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# HOW TO FIND A DATE IN 10 DAYS

Browsing for love on five dating sites

*by Zach Dyer*





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# HOW TO FIND A DATE IN 10 DAYS

Browsing for love on five dating sites, p.07

*article by Zach Dyer*  
*cover photo by Anthony Clay*

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

People worked themselves into a frenzy last February when “Watson,” an Artificial Intelligence designed by IBM, beat out Ken Jennings at *Jeopardy!* to win a million dollars (which was donated to charity).

I’m not really sure why.

Of course computers retrieve and spit out knowledge faster than humans can. That’s what humans built them to do. We’ve gotten better and better at building computers, and so the computers have gotten better and better at retrieving knowledge.

Why the uproar? (And the misappropriated *Terminator* and *Minority Report* references?) A professor at Pace told the New York Post, in fear, that “with Facebook and Twitter, there is so much more personal information for computers to track and potentially predict what a person will do.”

Part of it stems from a classic motif: that technology we build will soon supersede all human capabilities, and thus human contributions to the economy will be obsolete in the face of more skilled robot-workers.

Part of it, I think, also stems from an irrational fear that technology can know the world—and thus, human emotion—too well. That it can see

right through us, perceive clearly even the most nuanced and complex human neuroses. That technology strips us down to a sum of parts, leaving us feeling, well, naked.

Online dating strikes the same fear—one that’s much more pervasive than the kind shown on MSNBC specials. How can these sites attempt to know us? Can we trust the profile photo or the short blurb to convey who we are to complete strangers?

In this week’s lead, Zach Dyer tried conquering this fear by creating profiles on five popular dating sites. Some dates were good, some not so good. But dating has always been like that.

Watson now works at the Columbia University Medical Center. He’s being used as a tool to know people better, “to help doctors provide personalized treatment options that are tailored to an individual patient’s needs,” according to a press release. Watson, along with other technology we use as supplements for in-person experience, is ultimately what we make of him. There’s nothing to fear.

Amanda Cormier  
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# CRAIGSLIST MAD LIBS

BY MARGARET BOYKIN

Hello!

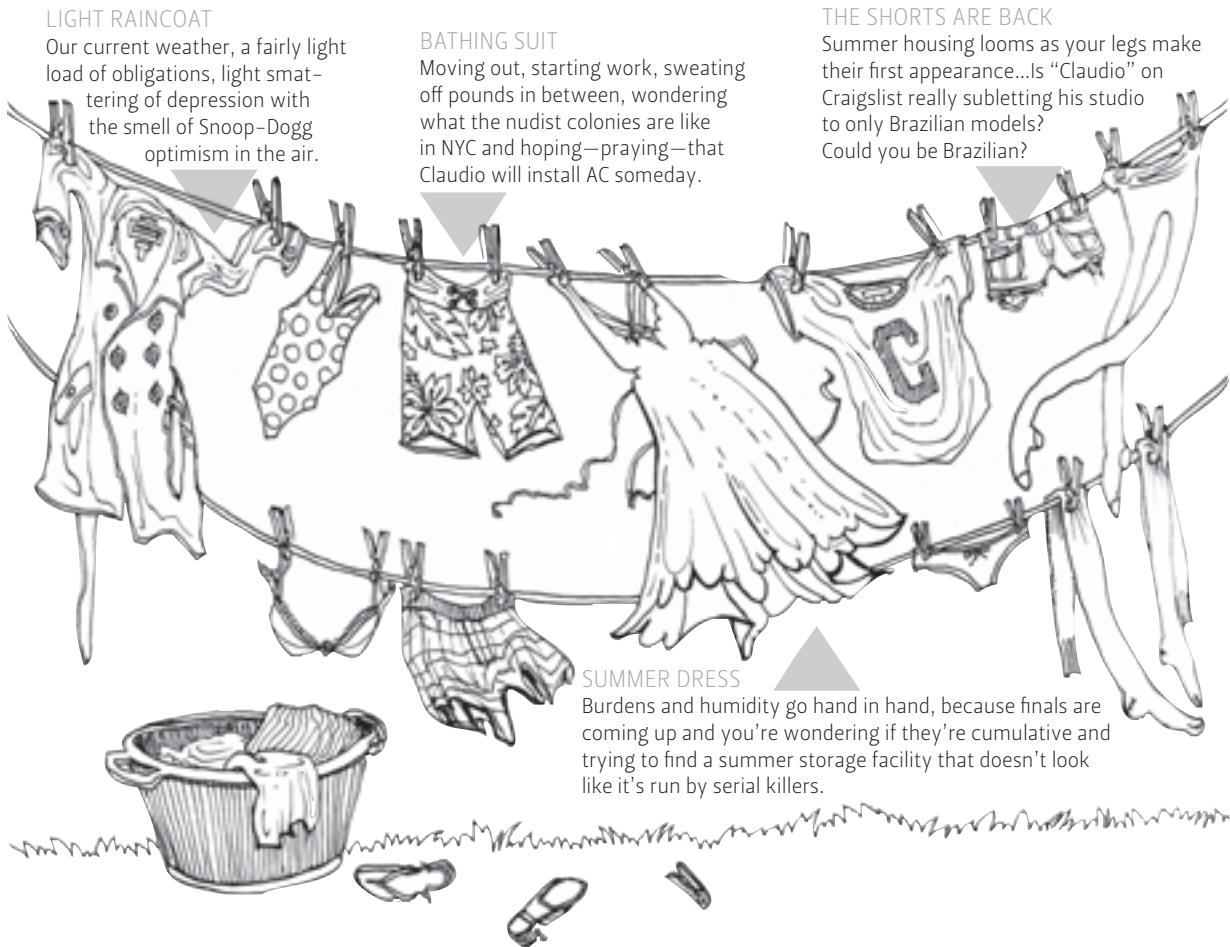
Thanks for your email and it is my gladness to hear from you. I am \_\_\_\_\_ Claudio and I am a \_\_\_\_\_  
(unexpected prefix) (career that involves animals)  
and part-time \_\_\_\_\_. I like \_\_\_\_\_ and have deep interest in \_\_\_\_\_. I respect every reli-  
(unexpected hobby of a sexual nature) (noun) (thrill-seeking sport)  
gion and love to hang around with people and I am definitely not a “trouble maker” and very \_\_\_\_\_ in na-  
(adjective)  
ture, I own the Apartment you are making inquiry on. Actually, I reside in the apartment now but I am leaving for the  
\_\_\_\_\_ soonest as possible. My apartment is still available for rent for \_\_\_\_\_ per month. It is fully  
(country you’ve only heard of in spy movies) (fee over \$100 x your age x 2)  
furnished with my pair of yellow hammocks and one half of a \_\_\_\_\_. Now, I am looking for a \_\_\_\_\_  
(furniture item) (positive adjective)  
and \_\_\_\_\_ person who is also 5’9” with big \_\_\_\_\_. I will solicit for your absolute maintenance of this  
(positive adjective) (body part)  
apartment and want you to treat it as your own. I want you to keep it \_\_\_\_\_ all the time so that I will be glad to  
(adjective)  
see it \_\_\_\_\_ when I come for a check up. I do that once in a while. I want to have trust in you as I always stand  
(adjective)  
by my words. Let me know how soon you are willing to move in.

Best fondness,  
Claudio

# IT’S GONNA GET HOT IN HERE

BY MARGARET BOYKIN  
ILLUSTRATION BY CINDY PAN

As temperatures climb and the semester speeds to a close, there are a lot of things to keep in mind. Here are some visual clues to help you keep track of your upcoming responsibilities.



