons for this equivocality. Is this a debate I can contribute to with my results?

My data show that equivocality is an important part of the courtship investigated. Speed dating can, for example, seem to be exclusively about courtship, but in my data it is also understood as a game, having fun, as relational therapy, and so on. Some singles also seem to embrace courtship ambiguity as a way to enact relations without committing, and to save face when courtship fails.

Intimacy itself, when understood as the basis of relationships, is ambiguous. The reason is that intimacy happens within situations, whereas relationships transcend situations. The implications of a specific intimate event must therefore be negotiated outside of that situation itself and are not contained within intimate experience.

Have I observed the disappearance or proliferation of courtship practices? These are two hypotheses explaining equivocality suggested by Cas Wouters and Beth Bailey respectively. My data do not allow me to draw any conclusions about such general hypotheses. As I will discuss, though, the data do imply that the two explanations are not mutually exclusive and that a combination might be possible.

Let me tell a story from the singles conference. During the first day, I happened to sit down with a number of men to discuss informally their participation and

thoughts about coupledom. At one point, Viktoria, the organiser, sat down with us. We were discussing dancing and Viktoria told us that a few decades ago, the codes for dancing were quite clear. Men asked women to dance. Women always said yes, and each couple danced twice. The man could then ask the woman for a third dance. It was at this point that the woman had a choice: If she agreed and the couple danced again, it was equivalent to agreeing to follow the man home. These codes have dissipated, Viktoria explained, but she hoped that her events could help retain some of the traditions that had disappeared.

The last day I sat down to breakfast with one of the men from the group. Having danced two nights in a row, he expressed disappointment over the fact that Viktoria's rule had not worked; women had danced three times with him, but had not accompanied him to his room.

Observations like these indicate that Cas Wouters might be right to say that informalised interaction between the genders have led to increased ambiguity in courtship practices. At the same time, I have given many examples of detailed arrangements and negotiations within singles activities that can work as courtship, including dinners, speed dating, weekly walks, Internet dating, and friendship. These examples suggest that writers like Beth Bailey might be correct when they argue that there is a proliferation of courtship practices.

So what hypothesis about singles activity ambiguity might accommodate *both* Wouters and Bailey? One solution would be to say that informalisation of cross-gender interaction has not led to the erosion of courtship, but to greater ambiguities within prevailing practices. These ambiguities would in turn have shifted the agency of parties involved in such practices, giving them unprecedented influence over the practices' meaning. Rather than undermining the practices as such, people could then use practices to give themselves and others varying types of agency.

One example of this hypothesis would be Ellen, who used Internet dating to find men with particular characteristics, but then decided to meet those men in the context of other singles activities to give the encounters a more open-ended framing. That combination gave Ellen specific kinds of impressions of the men, as well as increased power to decide the meaning of her encounters with them. Rather than interacting with men outside the framework of courtship practices, we thus see Ellen calculating within various practices in order to achieve the desired information and agency in the unfolding ambiguous situations.

This argument is not to say that I have conclusive evidence that a combination of Wouters and Bailey provides the right explanation of the current state of affairs. I only point out that the informalisation identified by Wouters does not necessarily lead to the destruction of courtship practices, but could rather give those practices new functions in the interaction between men and women. If this argument fails, we would still need to explain how informalisation and the proliferation of courtship practices can exist side by side in my data.

ALTERNATIVE UNDERSTANDINGS AND THE LARGER PICTURE

The limits of my research design means that I have little data to go on when speculating about single life more broadly. That I broadly avoid such generalisation has to do with concerns for validity. However, to avoid such speculations entirely, might also mean that I forgo a wider perspective that could contribute towards valid interpretation of my data. In this section, I will consider a few possible interpretations that such wider perspectives make possible. I will discuss to what an extent they find traction in the data.

Structures and individuals

One of the comments I have received concerns the importance of structures. Singles are people who can be categorised as belonging to certain classes, ages, sexualities, genders, and ethnicities. The question is: To what extent are the observed singles activities actually expressions of such structural differences, rather than phenomena in their own right?

This question is partly a matter of perspective, and partly empirical. Many sociologists have long held that social life has a macro and a micro level (Durkheim, 1988; Parsons, 1982). On the macro level, social structures like gender, class, and sexuality, determine society. On a micro level, on the other hand, individuals have some agency of their own and can manipulate the structures of society to bring about unexpected results.

However, other sociologists have asked if such a dualist understanding of society might not make us forgo relevant phenomena like organising, practices, places, and spaces, which are not reducible to either structures or individuals (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982; Garfinkel, 1967; Latour, 2005; Law, 2004). For example, differences between places in a city are often marked in terms of class and ethnicity – segregation, gated communities, and gentrification can be understood from a structural perspective. Urban places, however, also contain elements that structural understanding might have difficulties grasping – such as a certain communal style, identities, and architecture. Such elements are not possible to reduce to individual actors' actions either. An alternative, non-dual perspective might therefore introduce differences into the sociological analysis of urban places that are not reducible to differences between classes or genders.

To ask whether singles activities are not actually reducible to structurally defined differences between singles is therefore to pit one perspective against another. I would prefer for these perspectives to inform each other. But the question posed also contains an empirical inquiry: Do I have data to show that singles activities are a *sui generis* social phenomenon?

Gender, class, and sexuality are certainly important for understanding singles activities. As I have discussed, there is evidence to suggest that men and women tend to favour different types of singles activities, one gender tending towards courtship and the other towards community. Historically, these attitudes tended to be differ-

ently gendered, however. Historically, class has played an important role in differentiating singles activities, but may today be less conspicuous – for better or worse. Sexuality is certainly an important part of singles activities; contemporary heterosexual activities centre on exclusively heterosexual spaces, whereas singles communities historically could harbour straights, gays, and lesbians alike.

But such structural differences do not coincide exactly with the differences between the actual singles activities investigated (except, today, for the differences between heterosexual and LGBT singles activities). In other words, it would be very difficult to predict the character of today's Swedish singles scene using only structural data of the single population.

My survey is a case in point. Gender could very roughly predict participation at a small number of singles activities. However, for most investigated venues (including most dating sites), there was no significant difference between women and men. Age was a poor predictor except for singles association memberships (cf. table 6). The same goes for level of education, which was a reliable predictor for two dating sites and, to a small extent, the singles conferences.[58] These results do suggest that structural differences are important, but that singles activities cannot be reduced to them.

Singles activities contain a number of tensions that I suggest might be specific to them and which might be difficult to understand from a purely structural perspective. One concerns the difference between communal and courtship forms. Another is the dis/connection between intimacy and personal life. A third tension focuses on space and place. Lastly, singles activities take up and enact various courtship and communal practices that come with varying and sometimes contradictory meanings. One example of the latter tension would be Viktoria's employment of both a hugging game, where men could hug men and women could hug women, and speed dating, which is a clear-cut heterosexual arrangement. People ascribe great significance to structural differences, and so it is unsurprising that they sometimes fall back on these distinctions to understand singles activities. I nevertheless speculate that these tensions are part of the singles activities themselves and emerge independent of structural difference.

That said, age might play an important role for singles activities, particularly if understood in a nuanced fashion. While I have not emphasised this aspect in the analysis, it should be mentioned here. Age seems to be a loaded category among singles and in courtship. I overheard several discussions among participants at the various singles activities pertaining to men looking for younger women. Such age difference was frowned upon, and it seemed important to many to attend singles activities with participants in the same age group as oneself.

But age is more than the number of years from birth. People also enact their age. In chapter 7, I argued that old age seems conventionally associated with a less flexible

---

[58] I had no survey questions that let me measure class in a meaningful way other than educational level.

personal life, resulting in difficulties accommodating a new partner. That may be a reason for older people to downplay the difference between singledom and coupledom.

Traditionally, age has been associated with certain family-centred life experiences, such as marriage, children, the death of a spouse and so on. From that perspective, one can hypothesise that older singles who have had children and gone through divorce or who have been widowed, may find themselves freer to experiment with relationality and singles activities. The reason would be that they have fulfilled social demands on marriage and procreation. My data generally fit with this hypothesis, not least as most of my informants are 45 and over. However, I have made no comparisons with singles activities for younger singles, so I can neither exhaustively confirm nor deny the hypothesis. It should be noted that I did interview older people who were looking for a monogamous relationship. My survey found no correlation between age and attitudes to coupledom. In addition, there are indications that older people are finding themselves pressured to find a partner (Bildtgård, 2012). I suspect that the growing number of divorces may be a complicating factor here, reshaping old conventional connections between age, singledom and family.

Another comment I have heard concerns Anthony Giddens and late modernity theory (Giddens, 1992). If singles activities represent different ways of living single life, does that interpretation not support the notion that singles are the archetypal late modern reflective individuals who have thrown tradition overboard and relate to others on the basis of rational decision and emotive experience?

One of the points of my dissertation has been to suggest a moderated version of Giddens' hypothesis, much in line with Carol Smart's arguments (Smart, 2007). Singles may indeed be reflective and may give large significance to emotive experiences like intimacy. But these characteristics do not preclude singles from being embedded in various situations and relational networks – and that it is precisely by being thus embedded that they appear and act as individuals.

It is from this perspective that I have written about the liminal spaces of Viktoria's singles events and discussed the communal character of Filos and Monotopia. I show that singles activities today present singles with opportunities to be both intimate individuals with choices, and persons within communities. Intimacy plays an important role, but not only as experience. Different images or ideas of what intimacy is are involved, and the phenomenon cannot therefore be reduced to an experience freely shared between two individuals. Intimacy may be organised, and singles may thus be part of enacting various ways of being intimate.

