Online dating and mating:
the use of the internet to meet sexual partners

Submitted by

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Abstract

Australia has experienced high growth in internet usage and online dating (OD) in recent years. OD is used for seeking romantic and sexual partners. Australia has also recently experienced increases in the incidence and prevalence of some sexually transmissible infections (STIs). Risk factors for STIs are related to sexual behaviour patterns. As such, understanding sexual behaviours, including those resulting from online dating, is of relevance to public health. Risk is a feature of modern society and the concept of risk relates to hazards that are assessed in relation to future possibilities and consequences.

This project examines the behaviours and experiences of people who use OD, and how they may or may not address risk in their use of online dating. Using a qualitative approach, fifteen people who use OD were interviewed online.

The findings reveal that online daters use a variety of methods for managing and understanding the risks they perceive to be associated with OD. Online daters compare the risks of online dating with other activities in their lives to justify their use of the medium. Many feel self-confident in their personal ability to manage and limit risks they might encounter. For some, the ability to be able to scape-goat risk (i.e. to blame others) is a method by which they can contextualise their own experiences and support their risk strategies. For many, the control offered by the online environment is central to risk management. Additionally, the social context in which an individual encounters a potential risk will shape how they perceive and experience the risk.

Online daters do consider the risks involved and they demonstrate personal autonomy in their risk management. From a public health perspective, it is important to understand how individuals experience risk, but it is imperative that interventions are implemented at a population level.
Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the relevant Ethics Committee or Safety Committee or authorised officer.

_________________  _____________________
Date                Candidate’s signature
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## Abbreviations

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<td>APD</td>
<td>Adult Play &amp; Date: an online dating website site focussed on sexual interests</td>
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<td>CMC</td>
<td>computer-mediated communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAD</td>
<td>FindADate: an online dating website focussed on romance and friendship</td>
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<tr>
<td>ffm/FFM</td>
<td>Two females and one male threesome</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICQ</td>
<td>“I seek you”. An online, real-time chat program developed by Mirabilis that allows users to send and receive messages back and forth on the Internet. It can be configured to alert or notify the user when acquaintances are online.</td>
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<tr>
<td>LOL or lol</td>
<td>Laughing Out Loud</td>
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<tr>
<td>mmf/MMF</td>
<td>Two males and one female threesome</td>
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<td>OD</td>
<td>Online dating</td>
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<td>ppl</td>
<td>People</td>
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<td>STI</td>
<td>Sexually Transmitted Infection</td>
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Please note Appendix F: Emoticons provides an overview of common emoticons used in online chat.
Chapter One: Purpose and Significance

This project seeks insights into the behaviours and experiences of people who use online dating (OD) and how they may or may not address risk in their use of OD and any meetings and encounters which come of it. This thesis qualitatively explores and provides data analysis of online in-depth chat interviews and examines the relevance of risk theories in relation to how online daters manage risk.

1.1 Study background and rationale

Information technology has been used to assist with finding and matching new partners since the 1960s, when the first attempts were made to match individuals from data they provided from completing a questionnaire (Hardy 2002).

With the development of information technology and increased accessibility of the internet, OD is becoming increasingly popular in many countries, including Australia. The internet is becoming a common tool used to seek friends and romantic and sexual partners.

It was my own personal use of OD that drew my attention to the potential personal and public health issues involved with seeking (sexual) partners online. Additionally, I am an avid user of online technology and I am enthused with the increasing possibilities for online research and public health interventions.

1.2 Research questions

At the project’s outset, the key research questions I sought to explore were:

- how do people who use OD think about risk in relation to their OD contacts and interactions;
- how do people experience engagement and interaction with those they
meet, both online and offline, particularly in a sexual context; and
• what public health risks and opportunities does OD present?

The project has relevance to public health because of the growth in internet usage in Australia; expansion of online dating and use of the internet to seek sexual partners; increasing incidence and prevalence rates for some sexually transmissible infections (STIs) in Australia; and because risk factors for STIs are related to sexual behaviour patterns. Hence, understanding sexual behaviours, including those portrayed and sought online is of relevance. Furthermore, from an ethnographic point of view, understanding people’s experiences from a humanistic perspective is in itself worthwhile and insightful.

1.3 The project significance – an epidemiological perspective

Understanding sexual behaviours, including sexual behaviours and interests portrayed and sought online, is relevant to public health, as risk factors for STIs are directly related to patterns of sexual behaviour (Over and Piot 1996).

Globally, STIs effect hundreds of millions of people and are a major cause of infertility, acute illness, long term disability and death. They also cause considerable psychological and medical consequences for individuals (World Health Organization 2001).

The incidence of STIs has been increasing in many countries, including Australia (Mindel and Kippax 2005). In Australia in 2004 there were 46,762 STI notifications; a threefold increase compared to 15,355 notifications in 1997 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2006). However, this increase may be due to more sensitive diagnostic tests and increases in screening rates (Miller, Roche et al. 2005).

Sexual behaviour varies within countries and between continents (Over and Piot 1996), but the highest rates of STIs are most commonly found in men and women aged between 15 and 35, who live in urban areas (World Health Organization 2001). The risk factors for STIs include urban residence, being young, and single,
having a history of STIs and a large number of sexual partners (Over and Piot 1993).

An epidemiological concept in STI control is that of core and non-core groups. A core group is a minority subset of a population where the individuals have high rates of partner change, whereas the majority non-core group have low levels of partner change (Garnett and Anderson 1993). A number of theoretical studies have demonstrated that an endemic prevalence for an STI within a population can be attributed to the core group for that STI within the population (Garnett and Anderson 1993). Consequently, any insights into what may be a core group is worthy of study for public health.

Some research undertaken into the behaviours and outcomes of people who use the internet to seek sexual partners has found it is a risk environment for STIs as it can act as a rapid, efficient medium for arranging sexual contact. This, in turn, may result in more efficient STI transmission (Bull and McFarlane 2000).

In a study conducted to compare the risk of STI transmission for persons who seek sex partners through the internet, in comparison with the risk for persons not seeking sex partners online, it was found that the online persons had a greater number of partners than offline persons. They were more likely to have had an STI previously, and were more likely to have used a condom during their last sex encounter. They were also more likely to have participated in oral and anal sex, rather than vaginal sex, more likely to be men and more likely to be men who have sex with men (McFarlane, Bull et al. 2000).

In relation to women specifically, recent research has highlighted that women use the internet as a method of seeking sexual partners and that they use condoms more frequently. They are more experienced with testing for STIs and are more likely to be white and older than those who have never met a sexual partner online (McFarlane, Kachur et al. 2004). Additionally, these women had larger totals of lifetime partners, did not regularly use condoms, engaged in vaginal, oral and anal sex with internet partners and reported high rates of STIs.
To date, there has been little research done into how people negotiate and communicate health and sexual behaviour risk in an OD environment and how such interactions are then managed in actual physical meetings. Understanding how sexual activity is sought and portrayed online and how people portray and manage risk, risk aversion and safety may offer new insights into sexual behaviours, and therefore identify possibilities for public health interventions and sexual health promotion. This research project attempts to explore some of these knowledge gaps through qualitative interviews with online daters.

1.4 **Theories and perspectives on risk**

1.4.1 Risk

The acceleration of cultural and political change, rapidly advancing technology and the erosion of religion and traditions in Western countries has led people to increasingly perceive risk as a product of human action. As such, it is something over which control and personal responsibility can be exercised (Hall 2001). Risk is a feature of modern industrial civilisation. All previous and so called traditional cultures did not have or use the notion of risk; instead they had concepts of luck, fate or the will of the god(s) (Giddens 1999). According to Giddens (1999), the concept of risk is only used in societies which are future oriented and it only relates to hazards that are assessed in relation to future possibilities and consequences. Beck (1999, p.3) defines risk as “the modern approach to foresee and control the future consequences of human action, the various unintended consequences of radicalized modernization”; and that risks assume decision. Risks imply what should not be done, rather than what should be done (Beck 1999).

The notion of risk cannot be separated from concepts of probability and uncertainty (Giddens 1999). Assessing and profiling risk is now a central part of modern reflexive societies (Giddens 1991). As such, concepts of risk fit well within the rationalised discourses of public health and epidemiology, with epidemiology
being a science of risk profiling (Peretti-Watel 2002). Based on the idea that risks are knowable and can be calculated and hence prevented, a dominant paradigm of individual responsibility and risk control has arisen in public health and health promotion (Rhodes and Cusick 2002). This gives primacy to personal responsibility, promoting individual behaviour change rather than population based interventions (Rockhill 2001).

Risky behaviours are typified by the fact that they are socially defined as an issue, problem or source of concern; that they are undesirable to the norms of the general population (Peretti-Watel 2002). The ever-increasing array of behaviours that are identified as being risky to health can result in people feeling dissonance between their commitment to being healthy and their actual way of living and lifestyle (Peretti-Watel and Moatti 2006). The focus on risk in public health and health promotion has been criticised as a method of social control which contributes to the medicalisation of deviance (Conrad and Schneider 1992).

1.4.2 Risk Theories

Rhodes (1997) contends that focussing on the individual, particularly in the fields of HIV prevention and addiction, is a common method for examining risks. Theories of self-efficacy, reasoned action and planned behaviour have been used to examine which factors constrain risk avoidance in individuals (Rhodes 1997).

Peretti-Watel and Moatti (2006) note three specific techniques people use to elude the ‘risky’ label and thus deny risk. These are: scape-goating, comparison between risks and self-confidence.

Scape-goating is when a differentiation is made between the stereotypical ‘them’; the risky people, and ‘us’, the safe people (Peretti-Watel 2002; Peretti-Watel and Moatti 2006). ‘Them’ often refers to a minority considered deviant and it allows risk to be turned into blame (Douglas 1992). Comparison between risks occurs when an individual denies a risk by comparing it to another already well-accepted risk; and these comparisons often use information initially disseminated by health
bodies (Peretti-Watel and Moatti 2006). At an individual level, comparison between risks can indicate a fatalistic orientation (Peretti-Watel 2002). Self-confidence is used to deny risk; when an individual trusts their own personal ability to control or avoid risky situations (Peretti-Watel and Moatti 2006). Self-confidence in managing risks fits neatly with the modern prevailing paradigm of individual responsibility and self determination (Peretti-Watel 2002). It has also been found that voluntary risk taking (such as drug use and extreme sports) can provide feelings of self-empowerment and self-determination by offering temporary escape for people who feel threatened in their daily life by forces beyond their control (Peretti-Watel and Moatti 2006).

As OD is a social activity and involves negotiation between (at least) two parties, considering risk and risk management as a socially interactive activity can provide further insights into understanding behaviours, rather than focusing solely on risk at an individual level.

Social action theories posit that risk behaviours, as negotiated actions, are products of social interactions. These theories acknowledge that individuals’ perceptions and social interactions are affected by social contexts and network norms and mores. Additionally, an individual’s perceptions of risk are influenced by the social norms of what ‘risk’ is (Rhodes 1997). From this perspective, risk perception is socially organised. It is influenced by context and social norms (Rhodes 1997). As such, risk management is a product of social interaction and the social context.

Risk behaviours can become habituated into an individual’s norms and regular activities (Rhodes 1997) and risk behaviours can become part of an individual’s daily lived experience. Individuals do make decisions based on how they perceive risks, but their perceptions of those risks are largely influenced by the social context. In social interactions one person’s choice may be another person’s constraint (Bloor 1995). “Social relationships are power relationships” and in sexual encounters power is not generally equally distributed between the people involved (Rhodes 1997, p.216).
When considering sexual negotiation from a social action theory perspective, the unit of analysis is the social relationship, not the individual. It allows risk behaviours to be examined as “negotiated actions which occur at the levels of the interpersonal and social” (Rhodes 1997, p.223).

1.4.3 Managing Risk with Control

Using computer-mediated communication (CMC) such as synchronous chat, can offer users a high level of control in their online interactions. For many users of CMC, control is a key issue concerning why and how they use CMC and it is also a perceived benefit (Markham 1998). As Markham (1998, p.213) notes:

> Online technologies extend our physical capacities in many ways and offer potential for greater control over the flow of information and the presentation of self… As an augmentation of the self that is situated outside the body, online communication technology offers a powerful means of control over the text, over the performance of self through the text, and control over Others’ capacities as well.

When online, people have the ability to edit and re-write their comments and conversations before actually pressing the enter key, thus giving users “the feeling that they have control over their presentation of self as well as control over the other’s perceptions of the self. … Of course, because the user chooses the type of nonverbal expression he or she wishes the other to see, a powerful measure of control is granted to the sender of the message” (Markham, 1998, p.124). Control can also be extended outward as an individual can easily block interaction and conversation if they decide they do not want to continue. Or they can leave the website, log off or merely shut down their computer!

1.5 Summary of thesis structure

This thesis comprises six chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction and background context for the research project. Chapter Two outlines the growth of
the internet and OD and the basics of how OD operates. Chapter Three presents the research methodology. Chapter Four provides the research findings. In Chapter Five a discussion of the research findings is provided and Chapter Six offers a conclusion and recommendations.
Chapter Two: The Internet and Online Dating

2.1 History and growth of the Internet

In 1969, the internet grew out of the US Department of Defence’s research into the networking of multiple computers through the commissioning of ARPANET (Advanced Research Project Agency Network) (Hewson, Yule et al. 2003). Email and international connections were added by the early 1970s, and the first commercial variant of ARPANET was introduced in 1974. Although it was not until 1984 that the number of host computers networked together exceeded 1000 (Hewson, Yule et al. 2003). Growth continued exponentially and by 1987 there were over 60,000 host computers; by 1988 over 100,000; by 1992 over 1 million; by mid 1994 over 3.2 million; and by mid 1999 there were over 56.218 million hosts worldwide (Hewson, Yule et al. 2003).

The emergence of the World Wide Web in 1993 and the development of easy to use web browsers in 1993 -1994 facilitated the rapid growth of the internet (O'Dochartaigh 2002), making it more accessible to a vast number of people. Simply put, the internet is the millions of computers connected to one another globally, that all use standardised Transmission Control Protocols /Internet Protocols (TCP/IP) ensuring that all computers can communicate with one another (Hewson, Yule et al. 2003). It may be the greatest cultural phenomenon of our time; allowing people to connect, communicate and exchange knowledge with large numbers of other people (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005).

2.2 Who is using the internet: globally and locally

Globally, approximately 16% of the world’s population has access to the internet; 68.6% of North Americas and 36.4% of Europeans have used the internet (Internet World Stats 2006).

Australia has experienced high levels of growth in internet access and usage in recent years. A 2004 report found that 56% of Australian households are online
(connected to the internet), with 59% of persons aged two years and over having access to the internet via a home PC and 84% of persons aged 16 and over having access to the internet from any location (Department of Communications 2004).

In Australia in 2002, 58% of all adult Australians accessed the internet at some time. Broken down by age groups 84% of 18-24 year olds accessed the internet, 78% of 25-34 year olds, 69% of 35-44 year olds; 58% of 45-54 year olds, 42% of 55-64 year olds and 13% of adults aged 65 years and over (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004). Internet usage has been increasing across all age groups for the past five years.

### 2.3 Online dating: the current situation

Globally, America leads the way in the uptake of OD – it is the most profitable form of legal online content in the USA (Jackman 2004). British research indicates that the internet is the third most popular method of finding a date and that one in three internet users would consider using the internet to meet a potential partner (Nielsen/NetRatings 2005). It has been reported that 3.6 million Britons used OD in 2005 (The Age 2006).

It is difficult to determine the actual number of Australians using OD as research results vary, but all research indicates increasing numbers of people are using the internet as a method for seeking partners. Research by AMR interactive found that 6% of Australians had used an OD service and an online AC Nielsen poll found 30% of respondents had used OD (Manktelow 2004). The result of a ninemsn survey published in February 2004 showed that 22.5% of the 13,000 respondents thought OD was a good method for meeting potential partners; 16.5% had actually used OD to make first contact with a potential partner and 5.8% had met their current or most recent partner this way (ninemsn 2004). However, these findings are the result of research conducted online or by companies specialising in online research, so it is likely they are inflated figures.
One of Australia’s commercial dating sites, www.rsvp.com.au, saw a 95% increase of membership in the past year, with membership reaching almost 400,000 (Dudley 2004). Memberships on www.rsvp.com.au have now exceeded 850,000. A February 2004 report by Hitwise, a company which tracks global consumer internet behaviour, found that traffic to Australian internet dating sites had increased by 180% since March 2002 (Jackman 2004). An Australian telephone survey found that 78% of Australian adults had used the internet and that 13% of them had used the internet to form social relationships online (Hardie and Buzwell 2006). For the 13% who used the internet to form social relationships, 79% reported that they used the internet to make new friends, and the remaining 21% reported using the internet to form online romantic relationships (Hardie and Buzwell 2006).