# THE PROS AND CONS OF ONLINE DATING

BY MARGARET BOYKIN

As Zach Dyer observes in this week’s lead story, in our oh-so-isolated world, it’s sometimes easier to meet someone on the internet than when they’re walking down the street plugged into their iPhone. However, what’s easy isn’t always the best option, so we weighed your odds for success.

- +1 You can be anyone you want to be...
- 1 So can they.
- +2 They’re clearly excited about putting themselves out there and making the extra effort to find someone special!
- 1 In other words, they’re desperate.
- +2 Did you see that news item on the couple that met online? It was adorable!
- 5 Except they turned out to be siblings.

TOTAL SUM: -2

But then again, what romantic comedy ever starts with the odds in the protagonist’s favor? Good luck!

# Clown School

spending a semester at the second city in chicago

BY CHARLIE DINKIN

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHARLIE DINKIN

What do you get when you cross thirty unruly college students, five veteran writers and directors, and unlimited access to one of the greatest comedy theaters in the country? A semester at The Second City—where I am currently squandering my tuition in order to learn how to be a comic genius, guaranteed\* (\*no actual guarantee).

The Second City might be the most famous place you’ve never heard of. Dubbed the “Harvard of Improv,” its walls are practically crumbling under the weight of pictures of famous alumni, from John Belushi to Tina Fey (who, let me tell you, are not the easiest spectral audience to attempt your Fat-Natalie-Portman-Doing-Ballet impression in front of). However, having grown up in England with a diet of Fry and Laurie and *Monty Python*, and almost no interest in the distant cult of *Saturday Night Live*, it had never really registered on my comedy radar. That is, until this summer, when I traveled to Chicago to take my first ever improv class.

Improvised comedy, or “improv” as it is fondly known, is effectively the playing out of an actor’s worst nightmare: you are thrown onto an empty stage and expected to instantly create something cohesive, emotionally engaging, and, oh yeah—funny. The beautiful thing about improv is that, in theory, anyone with an imagination and a basic understanding of social relationships can do it, at any time, in any place—it’s everyman’s theater. The practical reality is that good improvisers work phenomenally hard to be able to make their work seem natural. But when it’s done right, it’s one of the most amazing things in the world. My favorite show in Chicago is called *Improvised Shakespeare*, where a troupe gets a suggestion for a title and “writes” a full Shakespeare show in an hour—using typical structures, plots, characters, and lots and lots of rhyming couplets. You haven’t seen anything until you’ve seen *The Return of Dr. Seuss* performed entirely in Seuss-themed Shakespearean verse, trust me.

So after exercising my own improv muscles for a week, I knew I couldn’t stop. I was hopeless and it was terrifying, but I’d never had so much fun. On my arrival back to Barnard, I called a few of my funniest and bravest friends and we started “Control Top,” an all-female improv group. I was also writing for Chowdah, and imagined myself to be a bit of a Dorothy Parker-esque wit, with a terrible haircut to match. As the semester progressed, I found myself trying to relate every part of my life to comedy—from papers (often with difficulty) to relationships (surprisingly easy). I stayed up all night writing scenes, and insisted my friends listened to hours of rambling stand-up routines. Just when my obsession with joke



Charlie Dinkin (far left), a Barnard junior, rehearses at The Second City

**AN AVERAGE DAY MIGHT INVOLVE MIMING THE BIRTH OF A BABY KANGAROO TO A SOUNDTRACK OF LADY GAGA; PERFORMING MY CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED SONNY AND CHER ACT, AND DISCUSSING — IN ANIMATED DETAIL - THE HISTORY OF THE POOP JOKE.**

structures was reaching the peak of lunacy—with an attempt to map out and categorize the comic beats of every single episode of *Seinfeld*—I found out that the Second City had admitted me to its “Comedy Studies” program for the next semester, and I figured I should probably give everyone else a break and go.

The theater itself puts on a “review style” show every night of the week: long and short sketches, single jokes, character pieces, improv sets, and songs. In my course, I study improv, sketch writing, acting, clowning, and comedy history and analysis. In real terms, this means an average day might involve miming the birth of a baby kangaroo to a soundtrack of Lady Gaga performing my critically acclaimed Sonny and Cher act (singing “I Got You Babe” while sitting on

a chair...it’s very postmodern), and discussing—in animated detail—the history of the poop joke. Sometimes I make a video, or write a song, or do more or less whatever the muses of comedy (and/or my awesomely talented teachers) tell me to do. In other words, I’m in heaven.

But while it’s often delicious, it isn’t all a piece of cake. Learning about comedy isn’t like learning about other things, because comedy is a social reflection on the world that comes from emotional engagement, not necessarily from reason. And at many points throughout the semester, I’ve had to check my “reasonable” mind at the stage door, which is scary in and of itself. But, as our teachers made clear on our very first day, the intention of the course is not to make us feel comfortable, but to prepare us to take risks: so, we’ve learned how to breathe properly, to maintain eye contact, and to use our emotions. We say yes to every suggestion we are given, and reward one idea with another. We produce mountains of material, develop and refine it, and instantly move on if it doesn’t work (gently referred to as “killing your babies”). We’re treated like professionals, but encouraged to embarrass ourselves whenever possible. We pursue beauty in our art, because it is important to us as human beings, and we have fun, every single day, because life considered through the lens of comedy is eternally flawed, and endlessly joyful.

So, maybe just for this semester, I’m doing what I love. And if that involves singing a passionate love song to Lifetime original movies or grossly over-sharing about the true nature of my love for Justin Bieber, so be it! You only live once; laugh as often as you possibly can. ●



# Soft-Core

do popular books have a place in the classroom?

BY KAITLIN PHILLIPS  
ILLUSTRATION BY LIZ LEE

It was 5:00 p.m. on a Thursday last semester—never a good time to be in class. English Professor William Sharpe, perhaps sensing this, began reminiscing about his days as an undergraduate at Columbia. It was the 1970s. Sharpe and friends (can we imagine him swapping the tweed for long hair?) were getting hyped up about a new seminar course. The idea was simple: they would spend the whole semester voraciously reading all the books referenced in the footnotes of “The Waste Land.” The goal was to understand the poem as Eliot himself did, or as closely as possible. Esoteric? Sure. Awesome? Absolutely. Except the expression on Sharpe’s face during this otherwise nostalgic monologue was rather withdrawn, even resigned. Sharpe sighed. There was no longer any interest in such a course. Students have changed.

Sharpe’s pessimism about academia, though mildly (if not overtly, depending on the degree to which you fancy yourself an intellectual) offensive, is not unsupported. You only have to take a cursory glance at a list of books in a recent article in the New York Review of Books, and you’ll get the idea. Titles include: “Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses,” “Higher Education? How Colleges Are Wasting Our Money

and Failing Our Kids—And What We Can Do About It,” “Crisis on Campus: A Bold Plan for Reforming Our Colleges and Universities.” The findings need no explanation—“rhetoric of crisis” nicely sums it up. Whether or not you agree with his conclusion, or the general hoopla over the failure of colleges to educate today’s youth, it signals an increasingly pervasive pedagogical mindset. At what point did the question of what students should be taught merge, rather inextricably, with the extent to which they “liked” the subject matter?