This discussion boils down to the argument that singles are not automatically synonymous with individuals, or singledom with individuality. Singles activities show us that one can be single in different ways, some of which do not entail the choices and experiences described by Giddens.

Commercialisation of close relations

When I have examined singles activities, I have looked at commercial services on the market. Many sociologists would ascribe great significant to that fact. One can, for example, ask if these spaces are not a continuation of the on-going commercialisation of close relations (Arvidsson, 2006; Hochschild, 2003a, 2003b). Creating spaces for singles, while at the same time avoiding communities, might be interpreted as a revenue maximising strategy; meaningful single life is restricted to commercial spaces, while participants' possibilities to build their own, non-commercial alternatives are circumscribed. The organisers sell access to the image of intimacy, but restrict people's access to full relationships.

This interpretation is certainly possible. It is an interpretation nevertheless, and I believe that it needs to be nuanced. As commercialisation has not been an important topic for this dissertation, I have not presented results pertaining to that theme. To evaluate the appropriateness of an interpretation that would emphasise commercialisation, I need to present data that has not been discussed above. I believe discussing alternative interpretations is so important, that it outweighs the awkwardness of presenting new results at the end of the dissertation.

Firstly, all of the organisers who were interviewed have been and are engaged in issues relevant for singles beyond their commercial interests. One organiser has been politically engaged, and all have invested a large amount of time and effort as proponents of certain positions. I could compare these backgrounds to that of the CEO of the company behind one of the larger Swedish dating sites, whom I interviewed. The CEO had no background in the singles business, and came from an unrelated software company. He was keen to make a distinction between the technology and the singles that used his site, emphasising that the company was responsible primarily for the former aspect of the site. My point is that the organisers behind the activities I investigated had intentions that were not exclusively commercial. This point must be taken into consideration when we interpret the results.

Secondly, the singles I interviewed *preferred* to be part of a commercial singles activity rather than engage themselves in a non-profit association. Some had been members of a non-profit community, and while they had enjoyed themselves, they also recognised the difficulties of sustaining such communities over time. When people pay one person to secure that continuity the activity is easier to sustain, these participants reasoned. Filos was one such example. The association is organised as a for-profit organisation owned by the current "CEO". Many other singles associations are non-profit, so I asked Gina, the coordinator, if they did not think about changing the organisational structure. She replied:

> Gina: Perhaps, but then you would lose the person that holds this together. […] It's what keeps this together somehow. And if you became non-profit, well that's a lot of work. You would need a secretary, a chairperson, and so on…

> Andreas: So it's a lot about convenience?

> Gina: Yes.

This conversation suggests that a commercial structure might be congruent with the singles community's interests, and is not always exploiting the latter.

I argue that we should avoid drawing conclusions about the effects of commercialism on specific communities or groups – and instead investigate these effects on a case-to-case basis. I therefore agree with Eva Illouz, when she writes:

> …we cannot presume *a priori* how the sphere of commodity exchange and the private sphere will interact or what the outcome will look like. Rather, this interaction must be systematically and empirically investigated in particular contexts" (Illouz, 1997).

My point here is not to deny that commercial interests might indeed impact on certain decisions about how singles activities are organised. And I would agree that the spatial arrangement of the activities investigated might be a commercially valid way to organise them. As I discussed above, a market of singles activities might need to rely on a variety of spaces, rather than being tied to places. Or, in other words, it is easier to attract people from around the country to a singles cruise, for example, than to a specific, permanent locale in Stockholm. I would, therefore, agree that the spatiality of current singles activities might be related to their marketisation. I also suggest that this relation might in turn undermine the possibility of forming communities among singles. The commercialisation of singles activities might therefore contribute towards setting heteronormative limits to their arrangements, emphasising liminality and intimacy, and downplaying community.

As I have shown, however, this is not a necessary state of affairs. Filos provides an example of how commercial interests can go hand in hand with creating opportunities for innovative relationalities among singles, including but not restricted to traditional community. Rather than interpreting my results as displaying the commercial exploitation of singles, I believe it is more fruitful to understand singles activities as operating on a competitive market that forces them to find new and "attractive" ways to organise singles. To this end, they often rely on conventional tropes like images of intimacy and notions of community to structure their activities. They also need to accommodate various groups among singles, which might make them more prone to cater to normative assumptions. But they also innovate and try out new combinations of existing elements. For example, Viktoria complained to me:

> There is a growing competition, a lot of new entrepreneurs. And it's hard work coming up with new stuff [Sw. *grejer*] all the time. I try though… You know, I heard about this new dance style the other day, something à la mode, and asked myself if it could be done for singles only. [She goes on talking about her most recent ideas.]

Here, Viktoria discusses that innovation is an important part of being a commercial agent on the singles activity market. While she does not suggest anything revolutionary in terms of relationality, her method is one of combining and resituating, an important mechanism behind transgression and subversion (Beasley et al., 2012; Butler, 1999).

The ethical imagination

To end this section, and indeed this dissertation, I want to return to my epigraph by Michel Foucault. This quotation comes from an interview, one of the few instances

in which Foucault mentions singles. He argues that from the perspective of single people, the number of recognised types of relationships (what I might call relationalities) available in society is limiting. Not only would legitimate relationship types outside of marriage potentially make singles less alone; but the currently narrow number of acceptable types of relationships means that we risk misrecognising the relations single people actually have and viewing them as "less real" or "less meaningful" than sanctioned social and cultural relationalities. To borrow a concept from Henrietta Moore, the singles community would be well-served by an ethical imaginary: a thinking about and practicing of interpersonal relations "outside the box" (Moore, 2001, p. 15ff).

In this context, I think it would be useful to reflect on Foucault's concept of ethics. As Moore argues, ethics for Foucault are models for practice that are suggested to individuals by their contexts, and which show how relation to self connects with relation to others (Moore, 2001). Towards the end of his life, Foucault began to examine the impact of Christianity and the Enlightenment on Western sexuality (Foucault, 1979, 2005). In particular, he wrote about confession as a Christian technique, whereby individuals' self-examination, particularly of their sexuality, became a new arena for the exercise of ecclesiastical power. Foucault then traced how the Christian concept of confession was taken over by such practices as psychoanalysis and was made the centrepiece in modern, secular notion of sexuality as revealing the truth of self.

This genealogy of the practice of confession is an example of one element of Foucaultian ethics: Foucault wanted to trace the history of people's willingness to submit themselves to ethical techniques and accept the outcome as truths of self. The concept of techniques is important in this context: Foucault is not interested in mere ethical "ideas" or "thoughts" that people might have, but arrangements that engage people in an ethical way of being. The other element of Foucaultian ethics emerged from what some have identified as an important turn to normativity in Foucault: his insistence that the contemporary emptiness of our historical ethics of self and others leaves room for a new resistance against power by means of self-styled ethics (Bernauer & Mahon, 2005). He wanted to show that people can work within their place in society and history to forge new techniques of ethics that work against those utilised for domination, such as discipline and biopower for example.

Singles activities might be analysed as ethics. As I have shown, not only do these activities allow people to encounter others in specific ways; they also entertain different notions of the single self. This perspective allows us to analyse various ethics and their connections. In addition, however, it provides singles activities with a normative underpinning, perhaps even an ethical imperative: These are spaces for the practical working-out of alternative ways to relate to others and oneself.

The interviewed organisers' notion of singles activities as therapy, through which singles learn to overcome an inner social deficiency, is congruent with modern techniques of power described by Foucault. The sexual or intimate life of a single person, when viewed exclusively from the perspective of not being engaged in a monogamous relationship, is understood to reveal the truth of self as lacking social skills, correct attitudes, and so on.

From a Foucaultian perspective, the practices of singles themselves, as they engage in aspects of relationships without committing to the whole "package", might be closest to the ideal of inventing new and subversive ethical practices. What remains if we unpack a relationship into its practical parts? And how many of these practices might be organised outside of monogamous relationships? Can places of close relations be replaced by spaces for specific practices? Questions like these concern both how we arrange spaces to encounter others, and how we come to know ourselves. But it also concerns gender relations. In Luce Irigaray's work for example, we find a preoccupation with the ethical as recognition of gender differences (Irigaray, 2001). For her, those differences are distinct from what she considers to be femaleness as a mere desirous projection of masculinity. From Irigaray's perspective, single women who attend singles activities could be understood to search for a way of being in the world, an alternative to coupledom that would allow them an ethical relation to men, a recognition as women beyond the regime of heterosexual desire and romantic love. This theory fits with my findings that there is a gender difference in how singles relate to communal singles activities.

Indeed, what are the ethical promises and dangers contained in that social formation we call contemporary singledom? While this question remain to be answered, I hope I have shown that they are inherent in singledom itself; that singles are not equivalent to a group of individuals, but might be understood as the name for a contemporary ethical project.

References

Adams, M. L. (1997). *The trouble with normal: Postwar youth and the making of heterosexuality*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Allwood, M. S., & Ranemark, I.-B. (1943). *Medelby. En sociologisk studie [Village Average. A sociological study]*. Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag.

Andriotis, K. (2010). Heterotopic erotic oases: The public nude beach experience. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *37*(4), 1076–1096.

Artaeus, I. (1992). *Kvinnorna som blev över. Ensamstående stadskvinnor under 1800-talets första hälft - fallet Västerås [Left-over women. Single urban women during the first half of the 1800s – a case study of Västerås]*. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.

Arvidson, M. (2007). *Den fabricerande människan: om bedrägeri som vardaglig interaktionsform [The fabricating human being: Deception as an everyday form of interaction]*. Karlstad University, Karlstad.

