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# MIZZOU

## Kiss and Tell

**MU staffer chronicles online dating in book and Web series.**

*Story by Kelsey Allen*

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**A**ccording to Meg Phillips, the mark of a nerd is knowing that you're a nerd. A nerd also knows who Salacious Crumb is (hint: *Return of the Jedi*), has read *The Hobbit* more than once and can list pi to digits beyond 3.14.

A nerd also wouldn't think twice about using a photo of herself dressed in a *Star Trek* costume for her OkCupid profile picture. That's exactly what Phillips did when she signed up for the online dating site after her second divorce. She wasn't surprised when she received some interesting responses, and they were just too funny to keep to herself. Especially one from ZenKinky: "I think you're a robotic [message] ... and I'm enthralled! I spent a few years in



Meg Phillips and Ben Hedrick on set of the *ZenKinky* web series. Phillips, Mizzou Advantage program director, wrote the book and the subsequent script for the series, and Hedrick, Arts '06, directs the series. Photo courtesy of Ben Hedrick.

the computerized creation gig and have just went back to school, but I am blown over to see the Internet's mastery in constructing the consummate profile. ... ”

Phillips began sharing some of her online dating escapades on Facebook, which got a lot of comments, including the suggestion to turn her posts into a book.

Fifty first dates later, Phillips published *ZenKinky and the Art of (Not Finding) Love on the Internet* (Mizzou Media, 2012), a memoir of the 18 months she logged onto a dating site every day. The book — a collection of Facebook statuses, OkCupid messages, texts, emails and streams of consciousness — reads more like a conversation or a long blog post. Her final advice for future online daters: Be polite, use spell check and don't say 'u' or 'hawt.'

Phillips says *ZenKinky* (and *ZenKinky*) taught her not to take herself too seriously.

“It was really illuminating, actually,” says Phillips, program director for Mizzou Advantage. “You can't write down 18 months of your life and not look back and think, ‘Wow, I did that. And then I did that again. And then, look at that, I did that again.’ You see patterns that you didn't see before. I honestly didn't realize I was a dramatic person, which now I'm like, how could I not know?”

It was that dramatic flair that made Columbia filmmaker, ex-boyfriend and fellow self-proclaimed nerd Ben Hedrick, Arts '06, think *ZenKinky* would

make a good Web series.



David Crespy, professor in the theatre department, plays a character named Exotic Genius Man in the *ZenKinky* Web series. Crespy will be featured prominently in season two of the series, which Phillips expects to film in spring 2013. Photo by Ben Hedrick.

“We get to be adults, and we think dating should get easier at a certain point,” Hedrick says. “You realize that certain things get easier, but other things get incredibly difficult. I think people can relate to that nervous adult dating. I’m just glad I’m not a chapter in this book.”

The Web series premieres Valentine’s Day — Singles Awareness Day as Phillips is calling it this year — on Blip, and new

episodes will air weekly on Thursdays. The first season of *The ZenKinky Chronicles* corresponds to part one of the book, with eight episodes clocking in around 10 minutes each. The cast and crew — about 80 people, at least 25 of whom are MU staff, faculty, students or alumni — have filmed a majority of the scenes at the Berlin Theatre, sometimes during 12-hour sessions.

“I am so tired of putting on makeup and doing my hair,” Phillips says, “but when I get to filming, it’s so much fun.”

David Crespy, a professor in the theatre department at MU, plays one of Phillips’ love interests in the Web series. The two met when Phillips enrolled in his playwriting course, and soon they realized they had more than theatre in common.

“We had a mutual interest in the strange, hilarious, bizarre and frustrating world of Internet dating,” says Crespy, although he admits he had a little bit more success than Phillips. Crespy met his wife, Shari, on the Jewish dating site JDate, and they have been married for 10 years.

“I became intrigued by what [Phillips] was doing in terms of creating a book that floats between a blog and a social media document,” Crespy says. “It’s a book, but it’s a compilation of different forms of modern communication surrounding this socially indifferent, anonymous world of online dating. *ZenKinky* is about dating, but it’s really about trying to find someone who shares your desire to suck the marrow from life.”

Although Phillips will spend this Feb. 14 without *ZenKinky* (or Quazar69 or Mutant-in-the-Buff) by her side, she has recently updated her profile on OkCupid from looking for short-term daters to looking for a long-term relationship.

“I also added, ‘Just so you know, I’ve written a book about online dating,’ ” Phillips says. “So they’ve been warned.”

Phillips plans to film season two of the series in spring 2013.

**Topics:** [Alumni](#), [Arts and Humanities](#), [Community](#), [Web Exclusives](#)

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573-882-5916 | Email: [mizzou@missouri.edu](mailto:mizzou@missouri.edu)

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