Not everyone blames the students for their taste. In 2009, The American Scholar published a rather controversial piece by Emory University English Professor William M. Chace entitled “The Decline of the English Department.” His opening line: “During the last four decades, a well-publicized shift in what undergraduate students prefer to study has taken place in American higher education.” Yet Chace, rather wildly, places the blame not on the poor, befuddled Shakespeare-hater. Instead, it is the fault of the university. It is his feeling that departments fail to provide a framework in which students will appreciate the Western canon. Professors have fallen into a trap: “[substituting] for the books themselves a scattered array of secondary considerations (identity studies, abstruse theory, sexuality, film and popular culture).” To Chace, the books stand for themselves, everything else just gets in the way,

## AT WHAT POINT DID THE QUESTION OF WHAT STUDENTS SHOULD BE TAUGHT MERGE, RATHER INEXTRICABLY, WITH THE EXTENT TO WHICH THEY “LIKED” THE SUBJECT MATTER?

confusing students and thus alienating them.

I ducked into the office hours of English Professor Rachel Adams to talk about the relative value of substituting “core” works for more contemporary, potentially more interesting (or at least hip), works. I assumed Adams, a petite, likable woman who occasionally brings her young son to class, saw the potential in “secondary considerations,” given her extensive work on disabilities studies. But Adams sees both sides. While supplementary materials can “repackage academics in lively and compelling ways,” they often “gloss over or oversimplify complex debates in order to make a point.” In other words, the Malcolm Gladwell problem: if you take academic information, package it up in the vernacular, and sell it to people—albeit in The New Yorker—is it still valuable? The difference is a matter of relative scholarship. Adams says that the general understanding is that “journalists lack the desire to grapple with complexity.” But then she gives a bit more: it is considered an, “insult when someone comes up for tenure and the comments are that they’ve just been writing journalism.”

The question of whether or not students “like” a work, though it spills into the debate and perhaps influences a professor or two to throw us a bone, is not so important. Adams argues for a healthy mix. English major Ismail Muhammad, a senior in CC and also in Sharpe’s seminar, spoke to me about his experiences in the department. He was quick to point out that academic materials aside, it all tends to come down to the professor’s ability to illuminate the text, whether one of scholarship or otherwise. In his mind “not every professor brings the same knowledge or talent for teaching to the classroom, especially in seminars,” this can hurt the class, no matter what subject or syllabus. “[I] can’t say that I’ve received the best education here,” he says. “I can count on one hand the number of professors that have actually taught me something or altered the way I think about literature.”

The question may not be whether or not to read Olson’s *Call Me Ishmael* or *Moby-Dick*, but rather who’s teaching it. As Professor Michael Golston pointed out to me, “one doesn’t need the Core in order to read and understand literature, but knowing the Core can’t hurt.” ●

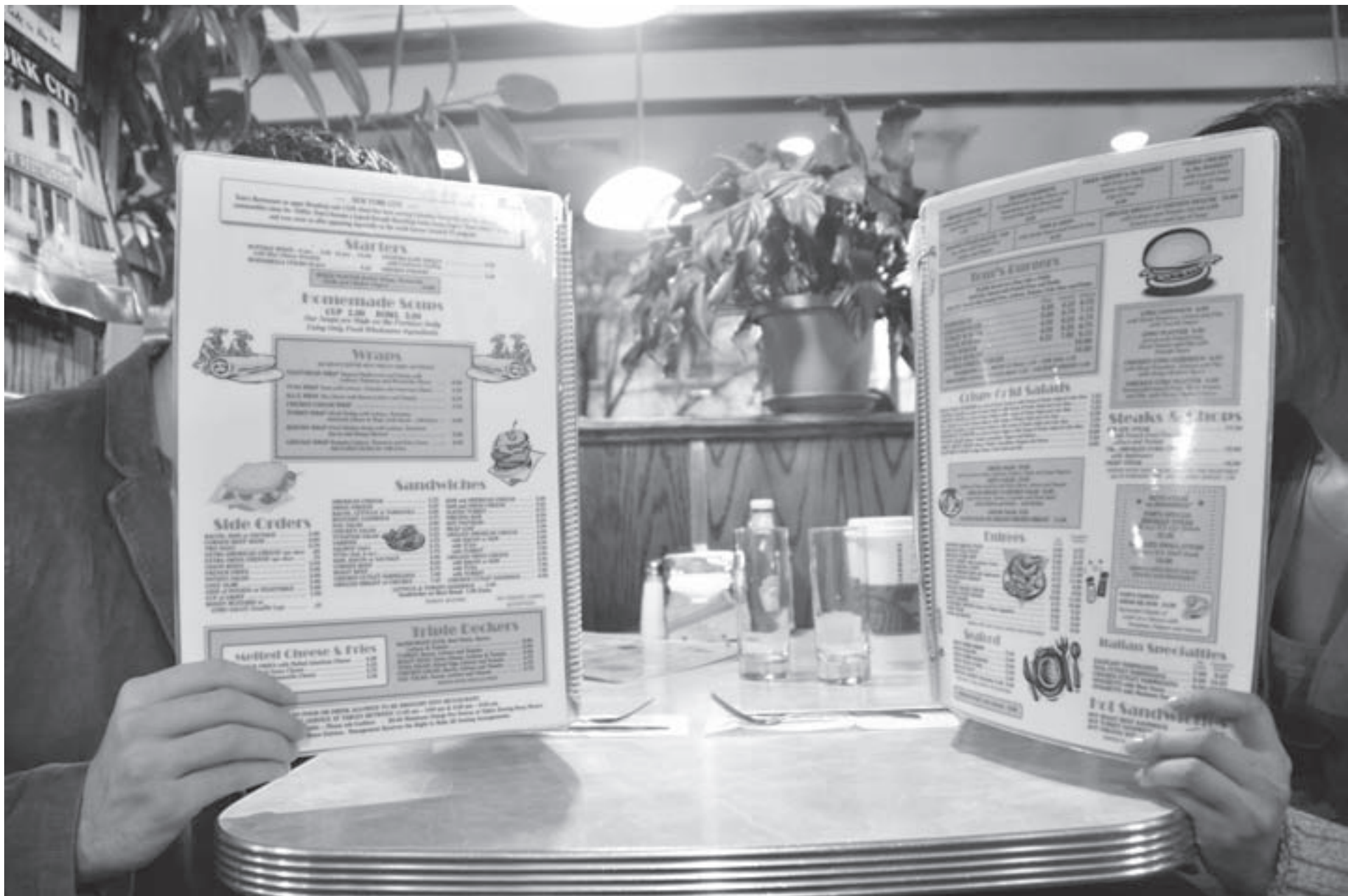


# THE DAYS ON CAMPUS SCHEME

BY CINDY PAN







# HOW TO FIND A DATE IN 10 DAYS

browsing for love on five dating sites

*by Zach Dyer*

*photos by Anthony Clay*

“**W**here do you want to eat?” my date asked me, looking across 9th Ave. “Doesn’t matter to me. Whatever you want,” I replied, hands deep in my pockets, glancing at all the restaurants, avoiding any eye contact for fear of revealing just how nervous I was to be on a date with someone I met online.

I’ve always been rather skeptical of online dating. After all, the most highly publicized tales of online dating have ended in tragedy—murder, abduction, stalking, moving to the Midwest upon finding “the one” only to move back home with one too many facial tattoos. The stories you hear from your lonely aunt at family gatherings or on the 11 o’clock news. As I spent hours entering absurd amounts of personal information on five different dating sites and meandering through all sorts of personality quizzes and maps that would supposedly produce optimized “matches,” it’s fair to say that I wasn’t expecting much more than some interesting stories to tell my friends and family, and the chance to write off online dating for good.

That said, when I started this process, I tried to approach it earnestly. All the information on my profiles is entirely true and as honest as possible. Most importantly, I didn’t look for “good material,” but rather for people whose profiles genuinely interested me, and with whom I would consider going on multiple dates. Besides striving for sincerity, I set ground rules for myself to make this as real an experience as possible: I couldn’t initiate contact—I could only message people who messaged me or visited my profile first—and I had to inform them that I went into this for the sake of writing an article before planning a second date.