I personally tracked the membership numbers of the web sites referred to in this thesis as Adult Play and Date (APD) and FindADate (FAD) 1. Over a period of 115 weeks there was an average of 6806 new profiles on APD each week; and on FAD there was an average of 4288 new profiles each week over a period of 61 weeks.

2.4 How people use online dating

OD generally involves an individual joining an OD website to set up a personal profile. Dependent on the website, an individual’s profile can include socio-demographic information, personal likes and dislikes, the types of partners and relationships being sought, photos and sometimes video footage. On sexually focussed websites, a personal profile can also include sexual orientation, sexual likes, dislikes, interests and practices. Once an individual’s profile is established, communication commences with other website members, indicating interest in different people and fielding enquiries and approaches.

Communications can take place in a range of formats, such as through a “wink”, “kiss” or “smile” being sent to another member, or the sending of an email via the

1 The names of the websites have been changed for the purposes of this paper.
website or through a website’s chat facility. A “wink”, “kiss” or “smile” (actual terms used on three different Australian OD sites) simply indicate interest; they do not contain a personalised message to the recipient. Some sites offer the user the ability to preselect a message to send with the wink/kiss/smile which can be along the lines of “I like your smile/sense of humour/style”. The individual then waits for the recipient to respond, which they may or may not do.

A user can send an email through the website, opening a more detailed dialogue. Alternatively, users may meet in a public or private chat room if the OD website they are using provides such a facility.

Following initial contact (whatever form it may take), it is up to the users to determine what will become of their communications and interactions. They may choose to discontinue communication, continue communication; which may then develop into an online or offline relationship, or they might arrange an offline, “real world” encounter. This process is not necessarily linear, and users may move between and back and forth of any of these steps.

One website sums up the benefits of OD as (Australian Dating 2004):

“Online Dating offers:

- Privacy- Anonymity guaranteed.
- Video Chat - The wonders of modern technology
- Anonymous text chat - feel free to say what you like (don't be too rude now 😊)
- No awkward silences - you can chat while watching tv
- Saving money - no buying drinks all night for no score
- Saving time - browse through personals only with likes and dislikes that suit you”

OD sites are set up to serve different market segments and audiences. For example, APD has a strong sexual focus, whereas FAD focuses on romance and the establishment of ongoing relationships.
Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Study design

The data collection methods used were qualitative, with online in-depth interviews conducted via the chat software program MSN Messenger. This process was important to the project as qualitative methods are useful and appropriate when describing and seeking to understand people (Liampittong and Ezzy 2005). It allowed me the opportunity to probe and seek clarification from participants and it allowed participants to articulate their lived experiences and to participate in a two-way conversation about these experiences.

A theme list and set of possible questions was developed for use during the interviews (Appendix A). A theme list ensured that all the relevant topics were covered (Liampittong and Ezzy 2005) and that allowed me to explore other relevant issues that might arise, without being constrained by a prescribed list of questions. The development of this theme list was informed by the research questions.

The interviews were conducted online using ‘chat’, as ‘chatting’ is a method of communication most online daters are comfortable using. It is also what people regularly use for initiating dialogue and maintaining relationships with others met online.

This project has an ethnographic orientation. Ethnography refers to social research which includes most of the following attributes (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994):

- Investigation of a small number of cases
- Working with mainly unstructured data - meaning that at the point of data collection the data has not been coded or placed into any predetermined categories for analysis
- A strong focus on studying the character and nature of a social phenomenon rather than testing a hypothesis about it.
• Data analysis which explicitly interprets the meanings and purposes of participants’ actions through description and explanation.

Ethnography allows researchers to see through participants’ eyes, providing a grounded method for developing understanding and insights into social groups’ mores and foundations (Hine 2000). As an ethnographic study, this project endeavours to examine data from a micro level, to examine present times and how people are experiencing their OD activities.

When conducting ethnographic research, one must examine the assumptions that one brings into the field (Hine 2000). My assumptions when deciding to undertake this project included:

• people who use OD do consider risks associated with the activity;
• there are sexual outcomes as a result of OD that may have public health relevance; and
• interviewing people via online chat would be a contextually appropriate method through which to explore the topic.

The research participants needed to be understood as a part of the relationship with me, the researcher. The research process involved observation of the participants and interaction with them and also communicating the research process and analysis with them (Vidich and Lyman 1994). The relationships that developed between myself as the researcher and my research participants affected the type of data that was available to me. For example, the people I interviewed knew I was a user of OD, so what they were prepared to reveal to me about their own experiences may have been influenced by the knowledge of me as a fellow online dater. (Further detail about my research experience is provided in Appendix D: Reflections on the research experience).
3.2 **Data sources**

The primary data source for this project was the interview transcripts; but there were other data sources that provided ongoing context and understanding of the project’s domain. These included:

- Media coverage of the Maria Korp case (based on the disappearance of a woman who allegedly had connection with an adult OD web site); this provided insights into the stigma surrounding sexual activities that fall outside societal norms and mores;

- My own OD experiences and regular chat activities, which provided a high degree of reflexivity as throughout the project I have been immersed in the field. I have approximately 250 contacts in my MSN Messenger (chat software program), with the majority met through OD activities. I chat regularly with many of these contacts; some chats are social, some are part of my personal dating process/screening/qualifying candidates and some are general discussions about OD – people sharing their thoughts, feelings, experiences with me as an online buddy. Although these chats are not included in this thesis, they have shaped my personal experiences of OD and my interpretations of the data I have collected. Ergo, there has been a continuous process of reflexivity.

- My weekly tracking of the membership numbers of FAD and APD.

- Weekly Google News Alerts for OD – a listing of articles that have appeared in global press and the web regarding OD. These have allowed me to track changing issues in the industry such as the instigation of criminal checks on members of some OD sites in the USA.
3.3 The participants

For the online interviews, the sampling strategy used was homogenous group sampling; that is, the sample aimed to maximise homogeneity and minimise variation to assist in gaining as much information as possible from the each participant (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005). The homogeneity related to the sample base being made up of people who actually use OD.

Participants were recruited online through snowball sampling from contacts I had made through my personal use of OD websites. Snowball sampling is regarded as a useful sampling strategy for participants who may be hard to reach directly, but may be well networked (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005). This was appropriate for the project as there is some stigma surrounding the use of OD websites, which was magnified during the project due to Australian media coverage of the Maria Korp case (discussed in further detail in section Appendix B).

Like all sampling for qualitative research, it needed to be purposive; that is, it had to be based on a clear rationale or set of criteria that were informed and directed by the research questions (Ezzy 2002), with the objective of selecting participants who were information-rich cases (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005). To be included in the study, a potential participant had to have used OD as a method for seeking partners and/or sexual interaction. Inclusion was also dependent on the participant having access to free chat software such as MSN Messenger or Yahoo Messenger, as chat software was the medium used for conducting the in-depth online interviews. (All interviews were conducted on MSN Messenger because all participants approached used this software program).

Participants were recruited in two ways: from my personal contact list and through contacts of my contacts. On several occasions, when I had finished interviewing a participant they were able to suggest one of their contacts who might participate. Establishing a positive and respectful rapport with the participants was vital to the success of gaining further contacts to interview.
To be added to a contact list, Person A needs to provide Person B with their chat contact details, in the form of an email address. Then Person B can add Person A to their contact list. Person A is then sent an automated message, through the chat software, asking if they are prepared to accept being added to Person B’s contact list. If Person A accepts, Person A will appear in Person B’s contact list when Person B is next using the chat software and vice versa. Each individual needs to consent to being listed in the other’s contact list, although contacts can be deleted or blocked as needed. In order to chat, both Person A and Person B need to be online simultaneously.

At the outset, I anticipated interviewing between ten and twenty people. I approached potential participants from my contact list by mentioning the project to them when we are concurrently online on MSN Messenger. This often occurred during chat that was unrelated to the research. Similar to conversations had in person, during online chat it is common to discuss what is happening in one’s life, so I often mentioned this project. If contacts expressed an interest in the project, I would gauge their interest in participating. With other contacts with whom I already had a good relationship (people I had met in person or with whom I have been chatting to for a year or more) – I simply opened a chat window and asked them if they would like to participate or introduce me to another contact who might be interested.

The majority of people in my contact list are there because in the past we have corresponded via an OD site and exchanged our chat addresses. Also, at some point we had mutually decided to have communications beyond the OD website. Moving communications away from a website does not necessarily mean that a date will be happen or even that there will be extensive chat between users, but it does allow users to circumvent the costs related to communicating through fee based OD websites. Consequently, I have many people in my contact list, some of whom I have only exchanged a few words with and some who I have developed an ongoing, but sporadic pure chat relationship with. For example, I had been chatting with one participant interviewed for this project for over two years. When we first had contact it was with the intention of determining dating suitability, and
although dating never occurred, a friendly online rapport was established and continued.

Quite a few of my contacts often tell me how their dating experiences are going - this kind of information comes up when chatting about weekend plans or what happened on a weekend. In my experience this is not uncommon amongst online daters. People are aware that if someone still has their profile up on a website they are still ‘in the market place’, so perhaps it allows for greater dialogue and transparency about how peoples’ dating experiences are progressing. Many contacts ask me “how is the website going?” I think many seek to discuss their dating experiences with others as a way of validating their own experiences or to see if their experience is comparable to others.

These pre-existing relationships might have affected the data I collected, but the effects could be both positive and negative. For example, on the positive side, having an already established rapport may have resulted in a participant being more open and frank with me; but if a participant still wanted to meet me to date at some point in the future, they may have chosen to respond to my questions in a different way.

From my own experiences of pre-dating chat, I know that frank and explicit discussions are often common, and are not necessarily unexpected in chat. So it may be reasonable to consider that people using chat for OD are familiar with discussing sex and sexual practices in a chat context. As part of the general chit-chat that occurs when people engage in chatting away from a website, I have been asked on numerous occasions what I am looking for sexually.

On other occasions, I have changed my online handle to reflect my desire to interview people. A handle is a nick name that an individual chooses to use when appearing online in chat. It may be similar to the user’s email address, or it may be completely different. It is common for people to regularly change their handle depending on how they feel and what they are to express at a particular time. For example, in my use MSN Messenger chat I use the email address
spectraelectra@hotmail.com. My handle changes regularly and has included some even flippant handles:

- Miss Spectra
- Studious Spectra
- Danielle
- Spectra is sleeping
- miss spectra reading transcripts
- Domestic Goddess

For specifically recruiting people to interview for this project, I used the handles noted below, which encouraged several people to participate:

- Let’s talk about sex and online dating
- Anyone want to talk about online dating and sex???
- I’m looking for people to interview

Changing my handle to reflect that I wanted to interview people attracted three people, as a result of them approaching me to participate after seeing my handle.

When someone indicated interest in participating, I sent them the information sheet and consent form (Appendix E) via chat software using the file transfer capability or via email to their email address. I requested that they read the information sheet and consent form and then advise me, via the chat program, whether they consented or declined to participate. The chat software has conversation history functionality, so when consent was provided there was a written record of the consent. The conversation history also provided the interview transcripts for the project.

I believe that the close and intimate relationships I have with some of my chat contacts has enhanced my research findings rather than detracted from them. Interviewing already established contacts may have added to the authenticity of the interviews as there was an already established relationship and what they told me was to some degree verified by what they had told me in the past and may tell me in the future.
3.4 **Data collection**

Data collection took place via in-depth online chat interviews. Chat can be defined as (http://www.webopedia.com 2006):

Real-time communication between two users via computer. Once a chat has been initiated, either user can enter text by typing on the keyboard and the entered text will appear on the other user's monitor.

These were text-based real-time interviews, where I typed questions to the participant and the participant typed their responses. Each interview was conducted as a ‘private’ chat— that is, only the participant being interviewed and myself as interviewer were present in the chat space where the in-depth interview took place.

The interviews were like conversations, with the conversation focussing on the participant being interviewed. In this way, the interview sought and valued the participant's responses, trying to tease out the participant's experience of their own social reality and their interpretations and understanding of it (Minichiello, Aroni et al. 1995).

It is not possible to describe exactly what all of the in-depth interviews covered, as whilst the interviews had possible questions, these were not prescriptive but allowed for a series of themes to be explored. I was, therefore, able to explore other relevant issues that might arise without being constrained by a prescribed list of questions.

Conducting the in-depth interviews using online via chat software offered benefits and challenges. It has been found that there are often cultural taboos surrounding the discussion of sexual behaviour and these may influence how and which people participate in sex research (Smith, Rissel et al. 2003). The use of online chat interviews provided the possibility for participants to respond more freely, without
feeling constrained by what might be regarded as risky or deviant behaviours (Markham 2004). It offered a method of collecting data that allowed the participant to maintain confidentiality and privacy. It may also have assisted in ensuring the data collected best represented the actual sexual interests, activities and behaviours being sought and lived through OD.

It also meant that the project was not constrained by geography or time (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005). That is, a participant’s location and my own location did not impact on conducting the interviews and the interviews could take place over extended periods of time, making it easy to pick up an interview where it last left off (Markham 2004). The interviews could be conducted safely at anytime of the day or night, although most of the interviews took place in the evenings between 7pm and 10pm. Some of the interviews continued over several sessions as participants would see I was online and want to update me about what had been occurring in their dating.

It allowed me, as the researcher, to pause and consider before asking the next question and it allowed the participants to do likewise when responding, so the questions and responses were more considered (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005). As Markham (2004) notes, users of online chat tend to expect pauses in conversations, as many users are generally doing several things at once rather than just concentrating on the one conversation.

Interviewing online offered challenges as it was not be possible to see a participant’s face when conducting the interview, or to gauge their facial expressions. My personal chat experiences have also taught me that it can be difficult to interpret the tone in which someone is expressing themselves, especially when it is a new online contact and a rapport has not yet been developed. For example, jest and sarcasm can be difficult to interpret and clarification sometimes needs to be sought.

Chat does allow the sharing of feelings and expressions through the use of emoticons, acronyms and through the text that is typed (see Appendix F for a list
of common MSN Messenger emoticons). Users can also personalise the way in which their text appears in chat, changing the font type, size and colour. In some chat programs users can display an image file, which can be a personal photo. Or they can use web cam, so whilst communicating with typed text they can see each other in a small photo or video window.

Online chat is generally enjoyable, and is commonly undertaken as a leisure activity. Ergo, online conversations can allow for the easy sharing of intimate information and allow individuals to openly and freely discuss important aspects of their lives (Ben-Ze’ev 2004).

As a regular user of MSN Messenger and OD, my active and visible participation in the field allows for a richer understanding of meaning. It also allows for reflexivity in what it is to be an online dater and user of chat technology for the purposes of seeking partners. As Hine (2000) notes, one cannot act as or stand in for every participant or user but one can experience what it is like to be a user.

Given the context of OD and that users of OD commonly use chat programs for their communications and interactions, interviewing people in this context about their OD experiences was all the more relevant, as this is the actual context that online daters often use in the initial stages of their communications and relationships.

The research experience is discussed in more detail in Appendix B, which is a book chapter written in conjunction with my supervisor Pranee Liamputtong.

3.5 **Data analysis**

The data analysis was qualitative, with the data obtained through the in-depth interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. This form of analysis allows for inductive interpretation of the data, whilst also considering pre-existing theory (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005). Thematic analysis is similar to grounded theory, but it does not employ theoretical sampling (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005). The use of
theoretical sampling was not possible for this project due to the time and size restrictions associated with a minor thesis.

The analysis began inductively with open coding. This allowed me to explore the data as I was collecting and to define the units of analysis, such as key issues, topics, concepts and actions (Ezzy 2002), allowing the codes to emerge from the data (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005). It also allowed me to adjust the theme list to further explore issues and refine the methods by which I explored certain topics.

Below is a summary of the steps I undertook in the data analysis process:

- After conducting the first few interviews I commenced open-coding, to identify themes, issues, topics and actions. I coded by sentence and/or paragraph, trying to determine the main idea presented.
- I continued conducting interviews.
- I continued to familiarise myself with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts and open-coding the transcripts.
- The participants' transcripts were examined for similar themes, including beliefs, actions, and practices; as well as for anomalous findings.
- I developed code notes, where I would copy a relevant piece of data from a transcript and add it to that code note. This resulted in the creation of lists of quotes that followed the same theme.
- To these code notes I was able to add sticky notes where I could list other potential codes that a particular code might relate to.
- I followed up on the emerging ideas and concepts identified in the initial open coding in further interviews and in some cases during second and third interviews, in an attempt to develop a cohesive and comprehensive understanding of the participants’ experiences of OD.
- I then began to group these open codes to determine if there were any greater categories or themes to which they could belong.
- Towards the end of the study I was able to create greater theme groups to assist in determining the possible theoretical concepts which were relevant to the data.
3.6 Ethical issues

This study was approved by the La Trobe University Faculty of Health Science Faculty Human Ethics Committee on 29th October 2004 (reference: FHEC04/178). As noted previously, at the time of recruitment, potential participants were each provided with a copy of the Information and Consent Form (see Appendix E).

