



Yuk! Oh, it's a reflection

ONLINE DATING

FOR: It's cheap, and you can find what you want as often as you want

AGAINST: People might not be exactly what they claim to be. High quota of oddballs

WHY WOULD YOU?: Meet lots of people without having to go out

ONLINE dating is cheap and convenient. At www.lavalife.com.au there's no interview; I just tick boxes that are meant to illustrate who I am and who I want. They are too easy to tick. I now have interests I never thought of. Well, who doesn't like an evening on a patio?

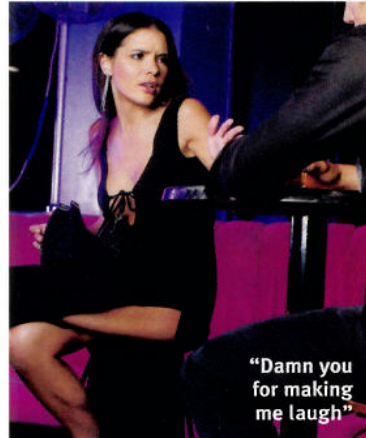
I upload my photo, mainly because I'm shallow and expect the same from others. The site is free, and it costs a few dollars on a credit card to send someone a message. For free, you can send someone a wordless "smile" to show you're interested.

There are hundreds of girls on the site, but fewer than half have photos on display, even fewer live within two hours' drive of me and fewer still have looks I'd want anything to do with. I choose five and send them messages, trying to sound like the kind of person they'd want me to sound like (see "Yvonne's Online Profile Dos and Don'ts").

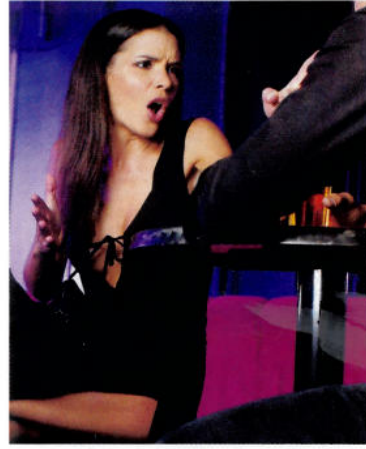
I scroll through the blokes to scope the opposition. There are millions of them: musclemen, dwarves, obvious weirdos, mummy's boys, countless "nice guys", the works.

The site has three sections: for those seeking dates, relationships, or an "intimate encounter". I notice that some guys have ticked all the boxes.

A few days after my profile appears, a girl sends me a smile. She's got a face I could stand talking to, so I pay for a reply. In the next week I get more smiles, but no messages. One is from



"Damn you for making me laugh"



an 18-year-old, another from a 39-year-old. Neither has a photo attached. I send them messages, just to be nice. Each expression of interest is like catching a girl's eye across the room. It doesn't mean much, but it's better than nothing. The usual sexual politics apply: I do the asking out. The girls send the smiles, I send the messages. If I smile, I get nothing back.

I finally get a date. It's taken more negotiation and planning than a superpower summit, but suddenly I'm in a pub in my best shirt, shaking hands with a girl. She looks like her photo; a good start. We sit down and try to act like this happens every day. But we're both aware that we are doing business with our emotions. We've never met before, so at the end of the evening we have the perfect right to say, "No thanks."

By 10pm, we're both smashed and saying dumb things such as, "I had a feeling you'd be nice."

Then I do something dumb. In a fit of drunken guilt, I tell her I'm only here to write a story for **RALPH**.

She takes this news badly. She swears at me for a dangerously long time without drawing breath. If there wasn't a drunken animal attraction between us, she'd leave. Instead, she goes to the bar to buy whisky. I don't know what to do.

She brings back the whiskies and slams them on the table. That's when I know we'll get it on. She carries on shouting at me, then we go back to her flat. I can tell she is struggling to explain her own behaviour. I tell her she's stupid for inviting a total stranger back to her place.

"You're an arsehole, not a rapist," she says, then clamps her lips over mine.

An hour later I'm kicked out, having enjoyed a very enthusiastic head job. She made Jenna Jameson look like the vicar's wife. I find a taxi and fall into it, my head trying to catch up with what the hell just happened. It's not supposed to go like that, is it?

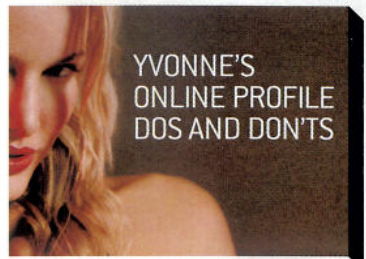
Two days later, a Swedish girl I'd messaged gets back to me. I'd been impressed by her no-nonsense approach ("I don't want a relationship. I am very independent"), not to mention her model's cheekbones.

We meet in a quiet bar. Her photo had been taken several years and kilos earlier, but she's very attractive. And nervous.

I discover she's a nurse. A Swedish nurse! It's like I'm out with a porn star.

"Yes, that's what everyone says," she says. "Wouldn't it be perfect if I was blonde?" Her expression tells me it's date-over if I even think about replying.

However, the amazing power of alcohol loosens things up, and once she's convinced I'm not a psychopath – or worse, dull – she tells me about other dates she's had. I've heard it's



YVONNE'S ONLINE PROFILE DOS AND DON'TS



PHOTOS: WHERE TO SHOOT AND WHAT TO LOOK LIKE

DO: If you're a fireman, mechanic or other sexy uniform-wearer, have your photo taken at work. Otherwise, have it shot outside. Look relaxed. Close-ups are best: then she can see what you look like. Leave your shirt on – shirtless guys look up themselves. Smile, or you'll look like you're no fun to be around. If there is a puppy handy, use it as a prop. **DONT:** Don't post a photo of you and your cut-out ex with her severed hand floating over your shoulder.



I like flowers and cabbage and film/cabbinets (brown ones)

WHAT TO SAY

DO: Be specific about your interests. If you like fixing up old cars, say so – she'll think you like to work with your hands. **DONT:** Don't say you're a stuntman if you aren't: she will find out. Don't say you are younger than you are: she'll know. If you must lie about your age, say you are older so she's pleasantly surprised by how well you've held up. Don't say you like children if you don't, because single yummy mummies will want to tear out your throat.

I don't even know Sam...



Do you like S&M?

HOW TO PUSH THE RIGHT BUTTONS

DO: Talk about your appeal to a certain girl, not all girls. Eg. "I'm looking for a girl who likes crap movies so we can laugh at them together. I'd even cook her my famous one-pot spaghetti dinner if she laughed at my jokes." **DONT:** Don't say you're "waiting for that special lady" – she'll think you're a conman. Leave out your star sign – guys only pretend to be into astrology to get into women's pants.