Sorting the wheat from the chaff

You have spotted a virtual hunk, but how do you decide if he is the guy for you? Here is how to find the truth behind the profile.

Let’s face it. Finding guys online isn’t difficult. Log on to any chat room or online dating agency and you’ll find the place stuffed to capacity with them. The question is, how do you separate the wheat from the chaff, or more simply, Prince Charming from Homer Simpson.

Before you even turn on your computer, sit yourself down and think about what you want to find in the first place. Unless you take a long, hard look at yourself there is no way you can successfully look for love. You may be looking for a knight in shining armour to sweep you off your feet and whisk you into a relationship of passion and adventure. Then again perhaps you only want a short-term fling. And there’s nothing to be ashamed about being one of the growing number of people who just want to meet new friends.

Once you’ve narrowed your criteria into a clear picture of what you want then it’s time to hit the profiles. . . . So, you’ve worked out what kind of person you want to find and are faced with a list of guys who match your requirements. What next? Well, hold off from sending that email or message just yet. The next step is to become an expert profile reader and there is only one way to achieve this: read, read and read some more.
Think about it for a second. You’re off on a shoe buying expedition. The last thing you’ll do is go for the first pair that catches your eye. No, you’ll think about what pair goes with what outfit and then shop around, seeing what else is available or whether there are any bargains to be had. Why then would you swoop in on the first potential beau that you spot? To be able to separate the wheat from the chaff you need to learn how to read between the lines.\textsuperscript{16}\textsuperscript{17}(\textit{Connect magazine}, Autumn, 2003: 22–23)

The above excerpt, taken from an article in a magazine devoted to relationships and online dating, would seem to reveal much about changing gender roles and changing expectations in relation to meeting a member of the opposite sex. Although the piece is written in a light-hearted style intended to entertain as much as to inform, the idea that women may ‘look for love’ in such a calculating (predatory?) way, and choose a partner as one may choose a pair of shoes, seems to reverse a long-established view on male and female roles and behaviours; namely, that men initiate sexual relationships and objectify women. The sexual selection ‘at a distance’ that the Internet allows is novel, and tells us much about how a new technology of communication may allow the creation of new meanings concerning partner selection and love. The provision of this kind of ‘how to do it’ advice in relation to meeting a potential ‘Mr Right’ also seems far removed from what would have been considered acceptable in many, if not most societies until relatively recently. Increasingly, competent decision-making in matters of the heart, like decision-making in other areas of our lives, is seen as something that can be learnt and perfected in practice, so that one can see past the impression, to discover the ‘genuine article’. That a specialist magazine has been created precisely for advice and information on the initiation of dating underlines the extent to which the mediation of relationships via such means has been ‘normalised’ in contemporary society. However, despite the shifting scripts of gender and rituals of sexual interaction between women and men, there is strong evidence to suggest that long-established assumptions about differences between the sexes and about the processes of sexual attraction have remained relatively stable.

This chapter focuses on the engendering of emotions in the sphere of love, intimacy, and sex, and assesses the extent to which recent