Book Review

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At 209 pages, the book “Online Matchmaking” is relatively short and easy to read. The title refers, of course, to the various ways and means that people use or have used the Internet to initiate and maintain online romantic relationships. It is divided into five sections: Defining Online Matchmaking, Presentation of Self to Attract Lovers, Online Dating Progression to Face-to-Face: Success or Failure?, Darker Sides of Online Dating and Online Dating Subgroups. Each of these sections contains two to three articles (14 articles in total).

I was pleased to be able to review this book, given my own interest in the area (older adults and their online romantic relationships) and even more pleased to see contributions by some well-known names in online relationship research (Whitty, McKenna, Wysocki, Albright, to name just a few). According to Whitty, who wrote both the introductory and concluding chapters, the book aims to provide a background into what is “currently internationally known about online matchmaking” (p.12). To achieve this, the book has pulled together articles from many diverse disciplines, such as Sociology, Communications, English, Cultural Studies, Law, Health, Journalism, Psychology and Rhetoric.

The book’s strength lies in its range of articles, taking readers in a stepwise manner through the initial development of online dating, the prevalence (and diversity) of sexuality online and how cyberdating is often “structured” through gender-based (heterosexual) rules (From the BBS to the Web; Cyborgasms; Scripting the Rules for Mars and Venus); how (and why) we try to create favourable first impressions online, as well as how easy it is to deceive would-be lovers (The Art of Selling One’s ‘Self’ on an Online Dating Site; How do I Love Thee and Thee and Thee); how lovers communicate and express emotion online without the aid of normal visual cues, and how these online relationships can, and often do, lead to face-to-face relationships (Expressing Emotion in Text; A Progressive Affair: Online Dating to Real World Mating); how online matchmaking can become dysfunctional and can provide an ideal opportunity for unwanted pursuit and victimisation (Cyberstalking as (Mis)matchmaking; Cyber-Victimisation and Online Dating); and finally to articles that question whether the way we define ourselves sexually determines our online sexual experiences, and how the Internet can facilitate connections for the pursuit of specialized sexual activities (Sexual Orientation Moderates Online Sexual Activities; Whips and Chains? Fact or Fiction?).

A minor criticism is that some of the articles do not always fit the logical progression of the book. For instance, one wonders why the article entitled “Expressing Emotion in Text: Email Communication of Online Couples” by Baker (one of the co-editors) appeared in the section entitled: “Online Dating Progression to Face-to-face: Success of Failure?” The article deals almost solely with the actual text of online dating and any discussion on face-to-face meeting is limited to a paragraph or two at the end of the article. Similarly, the article “Examining Personal Ads and Job Ads” hardly seems a relevant fit with the aims of the book.

However, the book does deliver what it promises – theory and data – although I felt that the content and citations were somewhat repetitious and this left me feeling that, as a background text, it was somehow lacking. That said, for new researchers in the area of
online relationships – and, for that matter, Internet studies students – it will provide a useful place to start.