Arvidson, M., & Henriksson, A. (2010). The seduction community: constructing masculinity as social magic. Göteborg: XVII World Congress of Sociology.

Arvidsson, A. (2006). "Quality singles": Internet dating and the work of fantasy. *New Media & Society*, *8*(4), 671–690.

Aspers, P. (2011). *Markets*. Cambridge: Polity.

Austin, J. L. (1975). *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Badiou, A. (2012). *In praise of love*. London: Serpent's Tail.

Bailey, B. L. (1988). *From front porch to back seat: Courtship in twentieth-century America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bauman, Z. (2001). *Thinking sociologically*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Bauman, Z. (2007). *Liquid love*. Cambridge: Polity.

Beasley, C., Brook, H., & Holmes, M. (2012). *Heterosexuality in theory and practice*. London: Routledge.

Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (1995). *The normal chaos of love*. Cambridge: Polity.

Becker, H. (2000). The etiquette of improvisation. *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, *7*(3), 171–176.

Bernauer, J. W., & Mahon, M. (2005). Michel Foucault's ethical imagination. In G. Gutting (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Foucault* (pp. 149–175). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bersani, L., & Phillips, A. (2008). *Intimacies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bildtgård, T. (2012). The impact of new intimate relationships in later life on social and filial relationships. Copenhagen, Denmark: Second ISA Forum on Sociology.

Bogle, K. A. (2007). The shift from dating to hooking up in college: what scholars have missed. *Sociology Compass*, *1*(2), 775–788.

Bologne, J.-C. (2004). *Histoire du célibat et des célibataires [History of celibacy and singles]*. Paris: Fayard.

Boltanski, L. (2011). *On critique. A sociology of emancipation*. Cambridge: Polity.

Bruce, K. (2012). *Doing coupledom: imagining, managing and performing relationality in contermporary wedding and civil partnership rituals*. University of Southampton.

Budgeon, S. (2008). Couple culture and the production of singleness. *Sexualities*, *11*(3), 301–325.

Burawoy, M. (1998). The extended case method. *Sociological Theory*, *16*(1), 4–33.

Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble*. New York: Routledge.

Cacioppo, J. T., Hawkley, L. C., Ernst, J. M., Burleson, M. H., Berntson, G. G., Nouriani, B., & Spiegel, D. (2006). Loneliness within a nomological net: An evolutionary perspective. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *40*, 1054–1085.

Callon, M. (1998). *The laws of the markets*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Callon, M., & Latour, B. (1981). Unscrewing the Big Leviathan: How actors macrostructure reality and how sociologists help them do so. In K. Knorr-Cetina & A. V. Cicourel (Eds.), *Advances in social theory and methodology: toward an integration of micro and macro-sociologies* (pp. 277–303). New York: Routledge.

Cargan, L. (1981). Singles: An examination of two stereotypes. *Family Relations*, *30*(3), 377–385.

Carlsson, S. (1977). *Fröknar, mamseller, jungfrur och pigor. Ogifta kvinnor i det svenska ståndssamhället [Fröknar, mamseller, jungfrur and pigor. Unmarried*

women in the Swedish society of estates]. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.

Cavanagh, A. (2007). *Sociology in the age of the Internet*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Cerulo, K. (2009). Nonhumans in social interaction. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *35*, 531–552.

Chatterton, P., & Hollands, R. (2002). Theorising urban playscapes: Producing, regulating and consuming youthful nightlife city spaces. *Urban Studies*, *39*(1), 95–116.

Chudacoff, H. P. (2000). *The age of the bachelor. Creating an American subculture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Cicourel, A. (1982). Interviews, surveys, and the problem of ecological validity. *The American Sociologist*, *17*(1), 11–20.

Clarke, A. (2005). *Situational analysis : grounded theory after the postmodern turn* (p. 365). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Clift, E. J. (2007). *Picking up and acting out: Politics of masculinity in the seduction community*. University of Texas at Austin, Austin.

Cook, C., Heath, F., & Thompson, R. (2000). A meta-analysis of response rates in web-or Internet-based surveys. *Educational and …*, *60*(6), 821–836.

Czarniawska, B. (2004). On time, space and action nets. *Organization*, *6*(11), 773–791.

Czarniawska, B. (2007). *Shadowing and other techniques for doing fieldwork in modern societies*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press.

Czarniawska, B. (2008). *A theory of organising*. Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Daneback, K. (2006). *Love and sexuality on the Internet*. Gothenburg University, Gothenburg.

Danermark, B. (2002). *Explaining society: Critical realism in the social sciences*. London: Routledge.

De Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The second sex*. New York: Vintage.

Dreyfus, H. L., & Rabinow, P. (1982). *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Durkheim, É. (1988). *Les règles de la méthode sociologique*. Paris: Flammarion.

Durkheim, É. (1995). *The elementary forms of religious life*. New York: Free Press.

Edwards, R., & Gillies, V. (2012). Farewell to family? A reply. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, *1*(3), 433–436.

Edwards, T. (2005). *Cultures of masculinity*. London: Routledge.

Elm, M. S., Lövheim, M., & Bergquist, M. (2003). *Att fånga nätet: kvalitativa metoder för Internetforskning [Grasping the Net: Qualitative methods for Internet research]*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Eriksson, B. (2007). *Social interaktion [Social interaction]*. Malmö: Liber.

Evertsson, L., & Nyman, C. (2013). On the other side of couplehood: Single women in Sweden exploring life without a partner. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, *2*(1), 61–78.

Fan, W., & Yan, Z. (2010). Factors affecting response rates of the web survey: A systematic review. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *26*(2), 132–139.

Foucault, M. (1979). *History of sexuality volume 1: An introduction*. London: Allen Lane.

Foucault, M. (1986). Of other spaces. *Diacritics - A Review of Contemporary Criticism*, *16*(1), 22–26.

Foucault, M. (1990). *History of sexuality volume 2: The use of pleasure*. London: Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (1996). *Foucault live: interviews 1961-1984*. (S. Lotringer, L. Hochroth, & J. Johnston, Eds.). New York: Semiotexte.

Foucault, M. (2004). *Society must be defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*. London: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (2005). *The hermeneutics of the subject. Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982*. New York: Picador.

Frykman, J. (1988). *Dansbaneeländet: ungdomen, populärkulturen och opinionen [The wretched dance halls: Youth, popular culture and the public opinion]*. Stockholm: Natur och kultur.

Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity.

Garfinkel, H. (1984). Passing and the managed achievement of sex status in an "intersexed" person. In *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (pp. 116–185). Cambridge: Polity.

Garfinkel, H. (2006). *Seeing sociologically: The routine grounds of social action*. (A. W. Rawls, Ed.). Boulder: Paradigm Publishers.

Geertz, C. (1993). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. London: Fontana.

Gernandt, N. (1994). *Solo-liv [Living solo]*. Stockholm: Norstedts.

Giddens, A. (1992). *The transformation of intimacy: Sexuality, love and eroticism in modern societies*. Cambridge: Polity.

Gilding, M. (2010). Reflexivity over and above convention: The new orthodoxy in the sociology of personal life, formerly sociology of the family. *The British Journal of Sociology*, *61*(4), 757–777.

Glendinning, S. (1998). *On being with others: Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Derrida*. Oxford: Routledge.

Goffman, E. (1971). *Relations in public. Microstudies of the public order*. New York: Harper Colophon Books.

Goffman, E. (1990). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. London: Penguin books.

Gorman-Murray, A. (2008). Reconciling self: Gay men and lesbians using domestic materiality for identity management. *Social and Cultural Geography*, *9*(3), 284–301.

Hajnal, J. (1965). European marriage pattern in historical perspective. In G. D. Eversley & D. E. Eversley (Eds.), *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography* (pp. 101–143). Chicago: Aldine.

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, *14*(3), 575.

Harvey, D. (2006). Space as a keyword. In N. Castree & D. Gregory (Eds.), *David Harvey: A critical reader* (pp. 270–294). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Hazan, C., & Shaver, P. (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *52*(3), 511–524.

Heino, R. D., Ellison, N. B., & Gibbs, J. L. (2010). Relationshipping: Investigating the market metaphor in online dating. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *27*(4), 427–447.

Henry-Waring, M., & Barraket, J. (2008). Dating and intimacy in the 21st century: The use of online dating sites in Australia. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies and Society*, *6*(1), 14–33.

Hetherington, K. (1996). The utopics of social ordering: Stonehenge as a museum without walls. In S. Macdonald & G. Fyfe (Eds.), *Theorizing Museums* (pp. 153–176). Cambridge: Blackwell.

Hetherington, K. (1998). *Expressions of identity: Space, performance, politics*. London: SAGE.

Hochschild, A. (2003a). *The commercialization of intimate life: Notes from home and work*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hochschild, A. (2003b). *The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hockey, J. L., Meah, A., & Robinson, V. (2007). *Mundane heterosexualities: From theory to practices* (p. 206). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hubbard, P. (2000). Desire/disgust: Mapping the moral contours of heterosexuality. *Progress in Human Geography*, *24*(2), 191–217.

Hubbard, P. (2001). Sex zones: Intimacy, citizenship and public space. *Sexualities*, *4*(1), 51–71.

Hubbard, P. (2002). Sexing the self: Geographies of engagement and encounter. *Social and Cultural Geography*, *3*(4), 365–381.

Hubbard, P. (2007). Space/place. In D. Atkinson (Ed.), *Cultural geography. A critical dictionary of key concepts* (pp. 41–49). New York: I.B. Tauris.

Husserl, E. (1977). *Cartesian meditations: An introduction to phenomenology*. Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publications.