#### Taking the Plunge

After about a week of frequent web-courting on OkCupid with a 27-year-old with a peculiar fondness for the winky emoticon, he gave me his cell number with the instructions, “txt me once you are sure I’m not a serial killer ;).” With a certain suppression of nervousness, I did. From what I garnered from our brief exchanges about the weather in NYC, my studies, and his work, he was someone I could get along with and maybe want to see more of, so I made plans for my first in-person date at a Hell’s Kitchen restaurant.

Walking the few blocks from the subway stop to where we were supposed to meet, I couldn’t help but feel more anxious than anticipatory. Would he like me? Would I like him? If I didn’t like him would I have to sit there for hours listening to him, talk about whatever family history I would pretend to be interested in?

As I approached the cross-street, I began scanning faces, hoping my date resembled the pictures on his profile, which had definitely influenced my decision to meet. When I spotted my date, I went up to shake his hand and was immediately struck with how awkward it was to introduce yourself to someone who already knew who you were, where you go to school, your political leanings, and whatever other random tidbits you had put on your profile.

“How about that Mexican place?” he said, pointing across the street and checking my reaction.

“Sure,” I responded, not caring where we ended up eating, as long as there were enough other people around that if he turned out to be the Long Island Ripper, there would be plenty of witnesses. We stopped at the Mexican restaurant and, while the margarita special was incredibly appealing at that moment, it was too crowded to expect a decent conversation. We went back across the street to a mostly empty Thai place, and began an hour or so of clumsy anecdotes about school, jobs, family, and living situations punctuated by brief uncomfortable silences where we both raced to find more questions or remember a point from the other’s profiles.

The topic of online dating was broached several times, adding to an ungainly conversation. My date told me that I looked different from my profile picture, which left me feeling slightly uncomfortable and thinking, “Well, then I must look worse in real life, otherwise he wouldn’t bring it up, right?” At this point, I started sitting up straighter, hoping to look more like my online representation of myself. I also regretted brushing off my friends’ suggestion to wear the exact outfit I was wearing in my profile picture, if only for consistency’s sake.

Eventually things became more comfortable and the food came, replacing silences and fishing for new topics with chewing. It turned out we actually had a lot in common, and I started wondering, “Did the site point us toward each other somehow? Did I say somewhere that I was a writer and it brought up my profile on another writer’s page?” We continued to sit in the restaurant for over an hour, even after we finished our beers and paid the bill (he paid, smoothly picking up the bill and paying before I could even protest), talking sincerely about everything from poetry to life after graduation. All the while, I was clutching my water glass and taking gulps at even the slightest pause, allowing the waitress to refill it no less than a dozen times, to the end that I suddenly realized I had to use the bathroom in order to avoid a serious pee-pee dance.

## I STARTED SITTING UP STRAIGHTER, HOPING TO LOOK MORE LIKE THE ONLINE REPRESENTATION OF MYSELF.

After a while, I expressed my need to get back to campus and he walked me to the train station, we each mentioned our interest in a second date, and, as we said goodbye, I rapidly debated the appropriateness of various levels of physical contact and committed to a heartfelt smile, a thank you, and darted down the stairs to the 1 train without as much as a handshake, preferring to err on the side of caution when it came to touching someone I had met only a few hours earlier, only to realize a few seconds too late that he had appeared to lean in for a hug just as I turned away.

Immediately I started replaying the date over in my head, wondering what he actually thought of me. Was I everything my profile claimed? One of the most difficult facets of the experience to come to terms with was realizing just how much

### OKCUPID

#### The six things I could never do without:

Google Reader  
Burgers  
WP7  
Music  
Leatherman  
Family

### PLENTYOFF

As a senior about college and looking for a program, I am a very thinking individual—doors—camping, hiking. I write a lot as one of the best yourself. I love music in the city a lot looking for new bands am looking for someone as I am to see where

information I had put forward. As I was going through some of the endless questions OkCupid uses to suggest potential matches, I realized that I had placed myself in a surprisingly exposed and vulnerable position. Not because of the reasons you always hear (“You never know who is out there,” “Watch out for stalkers,” “What about potential employers,” “Identity theft!” etc.), but because I knew what the information was there for—for evaluation by complete strangers, for other users to look at and decide whether or not I was worth pursuing, normal enough to message, or too strange, dumb, or ugly to bother with.

With every click ranking the importance of certain questions, I paused momentarily to think about what each said about me, and what people would think. Does it matter if I think it’s important to have strong political opinions or that I’d be willing to give a “most days” teeth brusher a chance? Do people actually care about or consider these preferences?

#### Second Shot

While I left my first date wondering about the value of this whole concept, I was already making plans for my second. Having seen the difficulties and level of commitment involved in a whole dinner-date, and less sure of my interest in this person, I made plans to get coffee with a dancer at NYU who I met on DateMySchool.

The pre-date online banter with the dancer was more typical than with my first date. We joked about student life, and she mentioned a terrible date she had just been on and I offered to clean her date palate, so to speak, at which point she gave me her number and we continued texting until we found a time that worked for us both.

Interestingly, while my interactions with her prior to our in-person meet-up suggested that we’d get along and be very compatible, that wasn’t exactly the case. Unlike the first date’s punctuations of awkward silence, one or the other of us was talking through the entirety of this date. But instead of interesting conversation, it seemed



# CH'S PROFILES

## ISH:

to graduate from  
g toward a grad  
ry forward—  
. I love the out-  
-shing, kayaking,  
and see writing  
ways to express  
sic—I go to con-  
ot and am always  
nds to try out. I  
neone as driven  
re it goes.

## JDATE:

I am a fun-loving,  
driven individual  
who is looking  
to make a posi-  
tive impact on the  
world around me.  
I am looking for  
someone who  
might be a partner  
in that goal, but  
nothing all too se-  
rious right now.

## DATE MY SCHOOL:

**Things I DON'T Like  
Such As Politicians,  
Assignments, etc:**  
I can't stand  
complainers and  
hypocrites. I re-  
spect anyone with  
a political opinion,  
though I may likely  
think it's wrong.

## AFFAIR MATCH:

Doesn't have  
a bio—it's  
all pics and  
stats. Like  
you're pick-  
ing out a  
racehorse.

that she was a frequenter of online-driven coffee dates with a list of predetermined questions. While I politely answered each one, she silently nodded and flashed a courteous smile whenever I said something intended to be funny. "What was growing up in Massachusetts like? What was high school like? Have you had any long-term relationships? Did you always want to go to Columbia?" She asked one right after the other, like a Date-MySchool fact-checker.

On every date, it was hard to distinguish exactly what my date had garnered from my profile or had just guessed. It's important to note that filling out a single profile is very different from filling out five. In one night, I created profiles on OkCupid, PlentyOfFish, DateMySchool, JDate, and the oh-so-shady AffairMatch (lots of scantily clad "married women" and a whole section dedicated to "webcams"). Each has its own setup, methods of matching, poorly thought out interface, and awkward third-party flirtation methods.

It's a slightly bewildering process to reiterate your traits over and over, following the vague instructions of a service with the lofty promise of potential love (or sex). OkCupid's guidelines of "my self-summary," "what I'm doing with my life," "what I'm really good at," and "the first thing people usually notice about me," are fairly different from PlentyOfFish's "Talk about your hobbies. Talk about your goals/aspirations. Talk about yourself and what makes you unique. Your taste in music." Each of the five sites seemed to represent a slightly different version of myself.