Participants were informed that confidentiality would be maintained and that participants’ identities (including their online aliases or handles) would be concealed in any published results.
Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 The context

My initial intention was to interview people who were users of the adults only dating website ADP, because of the sexual focus of this website and hence its potential relevance to public health. Through the interviews, it became apparent that all participants were also either current or previous users of additional OD websites. The FAD website was commonly referred to by several of the participants. This is a website more focussed on friendship and short and long term relationships.

Where I have provided direct quotes from participants, I have left the participant’s comments in the font each person used so text colours and styles vary. Additionally, there are symbols, abbreviations and emoticons in some of the quotes; everyone used these to express emotions when chatting and to increase typing speed.

4.2 Overview of participants

I conducted online interviews with 15 individuals. These participants ranged in age from 24 years to 44 years of age. Eleven of the participants were male and four were female. Most participants were located in metropolitan Melbourne; with four participants living in regional areas (Victoria and NSW).

Ten of the participants identified their relationship status as single (and one participant as “sort of single”). Two of the participants were married and one was attached (although that person had stopped using OD since becoming attached). The participants’ level of education obtained ranged from some high school to PhD. Twelve of the participants identified as heterosexual or “straight”, one as bisexual, one as straight/bi-curious and one as “straightish”. A table of the key details of each participant is provided in Appendix C.
4.3 How and why people use online dating

During each interview I explored how and why the person used OD. This included asking how they were introduced to OD, what were their reasons for using it, their patterns of use and what influenced their usage.

4.3.1 Reasons for using online dating

The reasons participants gave for using OD were varied and included seeking a soul mate, seeking sex, looking for fun, relaxation, to ease boredom, or because it seemed like an easy way to meet people. For most of the participants, changing personal circumstances provided the impetus for using OD. These included being very busy at work, most friends becoming partnered, having children and not being able to go out as much as previously, separating from a partner, moving to a new city or a partner becoming sick and unable to be sexually active.

HappyOne used OD as one, not the only, method of meeting potential partners.

it a different medium…. I do not just date online but [it] is another option just in case others do not work.

Serena’s move to OD was a way to meet sexual partners and was the result of a long and difficult process of adjusting to her partner’s illness:

well as you know my hubby got sick, we went for years trying to adapt… mechanical sex, chemical assistance etc. It was very frustrating because he was in pain so in the end he suggested I allow myself to play with other people

For Martin and Anunaki, the difficulty of most of their friends being partnered was an influence. Anunaki said:

my friends were mainly partnered, no one to go to pubs with and you feel embarrassed to go by yourself, as I think I look like a married guy
4.3.2 Patterns of use

The length of time that participants had been using OD ranged from two months to four years. In terms of current usage, the amount of time spent each week was quite varied, with Jeff noting that he only spent thirty minutes a week, “generally just reading, not sending messages” to Anunaki who said it “Has been quite a bit since changing to FAD, say two hours a day”. In addition to online time, Anunaki had also spent 15 hours of that week on actual person-person dates.

Several participants considered themselves technical savants, with a long history of internet use. Jeff had been using the internet for 12 years, and Anunaki had been on the “Internet since ’92 (black screen days)”. 

The frequency and intensity with which participants online dated was affected by their experiences of OD as well as external influencers, such as forming a new relationship or the amount of free time available.

For Elipse, his increasing familiarity with and exposure to the explicit content of ADP resulted in him having less desire to use the website as he became sated with its content:

I mainly send messages to interstate women on ADP... just to look at more pictures....I have basically wound down from using it....the novelty [of looking at explicit pictures] has worn off

Kate decided to close her membership when she had established enough contacts who interested her:

just cancelled my profile on ADP... just had enough of it for a while....Started seeing a guy I was very interested in. And I've got like, 12 plus contacts, around 5 interest me
4.3.3 Multiple Sites

There are differences between OD sites, with some focusing strongly on sex and others on friendship and romantic relationships. All of the participants had used more than one OD site to meet people. At the time of interview, some participants were using multiple sites, whereas others had changed their use to specific sites according to what needs they were hoping to have met; such as sexual titillation, sex or seeking a long-term partner.

Elipse was very clear when he discussed his reasons for using two different sites:

FAD is a very clean site with genuine people, ADP is full of people (or more than half of them) wanting casual sex... FAD was to meet a genuine partner, ADP was to have some fun.... Spent most of my time [on ADP] just looking at their rudie pics and viewing their profiles... Only met people from FAD

Anunaki also had differing experiences in his use of FAD and ADP:

I have moved to FAD and now getting lots of hits... FAD seems the best for the professional types... Also nice stuff like education level, politics.. getting a bit of detailed knowledge on the basics of selection beyond looks... I mean, likes dislikes, politics and whether or not they have the cringe factor... you can tell a lot about how people describe themselves.

HappyOne preferred ADP to FAD because:

I actually find it easier to meet people from ADP and have a good time... maybe its because they are more willing to be naughty...lol.

4.3.4 The Good and the Bad

For all participants, there were aspects of OD which they particularly liked and disliked and which influenced the ways in which they used OD.

Participants noted various good things about OD: the ability to search for potential contacts and dates at their own leisure; a way to pass time; quick and easy; meet
great people and made good friends; and rejection at first contact is not as personal.

Anunaki noted:

online dating is a bit sad, but once you accept that life's not perfect [and] that some poor fool may in fact like to share their gametes with you and create a beautiful new life, it's not too bad, and I think it helps lonely shy or really ugly people find some happiness...

For Serena, her experiences had been overwhelmingly positive:

[used online dating for] sex mainly but it has led to friendships and love too...yep it’s been great. For me its access to a larger number of people in safe environment… ohhh that’s the thing….out of all the contacts I've made….and there was over 100,000 at ADP for me last year, only three experiences have been bad.

Nearly all participants noted the worst thing about OD was the lies and number of people using fake profiles and/or misleading pictures. Several participants were also concerned about the mental state of some people they met online.

For 30Mmelb, the deceit of fake profiles and not being able to validate truth or dishonesty were the worst things about OD:

fake profiles and not knowing if it's a guy or girl lol and fake pics and people that are married and they say they are single and time wasters

Anunaki was more reflective of the deceit and lies which might be encountered online:

[Deceit and duplicity] “is normal in most people. Some people call it spin. It is normal for most people to act in their own interests. All's fair in love and war. Those of us who try to be honest in their approach have a hard time convincing people that we are not telling fibs. Some are so sure of their own spin they believe it themselves there are varying degrees, but most try to put a favourable face on themselves.”
Martin’s concerns also included the mental state of some people online:

I have also met a couple of people who seem to be a little more disturbed. This I can’t explain so well. Maybe some people just aren’t very socially aware, but I’ve had a couple of disturbing events that have made me question if meeting people from the internet is a safe practice.... I’ve had (to some degree) a couple of people engage in a level of stalking, which made me realise how careful I have to be about my personal information.

4.4 Screening online contacts

All participants had methods to screen people they encountered through OD. Some of the screening methods were simple assessments of attractiveness and geography and physical proximity. Other screening methods involved following a clearly defined process of communications, interaction and assessment before a physical meeting would take place. Screening was a key way in which participants managed risk.

4.4.1 What are people looking for?

In determining whom to meet, the importance of physical attractiveness and establishing a rapport was common to most interviews.

Anton looked for “pics and conversational skills. If they’re as dumb as dog shit, then they can tell their story walking!” A good sexual encounter for Anton came from “a person I click with, and chemical reaction. You both have to be relaxed”; and a bad sexual encounter was when “someone has little experience and doesn’t know what they like and don’t like”.

HappyOne also noted that conversation and pictures were the main reason for wanting to meet someone.
Anunaki noted that OD allowed the user to check out and screen potential candidates without having to commence dialogue:

*silent screening, don’t have to get drunk and sleep with everyone just to find out there was some horror that you missed :)*

### 4.4.2 Processes

As noted previously, it was very common for participants to raise concerns about the deceitful behaviour they had encountered in their use of OD. Participants’ experiences and concerns included physical descriptions being inaccurate, photos being misleading, lies about gender and people lying when online chatting. To ameliorate and manage these concerns, having a process to qualify other online daters was important and common to all participants, although the methods of assessments and qualifying varied between participants.

Online daters provide physical descriptors of themselves by ticking various boxes when establishing their profile(s), such as eye colour, hair colour, physique, ethnicity/nationality and providing details of other descriptors like height and weight. Nearly all participants noted physical attraction was important to them when meeting people online with the view to then meeting offline. The provision of photos (or ‘pics’) or webcam being available for viewing was very important to most participants for this assessment.

Kate was emphatic that photos were needed, but then conceded there was someone she was chatting with who she would make an exception for:

*Yes Yes Yes Yes... [I] won’t meet anyone anymore without a recent picture.......OH there’s one guy I want to meet I saw a photo of him a long time ago. I’ve asked him to meet for coffee...We’ve talked for ages....around 4months. On the phone....sexiest voice I’ve ever heard...... just want to put a face to the voice....saying coffee because of the NO PRESSURE thing...*
Additionally some participants noted that seeing another online dater on web cam was useful for assessing them and watching their responses to see if they would respond truthfully to questions.

HappyOne noted he liked web cam for “looks predominantly but you can see their facial expressions and that can be useful.”

For Elipse: “I was intending to use msn to see people on their web cam ...Initially it was to confirm that they are the person they say they are, meaning, a woman must be a woman.”

Other participants had a fairly standard process they followed from initial contact to deciding to actually meet, as Eliza explained below:

I make them talk to me on MSN first, then I get them to show me web cam so I can see their facial expressions - I’m a very good BS [bullshit] reader... Well if I like them and they look straight down the line...I'll give them my mobile number and text for a while, then they always suggest meeting.

Anunaki’s process involved carefully assessing what an individual noted in their profile:

Cross referencing the stats with the statements, seeing what is being left out, the kind of interests they claim and key words such as play, have a good time, clichés obvious male fantasy stereotypes etc

Serena’s husband was often involved in the screening process for Serena’s prospective sexual partners:

it’s in my control. I stipulate who I talk to. On ADP I stipulate verification², pix [pictures], chat and then phone calls. [I go through this process] in 90 % of case; the other 10 % used to go on my hubby’s feelings,[hubby would] still see

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² Verification is a process particular to this site; when an individual joins the site they are given a password/code, which they need to write on a piece of paper and then take a photo of themselves with that piece of paper with the password/code visible before emailing the photo to the site operators. The photo returned with the code should be of the same person who features in other photos on the profile the individual has set up. This verifies that a profile contains real/accurate photos.
pix and I'd chat and want a phone call, but they may not be verified…or sometimes I just make a decision.

4.4.3 Self-confidence

Several participants felt quite self-confident in their ability to identify other online daters who were lying and deceitful. As noted by HappyOne, Elipse and Eliza in 4.4.2 above, their ability to determine this was sometimes aided by the use of a web cam. Other participants simply noted that they felt confident in their own abilities to identify lies and liars.

Serena noted:

people that lie…there are a lot…not that I spend too much time with them…
I’m getting pretty good at it [figuring out the liars and bull shitters]

When Nico explained his general concerns about people lying he noted that for him and his partner:

… through discussions we can work out who is genuine and not. Also when we went to a couple of parties the people that have sent u pics look nothing like their pics…

Anunaki was confident in his ability to deal with any strange encounters he might have as a result of OD:

Not a real worry I deal with the loony public for a living and can handle myself - try to pick them [loonies] early enough that it doesn’t become a problem... might like the attention anyway if I was alone like I was for the last few years.

4.4.4 Physical location and distance

The nature of the internet means that it is very easy to contact and engage with people who are physically located a long distance from the user. But as the intention of OD is generally for users to meet up with people they have made
contact with through a web site, geographic location has some impact, although this differed among the participants interviewed.

When questioned about the importance of physical location and proximity, the responses were varied. Some participants explained that the people they would potentially meet needed to live within a certain geographic proximity to their own location. However, other participants did not find this an issue and arranged to meet people when they were travelling interstate.

Elipse also thought proximity to other online daters was important:

Geography is important. 30 minute drive is enough for me - 21 sets of traffic lights max. I used to see someone who lived in Frankston - 35 - 40 minute drive - too far. If it’s interstate, then all you have is a fun-time buddy, that’s no relationship... I do like the within 5km of St Kilda which I can flag on FAD.

For Nico and his wife, trips interstate provided new opportunities to meet people:

In Melbourne we met with 2 couples ...Another couple, we went on holidays to gold coast and met up for dinner...in gold coast the couple was really cool but we had dinner at their place the following day and didn't want to go any further as we had the kids with us...We did meet up with our first couple about 4yrs ago which we met them over MIRC, believe it or not. I had a business trip to Sydney, which we both went and caught up them and then they came down here.

Amo did not consider physical distance a large impediment:

I guess I have a rough guideline for age/location but that's not so important really...only in that it can be an effort to meet someone who is miles away if it's never going to go anywhere. but if someone really impresses me, I will see where it goes.
4.5  From online connections to real world meetings

Similar to the screening processes outlined above, there were processes and steps which most participants followed when making decisions about whether to progress their relationships from purely online communications to in-person meetings.

4.5.1 Methods of interaction and communication

After making contact via a website, the majority of participants commenced their interaction via email and online chat.

GlobalTom noted he would “chat online, chat on the phone, meet for a coffee, lunch, dinner, drink – whatever.”

Elipse tended to start communication through email, move to a phone call and then possibly meet in person because he has a dislike for ongoing email correspondence:

I want to send an email, then phone and if that lasts more than an hour, then I want to meet. Too many want to send 100 emails - emails tell you nothing about the person at the end of the day.....people generally know within 20 seconds of meeting the person.

Elipse also noted that the process of meeting people involved interacting with a number of people at any one time, assessing them and deciding whether someone was particularly nice and at what stage his interaction with others would cease:

BUT....people are like I am...juggling a few at a time, and everyone has a few choices and its all about timing...A bit of a numbers game, everything happens for a reason. You're suddenly with someone nice and the others drop off automatically...to me anyway - I didn't have to go and say "Dear Jane" I can't see you anymore...
Bally Hoo’s process was slightly different – she spent time in the website group chat room and from her interactions there decided if she wanted to communicate further.

...I have never gone through profiles to see what I like. I only look at them [profiles] if they are funny in the chat room or if they message me. If I like what i see/hear I will say hi in chat room or maybe wink them.

4.5.2 Meeting in person

The triggers to meeting an online contact were varied amongst participants and included having access to the other person’s photos, developing a rapport via chat or email, being mentally attracted to them and the ability to have sex quickly.

Bally Hoo noted that it was a mental connection that led her to want to meet someone:

...well to meet they have to catch my attention mentally. We chat - talk about where, make it clear what I am meeting for, and then work out a place.

Anton also wanted to chat and see photos and sought “A person I click with, and chemical reaction...:

Most participants outlined a standard process they followed in managing and progressing their online contacts. The process allowed them to qualify potential candidates and provided opportunities to control how the situation played out.

30Mmelb liked to meet during the day in public places to minimise safety concerns and because it also gave him an easy way to escape:

I only meet during the day and at a busy shopping centre not only for that [managing risk and safety] but if you don’t like what you see you can escape by saying you have to get back to work.
Similarly, Martin’s process of meeting also allowed for a quick exit – by only meeting for coffee, the initial meeting could be kept very brief if it did not meet his expectations or if it raised any concerns:

I will chat online for a little while. either using MSN if possible, or at least a few emails. Then talk to someone over the phone... Then when I meet someone, I do it in a neutral place and usually on the premise that is will be brief such as a coffee to start with. That was I can leave if I feel uncomfortable, but it’s easy to extend if things go well.

For Anton, the process of moving from online communication to a physical meeting was a simple process:

If I like I ask them if the want to meet! If they say yes, we meet then we fuck. Simple. No mess, no fuss!... I have a very high libido... I like to fuck a lot...every night if I can find someone willing!

Anton’s description of his approach to meeting people through OD portrays the potential speed by which people can engage in sex with people they have met online. For some participants, an initial meeting with someone they have contacted through OD was a meeting to determine compatibility; yet for others if all went well it would progress to sex at the first meeting.

Anunaki’s description of his first date from ADP demonstrates that meeting people from this site was not only about fast sex but could involve some romance and tête-à-tête:

It was my first date with ADP in January. I went all out, invited her over for dinner BBQ’d eye fillet and nice salad. All perfect...She was really nice actually and I still think she is a nice person ... things went well and we went to bed, my first time back in the cot for about 4 months.
4.6 From dating to mating...

4.6.1 Sexual Outcomes from Meetings

There was diversity amongst the sexual outcomes of OD. A couple of participants had sexual encounters with all of the people they met from OD, whereas others had slept with a fifth to a quarter of the people they had met in person.