Illouz, E. (1997). *Consuming the romantic utopia. Love and the cultural contradictions of capitalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Illouz, E. (2007). *Cold intimacies: The making of emotional capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity.

Illouz, E. (2014). What's in an emotion? The ecology and architecture of romantic choice. In *Exploring blind spots. The 27th Conference of the Nordic Sociological Association*. Lund.

Irigaray, L. (2001). *To be two*. New York: Routledge.

Jackson, S. (1999). *Heterosexuality in question*. London: SAGE.

Jamieson, L. (1988). *Intimacy. Personal relationships in modern societies*. Cambridge: Polity.

Jamieson, L. (1999). Intimacy transformed? A critical look at the "pure relationship." *Sociology*, *33*(3), 477–494.

Jamieson, L. (2012). Intimacy as a concept: Explaining social change in the context of globalisation or another form of ethnocentricism? *The Clarion*, *1*(1), 133–147.

Jeyasingham, D. (2010). Building heteronormativity: The social and material reconstruction of men's public toilets as spaces of heterosexuality. *Social and Cultural Geography*, *11*(4), 307–325.

John, G. S. (2001). Alternative cultural heterotopia and the liminoid body: Beyond Turner at ConFest. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, *12*(1), 47–66.

Jonsson, A. (2009). *A nice place*. Karlstad University.

Kaufmann, J.-C. (2008). *The single woman and the fairytale prince*. Cambridge: Polity.

Kessler, S. (1978). *Gender: An ethnomethodological approach*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Knopp, L. (2004). Ontologies of place, placelessness, and movement: Queer quests for identity and their impacts on contemporary geographic thought. *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, *11*(1), 121–134.

Kracauer, S. (1995). *The mass ornament: Weimar essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Krause, M., & Kowalski, A. (2013). Reflexive habits: Dating and rationalized conduct in New York and Berlin. *The Sociological Review*, *61*(1), 21–40.

Krekula, C. (2009). Age coding - On age-based practices of distinction. *International Journal of Ageing and Later Life*, *4*(2), 7–31.

Langhamer, C. (2013). Everyday advice on everyday love: romantic expertise in mid-twentieth century Britain. *L'HOMME, European Journal of Feminist History*, *24*(1), 35–52.

Laskar, P. (2005). *Ett bidrag till heterosexualitetens historia. Kön, sexualitet och njutningsnormer i sexhandböcker 1800-1920 [A contribution to the history of heterosexuality. Gender, sexuality and norms of pleasure in sex manuals, 1800-1920]*. Stockholm: Modernista.

Latour, B. (1987). *Science in action. How to follow scientists and engineers through society*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Latour, B. (1988). The politics of explanation: An alternative. In S. Woolgar (Ed.), *Knowledge and reflexivity: New frontiers in the sociology of knowledge* (pp. 155–176). New York: SAGE.

Latour, B. (2004). Why has critique run out of steam? From matter of fact to matters of concern. *Critical Inquiry, 30*(2), 225–248.

Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the social. An introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Law, J. (1994). *Organising modernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Law, J. (1999). After ANT: Complexity, naming and topology. In J. Law & J. Hassard (Eds.), *Actor Network Theory and After* (pp. 1–14). Oxford: Blackwell.

Law, J. (2000). *Objects, spaces and others*. Lancaster.

Law, J. (2002). Objects and spaces. *Theory, Culture and Society, 19*(5-6), 91–105.

Law, J. (2004). *After method. Mess in social science research*. London: Routledge.

Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Liljeström, R. (1988). Släkt, kön och familj [Kinship, sex and family]. In U. Himmelstrand & G. Svensson (Eds.), *Sverige - vardag och struktur. Sociologer beskriver det svenska samhället [Sweden - everyday life and structure. Sociologists describe the Swedish society]* (pp. 263–290). Stockholm: Norstedts.

Linné, R. (2003). Alternative textualities: Media culture and the proto-queer. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 16*(5), 669–689.

Long, N. J., & Moore, H. L. (2013). *Sociality. New directions.* Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Lundahl, P. (1998). Kontextbunden essentialism. Om svårigheterna att relativisera homosexualitet/heterosexualitet [Essentialism in context. On the difficulties to relativise homosexuality/heterosexuality]. In F. Miegel & F. Schoug (Eds.), *Dikotomier. Vetenskapsteoretiska reflektioner [Dichotomies. Epistemological reflections]*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Löw, M. (2008). The constitution of space. The structuration of spaces through the simultaneity of effect and perception. *European Journal of Social Theory, 11*(1), 25–49.

Marcus, G. E. (1998). *Ethnography through thick and thin*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Massey, D. (1991). A global sense of place. *Marxism Today*, *35*(6), 315–323.

Massey, D. (1994). *Space, place and gender*. Oxford: Polity.

Massey, D. B. (2005). *For space*. London: SAGE.

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

May, V. (2012). Are we really saying farewell to family? A response to Edwards and Gillies' Farewell to family?'. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, *1*(3), 415–421.

Maynard, D., & Schaeffer, N. (2000). Toward a sociology of social scientific knowledge survey research and ethnomethodology's asymmetric alternates. *Social Studies of Science*, *30*(3), 323–370.

McCarthy, J. R. (2012). Caring after death: Issues of embodiment and relationality. In C. Rogers & S. Weller (Eds.), *Critical Approaches to Care: Understanding Caring Relations, Identities and Cultures* (pp. 183–194). London: Routledge.

McDonnell, L. (2012). Me, you and us: Intimate relationships and the question of children. *Journal of Sociology*, *48*(2), 132–148.

Merkle, E. R., & Richardson, R. A. (2000). Digital dating and virtual relating: Conceptualizing computer mediated romantic relationships. *Family Relations*, *49*(2), 187.

Mjöberg, J. (2011). *Innerlighetens tid. En sociologisk undersökning av intimitet och senmodernitet [Time of intimacy. Sociological examination of intimacy and late modernity]*. Uppsala University.

Mol, A. (2002). *The body multiple: ontology in medical practice* (p. 196). Durham: Duke University Press.

Mol, A., & Law, J. (1994). Regions, networks and fluids: Anaimia and social topology. *Social Studies of Science*, *24*(4), 641–671.

Mongeau, P. A., Serewicz, M. C. M., & Therrien, L. F. (2004). Goals for cross-sex first dates: Identification, measurement, and the influence of contextual factors. *Communication Monographs*, *71*(2), 121–147.

Monto, M. A., & Milrod, C. (2013). Ordinary or Peculiar Men? Comparing the Customers of Prostitutes With a Nationally Representative Sample of Men.

International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, *58*(7), 802–820.

Moore, H. L. (2001). *Still life. Hopes, desires and satisfactions*. Cambridge: Polity.

Morgan, D. (1996). *Family connections*. Cambridge: Polity.

Morgan, D. L. (2007). Paradigms lost and pragmatism regained: Methodological implications of combining qualitative and quantitative methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *1*(1), 48–76.

Morrison, C.-A. (2010). Heterosexuality and home: Intimacies of space and spaces of touch. *Emotion, Space and Society*, *5*(1), 10–18.

Newmahr, S. (2011). *Playing on the edge. Sadomasochism, risk, and intimacy*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Nordin, L. (2007). *Man ska ju vara två: män och kärlekslängtan i norrländsk glesbygd [You should be two: Men longing for love in sparsely populated Norrland]*. Stockholm: Natur & kultur.

Oswin, N., & Olund, E. (2010). Governing intimacy. *Society and Space*, *28*(1), 60–67.

Pahl, R., & Spencer, L. (2010). Family, friends and personal communities; Changing models-in-the-mind. *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, *2*(3), 197–210.

Parsons, T. (1982). *On institutions and social evolution: selected writings* (p. 356). Chicago: Univ. of Chicago P.

Povinelli, E. A. (2006). *The empire of love: Toward a theory of intimacy, genealogy, and carnality*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Pritchard, A., & Morgan, N. (2006). Hotel Babylon? Exploring hotels as liminal sites of transition and transgression. *Tourism Management*, *27*(5), 762–772.

Quah, S. (2010). "Can't do without friends" - A study of the empowering experience of divorcees through friendship and self. Adelaide: 18th Biennial Conference of the Asian Studies Association of Australia in Adelaide.

Rabinow, P., & Rose, N. (2006). Biopower today. *BioSocieties*, *1*(1), 195–217.

Reynolds, J. (2008). *The single woman: A discursive investigation*. New York: Routledge.

Rich, A. (1980). Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. *Signs*, *5*(4), 631–660.

Rosenberg, T. (2002). *Queerfeministisk agenda [A queer feminist agenda]*. Stockholm: Atlas.

Roseneil, S., & Budgeon, S. (2004). Cultures of intimacy and care beyond "the family": Personal life and social change in the early 21st century. *Current Sociology*, *52*(2), 135–159.

Rubin, G. (1975). The traffic in women: Toward a "political economy" of sex. In E. Lewin (Ed.), *Towards an Anthropology of Women* (pp. 87–106). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Rubin, G. (1993). Thinking sex. Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality. In A. Habelove, M. A. Barale, & D. Halperin (Eds.), *Lesbian and gay studies reader* (pp. 3–44). London: Routledge.

Rubin, G., & Butler, J. (1994). Sexual traffic. *Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. Retrieved from http://www.sfu.ca/~decaste/OISE/page2/files/RubinButler.pdf

Sautter, J. M., Tippett, R. M., & Morgan, S. P. (2010). The social demographic of Internet dating in the united states. *Social Science Quarterly*, *91*(2), 554–575.