Each site also offers some method of matching up users. This is usually the feature they advertise to get you to fill out a profile in the first place—"Our unique personality test is proven to blah, blah—." OkCupid has its seemingly infinite number of questions to answer and rank by importance; JDate uses your description of yourself as a child through about a hundred multiple choice questions to assign a color that will supposedly lead you to similar users; PlentyOfFish has a personality test that assigns a certain type

of tropical fish upon completion that it may or may not actually use for anything. Each system is uniquely lengthy and arbitrary—does it really matter if I think I was more controlling as a child than I was stubborn, whiny, or mean-spirited, or that I prefer dogs to cats? I was left wondering if I was more a tuna than a large-mouth bass because I prefer that my partner doesn't smoke.

The results were equally baffling. PlentyOfFish used some algorithm that gave my best match a "Predicted Ideal Match Score of .21588." She happened to be a single mom from Jersey looking for an "intimate encounter." OkCupid's highest matches were all 83 percent (I guess no one could ever fully love me...whatever), and yet they continued to suggest sub-60 percent matches. JDate's color system was a little confusing, as not everyone displayed their color, and some users used the colors to suggest how to approach them.

The real gems were the additional tools on each site. A feature on OkCupid called "Quickmatch" turns online dating into a game, where you rapidly bring up profile after profile and rate each out of five stars. And if that person had also played Quickmatch and rated your profile with four or five stars, it notified you with a message in your inbox. This feature connected me with my first date.

Then there were the stranger features. Both OkCupid and PlentyOfFish allow you to gain points based on how much you frequent the site that can be used to send other users gift icons to display on their profiles a la Facebook. OkCupid let users "recommend a friend" for others to date, while PlentyOfFish offered a "relationship needs test," claiming that "it will tell you all the ways you mess up in relationships & dates and what you can do about it." But best of all was JDate's flirting tool. While each site had some nonverbal flirtation method, JDate provided prepackaged lines to use such as, "I like you lox and lox," and, my personal favorite, "You are my favorite of the un-chosen chosen people." With lines like those, no wonder my JDate profile proudly displayed my religion as "Willing to convert!"



**I WAS CLUTCHING MY WATER  
GLASS AND TAKING GULPS AT  
EVEN THE SLIGHTEST PAUSE.**

Despite all of these match-making devices, it was very clear that it wasn't any sort of percentage or self-summary that drives others to your page; rather, it is your picture. OkCupid's Quickmatch game displays all of the user's photos prominently to rate—in the world of online dating, just like in the real world, it seems it's physical attraction doing the heavy lifting as far as matching up goes, regardless of what the sites advertise.

In spite of the job-interview-like dynamic of date number two, the dancer was nice, and, from what she told me, talented, so I found no reason to end the date early (I had devised several methods of escape before the first date, but luckily never had to use any).

At the end, we conveyed our appreciation for each other's company, but no plans for a second date were mentioned. More prepared this time, I stuck out my hand as a final goodbye, but, by the time it was clear what I was trying to do, she had already started turning and I was left pretending I had not just gone for a handshake, as I imagined onlookers appraising my inability to determine the appropriate action when parting ways.

Despite the awkwardness of going on internet-mediated blind dates, many of the questions that make dating so difficult in an offline setting were nullified. Before you ever ask for a number or sit down in a coffee shop, you know that the person is looking for someone, his or her sexuality, and whether or not he or she is a Republican—you know, all the important questions to a Columbian on the prowl. What's more, all the sites pander to our generation's growing social ineptitude; nearly all the conversations I had on OkCupid resulted from us both seeing that we had passively rated each other four or five stars. And displaying your interest in another user without having to use words doesn't stop there—DateMySchool lets you “like” other users like some two-bit Facebook status, and you can add users to your favorites on PlentyOfFish, like choosing a recipe for glazed salmon. While we increasingly choose to communicate passively, through text message and Gchat, online dating is there to promote the search for love, whether it's while pretending to listen to your monotonous professor or waiting for the train on one of many mobile apps.

## WITH LINES LIKE THOSE, NO WONDER MY JDATE PROFILE PROUDLY DISPLAYED MY RELIGION AS “WILLING TO CONVERT!”

### Third Time's the Charm

Quite possibly the most mystifying stage of the online dating process is the in-between period, where two people acknowledge their interest in one another and begin sending messages back and forth, hoping to lead to an in-person date—or as I called it with my friends, “web-courting.” For most people, this period is by-and-large a screening process that starts with the very first message. For example, one message I received read, “Hey, Joseph here. Wanted to see if you were interested in chatting sometime. How about it cutie? Tell me



about yourself a bit...” at which point I decided I could never sit through an entire dinner with anyone who seriously uses the word cutie. But assuming most messages aren't as forward as Joseph's, the niceties begin: “Where are you from? Do you like the city? How do you like your school?” Until each person is sufficiently sure that the other isn't a creepster or pervert. Then, an offer (or request) of trust, by asking for the person's full name, number, or best of all, a link to his or her Facebook profile.

My third and final date was with someone I thought I had scared away early on, with whom I had plans to go to a museum earlier in the week, but who canceled the night before because he was sick. Having had my very first planned online-fostered date fall through the night before via text left me assuming I had done something wrong, that I had ignored some unspoken online dating rule. But as it turned out, he may have actually been sick.

Feeling older and wiser after my first two dates, I coordinated the third with the now-recovered architecture student. I again made plans for coffee, hopeful that I'd want to spend more than a single coffee amount of time with this person, I suggested Columbus Circle as a meeting point, with the potential to go elsewhere.

Whether it was because I had already made it through two dates that week, or because I just felt more comfortable with this person, the clumsiness of the prior dates was entirely absent. Conversation moved freely, and I was really enjoying myself—not that I didn't enjoy the other dates, but I was somewhat preoccupied with nervousness or unease. What really struck me about the third date is that the person brought up something very specific about my profile he had seen and liked, which to me was impressive considering I had nearly forgotten what I had written in the first place.

It was the first time I felt like the person was genuinely interested in getting to know me, without an end goal or pressure to think past just enjoying ourselves having coffee. Once we were tired of Starbucks, we took a walk through Central Park, talking at length about our families, and when it got to the point that we needed to get back to our respective schools, for the first time I didn't feel relieved for the date to be over.

As we were saying goodbye, I again prepared myself for what would undoubtedly be an awkward

exchange and, before I knew it, we hugged briefly, said goodbye, and left in opposite directions.

