

Several hours pass. I browse pics. I skim profiles. I attempt to say hello to a few guys but never hear back. I suspect my honesty in revealing my journalistic intent is turning off the horny. Too bad that doesn't dissuade irritating invitations from bots—automated advertising posing as chatters popping up more frequently than boners.

Along comes NipsyPDX, 47, looking for “bed buddies.” He’s partnered but doesn’t get enough at home. He says they have a “don’t ask, don’t tell” relationship and wants to “keep it discrete.” He’s looking for “truthful and honest” guys who don’t play games.

Around midnight, I chat up Numbers, a semi-closeted 23-year-old who says he’s past the phase of Internet hookups—or hopes so. Unlike three weeks ago, Numbers says he isn’t looking for sex tonight. He’s found a significant other...one who happens to be out of town. Numbers says he’s monogamous but not exclusive; I think I get his drift.

“Most people online are looking for sex, and if they’re not—if you’re hot enough or experienced enough—you can convince them that they are looking for sex,” Numbers suggests. “When you find someone who is willing to resist temptation, I can guarantee that there is someone close by who is more than eager to bring them down.”

He concedes that sometimes there’s constructive talk about STDs and HIV, but his overall skepticism remains.

“I never believe anyone on Gay.com,” he blurts. “People are a lot meaner online, too—me included—because you’re not face to face, because you can be. In a bar, if you’re mean, you’ll get hit in the face or kicked out or something. But trust me, I know Gay.com. One word: slut. Or jerk.”

So I ask the obvious question: Why keep coming back?

“There are diamonds in the rough,” he messages back, “and that’s what you hold out for. It’s either that or slit your wrists, I guess.”

MudpuddleOR is a 21-year-old student looking for chat, friends, dates, fucks—in that order. He’s made a grand total of one friend and hasn’t yet met anyone for sex in real life.

“I find the conversation appealing—the rapidity of starting conversations with people one doesn’t know,” he says, quickly adding that he doesn’t think guys online are honest enough to sustain healthy real-life friendships. And online anonymity might lead to precarious sexual encounters.

“Chat is easy to find,” he says. “Friends, less so.”

Yet, the same anonymity gives MudpuddleOR the courage to approach people online who he never would in person. “For instance, if someone’s quite attractive, I can know something about them in a safe way by reading their profile or even mustering the courage to send them a message,” he says.

When we bid adieu, he adds that this—our chat—is why he gets online. “Because something unexpected like this occurred on an otherwise unthrilling Friday night.”

Hours pass. One chat blurs into another. The

next day, I say hey to the virtual friend I’ve known the longest, Intelligencia. He’s a smart and sportsy 30-year-old suburbanite muscle-bear who’s in the high-tech sector—and an open relationship. Mutual admiration has led to instant-messaging off Gay.com about not only sex, but arts, politics and religion, too. Like me, he has a bit of an obsession with life online. He’s looking to meet interesting people, for chat or sex. When he’s lucky, it’s both, but he has no real expectations of either.

“The times I do come on here with the specific idea of hooking up, I’m usually disappointed,” he remarks. “It never seems to work out. You have to find someone else who you think is hot, who is also looking for right now, and when it comes right down to it, I think a lot of people on Gay.com are on here because they are chicken of actually hooking up. They like the idea of it more than the actual hooking up part.”

It’s a man’s thrill of the hunt, though even when you find “fresh meat,” it doesn’t always mean you’ve got something cooking. “It’s almost like, if they turn out to be cool and someone you would be friends with, you don’t want to hook up, because it might screw that up,” Intelligencia says.

Hi-Def is a Eugene business consultant hanging out in the Portland bears room. His partner of 17 years died in 2003. Hi-Def tried Gay.com as a way to deal with loneliness and isolation.

“A year into it, I met a boyfriend who turned out to be a major player,” he says. “I thought it was a new love, and he loved the regular sex he wasn’t getting in his relationship, which he lied about. That was a wake-up call as to what the people could be like here.”


Hi-Def also sees bad online habits bleeding into real life. “People are learning they do not need to be courteous anymore. We are all strangers that can be turned off by a click of a button.”

Still, he’s not completely dissuaded; he knows six couples who met online. He’ll be back.

Nearing the end of my daylong dalliance, exStream chats me up about my story, asking, “White guys only, or are black guys eligible too?” He’s searching for a monogamous relationship. In fact, he’s looking pretty hard, spending at least an hour a day chatting to as many guys as possible.

“In the bar, I can only talk to one guy at a time,” he explains. “Online, I can be simultaneously chatting with several men.”

He’s annoyed when I ask what he chats about; I try to explain that chat’s not the same for everyone. It’s different online, I say.

“That’s ‘cause most guys online are socially retarded and wouldn’t be able to walk up to someone in person and say hi or strike up a conversation,” says exStream. “They’re afraid to go to a gay bar and get shut down ‘cause all they want is to get a piece of ass. For those guys, Gay.com is their life-line.... They are just a hole to be filled, or a dick to suck. And nothing wrong with that, that is their choice.” 

After 24 hours online, TIMOTHY KRAUSE was anxious to go to bed...to sleep.

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—Hi-Def

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—Intelligencia

“I came thinking I’d find sex, but I found friends. I stayed for the community.”

—SaoPaulo



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