Of the participants interviewed, the number of meetings from OD varied. Eliza had only four meetings from OD compared with Serena who estimated she had met at least 260 people from OD – Eliza had been using OD for two years at the time of interview and Serena had been using it for two to two and a half years.

From her four meetings, Eliza had sexual interaction with one person. For Serena, all her of 260 meetings, except two, resulted in sex. She estimated she had the following numbers of meetings over the last couple of years:

- m [males]...hundreds
- f [females]...probably 60 or so
- lots of couples though [in] addition - nearly a hundred...I reckon

The difference in the number of meetings between these two participants highlights that peoples' experiences of OD vary greatly, according to their needs and methods of use.

At the time of interview, Anton had been using the internet for OD for two years. He had met 40 women and slept with all of them; “I’m going to hell for it aren’t I! 😇” He noted that he was having more sex because of OD and was: “Surprised my dick hasn’t fallen off yet!”

Anunaki provided a breakdown of his sexual relations over a three year period:

Since online in Jan there has been three sexual partners, doubling my number in the last three years. It was three off line [and] three on line in three years.
Anunaki’s experience demonstrates that OD potentially facilitates increased numbers of sexual partners – he was interviewed in March 2005 and he noted that since January of that year, he had doubled the number of sexual partners he had had.

Martin had sex with approximately 12 of the 30 people he had met through OD:

[met] I think around 30, maybe... sexual interaction - it would be about 12 (although I'm not sure if that is a accurate representation as I went through a bit of a sexual experimentation phase which has greatly increased that figure).

4.6.2 Sexual Behaviours and Experiences

As part of the interview process, I endeavoured to discuss sexual behaviours and activities with each participant. Some participants were very comfortable talking about their sexual experiences, likes and dislikes very openly, however a couple of participants were less receptive..

Anton openly described what he likes sexually:

I have a very high libido, I like 2 fuck a lot - every night if i can find some willing! And with the right girl, I like it dirty too - cumming in mouth, on face, anal, spanking, stuff like that.

When questioned further on what types of sexual activities he liked to participate in Anton noted:

intercourse, oral, anal (if I'm allowed) spanking, toys...3somes. Straight 2 the point here Danielle ;)

30Mmelb noted his favourite activities as “oral sex and lots of foreplay and anal play.” He went on to further describe his preferred anal activities as “anal sex/ fingering/ rimming / playing with toys.”
Bally Hoo described herself as very open-minded in relation to sexual experiences:

hmmm not really group sex I guess. I’m very open-minded. have done 3[some]. Group, no... but I would never look for it. I have done both [mmf and ffm] in the past. Not into [anal] - it ouched me when I tried. Hahahahaha. Toys yes. Not really into any fetishes as such...tried lots with a long term boyfriend from years ago.....but just open to anything. meeting someone new its not like I think... ooh yeah, piss on me babeee... hahahahahah !!!!! I’m not into it.

Anunaki noted that meeting people from OD and having sex with them involved issues other than just physical attraction and rapport:

... to be frank most people want to have sex a lot, hard part is with who, and what will my friends think of me if I do... Social issues associated with a coupling...Will my peer group approve?

Anunaki went on to further describe that it was the potential risks and dangers associated with sex that makes it exciting:

If sex was safe both physically and emotionally it would be an everyday thing. Involve the risk of unwanted pregnancy, STD and emotional loss then the risk is greater and the tragi-comedic elements are heightened.

The danger is what makes it fascinating... Too safe and it’s just as Marcus Aurelius the Stoic put it: as friction stimulating ejaculation enabling procreation, an animal aspect of humans (a stoic philosopher and Caesar as well).

4.6.3 Safe Sex Practices and Understandings of Sexually Transmitted Infections

During the interviews, I questioned participants regarding their thoughts and behaviours in relation to safe sex and STIs. Safe and unsafe sexual practices differed among the participants. Some participants were very stringent in practising safe sex, waiting until both partners had been tested for STIs. Others
practised safe sex most of the time but had lapses in their practices or felt confident in their own ability to assess risks.

Anton noted that he used condoms most of the time: “mostly, if I’m with someone, then condoms... I pretty much suss out the person, if I get a good vibe then maybe I’ll throw caution to the wind”. When asked what type of activities he thought of as risky sexual behaviour and what made him consider using some kind of protection he responded that intercourse was risky and “if a person might come across as unclean”.

30Mmelb noted that he always practices safe sex but that the same cannot be said for some of the people he has met:

I always practice safe sex you only live once. lol.

[Have all the people you’ve met been happy with that?]
strangely, no, because they don’t like condoms or they get a rash from it. I say no condom, no play… crap, used with lube [condoms] all is well. Oral, yes I do take a risk there but I thing it’s a small price to pay you can’t get AIDS from oral sex – very unlikely… I do check for any signs of a rash or excuse the punt ugly scores or herpes or warts… I always make both of us have a shower or bath which is also fun before oral or sex, plus you can’t hide a rash or warts or fluid discharge… I have to say I take a risk there in rimming and fingering with out a condom, just a good shower and washing toys.

Bally Hoo described her safe sex practices as:

pretty good – although I have been slack at times which isn’t a good thing.

When I asked Bally Hoo about her decision making regarding safe sex, she noted she stops having safe sex with:

People I have seen for a while. Umm sorry not true - thinking about it didn’t do it couple of times... I get caught in the moment I guess.
But Bally Hoo’s response also demonstrates that her safe sex practices are not fixed, they are dependent on situational context. When asked about STIs Bally Hoo noted:

hmmm I’m going 4 check up soon, just in case, people never know.

Elipse was confident in his instincts about assessing partners and whether or not to have safe sex:

If you’re asking...do I wear a condom, then the answer is that I prefer not to. But I am hopeful that my instincts are excellent and that there is trust.

Martin thought that safe sex was even more important when having sex with people met online:

I think safe sex is even more important with online contacts than normal, as you sometimes know very little about someone’s past... [STIs are] always a concern, and I think it doesn’t matter where you meet someone, you still have to be careful. [I’m] always safe to start with, as much as I do prefer un-protected sex, that really is something that I wouldn’t do until I was in a committed relationship, or we had both been tested.

Serena, who as previously noted has had sex with approximately 200 people through OD, explained that to her safe sex meant: “condoms condoms condoms”

But she also acknowledged she has broken that rule in the past:

...yes I have, and I probably will again, just like a normal person. When you get in a long term relationship...you change your practices... it only happens when I’ve been in a long term relationship...and only then after I’ve discussed it with Leo [her husband].”

For Serena, the move to unprotected sex was a conscious, planned decision. It did not happen as a spur of the moment decision or when getting 'lost in the moment': not with me....I love the feeling [of unprotected sex] but I’m not that silly. People have to earn my trust.
In terms of STIs, Serena noted:

I have tests as part of my normal checkups at my doc. She and I have talked about my situation so I have tests every 6 months.

Anunaki believed that the ratio of males to female on the sites (many more males than females) could increase the sexual activity of women and could lead to a higher risk of STI transmission:

If they can pick and choose so much, then how many good times have they had, permutations & combinations ... chances are higher they have stds [sexually transmitted diseases]

In terms of testing for STIs, Anunaki explained:

I get a thorough test about once a year if I have been active, last time went to a specialist clinic and checked for everything to be completely paranoid.

When making the decision about whether to move from safe to unprotected sex, Anunaki noted:

No penetration without condom. If longer time [seeing each other] then both off to clinic to get a clean bill of health, then go for it like rabbits.

Of all the participants, Nathan was the only one who had never been tested for STIs. He stated he would only be tested if he was concerned:

only if I was concerned I had something - physical signs of something, or feelings down there.

He talked generally about his thoughts on unprotected sex, stating that it was really dependent on the girl, as he preferred unprotected sex for vaginal and anal sex:

[condom use] sometimes depends on the girl - if she wants one, if she wants me to cum in her ass ... I prefer none as it feels better.
Nathan had met four to five women through OD and had sex with all of them. He had unprotected sex with one of these women:

Yeah, one girl in Melbourne I had didn’t want to [have protected sex] and it was fine. She was great :) It just happened that way and after I found out she hates them [condoms].

He also noted it “sometimes depends on the girl...if she wants one, if she wants me to cum in her ass ... I prefer none as it feels better.”

Elipse would prefer not to use condoms but waits for a few weeks to determine the pattern of the relationship and what methods of contraception might be appropriate:

If you're asking...do I wear a condom, then the answer is that I prefer not to. But I am hopeful that my instincts are excellent and that there is trust. [I] Have been known to wear a condom for the first 5 weeks of sex...It's normally long enough to see what the pattern is...or if someone has gone back on the Pill, Billings Method, Pull Out... Better than having to wear those f&*ken things.

Kate stated that she has both safe and unsafe sex and that her decision making in regard to this is dependent on how honest she thinks the man she is having sex with:

Both [safe sex and unsafe sex], depends on how honest I think the guy is. The guy I’ve just started something with....very, very, very honest guy, but if I think a guys a player and I’m just after a physical thing.....safe sex

When discussing her current relationship, Kate noted:

Well he was in a (can’t spell) mono [monogamous] relationship before me. Before that he was with a chick that had a past and he got himself blood tested when they broke up. I had tests about 4 months ago - all clear. I’ve only had sex with him in the past 3-4
months. I’m not [currently’, or intending to have sex with anyone else soon.

4.6.4 Sexual Networks, Expanding Connections and More Sex

OD websites and OD can allow for people to extend the number of people they meet and engage with sexually. Four of the participants noted they had been to ADP drink nights. These are social nights organised by users of the ADP website as a way to create an offline meeting environment with other people who use the website. The events are advertised on the website community board and people RSVP to attend and pay a fee to attend on the night.

Bally Hoo enjoyed these nights:

ADP have drinks nights which is a good thing, no pressure and you get to see people in the real world rather than behind a keyboard.

Serena also noted the ADP drinks nights as an avenue for increasing potential sexual contacts:

ADP have drink nights, you go and meet people there…I introduce many more people to others than do to me…but at some parties we do introduce people.

Serena noted what methods she had used for meeting people to have sex with in the last 12 months:

some have been the traditional way - going out - 80% would come from the net, and some are from friends

In terms of the people she has met through friends, these were friends she’d had had previous sexual encounters with, “people that I’ve played with before. “

In contrast, Kate had no interest in attending the ADP drink nights, as she thought such events defeated the whole purpose and experience of using OD:
I had one guy tell me about how people off ADP are meeting at a nightclub or something and asked if I was going. I thought what’s the use of that = isn’t the distant thing of the internet is what people are after at the start? If I wanted to go to a club and pick someone up I’d do it.

When asked if she thinks she has more sex as a result of her OD use Kate replied: “most definitely, yes.”

Eliza believed OD could greatly increase the amount of sex people have:

I know a few guys who sleep with a new girl every week as a result on picking up online.

When Martin was asked if he thought OD facilitated more sex he noted:

I think if you look for it, or approach it that way, then yes it can, especially for people who might be shy to meet people offline. Plus, I think, yet again, the anonymity of being online allows people to speak their thoughts more openly (which I see as one of the benefits as well in online communications)... it’s not a direct correlation, but if that is what they are looking for, then yes.

4.6.5 Speed, Convenience and Ease

Some of the participants noted the ease and speed of meeting people online to date and have sex with. When asked why he used OD, Anton’s succinct answer was for “sex”. The speed and convenience also appealed. He compared using OD for sex to the supermarket, where one can go and choose what one needs or wants to buy:

To me its a bit like shopping at Coles or something like that - you just look what’s on offer and go for it !... If I like [them] I ask them if they want to meet! If they say yes, we meet then we fuck. Simple.
Through his use of OD, Anton had met approximately 40 women and had sex with all of them.

Nathan described one scenario where he went very quickly from a request for sex via chat to actually having sex with the person that night:

Once was I was working back at work late, like it was 1am or something, and I was waiting for something and I messaged a girl on ICQ [chat program] and she basically came straight back to me and said ‘are you in the city and do you want a fuck?’

I played along and I thought it was a joke, but she picked me up from work and drove me home and was straight into it... We fucked about 4 times and she came while I was inside her so much it was like she came out a pool. It was the best sexual experience... and she loved sucking me off too which was the best thing - she loved sex.”

Anunaki saw OD as efficient:

I suppose on line dating is efficient at removing a lot of people from you're to do list, but so far I reckon it's not much better at finding the right person, (since I haven’t yet).

Although he did acknowledge “Most relationships of any value are not convenient”.

During the interview, he noted he had only met nine women in three years of OD but was going to meet five women that week:

Total in last three years is nine, but this week looking to add another five.

Nico noted that OD allowed him and his wife to search for people at their leisure without the concerns of managing one-way attraction in a club:

You get to search for people at your own leisure and try to find what appeals to you, rather having hassles in clubs where the girl wants the guy only or
other way round... [it is] easier than getting ready and going out and no pressure.

Jeff described one of his experiences where a woman he had communicated with online wanted to progress too rapidly for his liking:

I had a girl contact me last week, she started messaging me here, then gave me her phone number and demanded I rang her, which I did. She was a bit too quick for me... She had met 5 people in 2 days, sounded like she was on a mission.

A number of participants noted ease of use and convenience as reasons for using OD. 30Mmelb used OD because he thought it was easier as he is shy:

I am a shy person when it comes to meeting people for the first time so it makes it easier for me.

4.7 Risk and risk management

There were allusions and direct references to safety and risk made in all of the interviews but each one was different. There was safety and risk in relation to sexual practices, safety in terms of managing one’s level of public exposure on the websites, safety in terms of physical safety and emotional safety.

4.7.1 Minimising the risks

The varied processes, as described previously, which participants used for screening and assessing their potential dates acted as strategies for risk minimisation. Furthermore, most participants were cautious of the amount of information they would share with others they met online.

HappyOne noted a number of ways in which he minimised his risk:

everything from not giving my home number to making sure that I have safe sex....I just see it as common sense.
Martin noted that he had become very wary following a date where he felt very uncomfortable and concerned about his date’s behaviours:

... I don't give out my home number though. I'm also very careful about giving out my last name if I can help it. Then when I meet someone, I do it in a neutral place and usually on the premise that is will be brief such as a coffee to start with. That way I can leave if I feel uncomfortable...

Anunaki hoped that his methods of selecting prospective dates would minimise any risks:

[In] I try to pick the more thoughtful types who are likely to make the same choices re self preservation.

When I asked Kate about whether she had any concerns about OD being risky in any way, she noted that one of her friends had concerns but that she did not. Kate thought the level of risk of meeting someone dangerous was similar to that of anywhere else she might meet people. She noted she relies on her instincts to set off ‘warning bells’

Not really........my friend does....she used to beg me to get off the site....We came close to losing our friendship over it. I tried and tried to explain to her...I could be meeting these guys in a supermarket and they still could be serial killers... When the bells ringing, I don't go there.......there's more out there... I go by gut instinct.

Eliza was also very careful about the amount of detail she provided to people she met online:

... often pretend I live 90km from where I do. I never give out my mobile number either, nor mention any places I frequent.

When Eliza decided to meet someone, she had an unusual technique where she ensured that the person she was going out with knew their details were recorded by people she trusted:
I’d rather coffee but if they want to do dinner I make them pick me up. I do a very off putting thing by having my daughter phone photograph their license and send it too my best friend ...well it takes heaps of phone calls etc. before that. Lol. I do, I want people to see them including babysitter and know who they are where we are going and for how long... I make a joke out of it and say they could be a serial killer and they usually laugh. I’m an avid real life crime reader watcher, so if you’re going to put yourself out there you have to take some precautions.

Eliza also liked to make use of online technology to assist in her risk assessment – she used her web cam to study the body language of people before she met them.

### 4.7.2 Emotional and Physical Risk

Some participants were concerned about the potential emotional risks of OD. In contrast there was very little open discussion about participants’ concerns of physical risk, although the extensive risk management processes most participants undertook in their dating practices is indicative of the underlying perception that there may be some physical risk.

Anton acknowledged he found OD emotionally risky:

...emotionally [risky] as I am weak when it comes to matters of the heart ..., and I just got guttered again.

Anunaki was concerned about STIs, meeting stalkers and how to avoid hurting others:

Worry about getting STD’s or meeting a stalker (baby boiler I think is the expression). Also the thought of hurting those you reject. How to be nice in a world of cold smut and still get laid :)

Nico was concerned about being identified as a user of ADP and also of the potential the emotional risk to his wife:

risky with maybe running into people we know, and risky being thrown around with feelings on Veronica’s part as it once happened before.
As noted previously, Anton felt emotionally at risk but he was not concerned by physical risk “...I'm a big guy, what's a chick gonna do to me!”