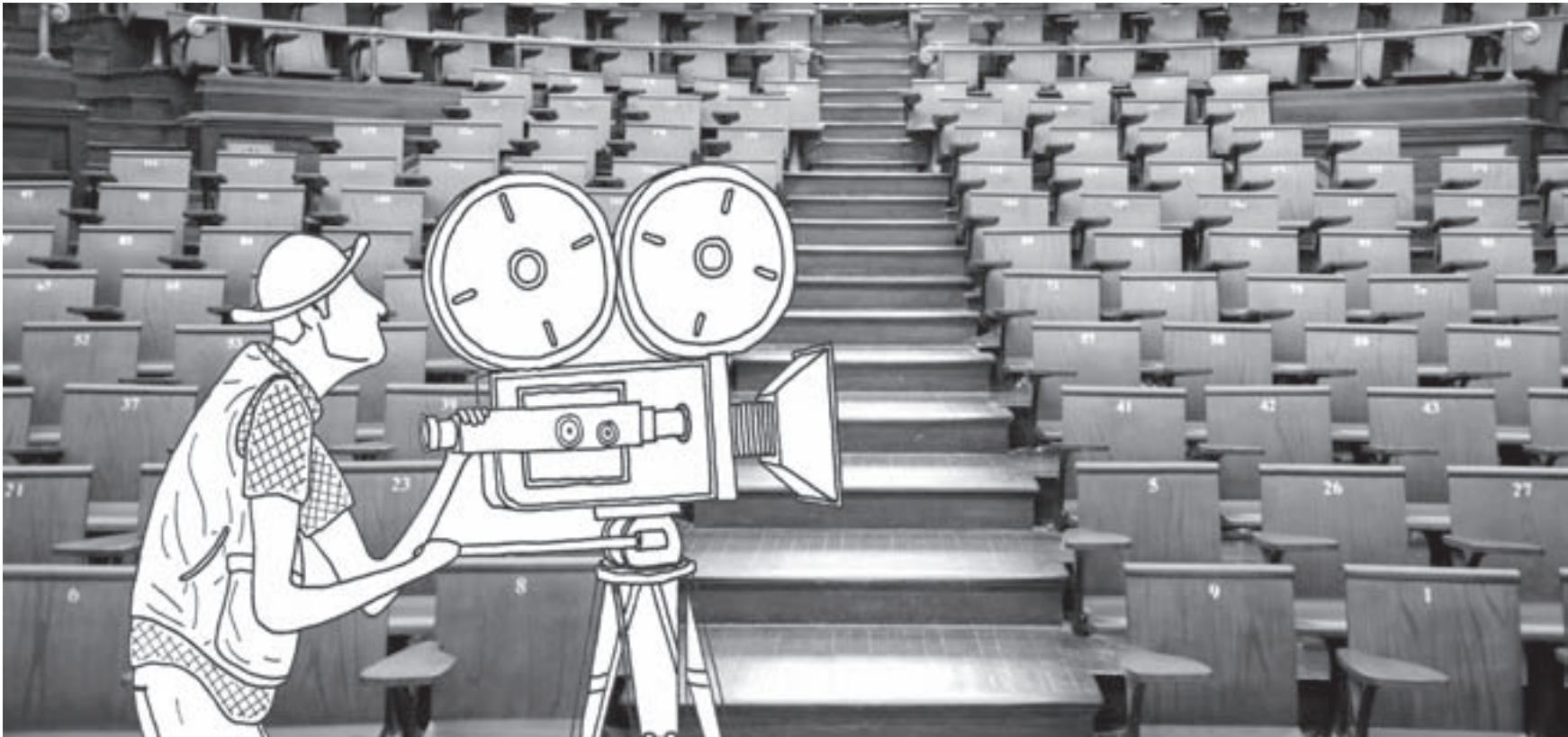
I went into this with the personal challenge of, in less than two weeks, finding one person who, after going on one date, I would definitely want to see again, and, while I was fairly certain at the beginning that this wouldn't happen, I am pleasantly surprised to say that it did.

While I've known plenty of people who have met their boyfriends or girlfriends through online dating sites, until going through this process, I always turned a dubious eye toward the whole scene, if you can call it that. Largely because I think most people are still fairly negative towards the concept of online dating, that, somehow, most people find it less questionable to meet someone in a bar than on a dating site.

But these sites offer us unique ways to meet people we wouldn't otherwise in a city that is brimming with interesting, unique individuals. When my first date asked why I chose to go out with him in particular, I explained, “Most of the people who have messaged me are college students. I can walk out my front door and talk to thousands of college students. ... I wanted to see what else was out there.” And while my next two dates were both college students, they were both kinds of people I hadn't met at Columbia, people I thought would be refreshing to be around—and they were.

A friend explained to me one day as I was getting ready for a date why she thinks she could never be in a relationship that started online, that she'd “always wonder what they were doing on there in the first place. Why did they need to find someone online?” At the time I understood her point, but now I can't help think of what Woody Allen wrote in his most recent box-office flop, *Whatever Works*: “Whatever love you can get and give, whatever happiness you can filch or provide, every temporary measure of grace, whatever works.” Which is honestly a little too sappy in my opinion—after all, we're college students, we're (hopefully) not at the stage of our lives that we need love or dating or a relationship to give our lives any additional meaning. As far as I'm concerned, until I graduate and get a job or something, I'm happy living a meaningless existence. But if that's what you're looking for, if that's what you need, why not look online? ●





# Calling Cut at Columbia

behind the scenes of cu on-screen

BY ELIZA ROSEN  
GRAPHIC BY COLIN SULLIVAN

Running into Blair and Serena fighting on the way to lunch. Finding your chemistry classroom while watching *Ghostbusters* or *Spider-Man*. Watching Joseph Gordon-Levitt weave through staged traffic on a shut-down Broadway. Experiences like these are part of what makes Columbia unique. Even though Morningside Heights doesn't seem like a typically picturesque setting for a movie, filming on or around the Columbia campus has been frequent over the last twenty years. According to [imdb.com](http://imdb.com), the university has been the setting for over thirty-eight films and various television shows, ranging from award-winners like Woody Allen's *Hannah and Her Sisters* to flops like the Olsen twins' *New York Minute*. 309 Havemeyer Hall reigns as the most filmed classroom in the country due to its architecture. But what goes into getting these productions to campus?

To gain filming access to Columbia's campus, a production company needs to go through University Events Management. They are required to fill out a lengthy application with questions chosen to give the University a sense of the production's impact on campus; for example, if there would be any actors that would attract a large crowd.

University Events Management also checks whether filming would disrupt or conflict with any of the activities or events housed in the relevant buildings. According to Leonard Cox, Assis-

tant Vice President of Student and Administrative Services, and a filming coordinator for University Events Management, whether a production can film on campus is mainly determined by "if it would disrupt our core mission of learning, research and teaching."

Productions also need to be approved by the University General Council. The council vets the production for specific content, such as excessive violence. Additionally, "If it is a film that has nothing to do with the University, then we would recommend to the studio not to use Columbia University logo, flags or any other indicators," says Cox.

The university receives three applications per week on average, and rejects most of them, except for those falling in a window of time between the middle of June and early August. But if the university does approve the production, it enters into a contract with the company outlining the correct treatment of university grounds.

Cox says that the producers of the popular TV series *Gossip Girl* had approached him several times to shoot scenes on-campus. Permission couldn't be granted because, being a television series, the production would have return throughout the school year, which would have caused too much disruption. Movies are easier to schedule because they shoot for a shorter period of time and typically don't need to return.

However, a production company is allowed to film outside of Columbia's gates, without fees or applications. This is because the university does not have jurisdiction outside of campus. This allows for *Gossip Girl* to continue to film around

## THE UNIVERSITY RECEIVES THREE APPLICATIONS PER WEEK, ON AVERAGE.

Morningside Heights, particularly at the Union Theological Seminary.

Filming on campus costs around \$1,500 per hour for movies, and \$1,200 per hour for TV series and commercials. This location fee pays for the usage of Columbia facilities, in addition to a university electrician, custodian and grounds-keeper on standby. Extra money left over from these fees goes into a fund to alleviate costs for students to rent audio-visual equipment in Le-rner. Additionally, the production company must pay for a \$2 million dollar insurance policy. This policy is taken out to protect the University in the event of an accident with the production or the campus during filming. The most recent filming on campus was the Sony Pictures movie *Premium Rush*, over summer break. Starring former GS student Joseph Gordon-Levitt, the movie shot on campus for five days. The production ran very smoothly, says Cox, "but there is the occasional person who gets a little out of sorts on a hot August day having to wait a few minutes for the all clear signal. This frustration is typical of most productions, especially in New York City." Though unfortunately for any students staying on campus this summer, Cox says, "At this time there are no productions, large or small, planned for the summer months." ●



# The Price of Spontaneity

local company gives customers the thrill of surprise

BY KAVITHA SURANA  
ILLUSTRATION BY JIIN CHOI

It's 9 p.m. on a Thursday and I'm desperately struggling to hang onto a wall. My left leg flails to make contact with something stable, and I hope against hope that no one is watching my ungainly spectacle. The palms of my clamped hands are cracking with the pressure of hanging on, and I fall to back to the ground with a resounding thud. As I dust myself off, glaring at the insurmountable wall in front of me, a hand taps me on the shoulder. "You look confused," a voice says.