Schatzki, T. R. (1996). *Social practices: A Wittgensteinian approach to human activity and the social*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schatzki, T. R. (2002). *Site of the social: A philosophical account of the constitution of social life and change*. State College: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Schutz, A. (1964). *Collected papers. Volume 1: The problem of social reality* (Vol. 11,15,22). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publications.

Schutz, A. (1976). *Collected papers. Volume 2: Studies in social theory*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publications.

Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research. A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Seidman, S. (1994). Queer-ing sociology, sociologizing queer theory: An introduction. *Sociological Theory*, *12*(2), 166–177.

Sharp, E. A., & Ganong, L. (2011). "I'm a loser, I'm not married, let's just all look at me": Ever-single women's perceptions of their social environment. *Journal of Family Issues*, *32*(7), 956–980.

Shields, R. (1990). The system of pleasure: Liminality and the carnivalesque at Brighton. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *7*, 39–72.

Shih, T., & Fan, X. (2008). Comparing response rates from web and mail surveys: A meta-analysis. *Field Methods*, *20*(3), 249–271.

Simmel, G., & Wolff, K. H. (1950). *The sociology of Georg Simmel*. (K. H. Wolff, Ed.). New York: The Free Press.

Smart, C. (2007). *Personal life. New directions in sociological thinking*. Cambridge: Polity.

Starrin, B., & Steffner Starrin, L. (2013). *Sverige dansar*. Karlstad: Starrin Förlag.

Tan, Q. (2013). Flirtatious geographies: Clubs as spaces for the performance of affective heterosexualities. *Gender, Place & Culture*, *20*(6), 718–736.

Ten Have, P. (2004). *Understanding qualitative research and ethnomethodology*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

The Limesurvey Project Team. (2011, April 24). LimeSurvey - the free and open source survey software tool! Carsten Schmitz. Retrieved from http://www.limesurvey.org/

Thrift, N. (2008). *Non-representational theory. Space, politics, affect*. (Routledge, Ed.). London.

Ulvros, E. H. (2004). *Dansens och tidens virvlar. Om dans och lek i Sveriges historia [The swirls of dance and time. On dancing and playing in Swedish history]*. Lund: Historiska Media.

Walsh, K. (2007). "It got very debauched, very Dubai!" Heterosexual intimacy among single British expatriates. *Social and Cultural Geography*, *8*(4), 507–533.

Warner, M. (1999). *The trouble with normal: Sex, politics and the ethics of queer life*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Weber, M. (1949). Objectivity in social sciences. In E. A. Shils & H. A. Finch (Eds.), *The methodology of the social sciences* (pp. 49–112). New York: Free Press.

Weber, M. (1968). *Economy and society. An outline of interpretive sociology. Volume 1*. New York: Bedminister Press.

Weick, K. E. (1979). *The social psychology of organizing*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Wettergren, Å. (2005). *Moving and jamming : implications for Social Movement Theory*. Department of Sociology, Division for Social Sciences, Karlstad University, Karlstad.

Witzel, A., & Mey, G. (2004). "I am NOT opposed to quantification or formalization or modeling, but do not want to pursue quantitative methods that are not commensurate with the research phenomena addressed". Aaron Cicourel in conversation with Andreas Witzel and Günter Mey. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *5*(3).

Wouters, C. (2004). *Sex and manners: Female emancipation in the West, 1890-2000*. London: SAGE.

APPENDIX 1. QUESTIONS DURING AN *IN SITU* INTERVIEW

1. Please present yourself, your name and so on.
2. (To woman, who has mentioned going to other singles activities) So it was through those singles activities you found information about this cruise?
3. (To woman) You say you prefer to travel together with others. But you travel alone this time?
4. Do Viktoria's singles events work well for you [Sw. *passar dig*]?
5. (To man) You say you have fun, but what else have you got out of these events?
6. (To man) Still, you said before the interview that Internet dating has worked well for you?
7. (To woman) So how do Viktoria's singles events work for you?
8. So what are these arrangements about, then? What is going on?
9. [To woman] What about those singles after-work events you've been to? Are they in the same … style, let us say, as this?
10. What do you think Viktoria does to create this nice atmosphere, and the fact that people are so forthcoming at these events [connecting to their own descriptions]?
11. [Man compares to a "less open" singles association that he has been member of] You mean the association became more like a group of friends?
12. So did you go to the speed dating event last night? Was it any good?
13. [They have not been impressed with the speed dating events and spell out why.] It seems difficult to make an arrangement like speed dating work.
14. How would you describe singledom in Sweden today? I mean to say; is it a sign of something in society, so to speak?
15. [Both describe a lack of commitment to family values in society and lack of engagement in existing relationships.] Why don't people do more, then, to keep their relationships going?
16. Someone told me that one reason for the growing number of singles might be that the gender roles are not working…
17. Perhaps you could describe what happened when you two met? If it's not too embarrassing? … You know, everyone here says encounters are so important, would you agree?
18. [A rather long discussion ensues, where the couple tells the story about how they approached each other during the cruise; I ask a few questions just to keep the story running.] Is there something more you want to tell me about how you two met?
19. [The couple discusses how important it is to be both responsive to the other and still remain naturally "yourself".] It must be difficult to both react responsively to the other and yet be natural?
20. [The woman tells me it's important to know what you look for in a man; I ask her:] So you knew what you wanted even as you stepped on board this boat?
21. [To man] Do you also have a clear image of what you want in another person?

22. [Woman mentions in passing that she has been a member on Monotopia.] Just want to check with you about your experience of Monotopia?
23. [To woman] So you checked out other members, but never wrote to anyone?
24. [To woman] I understand you have been a member on other sites as well. How does Monotopia compare to those, do you think?
25. I think I forgot to ask you how you felt about going on this singles cruise?
26. [To woman] So you experience it is as a release from everyday life, I take it?
27. [To woman] Do I understand you correctly if I say you are still not sure why you went on the cruise?
28. [To man] And how did you feel about going on the cruise?
29. I think what you are saying is that the word "single" means you don't have such high expectations of finding someone?
30. I think you said before the interview you would never go on a regular cruise with this ship, that you only go if the word "single" is used, am I right?
31. [They tell me singles cruises are more about friendship and not pick-ups (Sw. *raggning*)] And there's less alcohol involved?
32. Well, I think we're approaching the end of the interview. Do you think I got it all, or do you want to add something?
33. Thank you. You can find out more about my research if you go to [etc.].

APPENDIX 2. INTERVIEWING VIKTORIA A SECOND TIME

1. Initially, I just want to ask some follow-up questions on the last interview and what I have been able to research since then. One thing I found on the Internet is that there are some singles activities abroad with similar names as yours. Have you heard about [names of some activities abroad]…?

2. [It turns out Viktoria has been involved in one of the activities I mention. I ask her questions to support her telling me about that.] I also see some of the concepts you use for your activities have been usurped by others when you Google them.

3. This seems to be a lot of rivalry on the market, particularly with the Internet dating sites?

4. [There is a long narrative about different events that illustrate the point about rivalry; I merely ask questions to keep it going.] I know a couple of people researching entrepreneurship who would say that a lot of the ideas behind a certain business can often be found in a person's biography. Do you have such a biographical background to your business ideas?

5. [More about market rivalry; I try to get to Viktoria's biography by repeating the last question. She then starts talking about her background; I ask for specifics on some points along the way, and keep the narrative going. After a while, Viktoria gets to the present and gets more specific about how she arranges her singles activities. Presently, she is concerned about some volunteers that work for her.] I did not know you had volunteers. Tell me, how do you find them and get them to work for you?

6. [As Viktoria starts to talk about what flyers she sends out to her volunteers, we get to talk about her marketing and how good her coverage is around Sweden.] Suppose we take Varmland, where I live, as an example. How have you worked there?

7. [At this point in the interview, a journalist calls Viktoria to ask if the former can come and report from one of the events. We talk a while about journalists and their interest in Viktoria's business.] You mean they are more interested to report about dating, not singledom?

8. [Asking about a specific utterance] So you feel dating is a precarious situation for singles?

9. So what's so special when singles meet in a group? I mean, aren't your activities a bit like going out in Stockholm on a Friday evening?

10. [She makes comparisons and emphasizes the uniqueness of her "product".] Right, it's almost like a new way of socializing.

11. Do you ever invite people who are not singles?

12. [She says she can tell if someone is married, and always throws them out.] So how can you tell if someone is not single?

13. So are there people who come to your events who are not interested in finding someone?

14. Do they tell you they are not interested in finding someone?

15. Yes, I've been thinking about this as well. To say you look for someone makes you vulnerable; it may be easier to just say you are looking for a good time out.

16. [I ask about specific aspects of the market, which I need to exclude here for the sake of anonymity. Again, the discussion leads to specific events that

Viktoria is arranging at the moment.] I must ask; have you ever arranged an event that didn't go so well?

17. Are there people who come to your events that you wish hadn't?

18. So how do you make some people come and not others?

19. [It turns out that asking for a fee is an important element in keeping some people out.] So have you ever arranged a free event?

20. [After some more discussion we interrupt the interview for some tea and biscuits.] So, about the word "single" which you use for your events, how do people relate to that word? Is it something they embrace, or do they think it is a problematic label?

21. [We talk about nuances of the word "single" as well as Swedish synonyms. Viktoria mentions a couple of activities that use synonyms, like *ungkarl* (bachelor), which she associates with binge drinking.] So you mean you don't want to be associated with alcohol? Still, people drink alcohol at your events, right?

22. [She says they do, but in limited amounts. That's why she wants her events in "public buildings" (strange choice of word, she probably means places like hotels, cruise ships, etc.)] You mean, because it makes people behave in a more restrained way?