Kate’s analogy of OD and the supermarket suggests she thought there may be some physical risk involved in OD but such risk was comparable to risks she might encounter elsewhere.

4.7.3 Risk of exposure

Some of the participants felt there was a risk of exposure, whereby they might be discovered or recognised by people they knew. This was particularly related to profiles people had listed on APD.

When discussing whether he was open about his OD use, HappyOne noted:

   not really...few people know but not many... work in a conservative environment I do not think people would be receptive to it.

Nico noted that he has some concerns about him and his wife being discovered using OD:

   I think it’s ok if you’re single and you have a run in with people you know, thankfully we haven’t come across it yet.

   Does this person know me? What will she/he do if we exchange pics? Are they genuine? … Yes [OD is] risky with maybe running into people we know…

   …but the way it [OD] is perceived by the remaining public could have an impact if people we knew, knew of we are up to.

Elipse limited who he contacted on APD in order to reduce his risk of exposure and being discovered by people he knew:
I mainly send messages to interstate women on APD... just to look at more pictures - lessens the risk of being identified in Melbourne or at work... People at my work had seen me in the past on FAD.

Elipse’s concern was heightened during the high profile Korp case, where a woman who allegedly had her profile listed on an adult dating web site was found dead in the boot of her car:

God I was concerned, I work in Corporate Security and know what happens with investigations... it just enhanced my view that they are a lot of dirty, dirty people on APD.

Kate travelled for sexual activity to avoid the stigma of being sexually active in a small town:

... because I’m a manager of a business in a small country town, [I] started going down south for "FUN", so people wouldn’t talk about me here, so I’m a really, really good girl here and don’t harm the business.
Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Managing the risks of online dating

This exploratory study has identified that online daters have varying techniques for perceiving, understanding and managing risks associated with OD.

All participants ‘risk managed’ their OD experiences. Participants did not leave their experiences to chance, luck or fate. Rather, they managed how they would interact with other online daters. As Beck’s (1999) theories suggest, the participants all used the modern understandings of risk to anticipate and manage the possible consequences and outcomes of their OD and associated behaviours.

The understandings of risk and techniques of risk management are discussed in relation to the three risk management methods suggested by Peretti-Watel and Moatti (2006): scape-goating, comparison between risks and self-confidence. In addition, there is some discussion of the applicability of social action theories in risk management and the use of control.

5.2 Scape-goating and risk management

As Peretti-Watel and Moatti (2006) theorise, scape-goating is a method by which individuals can manage risk. It is where the individual notes a difference between ‘them’ the risky people and ‘us’ the safe people.

One of the main dislikes of OD noted by participants was the deceit and lies they perceived they encountered in other online daters. Most participants believed their portrayals of themselves were accurate and truthful but that those of the people they met online often were not. When an individual had a negative experience with another online dater in relation to how the other portrayed himself/herself, there was rarely any self-reflection on whether they might be behaving or portraying themselves in a similar manner. Most participants displayed high levels of
disappointment and angst as a result of their perceived encounters with deceitful daters, casting these others as the scapegoats for their poor OD experiences.

Some participants made assumptions about other online daters in relation to their relative promiscuity based on how these others listed physical attributes and if they had ‘naughty’ photos on their profiles: ‘naughty’ or explicit photos were indicative of someone wanting to share their body (even though one of the possible interests a user can list on their ADP profile is Taking/Swapping Pictures, so it is foreseeable that a user of ADP could provide photos for voyeuristic purposes without the intention of sharing their body). These participants were able to draw a border between themselves, with their safe portrayal and behaviours online compared to the risky and promiscuous portrayal of others.

The unbalanced gender ratio on ADP (more men than women) could present risks to heterosexual men seeking sex from women on ADP, as one participant believed the women would be more likely to have STIs. This is an example where women were the risky ‘them’ and the participant was ‘safe’; as such he needed to manage his interaction with these women, so that he remained ‘safe’.

By identifying other online daters as being different and risky, because of the methods in which they portrayed themselves, participants were able to cast themselves as safe and the others as being risky; they were able to scape-goat.

5.3 Comparisons between risks

As noted previously, comparison between risks is when one denies a risk by comparing it to another already well-accepted risk (Peretti-Watel and Moatti 2006). Comparisons were made between OD and going to a pub. In this comparison, participants were indicating their perception that meeting someone online bore the same risks as going to a pub to seek a potential partner or sexual liaison.

One participant, Kate, used comparison between risks to justify her use of OD to a friend who was concerned about the safety of OD. Kate believed that meeting men
from OD was no more risky than meeting men at the supermarket; regardless of where she met these men, they could pose a risk to her, “they still could be serial killers…” She did not heed her friend’s advice to cease OD because for her the risks of OD were comparable to any other method of meeting potential partners. As Peretti-Wattel (2002, p.28) noted, this type of risk denial, at an individual level, “reveals a rather fatalistic mind”.

5.4 **Self-confidence in risk taking**

Peretti-Watel and Moatti (2006) also suggest that self-confidence can be used for risk denial; this is when an individual trusts their own personal ability to control risky situations.

Most of the participants were confident in their personal abilities and strategies to manage any risks they might encounter through their use of OD.

Most participants thought of themselves as good ‘bull-shit’ readers; that is they were confident in their own abilities to determine who was and was not lying. They were confident in their ability to assess through chat, dialogue and from interpreting expressions on web-cam.

Furthermore, participants were confident in their abilities to assess potential sexual partners to determine with whom and when to use or not use condoms. This confidence and decision making was based on personal interpretations and understandings of STI symptoms, other’s cleanliness, “gut-instinct” and trust between the parties. One participant was confident that his physical size would ensure he would not encounter any physical risks.

5.5 **Control and risk management**

Markham’s (1998) theories suggest that the use of online technologies offers people high levels of control. Online people can control how much information they choose to share with others, what personal information they will and will not
disclose, how they physically describe themselves and whether or not they choose to provide photos of themselves. Having control in an online context allows users to feel they can manage risks presented and opt out of a dialogue at any given moment.

Many of the participants used control as a method of managing risks. They would control the amount of personal information they provided to people they met online. For example, not providing their last name or home phone number and choosing to meet in a public space. This allowed participants to feel that they were reducing the risks to themselves in case they encountered someone who behaved in ways they were not comfortable with.

A number of participants expressed their concerns about meeting people online who might have ‘mental’ or psychological problems, so controlling the amount of personal information they shared in the early stages was a method for minimising the perceived risk of encountering someone who might be psychologically unstable.

Deciding whether or not to keep one's profile live/visible on a dating site was another way in which participants were able to control how they portrayed themselves online. Participants changed the status of their profiles (cancelling or making them invisible) when they met someone special or had enough contacts to follow up on. Cancelling profiles (or hiding them) allowed the participants to control their self-presentation online.

It is possible for participants to control the geographic scope of people they communicated with. For example, to reduce the risk of being identified professionally or by other people he might know, one participant chose only to communicate with women interstate. Other participants were able to seek other online daters interstate to co-ordinate with their visits to those destinations.

The screening processes undertaken by participants demonstrate how control can be used to minimise risks. Participants could stipulate who they chatted to, they
could stipulate that the profiles of people they communicated with were verified and that they had to provide photos. For some, it was this level of control and the use of these processes that made them feel OD was a safe environment for meeting people.

Most participants noted they used the functionality of online communication to control how much they would expose themselves to other online daters.

5.6 Social action theories and risk

As Rhodes (1997) theorises, risk in a social context is situated within social relationships; and as such these relationships and the power and constraints within them should be considered.

For most participants, decision making regarding safe sex was dependent on the social context of the sexual situation. Participants would make decisions about safe sex based on their feelings and trust of the other person. For example, whether the other person came across as clean or unclean, whether there were any physical signs of infection, or whether they felt an adequate level of trust had been built between all parties, whether they felt relaxed with the other person, or based on what the other person wanted. One participant noted that she often had good intentions, but sometimes became “caught in the moment”. Her resultant unsafe sex demonstrated the interplay between context and her decision making; the participant knew she should not have unsafe sex but her knowledge of unsafe sex and the risks it might invite were not the only determinants of her behaviour.
Chapter Six: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

Individuals have always faced danger and hazards, but in modern society risk has become a central organising principle. Risk discourse is common in modern societies, and particularly in public health. Risks and the outcomes of risk taking are seen as the results of how people act; as such risks are perceived as something individuals can control and take personal responsibility for. Risks can be calculated and hence avoided.

This thesis does not critique the dominate paradigm of risk, but rather situates the research within this context where considering and seeking to manage risk probabilities are activities which online daters do undertake. This qualitative study has explored how people who use OD think about risk in relation to their OD interactions and what methods and strategies they use to rationalise and or reduce any risks they encounter.

In keeping with the modern understanding of risk, the findings of this study indicate that online daters acknowledge that there are risks associated with OD and in many ways participants exhibited risk management strategies to reduce the perceived risks involved with OD. Most participants took personal responsibility for managing the risks they believed they exposed themselves to. Participants exercised control and implemented strategies to minimise these risks.

The processes and methods that the participants used to navigate and manage their OD experiences allowed them to reduce their risks. By undertaking screening processes participants reduced the risk of progressing to a meeting in person with an inappropriate match. Limiting the amount of personal information shared online and during initial meetings was an additional risk management strategy employed by a number of participants. The safe sex decision making of participants was varied, with some participants strongly dedicated to safe sex and others basing their decision making on their instincts and their own self-confidence in their ability
to assess safe and clean sexual partners. The control offered by OD allows online daters to mediate and actively direct their interaction with others online providing a key method for managing and minimising the risks of OD.

In examining OD from this risk perspective this thesis posits that risk discourse, which predominates in public health and society more broadly, impacted on how online daters managed their OD experiences.

From a public health perspective, it is important to acknowledge that the health outcomes experienced by individuals are not solely determined by how an individual manages the risks they encounter. This study focussed on how individuals perceive and manage their own risks. However, it is imperative to always consider the other determinants of an individual’s health: the social, cultural, economic and political determinants. Focussing solely on the individual and their risk behaviours and risk aversion strategies abrogates society from its responsibility. Wherever possible health promotion interventions should be implemented at the population level rather than the assumption that certain individuals should assume self-responsibility because their behaviours may be deemed riskier.

6.2 Recommendations

This study has provided some insights into the emerging ways in which people are seeking casual and long term sexual partners through the use of the internet. The increasing numbers of people using the internet for dating and to seek sexual partners suggests that there is room for further research in the area. Further research could include investigating if safe sex practices between people who have met online differ from those who meet in more traditional ways. Additionally, OD has the capacity to dramatically extend people’s sexual networks through increasing the overall number of sexual partners an individual has and broadening the geographic and demographic range from which individuals can seek sexual partners. Consequently, it may be worth determining if some online daters could be considered core group members; that is individuals who have high rates of
partner change, as there is some theoretical evidence to suggest that core group members may be important in maintaining endemic prevalence of STIs in populations.

From a health promotion perspective, the opportunity to promote sexual health services on OD websites and at associated parties and events should be explored.

As with all technology, OD and the ways in which online daters use technology to facilitate relationships will change as the technology evolves and as OD becomes more common and socially acceptable. Public health practitioners will need to keep abreast of these uses of technology and the social phenomenon of OD to maintain a full understanding of how people may choose to romantically and sexually interact.
Appendices

Appendix A: Possible Interview Questions and Discussion Points

Demographics: age, gender, location
Age
Gender
Location
Ethnicity
Relationship status
Sexuality

Internet usage in general – history, current usage
How long have you been using the internet – approximately?
On average, how much time would you spend on the internet per week?

Online dating – introduction to it, history of usage, current usage
How did you come to use online dating? What attracted you to it?
How long have you been using it?
What sites?
What do you use it for?

(sex, dating, love, fun, friendship . . .)
Time spent doing things related to online dating each week?

Benefits of online dating
Can you list/explain some of the good things about online dating? What’s the best thing?

The downside of online dating
Can you list/explain some of the bad things about online dating? What’s the worst thing?

Interacting online – methods of communication, degree of intimacy and frankness
How do you generally interact with people from online dating sites?
What type of information do you share with someone online?
Moving from online to offline – meeting online contacts in person

How do you move from online to offline?
How do you choose those people you will meet up with?
How do you arrange to meet an online contact?
Where do you meet?
Number of people met through online dating
Of these meetings, how many have you had some kind of sexual interaction with?
What kinds of encounters have you had (from online dating)?
Do you think online dating facilitates more sexual interaction?
Do you meet more sexual partners as a result of online dating?
Could you tell me about your most memorable experience to come from online
dating? Can you tell me the story?
Could you tell me about the best experience you have had?
Could you tell me about the worst experience you have had?
Have you had any “strange” encounters? Please explain?
Could you tell me about your most recent experience?

Sexual interaction – motivations/considerations, type, frequency, outcomes
(+ve, -ve)

How many people do you think you have had sex with in last 12 months?
How many of these did you meet online?
Do you think you act any differently with people met online compared to offline?
(if yes, in what ways?)
What kinds of things help you decide if you will have sex with a person you are
meeting from online?
What kinds of sexual encounters have you had?
What makes a good sexual encounter/date?
What makes a bad sexual encounter/date?
What types of sexual activities do you participate in?
Can you talk me through your most recent sexual experience from online dating?

Risk and safety – general, personal, sexual

Do you have any concerns about online dating?
(if yes, what kind of concerns?)
Are some encounters riskier than others?
In what ways?
How does it compare to meeting people in other ways?
What’s risky about online dating?
How do you manage this risk?
How do you take account of safety/risk when meeting someone in person, when you have only met them online before?
Are there certain sexual activities you think of as riskier than others?
(if yes, what are these? When do you/don’t you participate in these?)
How does “safe sex” fit into it all?

STIs – relevance, experience, knowledge,
What does safe sex mean to you?
For what kind of sex? penetration? oral? etc . . .
Do you think about STIs when meeting an online dating contact?
Are you concerned about them?
Do you see STIs as a risk to you? How so?
What do you think of as risky sexual activity?

Is there anything else you would to tell me about your online dating experiences?
Generally or any specific stories or encounters you would like to share?
Appendix B: Dating and mating online: Some research experiences.

This Appendix contains the book chapter I wrote with my supervisor, Pranee Liamputtong:


LURID WEBSITE LAYS BARE FAMILY SECRETS

JOE and Maria Korp appeared to be a quiet suburban couple to their neighbours.
Joe, an amiable bloke, was polite and always up for a chat. Maria loved pottering around in the garden and feeding the family pets.

But the Korp couple had a secret.

In late January, details of their sex lives appeared on a website for suburban swingers.

The advertisement on the lurid introduction website leaves little to the imagination.

The Herald Sun will not reveal full details because of their explicit nature.

The website describes itself as Australia's largest on-line adult dating site with the motto: "It's the fun, easy and safe way to meet men,
women and couples who are looking for love, relationships and casual encounters."

On the Korps' extended posting -- which includes several photos of Maria -- the couple's likes and dislikes are listed.

Under the user-name title "Cple (Couple) for Fun", the posting says the husband and wife are looking for "discreet relationships".

The posting states: "Happily married couple looking to have fun with another lady or couples. We like to meet and get to know each other before taking the next step. "We are not asking for Beauty Queens but it is always nice to meet, talk things through and see if everyone is comfortable.

"Looking for a woman or couples who would like to relax in a friendly atmosphere and if the chemistry is right, have some real fun."

On their biographies, the couple are listed as Latino non-smokers who enjoy a social drink.

The couple were placed on the introduction website on January 31 as premium members.

Their posting was last viewed on the day Mrs Korp went missing.

Homicide detectives are investigating any connection between the website and Mrs Korp's disappearance after being alerted by the Herald Sun yesterday. Det-Insp Steve Francis said the sex site link would be treated as an avenue of inquiry...

(Anderson and Hodgson, 2005: 1)
A PERSONAL INTRODUCTION TO ONLINE DATING AND MATING – DANIELLE COUCH’S REFLECTIONS

Eighteen months prior to the above excerpt running in a Melbourne newspaper, Danielle had joined the website the above article refers to. One evening, whilst driving, she heard an advertisement for an adult online dating website. Faced with the prospect of heading home to continue work or checking out the website, she quickly opted to investigate the site. Pitching itself as a site for matchmaking adults, it was possible to register for free and set up a profile.

Having a profile involved registering with an online name (handle), providing an email address (for the website’s administration purposes) and password and then providing an array of details about herself. These details included basic demographics such as: her state of residence, suburb, postcode, age, ethnic background; physical descriptors, including her height, weight, hair colour, body hair and body type; behaviour descriptors, including smoking and drinking habits; and sexual descriptors. The sexual descriptors included: nominating her sexuality, relationship status, sexual interests, such as spanking (light or hard), oral sex (giving or receiving), anal sex (giving or receiving), one on one sex, group sex, erotic picture swapping, erotic email and numerous other options; whether she was registering as a single person, couple or group; and whether her interests were in male, female, transgender, single people, couples and/or groups. Danielle could also nominate her safe sex preferences as always, sometimes or never practise safe sex. She had the option to post pictures of herself in her public gallery (viewable by all of the website users) or in her private gallery (where she could control who had viewing access to her photos).