"More like surprised," I want to correct him.

But it's a surprise that I had asked for. Surprise Industries, founded in 2008 by young New Yorkers Tania Luna, Kat Dudina, and Maya Gilbert, specializes in orchestrating large-scale adventures and corporate team-building experiences for \$75 per person, and shorter "mini-surprises" for \$25.

For bigger projects, the \$75-and-up kind, the Surprise Industries team uses a questionnaire to delve into the interests and personalities of its clients. Participants can request date nights, bachelorette parties, family reunions,

or anything else that tickles their fancy. "Mini-surprises," like the one I experienced, are less personalized. The client simply lists any allergies or disabilities and shows up at a designated location for an hour-long surprise.

My adventure began with cryptic email instructions. "The time has come to reveal your surprise address," the email read, giving directions to arrive at my surprise destination—but warning not to Google the location.

There was one clue: "Get a grip."

Though I'd never tried it before, rock climbing wasn't exactly my idea of a fun evening out. In the end, I found it somewhat reminiscent of the torture of 7th grade gym class. Still, both the wild guessing game I played before arriving at my location and the spontaneity of trying out something that I'd never do on my own struck a chord. Caught in the never-ending routine of school weeks, I hadn't had the time to be in novel situations. Experiencing this discomfort awakened me to my potential. When I finally slapped the top of the bouldering wall, I felt a small thrill of victory.

After my experience, I called up Luna to get some insight into the science of surprise—and learn just what makes her team of 14 Agents of

Surprise tick. She admitted that my interest in experiencing a mini-surprise was unusual. "Most of the time, especially if people want to write about Surprise Industries, they don't want to go on their own surprise," she told me. "People have different tolerance levels for novelty and lack of certainty—the anticipation can be a little bit of an intense experience."

**"RESEARCH HAS SHOWN THAT MOMENTS OF ANTICIPATION, NOT KNOWING WHAT TO EXPECT, ARE REALLY LINKED TO HAPPINESS, ENERGY, AND CONNECTING WITH THE PEOPLE THAT YOU ARE WITH. IT ALLOWS YOU TO BE IN THE MOMENT."**



But it's exactly that intensity that Luna encourages cultivating. Along with her co-founders Dudina and Gilbert, she hopes that Surprise Industries can be a gateway for people to inject a little variety into their routine, or confront unknown situations more readily. Before starting their company, the three self-described "experience connoisseurs," compulsively kept lists of activities and experiences they wanted to try out around the city, until one day a light bulb went off.

"Originally we wanted to call it GoLearn-Something.com," says Luna. "People told us that sounded awful! We didn't get it, because we love learning!"

Luna's other jobs, besides "Agent of Surprise," include start-up consultant and psychology instructor. Her background fed into conceiving the philosophy behind the business venture. "I'm really passionate about the psychology of surprise," says Luna. "For the most part we live

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our lives with a lot of preconceived notions and plans ... research has shown that moments of anticipation, not knowing what to expect, are really linked to happiness, energy, and connecting with the people that you are with. It allows you to be in the moment."

People schedule surprises for different reasons—to refuel relationships or as team building activities. "For some companies it's perfect because they don't even have to plan anything, and since no one knows what the surprise is, everyone from the boss to an intern is in the same boat," says Luna. A surprise, it seems, is better shared, a kind of bonding experience starting with the anticipation and continuing as everyone steps out of their comfort zones.

Luna was maddeningly secretive about other experiences available besides my rock-climbing adventure. "Once they are written about, we have to retire them," she says. "In fact, it's hard to figure out how to promote a surprise business because we can't give anything away." Still, she says that each surprise is "immersive" in some way. She described a high-budget example that the company was putting together that will include racing helicopters to a private island for a day. A new experience in the works called "Blow Your

Mind" will involve an entire week of completely immersive experiences, involving the client's "home turf" and blurring the lines between reality and surprise.

But not everyone is sure that surprise experiences are for them. While I didn't bat an eye at testing a freely offered "mini-surprise," many Columbia students would hesitate before shelling out \$25. "I think for a college student on a budget, it's a big gamble: what if what they give you is something you wouldn't enjoy, or you thought you could spend your money doing something you enjoy more?" says Michael Rady, a sophomore in CC. "I find a certain entertainment in researching what would be fun, where to go, what would be a good place to spend your money," he says. "I feel like the best person that can determine how I would have fun would be me."

Frank Amaniera, a senior in CC, feels similarly: "[I want] a sense of ownership in my experiences. I want to be able to be an agent in its birth. I'm very calculated and I like to know what's going on. I like everything pretty transparent," he says.

"It really depends on the person," says Rady. "I have friends that would be really into signing up for this service. Some people just aren't into the whole planning out and doing a day excursion around the city or planning something different to do."

On the other hand, Luna argues that despite the wealth of information on services available online "you never really know what you're getting." Further, according to Luna, "research shows that too many options make choices less satisfying. A lot of people get it right away, for other people, they really have to get comfortable with that idea. Gaining peoples' trust is hard."

While most Columbians might not buy into the concept of Surprise Industries, I'm not sure I agree with them. Did I learn anything concrete from randomly going rock climbing on a school night? Not really, except to confirm my vague suspicion that I'm not a "rock-climbing type of person." But I did appreciate being in a new place doing a random activity with random people. I liked the spontaneity and appreciated the potential for growth that came with it. For students who don't typically go out of their way to put themselves in unstable conditions, like studying abroad or approaching unfamiliar people, Surprise Industries could provide a valuable kick-start to promote jumping outside of their comfort zone—an important skill to develop as students enter the job market, where being proactive is prized. "There are things that we don't really go after in our lives, we play it safe," says Luna. "But the times we feel most passionate and excited about life are those moments of uncertainty and novelty." ●



# Bright Lights

bringing hollywood to  
broadway, and broadway  
to columbia students

BY LIANA GERGELY

ILLUSTRATION BY CINDY PAN

*School of the Arts professor Gregory Mosher's newest directorial work, That Championship Season, brings the allure of Hollywood to the Broadway stage: the revival of the 1972 play features actors Chris Noth and Kiefer Sutherland. A Tony Award-winning director and producer of more than 200 shows, Mosher also pioneered the Arts Initiative at Columbia, and continues to teach. Mosher sat down with The Eye to discuss celebrity actors, being Juilliard's first directing student, and how the art of theater continues to reinvent itself.*

**For *That Championship Season* you worked with some A-list actors. What was it like working with Chris Noth, from *Sex and the City*, and Kiefer Sutherland, from *24*? Has having such high-profile actors affected your production, in terms of publicity?**

Chris is a wonderful actor, and the character he plays, Phil Romano, fits him like a glove. Kiefer is extraordinarily talented and skilled, and he has as strong a work ethic as anyone I've ever worked with. He's also probably the single most gracious actor I've ever worked with. Jason Patric, son of the playwright Jason Miller, both gives a fine performance and has been, as the executor for the play, a wonderful partner. Jim Gaffigan, who appears in a play for the first time in this production, more than holds his own. And Brian Cox is just one of the best actors in the English language.

