

## INSIGHT DATING APPS

**T**HEY are the warnings we know so well. Don't talk to strangers. Don't go anywhere with a stranger. Absolutely do not get in a car with a stranger.

So who would seek to be alone with, not to mention sleep with, a complete stranger? About 50 million people, it seems. And that's just on Tinder. Factor in the sea of other online dating platforms and we are talking about an issue of iceberg proportions. Zoosk, Redhotpie, Match.com, Badoo, RSVP, Blendr, Grindr, Lovoo, Happn, POF; the list goes on and the appetite apparently insatiable.

Whether dating app users are looking for love, a no-strings hook-up or something more sinister, it has become the norm for singles (and not-so-singles) to happily agree to a meeting with someone they know nothing about.

For Karina, 37, it was a rebound strategy.

"I decided to try Tinder after coming out of a long-term relationship. It was something I thought I'd never do, but I gave it a go," she says.

"There were creeps and weirdos as soon as I started swiping, basically wanting sex straight away, but I figured out how to unmatch them.

"I gave up on Tinder as it really wasn't for me but I'm still glad I did give it a go. Good things can happen from it."

Ashleen, 28, says she was apprehensive about using an app but, after meeting a couple who met on Tinder, decided to give it a go.

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**TECH MY HEART:** Millions of us are now using dating apps, despite the obvious dangers, and many are not looking for love but casual sex.

# Looking for an **appy** ending



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Ashleen, 28, says she was apprehensive about using an app but, after meeting a couple who met on Tinder, decided to give it a go.

"It gets a little addictive swiping left or right. I often wonder if I met one of the guys I dismissed in a bar, would their charm or humour win me over? I think it's made me a little shallow," she says.

"After talking to one guy on Tinder for four weeks, I'd run out of excuses and thought it time to meet for dinner.

"I felt secure knowing we had a few friends in common on Facebook – at least I knew he wasn't a total weirdo. I'm still dating this guy and all's going well.

"Tinder is what you make it. Of course there are people on it for casual hook-ups but, if you take steps to protect yourself and are clear and honest on your expectations, you shouldn't have a problem."

**N**ot all bad news then. Yet if you google "Tinder", reams of fodder along the "my-Tinder-hell" lines appear. And, in Queensland, in the past few weeks alone, we have seen two incidents resulting in the app making negative headlines.

On November 3, Port Macquarie doctor Angela Jay, 28, was stabbed 11 times and doused in petrol by a self-proclaimed "psychopath" she met on Tinder.

She saved her own life by crawling in agony to the neighbours and instructing them on how to stop her bleeding out.

Her attacker Paul Lambert, a 36-year-old deranged stalker

# appy ending

The jury is out on whether dating apps are taking stranger danger and casual sexual encounters to a sinister new level or are simply a digitised way of meeting the right (or just right now) person, writes **Lesley Hunter-Nolan**

from Brisbane, was shot dead by police. Lambert, who had changed his name from Paul Scales, had a history of terrorising women, including a US newsreader and his ex-wife.

And, on October 30, a Brisbane woman who was transitioning to become a male was accused of raping a woman she met on Tinder.

The 23-year-old allegedly raped her victim digitally, orally and with a sex toy at her home in Everton Hills, northwest of Brisbane, and now faces five charges including sexual assault, rape, occasioning bodily harm and deprivation of liberty and faces a "life in prison" sentence.

**W**hy then, given the evidence of risk, are we so eager to expose ourselves to possible danger for sexual, or other, gratification?

QUT Law Professor Dr John Scott says the vast majority of relationships initiated online do not involve violence and can be viewed as the "McDonaldisation" of sex.

"I think people are concerned about dating apps because the primary purpose of a relationship may be shorter-term sexual gratification and

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Elina Juusola-Halonen

this counters the way we want to view dating," he says.

"It may also shock people that women would want to initiate relationships purely for sexual satisfaction.

"We are still more accepting of men as being promiscuous and tend to consider signs of promiscuity in women as deviant and improper.

"I think the apps present as a kind of fast-food version of a relationship – quick and easy."

Scott doesn't believe violence after an app interaction represents a new type of crime.

"From a criminological

point of view, these (violent) cases are ordinary," he says.

"The issue is not so much technology, but is really about male violence, which we know occurs in many relationships.

"The most recent cases also reflect a lot of the things we find in the true crime genre, which is one of the most popular forms of literature in Australia.

"We have gendered violence and we have a white, middle-class, female victim. There is a kind of voyeurism with this stuff.

"Domestic or gendered violence is widespread in Australia. That's the discussion we need to be having here ... what we can do as a society to prevent it.

"Technology does provide new opportunities for crime and deviance. People can conceal their identity online and there is more opportunity to present oneself in a fraudulent or idealised manner.

"By bypassing a lot of the traditional social routines associated with dating, there is also less opportunity to vet partners. But the problem here is really about why male violence is widespread in Australia and our inability as a society to address this problem."



"Also, if you aren't careful where and how you meet, the other party can still use your vulnerability to get to you.

"It doesn't matter where the grooming happens, online or in person, people must be careful.

"The danger as such is not in the vehicle, it is in how you use it. If the user is aware and can recognise the dangers, then go for it. As it is, 33 per cent of marriages happen as a result of meeting online, including apps.

"If you find there is danger, leave immediately and don't look back.

"Otherwise, enjoy the ride."

lesley.hunternolan@news.com.au

**L**ove on the Line author and online dating scam victim Elina Juusola-Halonen says dating apps represent a great deal more than merely providing sexual freedom.

"I still don't see that this freedom of sexual expression has given us anything worth considering as free," she says.

"Rather, it has been digitally reprogrammed to make the women play to the male model even more than before. Where is the freedom in that?

"What I really would like to see is the freedom to build compassionate relationships between people with no underlying double morality.

"Unfortunately, it has not played out like that at all."

For Juusola-Halonen, (inset right) the danger of apps is not the platform but how you use it.

"There is always vulnerability and possibility for danger meeting new people online without proper protection," she says.

"Both your identity and other information can be used against you.