Danielle decided to set herself up, and she was soon receiving winks (a simple gesture indicating interest from another user) and emails. The ratio of men to women on the website was about 7:1. She was receiving plenty of attention and began exchanging emails, chatting and contemplating arranging her first dates. Her first foray into the online dating and the response she was receiving created a desire to know more about this phenomenon, so she joined another site, but one that was more focused on romance and relationships (be they friendships short
term or long term). Danielle found the amount of attention she was receiving was very flattering - she had certainly never been in this demand before!

The excerpt from a newspaper article below suggests the experience of being overwhelmed by the degree of contact is not uncommon when one starts online dating (Jackman, 2004: 1):

Suddenly, what was meant to be a whimsical romantic foray had become an administrative and logistical nightmare. “I feel like an air traffic controller,” Holmes emails, late one night. “It’s like I am trying to keep dozens of planes aloft, trying to keep them happy with little titbits of fuelled reassurance, juggling their interests and positions, nudging some closer to the landing approach … and occasionally plucking one out of the sky to land on my dating runway”.

“But … many have crashed. I’ve long forgotten some of them and they’ve left my radar screen for ever. Some have gotten the shits with their place in the ‘holding pattern’ and zoomed off to another controller…”

After using the adult online dating website for a while and perusing other users’ profiles, Danielle became aware that some people specifically noted that they were “clean and healthy” and looking for the same in their prospective sexual partners. Or, they would note they were D&D (drug and disease) free and seeking same. Working in public health, these descriptions caught her attention.

**RATIONALE AND GETTING STARTED**

The internet has been referred to as an “erotic oasis for obtaining sex online or in person” (Ross et al., 2000). It allows people to find and screen large numbers of potential partners in a short amount of time (Weinreich, 1997). It has been found that the use of the internet to seek sexual partners is a risk environment for sexually transmitted diseases (STIs), as it can act as a rapid, efficient medium for arranging sexual contact, which in turn may result in more efficient STI transmission (Bull and McFarlane, 2000). In a study conducted to compare the risk of STI transmission for persons who seek sex partners through the internet in
comparison with the risk for persons not seeking sex partners online, it was found that the online persons had a greater number of partners than the offline persons, were more likely to have had an STI previously, were more likely to have used a condom during their last sex encounter and were more likely to have participated in oral and anal sex, rather than vaginal sex, more likely to be men, and more likely to be men who have sex with men (McFarlane et al., 2000).

In relation to women specifically, North American research highlighted that women also use the internet as a method of seeking sexual partners, and that those who did use the internet to find sexual partners were more experienced with testing for STIs and were more likely to be white and older than those who have never met a sexual partner online. Additionally, these women had larger totals of lifetime partners, they more frequently used condoms but they did not regularly use condoms, they engaged in vaginal, oral and anal sex with internet partners and had reported high rates of STIs (McFarlane et al., 2004).

Discussing her thoughts with Pranee (as a supervisor), we decided to undertake a qualitative research project which involved analysis of a selection of personal profiles on the adult online dating website, with a particular focus on the health related content within individuals’ profiles, or lack thereof. Unfortunately, after scoping this idea, developing the research proposal and submitting the ethics application, the website we were interested in using changed its terms and conditions to explicitly prohibit the use of its content for study and research purposes.

Around this time, we also noticed that individuals had started posting warnings on their profiles targeted at researchers from a particular university stating they would take legal action if any details from their profiles were used for research purposes. We were not able to determine what the research was that was so offending and affronting to many of the website’s members, but it made clear the need to investigate online dating and sexual behaviours using a different method and one that gave those being studied the opportunity to be involved in a far more participatory manner.
Through Danielle’s personal use of online dating websites, we came to realise that it was common practice amongst website users to move away from the website to freely available chat programs such as MSN Messenger or Yahoo! Messenger, which allow users to chat in real-time (synchronously) online via text (and increasingly via voice and video). Moving communications away from the website did not necessarily mean that a date would eventuate between a contact and Danielle or even that there would be extensive chat between them, but what it did allow was a way to circumvent the fees related to communicating through fee-based online dating websites and to avoid the clunky private chat options offered by the site.1

Using online chat can feel just like having a conversation with someone, although it involves a lot of keystrokes rather than talking. Danielle was already a regular user of chat programs, and as, like many people, she had found them a useful method for keeping in contact with family and friends and also liaising with work colleagues when working offsite.

Discussion between Pranee and Danielle about emerging methods of online research led to the discussion of using chat as a method to explore how people were using online dating, their engagement with those they met online and offline, particularly in a sexual context, and how they thought about online dating in relation to risk and safety. It seemed very appropriate as it was a method of communication that many online daters were already comfortable with and using regularly for dating purposes; and the internet is becoming recognised as a useful tool for exploring HIV risk behaviours, with particular relevance to isolated and hard to reach groups (Davis et al., 2004)

Therefore, the second rendition of the research proposal and ethics submission was based on undertaking online in-depth interviews, conducted via chat, to explore peoples’ experiences of online dating.
When working through the practicalities of how we would conduct the study, it occurred to us that getting the signed consent forms from each participant would be difficult. Sending someone an electronic consent form and then expecting them to post back a signed copy was not going to be suitable for a study conducted online, nor would it fit with how people use chat technology. To manage this, we planned to use the file transfer capability available in the chat programs to send the information and consent form (and if this could not be achieved we could email the form). When the potential participant had reviewed the form we asked he or she to advise their consent in the chat window or via email (see also Chapter 2 in this volume).

Once the study had commenced we found some people to whom we emailed the consent form to would consent via return email and others would open a chat when we were next online concurrently and advise via chat that they consented to participate.

Being concurrently online with the potential participants when the consent form was sent allowed potential participants to ask any questions they might have and clarify issues of confidentiality and how long the interview might take. In the instance below, we were also able to answer questions and concerns of the partner of the potential participant.

Asked BeachBelle to participate. I have emailed her the consent form. She will check it out and let me know. Might have some other contacts too. Have spent quite a bit of time explaining the process to her as I am very keen to have her support and participation, as I think she is very well networked in the 'scene'. Her husband also had a question re why there were no set questions. I endeavoured to explain and have also sent a website link that is quite theoretical, but should hopefully demonstrate that we are not making up this research style!!! (Memo, 06/03/2004)
RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

To be included in the study, a potential participant needed to have used online dating as a method for seeking partners and/or sexual interaction. Snowball sampling was used, recruiting participants through contacts previously made through Danielle’s personal use of online dating websites, and through her contacts’ contacts. For a project such as this, snowball sampling was reasonable as it is a useful sampling strategy for participants who may be hard to reach directly, but may be well networked (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005).

Danielle’s current contact list has 170 people on it, some of which she has exchanged only a few words with and some with whom she has developed an ongoing, but sporadic purely chat relationships with, along with some family members and friends. Some of these contacts are online seven days a week and some are rarely online at the same time as her. Danielle has no idea who some of them are – they may have only exchanged a few brief words in the past – but some she knows very well, both online and offline.

Additionally, because her chat email address closely matches the name she uses on her profiles on two online dating sites she has experienced people guessing her chat address and adding her to their contact list. When the option to accept these new contacts is presented she has accepted, assuming they might have been someone she had corresponded with previously only to find in an initial chat that she had never had any contact with this person before. To be added to someone’s contact list, you have to accept their invitation; declining their invitation means you will not be added to their contact list and they will not be able to chat with you. This provides each chat user to control who they make themselves available to via chat. Furthermore, each chat user has the option of blocking contacts if they no longer wish to be contactable by that contact. This can prove very useful for protecting oneself from abusive or threatening or inane chatters.

Danielle’s list of contacts provided a starting point for recruiting participants. She asked people she had met through her own use of online dating to introduce us to some of their contacts who could perhaps be interviewed. Having the credibility of being a fellow online dater added legitimacy to the recruiting, so that potential participants did not feel they were being studied, but rather one of there own was
investigating this area. This was particularly important after the media blitz that surrounded the Korp case – the case which introduces this chapter.

On other occasions, Danielle changed her online handle to reflect the desire to interview people. For example, she changed her handle to:

- Let’s talk about sex and online dating
- Anyone want to talk about online dating and sex???
- I’m looking for people to interview
- Introduce me to your friends

Over time some of the people in her contact list became obvious candidates for possible participation in the research. For example, with three of the participants a sporadic friendly online chat relationship had developed – say hi when both online, how’s your week going? How’s work? How are you children? What did you get up to on the weekend? Questions and conversation typical of many social relationships. The contacts would tell provide updates on how their dating was going - this kind of information would come up when chatting about weekend plans or what happened on a previous weekend. Chatting about current dating experiences in chat amongst other online daters and contacts is common. People are aware that if someone still has their profile up on a dating website they are still in the dating marketplace, so it perhaps allows for greater dialogue and transparency in that dialogue about how people’s dating experiences are progressing. When using chat for personal reasons Danielle is frequently asked “how is the website going”. It seems many seek to discuss their dating experiences with others as a way of validating their own experiences or to measure if their experiences are comparable to others’ experiences. Some contacts volunteered to participate, wanting to share their experiences of online dating.

To broaden opportunities for participation, we had also hoped to place details of the research and how to participate on the community notice boards of the adult online dating website.
USING THE INTERNET TO MEET PEOPLE? WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU

Hello,

As a fellow online dater, I am interested in exploring sexual behaviour and online dating as part of my thesis.

The research project will aim to examine the use of the internet and online adult dating to meet sexual partners, and to gain insights into the sexual interests and behaviours of people using the internet to meet sexual partners.

I am very keen to hear the thoughts of other people who use online dating users, and I would like to undertake confidential online interviews with anyone interested in being involved. The interview would take place via chat software (e.g. MSN Messenger).

I will provide an information sheet on the project and a consent form. You will be able to opt out of the interview at any point.

I hope that the interview process will be insightful for all parties involved, so that we all get something out of the experience.

If you would like to be involved or would like further information please contact me at: [email address].

Thanks,

Danielle Couch

The advertisement was submitted to the website, but it was unfortunately rejected with no explanation provided. The advertisement was submitted after the media frenzy which accompanied the disappearance of Maria Korp and the subsequent case. Much of the media attention on the Korp case focussed on the sex or swingers website that Maria Korp was allegedly involved with, which was the site we wanted to recruit our potential participants from - the same site that had explicitly prohibited use of its content for research purposes, and the same site where a number of users had already been upset by other researchers. Thus, although disappointing, it was not too surprising that the website managers were not amenable to us using their site to recruit participants.
The participants in the project have been all Australian and predominantly Victorian. This is not surprising given how participants were found - we commenced sampling through contacting people Danielle had met through her own use of online dating. As she lives in Melbourne, Australia, she has only sought out potential partners that also reside in Melbourne, Australia, and these people have also sought other in close geographical proximity. This is not surprising as the purpose of online dating is, of course, to potentially meet the person you commence communication with, and the likelihood of meeting is substantially improved by residing in the same city!

**FEELING EXPOSED**

Sending through the information and consent form to potential participants made us feel exposed at times, as it made us into a real people who could not hide behind their chat program email addresses and handles. As is normal practice our full names and university details were provided on the consent form. This is much more information than Danielle would normally comfortably provide to a new online chatting contact, although she hoped that by ‘exposing’ herself in this way in the research she would gain the confidence and trust of those being asked for interviews. One of the research participants shared this feeling of risk of exposure: he noted “that's why we have hotmail accounts, I guess,” when referring to receiving unwanted information from people related the adult online dating website. When Danielle admits that she feels exposed when sending out the consent form, Elipse advises “Yes...I wouldn't share that email with people you haven't met.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:07:43 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>I sent you the info and consent form from my real email addy, so have a look and if you change your mind re being interviewed online let me know. :)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:11:56 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>I'll ask others first. You know, there are some things happening on adult online dating site which are annoying me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:12:41 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>First, there are Prostitutes, then there are people who have set up their own Net Sites in opposition to [the romantic online dating site]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and on [the adult online dating site], and are poaching innocent people.

<table>
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<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:12:54 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>you receive/send a message, then never hear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:13:31 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>then the next thing you know - Bingo...in comes an Invitation from the on [adult online dating site] email address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:13:48 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>Thats how I know and thats why we have hotmail accounts accounts, I guess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:13:54 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>I track receive emails re online dating from some news services. in the states a lot are moving to criminal checks of memebrs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:13:56 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>It pisses me opff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:14:00 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>a whole new business!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:14:09 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:14:13 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>ah, okay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:14:35 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>Enough of my whinging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:14:44 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>yes, it's funny. i was just writing in my study notes how i feel exposed when i send info from my &quot;real&quot; email ady like i just did to you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:14:53 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>so i know how you feel!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:15:14 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>hotmail anonymity gives a certain comfort leve;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:15:17 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>I might go and watch the Idiot Box in front of the fire for a while</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:15:20 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>level and expose level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
USING CHAT

One of benefits of interviewing via chat and being regularly online is the ability to follow up on issues, thoughts and questions that you may have during the research process. Whilst writing this paragraph about the geography of the sample, we were able to test our assumption by asking two of the participants, Anton and Elipse (Matt) who were signed into the chat program while we were writing.

Both Anton and Elipse had their statuses set to away on the chat program (chat programs generally allow users to set their status to online, away, out to lunch, busy, be right back or on the phone). Seeing this, we thought they might not be there or they might have just set it to that to give them the freedom to respond to chat requests at their leisure (or not at all), rather than feeling obliged to respond.

Anton responded promptly to our question about geography, as indicated by the lapse in time between Danielle’s (Miss Spectra’s) request and his response:

| 29/05/2005 | 1:17:10 PM | Miss Spectra | hey Anton, quick research question for you.... as i’m writing something about research online at the moment and the online dating/sex research...
| 29/05/2005 | 1:17:17 PM | Anton... | hit me
| 29/05/2005 | 1:17:19 PM | Miss Spectra | How does geography impact on people you contact through online dating?
| 29/05/2005 | 1:17:35 PM | Anton... | if its going 2 be 2 far,then she wanna be hot
| 29/05/2005 | 1:17:44 PM | Anton... | other wise 4get it
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:17:56 PM</td>
<td>anton...</td>
<td>half hour in any direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:18:00 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>ok...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:18:10 PM</td>
<td>anton...</td>
<td>maybe hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:18:13 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>so how about interstate or regional?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:19:12 PM</td>
<td>anton...</td>
<td>nope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:19:12 PM</td>
<td>anton...</td>
<td>no way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:19:12 PM</td>
<td>anton...</td>
<td>only if i was going there in the first place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:19:12 PM</td>
<td>anton...</td>
<td>stop by 4 a shag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:19:13 PM</td>
<td>anton...</td>
<td>then on my way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:19:13 PM</td>
<td>anton...</td>
<td>:D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:19:22 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>:)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:19:25 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>cool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:20:27 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>i had another thought the other day too, i know you have told me you have been to parties/events organised thru [adult online dating website] before. has this extended your network of sexual partners further than just those you had already contacted thru the site?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:20:50 PM</td>
<td>anton...</td>
<td>no,they were all pigs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The conversation with Anton lasted five minutes, but while we were waiting for responses from Anton we was editing and discussing other parts of the research. Multi-tasking is the norm for most people using chat. Anton would have been doing other things - in fact to establish whether or not this assumption was again true, Danielle asked him:

