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## Unreal marriages the way of the future

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What happens if your husband's online alter ego marries a sexy cyber-babe in the fantasy world of Second Life? Does this nullify your marriage in the real world? What about if he spends more time with his virtual wife than you?

As far-fetched as it sounds, London woman Amy Taylor divorced her husband of three years last year after discovering his online character, or avatar, was cheating on her in the computer-generated world of Second Life.

The murky, as yet unregulated, world of cyber infidelity, is an "extreme example" that futurist Alison Sander uses to illustrate how so-called "megatrends", such as the rise of the internet, are reshaping the world we live in.

"Trends are moving so quickly they are moving ahead of our regulations, they are even moving ahead of our mental ability to grasp them," Ms Sander, a keynote speaker at the Future Summit in Melbourne yesterday, told *The Age*.

Ms Sander, the director of the Boston Consulting Group's Centre for Mining and Sensing the Future, has spent the past decade helping companies and governments respond to the risks and opportunities presented by an uncertain world.

She said most people saw the job title "futurist" and thought of sci-fi writers, stockmarket predictors or psychics. "Part of the future is incredibly hard to predict, such as the next AFL winner or the price of energy in 2011," Ms Sander said.

"But what's interesting and very surprising to people about the future is there are a large number of very critical issues we say you can set your watch by."

These included megatrends like demographic shifts, such as the ageing population, urbanisation and the rise of lifestyle illnesses like obesity. "They provide billion-dollar opportunities but also billion-dollar risks if you fail to spot them," she said.

Before the Future Summit, a forum for Australia's leaders to discuss issues and challenges for the future, Ms Sander surveyed 160 summit participants and asked them to rank 18 megatrends in order of importance. Ageing was ranked 11 out of 18.

Ms Sander was surprised by the response, given ageing is a critical issue for not just Australia — which announced in the budget it would raise the pension age to 67 — but most developed countries.

"The fastest growing demographic age group on the planet over the last 30 years are centenarians," Ms Sander said. "If you track ageing in the last 100 years, we have gained an extra third of life. If all these people are going on the pension you have an enormous fiscal challenge, but it's an incredible resource if you tap into it."

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"The over-50s is also a \$700 billion market — it used to be called the grey dollar, but now it is so lucrative it has been renamed the silver dollar." Despite this, she said, very few companies developed products for the elderly, such as cars or phones with easy to read numbers.

*This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/national/unreal-marriages-the-way-of-the-future-20090518-bcr8.html>*