

SOURCE LINES

Navigating the High Seas of Internet Dating

I am a single man, separated after 20 plus years of marriage. Some months ago, I felt ready to meet some women. I considered asking friends. I worried that some of them would feel disloyal to my ex-wife. Others would not know anyone because most of their friends are married. A 'blind date' set up by friends would have been awkward, anyway. In the past, a single person in my situation might have gone to bars, contacted a dating service or written a personal ad in the newspaper. These days, the internet provides a popular way for connecting single people with other single people. It has the advantage of looking beyond your own social circle. It is fast, effective, anonymous and can be risky.

The Sea is Vast and the Fishing Plentiful

Most have heard of internet dating and some of the well known sites. Like many, I had a negative view about internet dating. My fear was that it is for the pathetically unattractive and desperate loners. So, when I visited the first website, I had quite a surprise. I felt like a kid in a candy store. I saw all these attractive and interesting women on the shelves of the cyber superstore! On these websites there are normal men and women from around the globe, who have posted their photo, a personal ad, entered data about themselves and preferences about their date into the site's database. On some sites a personality questionnaire can be completed to help match you with compatible partners. Participants can then search the sites' database on a dozen items, such as, race, religion, education, body type, interests, distance away, personality etc. Some people are looking to date, some for a relationship and some for 'intimate encounters'.

Finding Your 'Sea Legs'

What makes this method of match making different

than the more traditional in-person dating services, is that the consumer is in total control over the selection process. The sites have a variety of ways you can 'flirt' with someone who you are interested in. If they respond to your flirt, communication occurs through the site's email, instant messaging system or chat room. Some sites have monthly fees others charge for the messaging.

Like most men and women a year or two out of a long term marriage, I was in the 'experimental' dating phase. I was figuring out what it feels like in terms of readiness, what kind of person might appeal to me and how dating makes me feel about myself. I was finding my 'sea legs' after having spent along time on land in a long term relationship. People just out of relationships, especially long term ones, must be careful not jump into another "permanent relationship", to either replace the ex with a newer improved version of the same person or go for the total opposite type of person. Both mistakes indicate a lack of self examination and learning about the part they contributed to the breakdown of their own marriage/relationship. Men are particularly prone to replace without introspection.

Beware! There are Sharks in Those Waters!

Internet dating, like any method of matching, has its risks and benefits. There is no question that internet dating websites provide a convenient, inexpensive and effective way of bringing people together. For those looking for excitement, adventure, escape, comfort or love, the internet can be very engaging. The ease of access, privacy, and anonymity makes the internet incredibly appealing. Without the social inhibitions that are part of in-person contact, deception is easy. Each site has guidelines for safe on-

line and off-line dating which are worth reading. Seduction always has some element of deception or exaggeration. On internet dating sites one should always assume that there is a good chance the other person is lying or at least exaggerating until you have had plenty of verification they are not. Some lie about being single when they are married; about their age (20 something men posing as 40 to catch a Cougar); about their weight saying they are average when they are 40 lbs overweight; and about their appearance - have photos that are from many years/decades ago. Some women/men are on-line to attract you to their webcam site to pay for on-line porn or an escort service.

Distortions Occur When You Go to Sea

Internet contact and in-person contact can be vastly different. On the internet one processes a static visual image - a photograph and the written words in an email or instant message (IM). The human mind then tries to fill in the dots to create a real person, a dynamic human being from this limited information. To do this, the mind is likely to project all your own feelings and wishes to create that person you think you are in contact with. Without diligent scrutiny of your own assumptions and verification of the others person's honesty, the person you meet for that first coffee date can be a very different from the one you had in your mind when you were on-line. Once you meet in person, it is like starting over getting to know them. This is what I have found and heard from many others.

Go Ashore Frequently

It feels really good when others you find attractive are interested in you. It can mend a broken heart and help to heal the wounds of previous relationships. It is a kind of validation which we all crave. Like any enjoyable and exciting activity, moderation is wise. Therefore monitor your dependency on the websites carefully. When you meet someone on-line, don't spend too long on-line. Use the service for what it is meant for - to get you out with someone in person. Avoid collecting

a 'stable of cyber friends'. Real life is better for you than simulation.

Create Your Own Sea Charts and Learn Your Way Around the Shoals

The internet can be an excellent medium for helping people meet lots of different potential partners outside their social circle. It also has the potential of being a good method for learning about yourself and what you are looking for or should be looking for. Especially, if you take time to reflect, read the on-line articles and use some of the tools available on some of the sites to help you. Develop a spreadsheet and evaluate your experiences against your own personal criteria. The website cannot substitute for your own good judgement, rigorous scrutiny and discrimination.

Have people found the new permanent 'love of their life' on-line. Yes, according to the success stories and testimonials on their sites. All I know is that millions are looking and these sites are very profitable businesses. They do provide a useful service.

Internet dating sites may not be for everyone, however. Some people may need the in person guidance that dating service counsellors provide to coach them and select for them. It is difficult to know who might be best for us.

I have screened out on-line several 'wackos'; met many very nice women in person where there was no mutual spark; I have been stood up on a first meeting; had a 'drive by' date (checked me out from a distance and left). I have also had some really good dating relationships. I am learning a lot about what I need and how to see that in a woman. I am having fun. I also like entertaining some of my happily married friends with the stories of my adventures and misadventures on the dangerous and exciting high seas of internet dating.

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