

Lizzy Kinsey and the Adult Friend Finders: The Talking Genitals of Social Networking



A few years ago I became intrigued with www.adultfriendfinder.com, a massive web site for hookups and casual sex that is currently sweeping across the globe and fast becoming the “MacDonalds” of pornographic self-representation or DIY porn. In December 2007 the site made news through a ground-breaking 500 million dollar sale to the Penthouse publishing company. Friendfinder Inc. became the world’s largest adult entertainment network, owning a booming family of sex sites with a combined membership of more than forty million people. As an expanding family of sites, it now caters to multi-lingual cultures based on various demographics such as age: *seniorfinder.com*, religion: *BigChurch.com*, *JewishFriendfinder.com*, ethnicity or nationality: *AsiaFriendfinder.com*, *IndianFriendfinder.com*, *Amigos.com*, *GermanFriendfinder.com*, *FrenchFriendfinder.com*, *KoreanFriendfinder.com*, *Filipino Friendfinder.com*, and dating preferences: *Passion.com*, *Alt.com*. The membership rates are reasonable and range between \$ 15 to \$45 per month, depending on the type of membership one would wish to obtain and the length of

the service (standard, silver, or golden). Standard members are non-fee paying members who are allowed to create site profiles but do not have access to the bulk of luscious data and “the works”--photography albums, voice and video introductions, astrology matchings, featured listings, fun and games, rating systems, chatrooms and blogging areas.

For several years I indulged in checking out the site with a gloomy mindset, while I also got sucked deeply into receiving daily messages and compliments from a euphoric meat factory. I created and uploaded the profile of Lizzy Kinsey, a 40 year old Caucasian bi-sexual woman, and the imagined granddaughter of American sexologist Alfred Kinsey. Alongside my scholarly ambitions to garner data and interview people as “Kinsey,” I also wanted to experiment with my own sexual self-presentations. I tried to make Lizzy the kind of juicy hamburger that I could never be, but I had mixed feelings about the outcome of this process. The picture I finally selected for the site showed a close-up of my naked torso and breasts. I am sitting down on my knees and have a pen lying on top of my legs. I have scribbled a text on my stomach that reads “Are you Ready?” I followed the Internet fashion of the day and disguised my identity by cropping the picture so my face was not showing. I meant to cast Lizzy as a horny female who would like to use a pen either as a phallic instrument or a tool for reflection. The pen could be used to have sex or to scribble down words and stories. And indeed, people started replying to the photo and projecting words onto Lizzy’s body like the esoteric or raw signatures of urban graffiti. The response was intriguing and overwhelming.

I had not really looked at my naked body in detail and now started enjoying the process of capturing my different moods, through different angles and positions. The challenge, of course, was dealing with my mature body and its aging curves, my chubby thighs, my saggings breasts, and many other self-perceived imperfections. But this very process unleashed my sexual feelings along with some interesting pictures. It also garnered unpredictable responses from the

network. It was a remarkable experiment. I recommend it highly to anyone who is curious yet, alternatively, nerdy about sexual life in the underworlds of the Internet.

Meanwhile, I also fell into a melancholic state about the process of observing my potential serial suitors, receiving endless repetitive compliments about my breasts and stomach. Of course the mere quantity of these responses inflated my ego, but I also kept feeling low and deflated. For one thing, since there is a huge discrepancy between the number of males and females on those hookup sites (10 females to 1 male) women automatically get bombarded with a huge amount of requests while men may not get any responses at all. So as a female, I was getting a lot of feverish mail but it did not mean a lot after all. I also found out through interviews that the site lacks the kind of cross-racial generosity that it preaches about in its ad campaigns. For instance, Caucasian men in Hong Kong have a much higher chance of hooking-up than Chinese or Asian men. As it turns out, the Hong Kong website carries a wide range of female profiles who are not into dating locals and ask to be contacted by “Caucasians Only.” For instance, the female profile “Double Trouble” was having so much fun with their penis inspection that they automatically banned Chinese males: “Rock hard average cock (hump the magic seven ...): 7 inches. Not too thick as we both have tight pussies. Caucasian Males only. We will update our profile accordingly if they want to venture into huge black cocks or nine inchers.” It is obviously important for Chinese women to overturn the parochial demands of Confucian morality, but there is also a simple opportunistic premise at work through which females demand attention from the biggest cock.

The AFF match-making engine does not care about the ethnic complexities behind these desires. The AFF bot is like a nagging automaton who cares about your sex life, regardless of your ethnicity or the size of your aching genitals, and sets you up on a date as soon as possible. Your quantitative “friend of sex” sends you daily blurbs and a weekly “activity report” with stats of online popularity and

a hint at how to make further progress. For example, Lizzy Kinsey's activity report on December 5, 2008, reads:

Dear lizzy_kinsey, 71 members want to meet you. These members are waiting to hear from you! They have either hotlisted you, viewed your account or sent you a wink. Recently you've had: 5 winks, 2 hotlistings and 64 views. Login to Adult Friendfinder to see your full activity report . Then flirt with other members to increase your chances of hooking-up! Send them a wink, add them to your hotlist or take the next step and send them a message!

I also kept a record of selected messages and stories sent by my adult friends between July 15 and November 15, 2008. Many of the hookup invitations came from business travelers who would be visiting Hong Kong and wanted to go on a casual date. Additionally, there were Hong Kong-based expatriates and Chinese men who wanted to have discreet longer-term affairs. Most of the messages were monotonous and bland, though some of them were those charming requests that can make one feel fuzzy and loved.

It was very interesting to see that men are happy to self-objectify by sending a picture of their penis rather than their face or full body. About 50% of males used an image of their erect penis in an attempt to seduce me. Additionally people took on clichéd alter-ego names like “HK juicy lover,” or “Devil 8 Incher.” People seemed inclined to use the clichés of potent masculinity and used the penis image as the prevailing signifier of seduction. The penis images were represented in a variety of shapes and skin colors, and in the many states of arousal, from flaccid to fully erect.

Even though these cock images don't turn me on , I am very supportive of the fact that people feel free to post images of their genitals on these sex sites. Peter Lehman goes further and argues that user-generated images of the penis on heterosexual adult sites have significantly impacted representations of the male body and the penis. The male body and the penis have been poorly depicted in the history of heterosexual pornography, controlled by porn industries that have

focused on lush representations of female bodies and vaginas. Lehman applauds a trend towards autonomy and diversification, where everyday web users define male sexuality. As he writes: "... it gives people who normally have no voice in these profoundly important issues, no conferences to go to, no journals in which to publish, no university presses vying for their next book, no students trying to get into their next class, a place to participate in this process." (Lehman 2007: 111) My sample of cock images would endorse Lehman's point about cock emancipation, as members did make an effort to show the genital in unusual angles and colors, thus making the viewer more aware of the fact that there is no such thing as an ideal penis shape.

Nonetheless, even though the ideal penis had been firmly deconstructed, the surplus of cocks in my mailbox made me feel alienated from the project and the personalities involved. How would it be possible to find connections with these serial genitals? I did end up meeting with a handful of unusual personalities whom I would never have met in my ordinary social whereabouts and who shared their feelings and escapades. But overall they also agreed that the site caters to an already hypersexual and cultural elite, while its pedestrian aesthetics discourage imaginative self-display. Perhaps it just works better for those who build their adult friendships and cross-racial emancipation as quantity over quality, and then just press the delete button when it is done.

References:

Lehman, Peter. 2007. 'You and Voyeurweb: Illustrating the Shifting Representation of the Penis on Internet with User-Generated Content,' In *Cinema Journal* 46:(4): 105-115.