I am Monica Barratt, PhD Student at the National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University of Technology (Australia). I am conducting a study of how the use of online forums by Australian ecstasy, methamphetamine and other drug users influences drug use practices in ways that decrease or increase drug-related harm. For example, I am interested in the influence of online forum discussions on novice drug users, and how ecstasy users incorporate information from online pill reports into their decisions. I would appreciate your participation in this study as it will assist me in understanding the relationship between participating in online forums where drugs are discussed, and drug use practices and related harms.

Research procedures

In order to answer my questions about drug use and online forums, I will be collecting and analysing a variety of different kinds of data from publicly available documents, but believe this is no substitute for genuine participant response to research ideas. Therefore I will also collect data directly from online forum participants. To be more specific I will do the following:

- collect and analyse publicly available documents (online forum posts, websites);
- conduct web surveys; and
- conduct in-depth online interviews (using instant messaging).

Risks and benefits

The risks associated with participating in this project are the (very remote) possibility of information about your own illicit behaviour being linked to your identity, and experiencing distress when discussing your own drug use. Additionally, you may not approve of what I write about you. I will do the following to guard against these risks and to protect your interests:

- Protect your confidentiality. The data I collect will be used to produce a doctoral thesis and other scholarly presentations and articles, which will include descriptions of individuals and groups. However, all names/ usernames, locations and any other identifying information will be replaced by fictitious names or amended/omitted, to ensure that individuals and groups cannot be identified. To protect your confidentiality, I will never ask for your real name and I will not collect your Internet Protocol (IP) address. Researchers at the National Drug Research Institute have been doing drug research for 20 years and at no time have the police attempted to gain access to information about the individuals interviewed.

- Ensure data security. I will also guard against the possibility of data being intercepted and potentially read by third parties by using a secure uplink for web surveys and encrypted instant messaging. I will also encourage you to use accounts that do not contain which could identify you.

- Manage data storage securely. Data will be stored on a secure workstation and backed up regularly to an external hard-drive. All data are locked to unauthorised access. Upon completion of the project, the encrypted data files will be archived solely on CD/DVD media in a locked cabinet. Data will be stored for a minimum of five years from thesis completion.

- Refer to drug counselling services. If you are concerned about your drug use, I will arrange referral to online drug counselling services and other information sources as appropriate.

- Provide opportunity for feedback. Before presenting or publishing from the data I have collected with your help, I will make a reasonable attempt (e.g. emailing you drafts with a request to respond within a reasonable time period) to obtain your feedback and incorporate it into my work.
You may also benefit from participating in this project by having the opportunity to contribute to discussions and publications that will shape the way researchers, educators and policy makers think about drug use and online communication. Anticipated project outcomes include the development of more relevant and useful interventions and policies aimed at encouraging safer drug use practices, such as an online version of Ravesafe peer education, and more timely and effective responses to new drug trends.

**Time and location**

Data collection will occur throughout 2007. Data collection will be entirely online, which means you can complete surveys and interviews anywhere and anytime you wish. Your participation will fall into one or more of these categories:

- **Web survey.** Survey respondents should spend about 30 minutes completing the online form.
- **In-depth interview.** Online interview participants can expect to invest more time in an online exchange with me, depending on how much detail participants wish to discuss. The amount of time and effort is entirely at the convenience of the participant.
- **Moderator interview.** Forum moderators should spend no more than one hour completing an online survey and follow-up online interview.

**Freedom to withdraw**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without penalty. If you do so, I would hope to continue to use the data I have gained from your participation, but I will destroy it at your request.

**Offer to answer enquiries**

As stated above, I will share and request feedback on any and all presentations and publications that result from this research. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please contact me as follows:

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Curtin University of Technology  
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Camberwell North Victoria 3124  
0407 778 938  
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http://www.ndri.curtin.edu.au/drugsonforums

This project is supervised by Associate Professor Simon Lenton, Deputy Director of the National Drug Research Institute. He can be contacted by phone (08 9266 1603) or email (s.lenton@curtin.edu.au).

**Ethics approval**

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number 102/2006). If you have any concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact:

The Secretary, HREC, Office of Research and Development, GPO Box U1987, Perth WA 6845  
or by phone (08 9266 2784) or email (hrec@curtin.edu.au).

All communication is treated confidentially. Verification of ethics approval can also be obtained by contacting the Secretary.