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kjacobs@cityu.edu.hk**Lizzy Kinsey and the
Adult Friend Finders****DIY Pornography: Living and Breathing with Cybertypes**

AFF.com is a massive transnational social network run by a corporate-driven American entertainment company that allows people to buy a membership and upload sexually explicit photos and videos. It is one of the leading commercial websites of an ongoing trend towards Internet sexuality as participatory digital media or DIY pornography, involving a blurring between selfhood and the ephemeral signs, myths, and pathways of netporn culture. Web users across the globe are encouraged to formulate and depict sexualized selves to get access to other people's databases and arrange cyber encounters or actual sex dates.

Friendfinder Inc. was founded in 1996 by a Silicon Valley company called Various that pioneered different sex and dating sites. In December 2007 the site was sold for a ground-breaking US\$500 million to Penthouse, making a successful adjustment from traditional pornographic media to DIY pornography – the era of user-generated content and social networking. It thus became the world's largest corporate network for adult entertainment, owning a booming family of sex sites and a combined membership of more than forty million. The network now caters to a wide range of cultures and communities based on various demographics such as age: seniorfinder.com, religion: BigChurch.com, JewishFriendfinder.com, and ethnicity or nationality: AsiaFriendfinder.com, IndianFriendfinder.com, Amigos.com, German-Friendfinder.com, FrenchFriendfinder.com, KoreanFriendfinder.com, and Filipino Friendfinder.com.

These websites promise endless possibilities for inclusive and imaginative self-display and sexual joy, but are they really helping people to experience stimulating encounters within the sex culture of Hong Kong? Although there are in theory very few restrictions on the kinds of sexy pictures and videos Hong Kong people can exchange, their choices are affected by engrained cultural behaviors, local social lifestyles and normative preaching by the expansionist corporate site itself.



Fig. 1 : Lizzy Kinsey Profile Pic



Fig. 2 : Lizzy Kinsey Profile Pic

One of the projected behaviors on AFF.com seems to be an assumed familiarity with pornographic clichés of gender and race; or a collective use of generic and predictable names, images and profiles. Nakamura (2002) has pointed out in *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity and Identity* that digital networks are indeed socially transformative spaces precisely in how they allow people to play with stereotyped depictions of race and gender within emerging media cultures. As she writes:

Cybertyping is the process by which machine-enabled interactivity gives rises to images of race that both stem from a common cultural logic and seek to redress anxieties about the ways that computer-enabled communication can challenge these old logics (Nakamura 2002, 5).

It is hard to pinpoint who the perpetrators of this cultural logic are, as web users collaborate in creating the semantics of a new medium while equally challenging older cultural logics.

Nakamura is interested in how racial identity, racial diversity and racist attitudes are engendered in machine-enabled communication practices and believes that cybertyping performs a crucial role within the signifying practices of networks. Even though this study about AFF.com is not primarily focused on race and racial identity, it applies Nakamura's philosophical approach to studying self-display. People may decide to disguise as "types" in order to maximize their chances at finding partners, though these signifying practices would obviously be hurtful and off-putting to potential partners.

This study aims at revealing sex as complex inter-cultural probings and frustrations behind the use of a simplified social mask. In doing so, it examines the social-cultural associations people may have with this specific network in deciding whether or not to be sexually connected. Boyd (2007) for example has functioned as a participant ethnographer of the social networks MySpace and Facebook to witness deep-rooted social divisions amongst US teens. Her study reveals how popular networks easily reproduce a social elitism or ethos of upward mobility that leaves behind the imaging processes

of fringe or minority cultures. The self-representations of Hong Kong sex seekers are read against this background of social unrest within a potentially emancipatory sex site. Web users exploit social networks because they want to parade and display their subjectivities and social connections (Donath and Boyd 2004, 72). As players within AFF.com, web users show themselves and their social circles as sexualized subjectivities and cybersexual types. How can we capture, contextualize and re-imagine this process of sexualization produced by machine-generated human behaviors? Through my interactions with AFF.com as "Lizzy Kinsey, scholarly sex machine," I acted diligently and emphatically to find my own answers and sexual connections, while inviting web users to cooperate in generating a unique kind of reflection.

References

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