**Even before the production of *That Championship Season*, you were well known for working with many Hollywood actors like Alec Baldwin and Scarlett Johansson. How does a Broadway actor differ from a Hollywood actor?**

I think acting is acting. I used to think film and theater were like soccer and football, but now I think it's like swimming in a pool and swimming in the ocean. Same skills, different environment. Your job as director, if you have an actor who has primarily worked in film, is to help him or her adapt to the salt or fresh water. Use your body, use your eyes. You move, or the camera moves. Alec, of course, was a stage actor before he did film and TV. Likewise Kiefer and Chris, Scarlett came from film, and Jim Gaffigan comes from stand up.

**What was it like being the first directing student at Juilliard?**

I enjoyed the almost militaristic rigor of the

program, after mostly wasting my years in college. And I was so lucky to find among my classmates such wonderful actors as William Hurt, Christine Baranski, Frances Conroy, Robin Williams, and the wonderful Chris Reeve. I learned a lot from them. I dropped out in my third year, but it was just time to go play in the big bad world.

## I DROPPED OUT IN MY THIRD YEAR, BUT IT WAS JUST TIME TO GO PLAY IN THE BIG BAD WORLD.

**What was your time working as the director of the Lincoln Center Theater like?**

Lincoln Center was crazy! It hadn't put on more than a few plays in the four years before I came, and the likelihood of failing was pretty high. We found a way to make the theater about the artists and the audience, not the administration, and then we got lucky with some fine plays, writers, and actors.

**What are the main differences in working off-Broadway and on Broadway?**

Magnificent theater can happen in a fancy Broadway or an unheated garage. You can have an extravagant set or a bare stage and simple props. I spent most of my career in small, often make-shift spaces, and loved it. The lesson, over and over, is that the venue, the price point, the extent of the physical production, and the pay scale all matter far less than the story you're telling, and the commit-

ment, imagination, and skill you bring to the work. Eventually, of course, you hope to make a living at it, but the trick is to hold on to the sense of adventure you had as a young person. Just look at Jerome Robbins, or Leonard Bernstein, or Tony Kushner. Big kids, every one of them.

**As a director, what is the relationship like with your actors? Is there a consistent dynamic or does it change from cast to cast?**

When you're a young director, you think in terms of getting the cast to do your ideas. As you get more experienced, it becomes more rewarding in every way to guide a process of discovery. I trust actors a great deal, and build a production on their trust of each other.

**As the director of the Arts Initiative at Columbia, how have you incorporated the theater and film world into the college atmosphere?**

President Bollinger offered me the unique opportunity to find ways to incorporate arts and culture into the lives of all Columbians. Because there is enormous creative energy on the campus, and considerable curiosity about NYC culture, it was really a question of listening to the community, and then building mechanisms. It responded to student, faculty, and alumni hopes. And many more projects will come to fruition.

**Even though most student actors and directors won't pursue professional careers, what do you try to teach students about the art form as a whole?**

Of course, I think the power of plays is that they do indeed hold the mirror up to nature. It can be a distorted mirror, not naturalistic, but the human experience is the core of the work. ●





# Out of India

the trials and triumphs of becoming an american citizen

BY DHRUV VASISHTHA  
ILLUSTRATION BY COLIN SULLIVAN

It's rare for me to be in a group of only minorities, even on Columbia's diverse campus. Yet I walked into a confluence of Jamaicans, Indians, Filipinos, Hispanics, Koreans, and other bleary-eyed immigrants with a shared—if not subdued—excitement. Nevertheless, I still stuck out.

My parents did not rush to America after my birth, and I did not move here until I had a childhood under my belt. I was seven years old, and self-aware enough to form my own memories of India, whether it was a firework-filled Diwali or listening to my grandfather's war stories during a blackout. Still, it was in America where I grew from child to man. During my most formative years I traded nights of cricket for nights at sprawling suburban malls. Slowly I became an American teenager, but there were always cracks in my ever-hardening whitewashed veneer. I would constantly mangle American idioms and my friends would be taken aback whenever I spoke in a thick Indian accent with my family—some boys had a “girlfriend” voice, I had a “parent” voice.

My assimilation was never truly complete: I

remained an observant Hindu and attempted to celebrate Americanized versions of Indian holidays. Diwali without firecrackers, Holi water gun fights in March. Brandishing my religion, culture, and passport as my ultimate vestiges of Indian-ness, I remained tethered to my homeland. I was by all means an American and an Indian, stepping back and forth between two continents.

Although I considered myself an anomalous immigrant, my family's path to America was quite traditional. Visas, as I would later on see, were always hard to acquire. My parents would wait in hour-long lines at the American consulate whenever our “uncle,” who was tenuously associated to some government official, could not help them cut in line. At one point my father considered becoming a chef and moving to Bangkok because the visa was available. “Go to New Zealand,” the consular official would suggest, “you'll be more likely to get a visa to America then.” Harebrained schemes were common. My uncle had moved from New York to a small town in Kansas under a government program that placed immigrant doctors on an expedited track to a green card if they worked in medically underserved areas. My father persisted after being persuaded out of a culinary career in Thailand, and in early 1995 was sponsored for an H-1B visa to the United States.

There are endless restrictions on traveling with an H-1B visa or H-4 visa (which I was on). Even after the three-year visa period when my family was applying for our green cards, traveling outside the United States was prohibited. As India underwent rapid change and westernization, my family underwent its own Americanization. In our forced separation, we missed important events and mo-

**STILL, IT WAS IN AMERICA WHERE I GREW FROM CHILD TO MAN. IN MY MOST FORMATIVE YEARS I TRADED NIGHTS OF CRICKET FOR NIGHTS AT SPRAWLING SUBURBAN MALLS.**

ments, like the births and weddings that tied us tightly to our family network. My wait, in particular, was greatly complicated after Sept. 11, 2001 and the new rules governing screening processes of males over the age of 13.

In late 2004 I finally received my green card which, much to my chagrin, was not green. Trips back to India became a yearly routine, but my ancestral land's open fields with grazing cattle and peacocks had been replaced by large towers bearing the names of Fortune 500 companies. With every trip back to cosmopolitan Delhi and its quickly growing satellite city Gurgaon, I realized that just as India and Indians had broadened their horizons, I had to do the same.

India does not offer dual citizenship, and when I returned to America, I knew I had to apply for my American citizenship. Aside from the inability to travel to most countries without a visa, and my newfound love of traveling, I was a senior who could not apply for many fellowships and government jobs with my legal status. For these practical reasons, I found myself in a Brooklyn courthouse sitting amongst an array of colorful faces, the youngest by at least 20 years. I did not think I would be emotional; this was a formality that would simply take me from one line at immigrations to another. In the several hours we were waiting—government ceremonies often start late—I looked around and wondered. I began to recall memories subdued by college, prom, and Boy Scouts, suffocated by my transformation into an American life. I recalled my first Happy Meal, my father correcting me when I called our neighbor “uncle,” parents calling me over for play dates so that my manners might rub off on their children, my first friends who taught me how to play video games and American sports.

My age did not matter; my Ivy League education did not distinguish my immigrant narrative from another's. All 119 of us immigrants stood together that morning, and I was no different from any of them. We had pursued, for over 15 years, the same goal—a goal which united us and was culminated in a mere matter of moments, and fewer words, when the judge announced, “Congratulations. You are now American citizens.” ●

**IN LATE 2004 I FINALLY RECEIVED MY GREEN CARD WHICH, MUCH TO MY CHAGRIN, WAS NOT GREEN.**