23. So it's mostly the men who get drunk?

24. I just wanted to ask you about the singles associations. Have you ever been a member or been invited?

25. [We discuss different singles associations. Viktoria has been invited to co-operate with one, but declined, as they were "not her style".] So what's their style [meaning the singles association]?

26. Where do you make most of your profit?

27. So you don't rely on, say, public financing?

28. You often offer some lectures, crash courses in dancing, and so on, at your events. Where do you find lecturers and course leaders?

29. [We get into the topic of the market again, Viktoria's networks, and so on. At one point, she talks about how she works to market her events to men.] Yes, men. Could we talk a bit on the topic of men and your events?

30. [Men always register late for her events, Viktoria says.] Why do you think that is?

31. [More talk on the topic of men and how they relate to the events]. One of my supervisors said something interesting; she said the word "single" is more associated with women. Something about *Sex and the City*.

32. [We talk a bit about whether the word single has "women connotations". Viktoria thinks there might be something to that idea. She asks if there is anything one can do about it.] You know, there is this whole thing about the "The Game" by Neil Strauss for men, you've probably heard about it.

33. [Viktoria has never heard about the phenomenon. When I explain, she complains about the "same old pattern" with men and women.] So what is the pattern you see at your singles events?

34. [Viktoria says that her events are more "natural", but that there is a strong family norm in society that influences everyone.] So where do you think this family norm is at its strongest?

35. What would be the goal politically, if you could decide?

36. [Viktoria wants people to respect each other regardless of how they live their lives, even if they choose to live alone.] But you think there are people who choose to live alone?

37. I'm thinking, if I go to a singles event, don't you think I'm looking for someone?

38. [Viktoria thinks that people "deep down" wants someone, but that her singles events also offers another kind of community (Sw. *gemenskap*).] Yes, it's interesting; the word single gets another meaning in a sense, its not just about finding someone, but having a community with people going through the same experience.

39. [Viktoria broadly agrees.] I think this is very interesting. It could even be we're seeing a new lifestyle emerge?

40. [Viktoria hopes so, as she sees so many people sitting at home, drinking wine alone.] So how would you go about changing that?

41. So places to meet up are important?

42. [Viktoria talks about places where people feel safe.] So what makes people feel safe?

43. [I understand from the reply that many people Viktoria talks to expect something other than safety when they first hear of singles events.] What do you think they expect?

44. So what age groups come to your events?

45. What are the specific challenges when you arrange events for younger people?

46. I have a few questions left. We didn't finish the part about *Sex and the City*. You were saying the TV series has had an enormous impact?

47. [Viktoria says there are some women who seem to identify with the characters, often younger and a bit nonchalant, who nevertheless deep down have the same feelings as everyone else.] Are these women from Stockholm or Gothenburg, I mean the larger cities?

48. You said before that some are critical of you because you want payment for your events. What are their arguments? Is that a common opinion?

49. [Viktoria says it's a strange argument.] Yes, it is strange, you could speculate why they would hold that opinion. Last time we spoke, I think you said it's mostly something you hear from members of singles associations?

50. By the way, who delivers the food to your different events?

51. Last time we spoke, you had tried to make ICA [a supermarket chain] to be more single friendly. How did that go?

52. There're a lot of different singles activities going on in Sweden. I saw that the Royal Opera gave performances for singles.

53. [It turns out Viktoria knows a lot about it.] So you keep up with the singles activities around the country?

54. [We discuss how much work is involved for Viktoria. The interview ends with a discussion about people we both have been in contact with.]

APPENDIX 3. INTERVIEWING NAIMA

1. Perhaps we could start with you telling me a bit about yourself?
2. [Naima is unsure where I want her to start.] Well, perhaps we could begin with your age?
3. So now, please tell me a bit about your background if you can.
4. You talk about your "old life". Is that how you see it, you have an old and a new life?
5. And how would you describe your new life, what people nowadays call single life?
6. So I understand you wish to remain single for a while longer and then try something different; is that your plan?
7. Today there is this whole singles culture developing in Sweden, with travel, Internet sites and so on. How do you relate to all that?
8. [Naima gives a lengthy reply, during which I merely support her with some "Mhm, right" and so on.] Well, I want to talk with you more about Mono-topia soon, but first I have a few follow-up questions on what you said. You said that as single you are able to do things you didn't have time for as a young adult. Could you perhaps develop that a bit?
9. So it's a lot about things people usually do on their own?
10. So you socialize with both men and women now?
11. So you have moved?
12. You also mentioned you have changed your views on how a partner should be after you became single. It would be very interesting to hear more about that aspect.
13. [Naima discusses that she understands her life as a puzzle today, where every piece is equally important and "not to be compromised" with.] You also seem to connect all of the pieces with yourself, so to speak, am I right?
14. You mentioned a man you dated a few weeks back before. Did these kinds of considerations play a part in your decision to stop seeing him? You said he wasn't serious about finding someone?
15. Well, I thought I would ask you to fill in a bit more about your background. You said you have a [name of certain education]. And that you now work as a [name of professional career]. Could you tell me a bit more about how you came to those two life choices?
16. [Naima talks for long while about her background, the narrative ends with her decision to go into the line of work she is presently in.] This change of career perhaps came about in connection with the divorce?
17. Thank you so much for that story, it was very interesting to listen to. It gives me a great background. Let's proceed a bit. We talked before about different singles activities and you mentioned going to this one meeting. Have you been to other activities?
18. One thing I've thought about is in what circumstances you identify as single, and in what circumstances you do so less?
19. [Naima asks if I mean on Monotopia.] No, I mean in life generally.
20. [Naima says she hopes most members on Monotopia are singles, although it is difficult to verify.] Right. Well, I was perhaps thinking more about how you yourself sometimes think of yourself as single and sometimes perhaps as a [job title], a bit like an identity.

21. [Naima says you always ask people for their jobs when contacting them on sites like Monotopia. She also thinks that some members use the site to promote their products, services, etc., but that is something she doesn't do.] Okay, right. So what would you say Monotopia is all about then?

22. How often do you yourself use the site?

23. [Naima compares Monotopia to dating sites, and remarks that the latter are more like places to shop for a partner, as they immediately give her an overview of what's "on offer", something Monotopia does not.] Still, you seem to think it's almost a positive that you get an overview and so on [on those other sites]?

24. So if you would compare Monotopia to other similar sites, what would you say distinguishes the site?

25. You decided to remain for a while on Monotopia, even as a paying member? I would suspect something kept you there?

26. If you could decide, what would a really good Internet site for singles look like?

27. When I've spoken to the group that designed Monotopia, I've come to understand that some wanted the site to guide singles to be more self-assertive; is that something you would like on "your" site?

28. So have you had contact with someone through Monotopia?

29. If you went on some physical singles activity, like for example the upcoming New Years party, why would you decide to go?

30. [Naima says it would be for meeting new people and making new friends.] But you also think it's a good way of finding a partner? [Naima has mentioned earlier in the interview that she prefers to meet potential partners on this kind of activities, rather than online.]

31. So an additional intention behind going to an activity like that would be to meet someone?

32. [Naima says no, it would not be part of her intentions, although she would not automatically reject a man who approached her as a potential partner.] No, okay. Yes, I hear sometimes that people go mostly to meet new people. And then there are those that say they really go just to meet a partner.

33. [Naima says some people might have an unconscious intention to meet someone, but that she has stopped thinking like that, she does not harbour any unconscious hopes of finding someone.] Still, you said before you did not want to continue living as a single?

34. [Naima says she would want to find someone, but only if he is perfect – otherwise she prefers to remain single. We both laugh at this.] So you simply have a lot of demands of men? [Asked in a joking manner, both laugh.]

35. In short, it seems you are after all pretty happy with your life as a single?

36. I remember I went on this singles conference, and observed that they almost always placed men besides women and vice versa. [Naima asks: "The placing of men and women was obligatory so to speak, almost like speed dating?"] Yes, like speed dating. Now, is that something you would like to go on?

37. I see. Well, it seems I'm out of questions. Perhaps you have something to add? And so on.

APPENDIX 4. SURVEY ABOUT SINGLES

A research survey about singles cultures

Numbers within square brackets represent number of respondents or, if specified, the mean and standard deviation. For some questions, the total number of respondents is unknown, as the default response (i.e., the response given when no answer was given) was not set to null (for example, for multiple choice questions, the default value was that none of the choices was selected, which is tantamount to a valid answer rather than no answer at all). ◯ is used for single choice options, while ☐ signifies multiple choice options.

Thank you for participating in my research project about singles! Your response means much for my research!

My name is Andreas Henriksson and I work as a PhD candidate at Karlstad University. The survey is part of my dissertation project about singles cultures in Sweden. The survey is done with permission from Monotopia, but is not attached to that site in any other way. People at Monotopia will, however, have access to the end result.

Anonymity is important. In the final results from the survey, it will not be possible to link any respondent to a specific response.

Your participation is voluntary. You cannot, however, withdraw your responses after having filled out and sent in the survey.

I can be reached on [email address] or [telephone number].

The survey is meant to investigate how different singles use Monotopia, as well as what other singles activities members participate in. There is also a shorter attitude study included. You can answer the survey without having been an active member on Monotopia.

At the end of the survey you will be asked if you wish to participate in a follow-up interview. To participate, you need to fill in your email address to allow me to contact you.