Elipse took time to respond, and as the transcript below reveals, this was because he was away from his computer (again, note the lapse in time from when I posed the question to when Elipse responded). We also checked with him what else he might be doing whilst logged into chat – his transcript reveals initially he was fixing
his pergola, that’s why his response was tardy, but he also informs Miss Spectra that he usually checks emails when logged into “msn” – the chat program he uses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>User</th>
<th>Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:09:00 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>:)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:09:48 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>Hello Matt, just in the middle of writing some stuff re research and have a quick question for you if you're around.... How does geography impact on ppl you contact thru online dating?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:35:24 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>Hello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:35:37 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>I'm just out still working on my Pegola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:35:55 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>okay. keeping busy. :)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:36:01 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>Geography is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:36:11 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>I'll answer whatever questions you have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:36:46 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>I don't travel fruther past Shore St, Milford Grove, Shannon St or St Villar St</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:36:47 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>lol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:36:49 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>thanks. I am just testing an assumption re my sample.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:36:54 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>only joking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:37:10 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>30 minute drive is enough for me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/05</td>
<td>1:37:11 PM</td>
<td>Miss</td>
<td>so hpow is geography important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date/Time</td>
<td>Sender</td>
<td>Message</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005 1:37:26 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>21 sets of traffic lights max.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005 1:37:26 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>okay. so what about interstate or regional?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005 1:37:32 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>WHAT?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005 1:37:39 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>Forget it</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005 1:37:46 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>I used to see someone who lived in Clyde</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005 1:37:53 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>35 - 40 minute drive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005 1:37:55 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>too far</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005 1:38:16 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>If its interstate, then all you have is a fun-time buddy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005 1:38:24 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>thats no relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005 1:38:39 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>okay. thanks for clarifying. :)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005 1:38:56 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>Hey...have you cleared the outstanding 2.5 remaining interviews?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005 1:39:14 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>That lady Jane wants to come and see me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005 1:39:14 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>no, not yet, busy writing chapter for book about process of online dating...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005 1:39:28 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>I think she lives in Kilmore or somewhere</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005 1:39:37 PM</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td>Oh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>User</td>
<td>Message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005</td>
<td>1:39:51</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td><em>Tell me, when you are chatting online to a person, are you generally chatting solely to them or doing other things?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005</td>
<td>1:39:59</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td><em>Yes, I do like the within 5km of [my home] which I can flag on [romantic website]</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005</td>
<td>1:40:09</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td><em>Oops, no writing chapter about process of doing research online!!!!</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005</td>
<td>1:40:32</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td><em>Make up your mind please</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005</td>
<td>1:40:53</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td><em>Okay, thanks. I wanted to check out these things, so I can put your thoughts in chapter I am writing. Clarifying one of my assumptions</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005</td>
<td>1:40:56</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td><em>I log onto my Email and msn at the same time</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005</td>
<td>1:41:06</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td><em>Ok</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005</td>
<td>1:41:11</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td><em>What was your assumption?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005</td>
<td>1:42:32</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td><em>That my sample of interviewees are all Victorian and mainly Melbourne based. I was thinking this is because I have interviewed my contacts and thru them and that ppl are more likely to make contact with ppl within a certain geographic proximity as it facilitate meeting.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005</td>
<td>1:42:55</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td><em>Yes</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005</td>
<td>1:43:14</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td><em>There is another lady who I'd been in contact with who seems to work all over Victoria</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005</td>
<td>1:43:26</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td><em>And she seems to have Bonk Buddies scattered around</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/05/2005</td>
<td>1:43:43</td>
<td>Elipse</td>
<td><em>Or she just treats every one of them as if it were her</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The transcripts also demonstrate the close rapport that we have established with these participants, and their level of participation in the research. The immediacy of feedback for researchers, when such a rapport is established, can be incredibly beneficial for theory development and for inductively working through any issues raised in the research (see also Chapter 1 in this volume).

Chat programs offer a range of functionality, some of which include the ability to store a conversation history of previous chats. Any chat user can enable this on the chat program. Conducting the interviews with chat history enabled ensured that when consent was provided in the chat dialogue there is a written record of this consent in the conversation history. If working in a Windows environment, these conversation histories are generally stored on a user’s hard drive in the Received Files folder. These conversation histories can act as the interview transcripts, which can printed for analysis or copied into other programs if the transcript is to be analysed with software.

**NON-LINEAR CHAT**

With the speed of chat and because you are not seeing the other person whilst chatting, it is common to have two threads of conversation going with one person at one time. Chat does not always follow the conventional norms of turn-taking, nor is it always linear (Davis et al., 2004). This can be confusing when first encountered but quickly becomes a normal way of communicating – perhaps because people are often chatting to several people at one time, hence, jumping from one topic to another becomes comfortable, even in a conversation with only one person.

During the research, when interviewing, this happened. We would think an interviewee had finished answering a question and so we would move onto the next area of the interview only to find that they were still answering the previous
question. They might then answer the next question asked while we went back to probing them on their previous response. As generally you cannot see your participant, it is difficult to determine what they are up to.

The lack of visual contact and non-verbal reinforcement has been noted as compounding the noticeable slowness of interviewing online (Mann and Stewart, 2002). As Markham (1998: 70) points out, “because writing takes much longer than talking, being a good interviewer means being patient” (Markham, 1998). Typing takes longer than speaking, and so responses take longer to iterate. Additionally, the interviewer must account for the fact they cannot see the participant’s face, so need to be aware that they may be missing the visual cues of reflection and contemplation. Although as an online interviewer, you need to be aware that your participants may be very busy “multi-tasking” during the interview.

When someone you are chatting with has a webcam and they are using it, you can see them in much the same way you would in a regular conversation, hence, you can see when they sit back and pause to think or have a sip of their drink or turn around to talk to someone else who may have entered the room they are in before returning to type their message to you. Watching people using chat via web cam using chat is a good way to become familiar with the various manners in which people use chat. You realise that the person you are chatting to is in another environment, with potentially numerous other things going on around them – they are not necessarily dedicated solely to their keyboard patiently awaiting the next chat comment or question to pop up on their screen. They might be playing computer games, talking on their phone, wandering off to the fridge to get a drink or turning around to talk to someone that is physically in the room with them, or they might be busy in other chats….  

I have asked BeachBelle again if she would like to participate and she is keen, so I have commenced the interview. She has told me she is in four chats and has a guy masturbating on webcam for her at the moment, so she might be a little slow in responding. I was originally introduced to BeachBelle via one of my online dating contacts. I have been keen to interview her for a while as I would like more
female participants. just not certain how well the interview will go if she is really distracted... A pro or a con - she can multitask while being interviewed and so can I, but if she is doing something more interesting in another window, the responses to me might suffer... (Memo, 25/04/2005).

Online interviewing is different and as such the interview methods and techniques need to be adapted to the situation. It has been noted that researchers need to adopt some of the conventions of chat when conducting online interviews (Davis, Bolding et al. 2004). To us, this is given, for example when you conduct telephone interviews you use the telephone in a manner similar to how you would when making a telephone call and when you conduct face-to-face interviews you follow the social norms appropriate to the environment. The same is, of course, relevant for online interviews. As such interviewers need to be comfortable with being online and using chat as a normal communication method before assuming they can start effectively interviewing online. The ability to interpret what is being communicated online will also be affected by the interviewer's familiarity with the space and context. The interview notes, given below, relating to one of the first interviews we conducted online show some of the early learning experiences in terms of adapting to the interview environment.

10:24pm
Really hard to provide feedback or just encourage continuation of the interview without entering the conversation. If I just stick with "Yes" "A-ha" "I see" as responses it makes the interview seem stilted as the medium is all about chat!!! and conversation = interaction 2-ways. Yet I am conscious of trying not to lead the interview or to put too much of "me" into it. (Memo, 17/02/2005)

CONCURRENT INTERVIEWS
There is the potential as a researcher to be talking with more than one research participant at once, although we would not recommend it. It occurred once during this research project. Danielle was faced with the dilemma of being in the midst of one interview when another contact introduced one of their contacts as a potential participant, and this potential participant was ready and keen to be interviewed
right then and there. Danielle was torn between whether she should tell this potential participant we could do the interview another time and risk losing her interest and availability or endeavouring to undertake two interviews simultaneously. She opted to do the two interviews at once, as previously other potential interview opportunities had been missed when an opportunity had not been taken when it presented itself.

Fortunately, the person Danielle was in the midst of interviewing was busy at work, so he was also multi-tasking throughout the interview, and as a result of this, his responses were slow. This gave Danielle a little more time to respond to him with follow up questions. At the same time she started interviewing the woman who was responding very rapidly to all of the interview questions. While both interviews were taking place, Danielle also had open her interview log document, to which she added relevant thoughts, ruminations and details as the interviews were progressing.

8:56pm
Fairly succinct answers. Working at same time as responding to me. Good he was slow as I was interviewing Bally hoo at same time and she was very fast. Felt like he didn’t feel comfortable exposing himself through answering qus. So probably not the most in depth answers… (Memo, 21/02/2005)

**EMOTICONS AND ACRONYMS**

Most of the interview transcripts are littered with emoticons, which are symbols that can be typed using characters to create more expressive and efficient communication. For example, :-) and :) are used to represent a grin or smile, ;-) a winking smile and :-( a sad face. :D is a big grin and :p is sticking one’s tongue out.

With advances in chat software, emoticons are becoming increasingly graphic. What started out as a combination of characters and punctuations marks attempting to represent emotions, feelings and expressions are quickly being replaced by cartoon like faces and various animations. The chat user has the
option to select from a menu of emoticons and insert these into chat conversations at will.

Acronyms are also very common in chat as they speed communication – they are much quicker than typing whole phrases, and again, can be used to quickly inject emotion into chat, such as:

- `brb` = be right back (this one gives the participant (or researcher) an opportunity to make a cup of tea, use the bathroom or answer a telephone call).
- `lol` = laughing out loud
- `lmao` = laughing my arse off
- `btw` = by the way

A quick web search can provide any user with a glossary of emoticons and acronyms commonly used online. Interviewees might use emoticons acronyms to demonstrate humour, feelings such as happiness and sadness, curiosity or ire.

When conducting interviews, we have found emoticons useful for providing encouragement and visual recognition that we had ‘heard’ what the interviewee was telling us and so emoticons could act as a prompt for the interviewee to continue with their stream of thought or chat without being interrupted by words. Emoticons can be used to replace the nods on encouragement that one might use in a face-to-face interview. See also Chapter 13 in this volume.

**PERSONALISATION OF THE CHAT ENVIRONMENT**

Some chat programs allow users to post a picture that will appear when they are in a chat window. People can choose to display whatever picture they like. There are pictures included as part of the chat program, but users also have the option of selecting from pictures they might have available on their personal computer, such as their own digital photos. When Danielle chats, she has a picture of herself visible as part of the chat window, so people can see a visual representation of her. Other examples of pictures people use are digital photos of their pets, their genitalia, cartoons, or photos of themselves with their face hidden, cropped off or blocked out if they are concerned about revealing their identity.
Additionally, most chat programs also allow users to change the colour and font of their text, which can allow users another avenue for expression of personality and mood. In one interview Danielle was using the same font type and colour as the interviewee, Bally Hoo, which was causing some confusion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bally Hoo</th>
<th>hey we have to change colors im getting confused</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bally Hoo</td>
<td>lol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bally Hoo</td>
<td>hang on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bally Hoo</td>
<td>thats better [when her text changed from pink to blue]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>ok!!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When using chat it is also possible to change your handle - a handle is a nickname that an individual chooses to use when appearing online in chat. A handle may be similar to a user’s email address or it may be completely different. Some people choose never to use handle and appear in chat solely by their chat email address or by their first name.

Changing one’s handle allows people to reflect their mood, what is going on in their life or a message they are trying to convey. Some examples of handles are:

- Mondayitis
- Bombing For Peace is Like Fucking for Virginity
- Girls drive me nuts
- In Sydney on February 1
- So snowed under with paper work
- coolangatta kid

It is common for people to regularly change their handle depending on how they feel and what they might be trying to express at a particular time). For example, one of Danielle’s chat email addresses starts with spectraelectra@.... Danielle changes her handle regularly and some of the names she had used include:

- Miss Spectra
- Studious Spectra
- Spectra from Planet Electra
- Spectra is sleeping
miss spectra reading transcripts
poor dog next door is howling

And as previously mentioned, changing one’s handle can be a useful method for attracting potential participants. Using the handle Introduce me to your friends created some interest in Danielle’s contact list and facilitated the introduction to some contact’s contacts which resulted in interviews.

INTRODUCTIONS
As noted earlier, the sampling strategy involved having already known contacts introduce us to their own other contacts. Anton proved a great recruiter. In the chat excerpt below, he introduces two potential participants, and for a little while there are four of us in the one private chat.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Receiver</th>
<th>Chat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:40:52 PM</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>hows your sex survey going?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:40:57 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>what did you get up to?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:41:03 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>still need to interview ore ppl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:41:08 PM</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>went 2 a party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:41:13 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>know anyone who might be interested?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:41:14 PM</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>o.k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:41:16 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>need some women!!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>User</td>
<td>Message</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:41:21 PM</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra: just thinking that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:41:27 PM</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra: 1 sec i'll ask</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:43:57 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td>Leah has been added to the conversation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:44:06 PM</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Leah: say hi 2 danielle Leah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:44:14 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>Leah, Anton: Hi Leah!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:44:18 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>Leah, Anton: nice to meet you.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:44:55 PM</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Leah: Leah</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:44:58 PM</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Leah: where are u</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:45:40 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>Leah, Anton: probably busy with something else for the moment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:45:48 PM</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Leah: god knows</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:46:07 PM</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bally Hoo has been added to the conversation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:46:13 PM</td>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Bally Hoo, Anton: hiyaaaaaaaa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:46:23 PM</td>
<td>Bally Hoo</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Leah, Anton: hiyaaaaaaaaaaa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Message</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:46:26 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>Bally Hoo, Leah, Anton – hi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:46:28 PM</td>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Bally Hoo, Anton – hi bally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:46:29 PM</td>
<td>Bally Hoo</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Leah, Anton – roped 2 of us in ants ?? lol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:46:35 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>Bally Hoo, Leah, Anton – lol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:46:36 PM</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Bally Hoo, Leah – and this is bally hoo danielle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:46:37 PM</td>
<td>Bally Hoo</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Leah, Anton – hey swoooooolllllllllllllllllllllllllllllssss</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:46:40 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>Bally Hoo, Leah, Anton – hi bally hoo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:46:40 PM</td>
<td>Bally Hoo</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Leah, Anton – hey danielle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:46:43 PM</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Bally Hoo, Leah – there both demons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:46:49 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>Bally Hoo, Leah, Anton – Anton is being very helpful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:46:51 PM</td>
<td>Bally</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Bally Hoo, Leah – im an (A)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>User</td>
<td>Other Users</td>
<td>Message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:46:53 PM</td>
<td>Bally Hoo, Leah, Anton</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>well demons are good!!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:46:54 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Bally Hoo, Leah</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>:D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:47:11 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Bally Hoo, Leah</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Leah, Anton</td>
<td>did Anton give you the speil about what I'm doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:47:40 PM</td>
<td>Bally Hoo</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Leah, Anton</td>
<td>kinda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:47:43 PM</td>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Bally Hoo, Anton</td>
<td>yeah brifly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:48:03 PM</td>
<td>Bally Hoo</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Leah, Anton</td>
<td>is this going to take long ???</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:48:04 PM</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Bally Hoo, Leah</td>
<td>she is a good girl u 2 guys :D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:48:18 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Bally Hoo, Leah</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>I'm doing some interviews re peoples experiences of online dating and sex, basically it's an interview via chat I ask some quesitons, you tell me as much or as little as you like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:48:24 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra, Bally Hoo, Leah</td>
<td>Miss Spectra Electra</td>
<td>lol. what an intro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>User</td>
<td>Message</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:48:35 PM</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>always 4 u kiddo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:48:48 PM</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>i held back with what i really wanted 2 say</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:48:50 PM</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>lol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:48:57 PM</td>
<td>Bally Hoo</td>
<td>fire away !!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:49:00 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>If you are interested I can email thru the official form which explains it all, tells you about how it will be confidential etc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:49:12 PM</td>
<td>Miss Spectra</td>
<td>well we might want to do it in a private chat window.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:49:12 PM</td>
<td>Anton</td>
<td>o.k u guys go 4 it, i'm goin 4 a smoke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:49:13 PM</td>
<td>Bally Hoo</td>
<td>thats cool, do it now</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:49:15 PM</td>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>ok mail me detaols</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:49:19 PM</td>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:49:25 PM</td>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>ok</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### REFLEXIVITY IN THE RESEARCH

For Danielle, there has been a large degree of reflexivity in the research. Her ongoing use of online dating for personal reasons, in addition to interviewing people who are also online dating has meant that she has been immersed in the field, with her own changing experiences influencing how she thinks about the whole process of online dating, her needs, wants, and expectations and others’ needs, wants and expectations.

She is constantly chatting with her other online contacts that she has met through dating, and although she cannot use the chats that are not part of the project, these chats are fundamental to her personal experience and interpretation of online dating. Discussions in personal chats can inspire new directions for
questioning in future interviews or prompt different ways to look at the data collected to date.

Danielle has been frequently asked: “What are you looking for from the website?” as a part of the early dialogue with new contacts. Knowing that her own responses to this question vary depending on what else is going on in her life provides some perspective in understanding the diversity of responses received when people describe their own online dating experiences during interviews. From her personal experiences of online dating chat Danielle also knows that frank and explicit discussions are often common, and not necessarily unexpected in chat, so it is reasonable to consider that many people using chat for online dating are familiar and comfortable with discussing sex and sexual practices in a chat context, which has meant that most of the interviews have been fairly open and explicit.

**CHAT INTERVIEWING PRACTICALITIES – OUR CONCLUSION**

When interviewing via chat there are some benefits for the researcher. As soon as the interview is finished the transcript is immediately available for analysis. All the researcher needs to do is locate the conversation history in their received files and print this or begin working with it using analysis software (see also Chapter 1 in this volume).

Interviews can be conducted at any time; all that is needed is for the participant and researcher to be online at the same time. Many of the interviews in our online dating research were conducted late at night on week nights. When potential participants indicated their interest in being involved, we would either commence interviewing immediately if it suited them, or we would just suggest that we would do the interview sometime soon when we were online concurrently.

Only one interview was scheduled for a particular day/time as going online for many people may be a regular occurrence but it is not always planned; many people log in when they have some spare time rather than at pre-determined scheduled intervals. We made several attempts to line up interviews via email with contacts of contacts. Initial contact would seem positive, but the interviews
never eventuated. Although it is not possible to determine why, it may be because an email is easier to disregard or put off, whereas when one starts a chat dialogue it is immediate and more likely to engage the person, as any questions or concerns about the process or research can be answered immediately, and the person is already online chatting, so you are not inconveniencing them by asking them to be available at a pre-arranged time.

Online interviewing can offer safety and convenience for researchers and the participants. Involvement does not require anyone to leave the comfort or familiarity of their own home or office, or wherever they may use the internet. The researcher can conduct the interviews from anywhere, provided a computer is available with the chat program loaded on and an internet connection. It can also offer a greater degree of comfort for the participants, as it can alleviate concerns about disclosure and anonymity (Davis et al., 2004) which is beneficial when conducting sex research (see also Chapters 1 and 7 in this volume). It’s easy to continue interviews if they need to be cut short for any reason. This has happened on a couple of occasions, and it has been possible to pick up the interview where they left off a couple of days or weeks later.

Overall, interviewing by chat can be very convenient for the researcher and the participants. A number of the research participants noted that it was also convenience that appealed to them about online dating. Anton noted “its quick and straight 2 the point… 2 me its a bit like shopping at coles [supermarket] or something like that …. u just look whats on offer and go 4 it!” For the researcher too, if you can find a contact online at the right time who is interested in participating, then you can just go for it. It also allows for an equalising of power - if the participant wants to finish the interview or have a break, it is very easy for them to do so.

The potential convenience offered by online interviewing is not a panacea for the resource poor researcher. Like any form of interviewing, the interview will be very much dependent on the interviewer’s ability which includes their familiarity with the interview context. It would be unlikely that someone who had never used chat before would be as an adept an interviewer in a chat space as a skilled interviewer
that was also a regular user of chat. Familiarity with online social customs, mores and expectations that one develops through regular use of chatting will enhance relationships between the interviewer and participants and the interviewer's ability to interpret what is occurring in an interview. Similar to how one might ease into a face-to-face interview by “settling” into an interview (Liamputtong and Ezzy, 2005), an online interview should start with pleasantries that might be unrelated to the interview topic and needs to finish with the common courtesies of thanking the participant for their time and responses and also being available to respond to any thoughts or questions they might have regarding the research process.

Having people added to one's contact list also raised the question of what to do after the interview was done. To remove someone from a contact list, you need to block them (which means they can no longer see you when you are online). For this project, we left that option with the participants. Blocking tends to be only done to one's online contacts when there has been rudeness or offence, thus, blocking participants after their interview was completed felt like the height of online rudeness. They could block us, but we were not going to block them – we left this in their control. This has resulted in some people proactively following up on the state of the research and offering to introduce contacts. Others have continued to be visible when online, but have not initiated any further dialogue. Remaining available also allowed participants to follow up any concerns they might have. For example, some time after an interview, one participant was concerned about his gender, age and location being revealed in the research, as he believed it would make him identifiable, even though this confidentiality had been ensured prior to consenting to participate in this study. We were able to talk through this issue in this post interview chat so that he felt comfortable with the process and his anonymity.

Throughout the research all participants continued to appear sporadically online in the chat contact list, so we felt reassured that they were comfortable with our presence, the research and their role in it. Although if someone stopped appearing online in the chat list, we would have no way of knowing if they have blocked us or if they simply spending less time or no time using the chat program.
In summary, chat interviews provide data that is very different to what an interviewer might gather in a face-to-face interviews, but if chat is a common method of communication to the context being researched then it can offer a useful method for exploring how people participate in that context.

NOTES
1 Private chat is online chat between two people, or perhaps a small group, as opposed to the chat rooms that are hosted by various websites where many people can enter the room the room at random and chat with many others all at the same time.
2 Contact is the term used in most chat programs to refer to people that have been added to an individual’s contact list or address book – that is people accessible through use of the chat software.
3 The typographical errors in these transcripts have been left in to demonstrate what real chat is like.
4 It is possible to bring numerous people from a contact list into a chat together, by inviting others into a chat that you may already be having.

REFERENCES
Anderson, P. and Hodgson, S., 2005, 'Lurid Website Lays Bare Family Secrets', Herald-Sun, 15 February. <HERSUN0020050214e12f0005u>
Markham, A., 1998, Life Online: Researching Real Experience in Virtual Space, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek.
## Appendix C: Participant Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Location*</th>
<th>Ethnicity^</th>
<th>Relationship status^</th>
<th>Sexuality^</th>
<th>Highest level of education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 30Mmelb</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Anton</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Year 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 HappyOne</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Croatian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Masters degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 GlobalTom</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Bally Hoo</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>White Caucasian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Straightish</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Anunaki</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Scots/Irish</td>
<td>Separated</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Nico</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>High school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Jeff</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Aussie</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Year 12 and trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Nathan</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Aussie</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Serena</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Regional Victoria</td>
<td>Aussie</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Elipse</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Aussie</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Hetero</td>
<td>Masters degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Amo</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Regional Victoria</td>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>Attached</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Some college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Kate</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Regional Victoria</td>
<td>White Caucasian</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Straight/bi-curious</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Martin</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Eliza</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Regional NSW</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Sort of single</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Year 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Please note, participants provided me with details of their actual suburbs and towns of residence but to increase the anonymity I have categorised their actual suburbs and towns into city or general regional locations.

^ For ethnicity and sexuality I have provided the terms each participant used to describe their own ethnicity and sexuality.
Appendix D: Reflections on the research experience

When asking participants about their sexual experiences, they would sometimes turn the questions back onto me. Initially I was reluctant to answer them, but upon reflection I realised I was only reluctant because some of them required introspection that made me feel uncomfortable. By acknowledging I was committed to a participatory method of research, I realised that it was well within my participants’ rights to ask me these questions and that I had an obligation to answer them in the same honest way they were responding to my questions. Once I got over my feelings of uncomfortableness, having two-way discussions about online dating experiences facilitated a better dialogue and allowed for more in-depth probing than merely following my interview list and developing codes.

During the research process, I pondered what was the right way to treat participants after an interview was completed. I could choose to block and/or delete them from my contact list but if I blocked them, they could no longer see me online. In my opinion, I thought this could be construed as being rude, so throughout the project I allowed my interview participants to see me whenever I was online. My rationale for this was multi-fold. As noted, I did not want to be rude to my participants. I only block online contacts when they are rude to me or offend me, and so I assume this is how others use the block feature. If I was to interview people and then block them they may feel slighted. Additionally, allowing my contacts to see me whenever I was online allowed ongoing dialogue about the research and their online dating experiences. It gave me the chance to ask quick follow-up questions when I was undertaking the data analysis. It also gave them the opportunity to ask me any questions about the research process and experience. Many of my participants demonstrated a genuine interest in the research; they initiated post interview chats with me to update me on their experiences or to introduce me to their contacts who might have been available for interview. (They could introduce me by inviting another person into our chat. This was a great method as it helped to credentialise me in the eyes of possible participants).
When my participants updated me on their experiences I was careful to ask if they were telling me this “off the record” or “on the record”, that is, I again sought their consent again to use what they are telling me in my research. My experience is that people and relationships can become very intimate and familiar in chat, so I wanted to make sure I was not taking advantage of any familiarity or friendship that these people may have felt with me.

I endeavour to treat my research participants as I like to be treated online; with courtesy and respect. When they have their status set to busy I do not contact them, as I expect to be left alone when my status is set to busy. If any research participant wishes to remove themselves from my contact list they may do so by blocking me, so they have the control to remove me from their online chat experiences and chat contacts or to allow me to remain present. Throughout the project all interviewees continued to appear in my chat list when we were simultaneously online, so I felt reassured that they were comfortable with my presence, the research and their role in it. However, if someone stopped appearing online in my chat list I had no way of knowing if they blocked me or if their life and priorities changed, where they might just be choosing to spend less time or no time using the chat program.

I have not ‘left the field’ since completing the interviews. It has been noted that there are at least three ways by which researchers can leave the field: withdraw by cutting relations quickly and completely, withdraw gradually or never withdraw completely (Minichiello, Aroni et al. 1995). My perception of courteous use of chat meant that I could not leave the field quickly and completely. Time and my own personal situation will determine whether I leave the field gradually or never.

I must be upfront in acknowledging that these reflections and findings from the research are a product of my own experiences online and my interpretations of what others have told me in chat. I have made assumptions based on my own experiences of online dating and may have interpreted what participants have told me in a way which is coloured by my own experiences. But my own use and experiences are integral to being immersed in the field.
My personal experiences have shaped my understanding of the research experience and my analysis interpretation of the data. Ezzy (2002) notes that personal experiences can provide data, ideas for theories, research subject contacts, determine the methodology, the manner of fieldwork and analysis and act as important part of the research report. Some researchers may argue that personal experiences undermine a researcher’s objectivity and distance from the research, however it can also be seen as a way of acknowledging the researcher’s presence and role in the research (Ezzy 2002).
Appendix E: Information Sheet and Consent Form

INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

Project Title: ONLINE DATING AND MATING: THE USE OF THE INTERNET TO MEET SEXUAL PARTNERS, AND THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACTS AND OPPORTUNITIES.

Senior Researcher: DR PRANEE LIAMPUTTONG, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH, LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

Researcher: MS DANIELLE COUCH, MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH STUDENT SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH, LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

This research is being conducted as part of the requirements for Ms Danielle Couch’s Master of Public Health degree. The project is being supervised by Associate Professor Pranee Liamputtong.

This research project aims to examine the use of online dating, more specifically, the project aims are as follows:

- to gain an understanding of how people who use online dating consider concepts of sexual risk and safety;
- to explore the ways people experience engagement and interaction with those they meet, both online and offline, particularly in a sexual context; and
- to explore any possible public health risks and opportunities presented by online dating.

The researcher (Danielle Couch) will invite individuals, already personally known to her through online dating websites, to participate in an in-depth interview conducted via chat software (MSN Messenger), or to recommend other people they know to participate in the project.

Additionally, if more participants are required, the researcher may attempt to post an invitation to participate in her cases of notice boards of online dating sites or via chat rooms on online dating websites.

If you agree to participate in this project:

i. you will be asked to take part in a in-depth online interview via chat software (such as MSN Messenger) at a time convenient to you;
ii. you will have the opportunity to shape the research by highlighting your online dating experiences and what is important to you; and
iii. you will be able to access the final research report as the completion of the project.

In this chat interview you will be asked questions relating to your use of online dating, resulting interactions – both online and offline, sexual interests, behaviours and health. The interview will be similar to a normal chat, and it will offer you a chance to tell your story and reflect on your online dating experiences.

There will be key areas that the interview will cover, but you will also have the opportunity to openly respond and reflect on experiences and issues important to you.

The benefits of undertaking an interview this way mean that:

- you have an opportunity to talk about your experiences with someone without meeting them in person, and hence your anonymity is maintained;
• you will be able to take part in the interview at a time convenient to you;
• you may be doing other things whilst involved in the interview;
• you do not have to answer all the interview questions in one chat session;
• it gives you time to consider your responses; and
• you may find the process less intrusive than a face-face interview.

Returning this form, or advising your consent via the chat program at the commencement of the in-depth interview, is taken as your agreement to release this information to the researchers.

The results of this project and the information from your in-depth interview record will be kept on a secure computer. Although the researchers will know who you are during this study, your name will not be included on any documentation relating to the results of the project. You will therefore remain anonymous to everyone apart from the researchers. During the research and after the project has been completed your interview responses will be kept on a secure computer. No-one apart from Ms Couch and Dr L immacuttong will have access to these records.

The results of this project will appear in a thesis to be written by Ms Couch, in future publications and in presentations at conferences, but you will not be identified in any of these reports.

You may not directly benefit from participating in this project, but your participation will help in furthering the understanding of the use of online dating and the internet for seeking sexual partners, and how this may impact on individual’s sexual health and on public health. You will also have an opportunity to discuss your experiences with a stranger with your anonymity maintained.

You have the right to withdraw from active participation in this project at any time and, further, the right to require that all traces of your participation be removed from the project records provided that this right is exercised within 6 weeks after the completion of your participation in the in-depth interview.

Any questions regarding this project titled ‘Online Dating and Mating’ may be directed to the Senior Researcher, Dr Praneet Liamputtong, of the School of Public Health at La Trobe University on the telephone number (03) 9479 1760 or via her email: praneet@latrobe.edu.au.

If you have any complaints or queries that the Senior Researcher has been unable to answer, you may contact the Secretary of the Faculty Human Ethics Committee, Faculty of Health Sciences, La Trobe University, Victoria 3086, telephone (03) 9479 3573.

To participate in this research please insert your name into the paragraph below and return this form via email to dlcouch@optusnet.com.au or advise your consent via MSN Messenger at the commencement of the interview.

I, .............................................., have read and understood the information above, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this project, realising that I may withdraw at any time. I agree that research data collected during the project may be included in a thesis, presented at conferences and published in journals, on condition that my name is not used.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT (in block letters): ............................

DATE: ......................................

NAME OF SENIOR RESEARCHER (in block letters): DR PRANEET LIAMPUTTONG

DATE: ......................................

NAME OF RESEARCHER (in block letters): DANIELLE COUCH

DATE: ......................................
Appendix F: Emoticons


**Emoticons**

Use emoticons when you’re messaging with friends to show them how you really feel. Emoticons are emotional graphics—visual ways to express the way you feel when words alone just aren't enough. Try out all of the Messenger emoticons:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To send this:</th>
<th>Type this:</th>
<th>To send this:</th>
<th>Type this:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>😊 Smile</td>
<td>:-) or :)</td>
<td>😃 Open-mouthed</td>
<td>:-D or :d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>😱 Surprised</td>
<td>:-O or :o</td>
<td>😃 Tongue out</td>
<td>:-P or :p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>😂 Wink</td>
<td>;- or ;)</td>
<td>😃 Sad</td>
<td>:-( or :(</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>😕 Confused</td>
<td>:-S or :s</td>
<td>😃 Disappointed</td>
<td>:-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>😢 Crying</td>
<td>:'(</td>
<td>😃 Embarrassed</td>
<td>:-$ or :$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🌡️ Hot</td>
<td>(H) or (h)</td>
<td>😃 Angry</td>
<td>:-@ or :@</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>😇 Angel</td>
<td>(A) or (a)</td>
<td>😈 Devil</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>😞 Don’t tell anyone</td>
<td>:-#</td>
<td>😃 Baring teeth</td>
<td>8o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>😎 Nerd</td>
<td>8-</td>
<td></td>
<td>😃 Sarcastic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>😢 Secret telling</td>
<td>:-*</td>
<td>😃 Sick</td>
<td>+o(</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>😞 I don’t know</td>
<td>:^)</td>
<td>😃 Thinking</td>
<td>*- )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>😃 Party</td>
<td>&lt;:o)</td>
<td>😃 Eye-rolling</td>
<td>8-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>😴 Sleepy</td>
<td>[-)</td>
<td>🥤 Coffee cup</td>
<td>(C) or (c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🤘 Thumbs up</td>
<td>(Y) or (y)</td>
<td>🤘 Thumbs down</td>
<td>(N) or (n)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🍺 Beer mug</td>
<td>(B) or (b)</td>
<td>🥂 Martini glass</td>
<td>(D) or (d)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>👩 Girl</td>
<td>(X) or (x)</td>
<td>👨 Boy</td>
<td>(Z) or (z)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🤗 Left hug</td>
<td>()</td>
<td>🤗 Right hug</td>
<td>()</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🦇 Vampire bat</td>
<td>:-[ or :[</td>
<td>🎂 Birthday cake</td>
<td>(^)</td>
</tr>
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<td>🖤</td>
<td>Red heart</td>
<td>(L) or (l)</td>
<td>🖤</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🖤</td>
<td>Red lips</td>
<td>(K) or (k)</td>
<td>🎁</td>
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<td>🌺</td>
<td>Red rose</td>
<td>(F) or (f)</td>
<td>🌺</td>
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<td>(P) or (p)</td>
<td>🎞</td>
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<td>(@)</td>
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<td>(T) or (t)</td>
<td>🌟</td>
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<td>Stormy cloud</td>
<td>(st)</td>
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<td>Money</td>
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