Background

1. Gender? [n=394]

◯ Female [263]

◯ Male [127]

2. What year were you born? [n=392]

| | [mean=1959.1; standard deviation=11.5]

3. What alternative best describes you? [n=382]

○ a) Widow/widower [29]

○ b) Divorcee [183]

○ c) Have not been married, but have had one or more longer relationship(s) [108]

○ d) Have not been married and have not had a longer relationship [37]

○ e) I am not single! [25]

4. About how many years have you been single? [n=138]

○ a) Less than 1 year [11]

○ b) Between 1 and 5 years [65]

○ c) Between 6 and 10 years [22]

○ d) Between 11 and 20 years [26]

○ e) More than 21 years [14]

5. [For 3.d.] How many relationships have you had that lasted more than one year? [n=34]

| | [mean=0.9; standard deviation=1.1]

6. [For 3.b.] For how many years have you been divorced? [n=181]

○ a) Less than 1 year [4]

○ b) Between 1 and 5 years [51]

○ c) Between 6 and 10 years [53]

○ d) Between 11 and 20 years [55]

○ e) More than 21 years [18]

7. [For 3.a.] For how many years have you been a widow/widower? [n=29]

○ a) Less than 1 year [0]

○ b) Between 1 and 5 years [13]

○ c) Between 6 and 10 years [6]

○ d) Between 11 and 20 years [7]

○ e) More than 21 years [3]

8. [For 3.c.] How long was the longest relationship you have had? [n=107]

○ a) Less than 5 years [38]

○ b) Between 6 and 10 years [37]

○ c) Between 11 and 20 years [25]

○ d) Between 21 and 30 years [6]

○ e) Between 31 and 40 years [1]

○ f) More than 40 years [0]

9. [For 3.a] About how long was the relationship you had before you became a widow/widower? [28]

○ a) Less than 5 years

○ b) Between 6 and 10 years [2]

○ c) Between 11 and 20 years [6]

○ d) Between 21 and 30 years [5]

○ e) Between 31 and 40 years [12]

○ f) More than 40 years [3]

10. [For 3.b.] About how long was the relationship you had before you divorced? [n=181]

○ a) Less than 5 years [16]

○ b) Between 6 and 10 years [27]

○ c) Between 11 and 20 years [79]

○ d) Between 21 and 30 years [43]

○ e) Between 31 and 40 years [15]

○ f) More than 40 years [1]

11. How many children under the age of 18 do you have? [n=unknown)

○ a) None [default]

○ b) 1 [42]

○ c) 2 [33]

○ d) 3 [4]

○ e) 4 [1]

○ f) 5 [0]

○ g) 6 [0]

○ h) 7 [0]

○ i) 8 [0]

○ j) 9 [0]

12. How many children <u>over</u> the age of 18 do you have? [n=unknown]

◯ a) None [default]

◯ b) 1 [44]

◯ c) 2 [110]

◯ d) 3 [54]

◯ e) 4 [9]

◯ f) 5 [6]

◯ g) 6 [0]

◯ h) 7 [0]

◯ i) 8 [0]

◯ j) 9 [0]

13. How would you describe the place where you live? [n=390]

◯ a) Large city (Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö) [125]

◯ b) Average city (e.g., Örebro, Norrköping, Sundsvall) [110]

◯ c) Smaller city [114]

◯ d) Countryside [41]

14, Do you live with… [n=unknown]

☐ a) Children (have whole custody) [33]

☐ b) Children (have shared custody) [72]

☐ c) Friend/s [4]

☐ d) Your parents [7]

☐ e) Other student [0]

☐ f) Other [91]

15 Which is the highest level of education you have completed? [n=385]

◯ a) Nine-year compulsory school [Sw. *högstadiet*; up till about 16 years of age] [22]

◯ b) Shorter secondary education [Sw. *2-årigt gymnasium eller motsvarande*; up till about 17 years of age] [45]

◯ c) Secondary education [Sw. *3-årigt gymnasium eller motsvarande*; up till about 18 years of age] [80]

◯ d) University/college for 3 years or less [113]

◯ e) University/college more than 3 years [125]

16. Which of the following alternatives best describes you? [n=386]

◯ a) Employed [245]

◯ b) Self-employed [47]

◯ c) Student [11]

◯ d) Unemployed [17]

◯ e) On sick leave/sickness pension [19]

◯ f) Retired [47]

17. Do you work fulltime or part-time? [n=240]

◯ a) Fulltime [209]

◯ b) Part-time [31]

18. [For 16.a.] How would you designate your profession?

┌─────────────────────────────┐
│   │
└─────────────────────────────┘

19. [For 16.b.] What line of business are you in?

```
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│                             │
└─────────────────────────────┘
```

20. [For 16.c.] How would you designate your education?

```
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│                             │
└─────────────────────────────┘
```

21. [For 16.d.] How would you designate your employment before becoming un-employed? (You can write 'student' or 'none'!)

```
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│                             │
└─────────────────────────────┘
```

22. [For 16.e.] How would you designate your employment before taking sick leave or being granted a sick pension?

```
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│                             │
└─────────────────────────────┘
```

23. [For 16.f.] How would your designate your employment before retirement?

```
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│                             │
└─────────────────────────────┘
```

Monotopia

24. Are you presently a (paying or non-paying) member on the site Monotopia? [n=332]

○ a) Yes [113]

○ b) No [219]

25. Have you ever paid for membership on the site Monotopia? [n=339]

○ a) Yes [107]

○ b) No [232]

26. Would you consider paying for membership on the site Monotopia in the future? [n=265]

○ a) Yes [113]

○ b) No [152]

27. About how long have you been a member on the site Monotopia? [n=271]

◯ a) 1 week or less [32]

◯ b) Between 2 and 3 weeks [20]

◯ c) Between 1 to 2 months [63]

◯ d) Between 3 to 4 months [37]

◯ e) Between 4 to 5 months [10]

◯ f) Between a half year and 1 year [57]

◯ g) More than 1 year [52]

28. During an average week of your membership on Monotopia, how often are you logged in on the site? [n=247]

◯ a) More than 2 times a day [6]

◯ b) 2 times a day [9]

◯ c) 1 time a day [33]

◯ d) 1 time every two days [40]

◯ e) Less than 1 time every two days [159]

29. During a week of your membership on Monotopia, how long do you stayed logged on during an average session? [n=251]

◯ a) More than 2 hours [2]

◯ b) Between 1 and 2 hours [13]

◯ c) Between 30 to 60 minutes [13]

◯ d) Between 15 and 30 minutes 47]

◯ e) Between 5 to 15 minutes [88]

◯ f) Less than 5 minutes [88]

30. When I am logged in on the site Monotopia, I use it to…

	1 – Fully agree	2	3	4	5 – Fully disagree
Internet date [n=218]	◯a) [27]	◯b) [7]	◯c) [13]	◯d) [15]	◯e) [156]
Contact new friends [n=212]	◯f) [15]	◯g) [19]	◯h) [34]	◯i) [15]	◯j) [129]
Contact old friends [n=201]	◯k) [9]	◯l) [10]	◯m) [15]	◯n) [13]	◯o) [154]
Keep up-to-date with offline singles activities [n=236]	◯p) [97]	◯q) [34]	◯r) [53]	◯s) [16]	◯t) [36]
Invite people to my own events [n=200]	◯u) [5]	◯v) [6]	◯x) [10]	◯y) [3]	◯z) [176]
Read and comment on blogs [n=210]	◯aa) [5]	◯ab) [17]	◯ac) [34]	◯ad) [41]	◯ae) [113]
Write my own blog [n=203]	◯af) [4]	◯ag) [5]	◯ah) [7]	◯ai) [7]	◯aj) [180]
Discuss various topics [n=207]	◯ak) [6]	◯al) [9]	◯am) [25]	◯an) [34]	◯ao) [133]
Keep up to date with Swedish singles culture [n=225]	◯ap) [24]	◯aq) [28]	◯ar) [50]	◯as) [48]	◯at) [70]
Read tips and advice [n=220]	◯au) [21]	◯av) [31]	◯ax) [63]	◯ay) [42]	◯az) [63]

31. I understand Monotopia to be a… [n=235]

◯ a) Dating site [85]

○ b) Friendship site [92]

○ c) Discussion site [6]

○ d) Site for tips and advice [50]

○ e) Blog site [2]

32. I think Monotopia should be… [n=219]

○ a) Same as today [68]

○ b) More of a dating site [84]

○ c) More of a friendship site [39]

○ d) More of a discussion site [10]

○ e) More of a site for tips and advice [16]

○ f) More of a blog site [2]

33. If you would recommend Monotopia to a friend, what <u>three</u> advantages would you emphasise among the following? [n=unknown]

☐ a) The site has a straight forward and personal character [115]

☐ b) It is easy to use Internet dating on the site [10]

☐ c) There is a nice mood on the site [71]

☐ d) The site is full of activities [70]

☐ e) There are a lot of interesting texts to be read on the site [17]

☐ f) The site is a good portal to singles activities in Sweden [74]

☐ g) The site helps you become a better single [8]

☐ h) It is a good way to stay in touch with friends [18]

☐ i) It is nice that the site is not just about dating [62]

☐ j) You get in contact with knowledgeable people who have worked with singles [22]

☐ k) It is easy to find friends on the site [9]

☐ l) The site is easy to use [52]

☐ m) The site does not emphasise masculinity and femininity [27]

34. Are there other advantages than those you were able to select above, that you would mention if you recommended Monotopia to a friend?

[ ]

35. You are welcome to submit other thoughts on what you like or dislike on Monotopia.

[ ]

Other sites

36. Have you been a (paying or non-paying) member on other sites for singles and how long ago were you a member in that case?

	Current member	Was a member a few weeks ago	Was a member a few months ago	Was a member a few years ago	Never been a member
Internet dating site 1 [n=278]	a) [49]	b) [8]	c) [45]	d) [101]	e) [75]
Internet dating site 2 [n=218]	f) [25]	g) [1]	h) [12]	i) [33]	j) [147]
Internet dating site 3 [n=208]	k) [8]	l) [1]	m) [15]	n) [21]	o) [163]
Internet dating site 4 [n=207]	p) [5]	q) [0]	r) [4]	s) [23]	t) [175]
Internet dating site 5 [n=221]	u) [8]	v) [0]	x) [13]	y) [53]	z) [147]
Internet dating site 6 [n=209]	aa) [17]	ab) [2]	ac) [12]	ad) [13]	ae) [165]

Internet dating site 7 [n=200]	af) [0]	ag) [0]	ah) [3]	ai) [12]	aj) [185]
Internet dating site 8 [n=253]	ak) [26]	al) [10]	am) [35]	an) [59]	ao)[123]
Internet dating site 9 [n=250]	ap) [41]	aq) [6]	ar) [40]	as) [82]	at) [81]
Internet dating site 10 [n=221]	au) [23]	av) [2]	ax) [23]	ay [22]	az) [151]
Internet dating site 10 [n=215]	au) [20]	av) [4]	ax) [14]	ay [14]	az) [163]
Internet dating site 11 [n=206]	ba) [10]	bb) [2]	bc) [15]	bd) [8]	be) [171]

37. If you are or have been a member on another singles or dating site than those mentioned above, please write the name of that site here!

[   ]

38. Have you been to any of the following arrangements? In that case, how many times?

	More than four times	Between two and four times	Once	Never been to
Singles confer-ence [n=257]	a) [10]	b) [16]	c) [30]	d) [201]
Singles cruise [n=251]	e) [1]	f) [6]	g) [38]	h) [206]
Singles after-work event [n=263]	i) [27]	j) [33]	k) [32]	l) [171]
Activity ar-ranged by sin-gles association [n=257]	m) [33]	n) [30]	o) [29]	p) [165]
Singles travel abroad [n=240]	q) [7]	r) [6]	s) [11]	t) [216]
Other arrange-ment for sin-gles [n=249]	u) [26]	v) [23]	x) [21]	y) [179]

39. Are you or have you been a member of a singles association? [n=296]

◯ a) Yes [88]

◯ b) No [208]

40. If you have been a member or participated at any of the following arrangements, how well did you think they suited you?

	1 – Suited me very well	2	3	4	5 – Did not suit me at all	Never been
Singles conference or singles cruise [n=234]	◯ a) [18]	◯ b) [26]	◯ c) [48]	◯ d) [36]	◯ e) [25]	◯ f) [81]
Other Internet dating sites [n=236]	◯ g) [21]	◯ h) [37]	◯ i) [50]	◯ j) [28]	◯ k) [26]	◯ l) [74]
Offline singles activity [n=225]	◯ m) [28]	◯ n) [36]	◯ o) [21]	◯ p) [15]	◯ q) [12]	◯ r) [113]
Singles association [n=209]	◯ s) [12]	◯ t) [11]	◯ u) [18]	◯ v) [11]	◯ x) [15]	◯ y) [142]

41. How important do you think the following factors are, when you decide whether a certain singles site or activity suits you?

	1 – Very important	2	3	4	5 - Irrelevant
Other participants are attractive [n=256]	◯ a) [80]	◯ b) [69]	◯ c) [67]	◯ d) [19]	◯ e) [21]
Other participants are the same age as you [n=271]	◯ f) [100]	◯ g) [102]	◯ h) [38]	◯ i) [17]	◯ j) [14]
The level of education or occupation among other participants is similar to	◯ k) [40]	◯ l) [66]	◯ m) [72]	◯ n) [38]	◯ o) [53]

my own [n=269]					
The site/activity seems tidy and serious [n=277]	⦾ p) [180]	⦾ q) [72]	⦾ r) [14]	⦾ s) [5]	⦾ t) [6]
The site/activity allows you to break with everyday life [n=248]	⦾ u) [32]	⦾ v) [62]	⦾ x) [83]	⦾ y) [36]	⦾ z) [35]
Focus is on changing yourself [n=236]	⦾ aa) [10]	⦾ ab) [29]	⦾ ac) [61]	⦾ ad) [52]	⦾ ae) [84]
It gives you opportunity to socialise with people without committing [n=262]	⦾ af) [75]	⦾ ag) [86]	⦾ ah) [59]	⦾ ai) [19]	⦾ aj) [23]

Attitudes

42. [Heading for the following 7 questions] The following arguments have been made when I have interviewed singles. To what degree would you agree with them?

43. Internet dating is the best way to meet a partner. [n=307]

⦿ a) Entirely agree [15]

⦿ b) Partly agree [103]

⦿ c) Neither agree nor disagree [117]

⦿ d) Do not agree [41]

⦿ e) Do not at all agree [31]

44. No one is really "happy" being single. [n=306]

○ a) Entirely agree [35]

○ b) Partly agree [104]

○ c) Neither agree nor disagree [64]

○ d) Do not agree [62]

○ e) Do not at all agree [41]

45. Internet dating sites are full of insincere people. [n=300]

○ a) Entirely agree [21]

○ b) Partly agree [123]

○ c) Neither agree nor disagree [83]

○ d) Do not agree [60]

○ e) Do not at all agree [13]

46. Coupledom is an important goal in life. [n=306]

○ a) Entirely agree [84]

○ b) Partly agree [127]

○ c) Neither agree nor disagree [53]

○ d) Do not agree [28]

○ e) Do not at all agree [14]

47. I would like to be seduced when I participate in activities for singles. [n=292]

○ a) Entirely agree [54]

○ b) Partly agree [95]

○ c) Neither agree nor disagree [64]

○ d) Do not agree [42]

○ e) Do not at all agree [37]

48. People focus too much on coupledom in Sweden today. [n=305]

○ a) Entirely agree [68]

○ b) Partly agree [125]

○ c) Neither agree nor disagree [58]

○ d) Do not agree [45]

○ e) Do not at all agree [9]

49. Singles activities risk making singledom permanent, since they put too little emphasis on coupledom. [n=287]

○ a) Entirely agree [7]

○ b) Partly agree [53]

○ c) Neither agree nor disagree [107]

○ d) Do not agree [73]

○ e) Do not at all agree [47]

50. The proportion of single households is high in Sweden today. How important do you consider the following explanations to be, to better understand that fact?

	1 – Very important	2	3	4	5 - Irrele-vant
People care mostly about themselves [n=276]	○ a) [20]	○ b) [64]	○ c) [97]	○ d) [60]	○ e) [35]
Working life and similar en-gagements steal time we need for the family	○ f) [55]	○ g) [83]	○ h) [79]	○ i) [47]	○ j) [17]

[n=281]					
Internet allows people to avoid getting real relationships [n=279]	○k) [30]	○l) [74]	○m) [80]	○n) [53]	○o) [42]
Women and men are too much alike instead of complementing each other [n=266]	○k) [15]	○l) [40]	○m)[60]	○n) [63]	○o) [88]
Women and men are too different and cannot complement each other [n=261]	○p) [4]	○q) [15]	○r) [63]	○s) [67]	○t) [112]
There are too few places to meet [n=286]	○u) [35]	○v) [35]	○x) [35]	○y) [35]	○z) [35]

51. Is there another explanation that you think is important in understanding why the proportion of single households is so high in Sweden?

[   ]

On dating

52. If you had the opportunity to arrange a first date with someone you like, which of the following elements would you include? [n=unknown]

☐ a) Visit to a theatre [63]

☐ b) Visit to the pub [80]

☐ c) Walk in the forest [151]

☐ d) Visit to the cinema [54]

☐ e) Conversation about life [164]

☐ f) Sun and bathing at the beach [38]

☐ f) Information about your date's background [62]

☐ g) Good wine [91]

☐ h) An evening at your place [48]

☐ i) Visit to the café [185]

☐ j) Some form of dancing [58]

☐ k) Discotheque [8]

☐ l) Visit to a sports event [28]

☐ m) Shopping [10]

☐ n) A trip in a car [52]

☐ o) Visit to a nice restaurant [147]

Follow-up interview

I will do a few follow-up interviews with some of those who have responded to this survey. An interview takes between 30 to 50 minutes. If you would consider taking part in an interview, please write your email address below:

> Thank you for your replies!
>
> If you have questions or wish to read the results from the survey, please contact me at [email address] or [telephone number].
>
> Andreas Henriksson, PhD candidate at Karlstad University

Organising Intimacy

Singles activities have long offered single people venues to meet friends, build community or look for partners. The dissertation discusses a conference, a cruise, an online site and an association for heterosexual singles in contemporary Sweden. These venues have relevance for studies of heterosexuality, intimacy, personal life and space. By combining observations, interviews and a survey, the book shows how the activities, analysed as organising people and spaces, offer participants different versions of intimacy and ultimately singledom itself.

The concept non-relationality is coined to describe how people understand and enact what it means not to be engaged in a certain kind of relationship, extending recent theories on relationality into the field of singledom. The book also includes a discussion on the intimacy concept and how it can be used to analyse singles activities.

Singles activities can be understood to offer practices entailed in a relationship without necessarily demanding commitment to a whole relationship or a specific person. The singles association in particular figures as an example of a community that blurs the boundaries between relationships and singledom, for example when members who find partners wish to remain part of the association. The transgressive or "hetero-doxical" potential of singles activities, challenging the boundaries between singledom and relationship, is negotiated among participants and plays out in the different ways of arranging and understanding the singles activity spaces and intimacies.