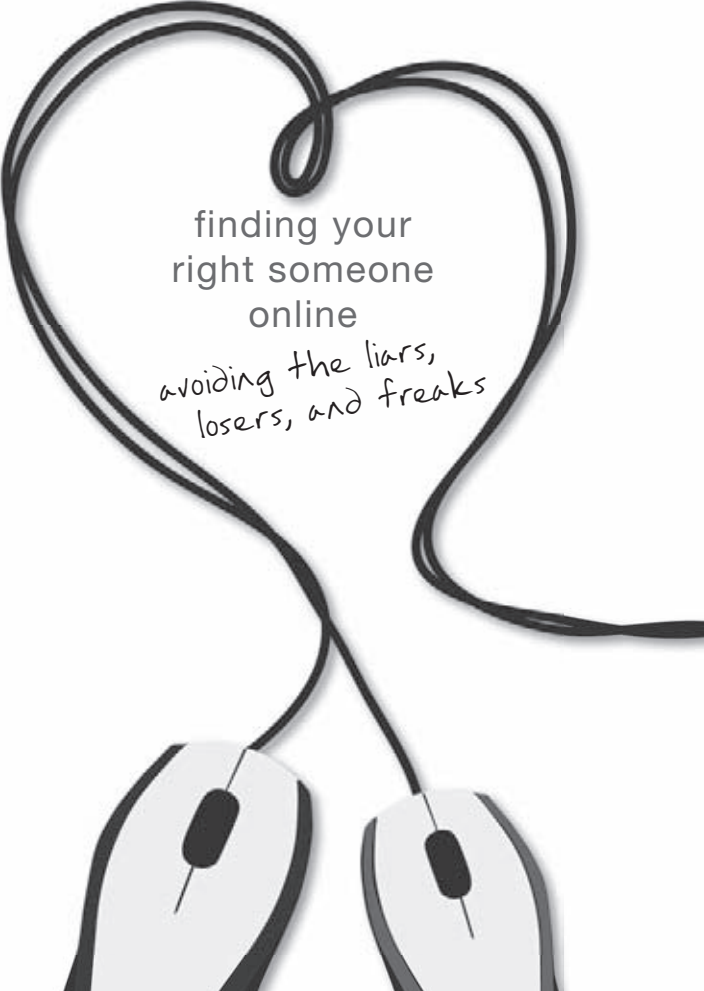




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who are passionate in their faith and
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megapixels and modems— the new normal for dating?

*I met my husband online. We lived three streets away
from each other but never would have met otherwise.*

—VICKIE WAGONER

A MAN SENDS a knowing glance to a woman from across the room. Her head tilts slightly as she sees him. She lifts her shoulders and touches her hair. Their eyes lock for a brief moment. She smiles, then slowly drops her eyelids, tilting her head down and to the side. Volumes of body language are written between them in mere seconds. The exciting spark of mutual interest leads the man to walk toward her and strike up a conversation and possibly ask for a date.

It could happen anywhere: school, church, a party, a restaurant, even standing in line at the grocery store. But these days, for many, those romantic sparks are just as likely to be found *online* as they are to be found *in* line.

There's no denying it. People are finding their soul mates on the Web as often as they are anywhere

else. *More than a third of America's ninety-seven million singles are dating online.* With the click of a mouse, single people are meeting other singles. In fact, more than half of the people who have signed up for an online dating service have been on a date with someone they met online. According to Mark Penn, author of *Microtrends*, one in five Americans in their twenties, and one in ten Americans in their thirties or older are actively looking to find their soul mates online.¹ And the numbers grow larger every day.

Is it working? The answer is an unequivocal *yes*. Singles of all stages and ages are not only finding someone to date; they're also finding matrimony. Every week we hear from happy couples who met in cyberspace and are enjoying marriage together. More than twice as many couples who married last year met through online dating services compared to social events.² According to a recent study conducted by a consumer group, one in five people who've used dating sites have gone on to marry someone they met online. That's more than the number of couples in America who say they met in church.³

Why We Wrote This Little Book

As a psychologist (Les) and a marriage and family therapist (Leslie), we think a lot about relationships.

We've written more than a dozen books on the topic. We teach university courses on relationships and marriage. On most weekends you'll find us speaking at a relationship seminar, usually in a church, somewhere in North America. We have a Web site (RealRelationships.com) where we provide complimentary video answers to relationship questions people ask when they write to us. We do television, radio, and magazine interviews on relationship issues almost weekly.

Because of all that, we hear from thousands of singles across the country every year. And the question they ask us more than any other is this: Do you think I should try online dating?

The question typically comes from the earnest hearts of people who are genuinely wondering when or if they will find the love of their lives. The heartfelt sincerity behind this often-asked question—which comes from the young and never married as well as from the more mature widowed and divorced—set us on a quest some years ago to research the practice of online dating from every angle. In the end, it resulted in more than just this little book. We'll be upfront: It resulted in a compelling call to cofound an online dating site that does something for Christian singles that no other site has done before. We'll fill you in on that, just briefly, at the end of this book.

Our Promise to You

For now, we simply want to give you the information from our research that we believe you'll find helpful when it comes to being smart about this increasingly popular tool of electronic dating. Whether you end up going online to find your special someone or you decide to rely on "old-fashioned" means for finding your romantic sparks, we want to help you improve your "Love IQ" by helping you get savvy about your options. This holds true even if you've already tried online dating and ended up being skeptical.

We've made this book brief and to the point. Each chapter is only a few short pages because we don't want to load you down with unnecessary details. We promise to cut to the heart of the matter by focusing on the following three major issues:

- First, we'll debunk the myths too many people still hold about online dating, typically because they are misinformed or are relying on old information.
- Second, we'll help you determine whether online dating is for you, and we'll show you six ways to know for sure.
- And finally, we'll give you a list of questions you absolutely must ask before you sign up

for any online dating site. We think they could make or break your online dating experience.

Before we leave this introduction, we want you to know something. We've written every word of this book with you in mind. We don't know you, of course, but we *do* know that you are sincere about finding that special someone. You wouldn't read this book if you weren't. We also assume that you could be anywhere from your twenties to late in your more-seasoned years. You may have never been married, or you may be divorced or widowed. We also assume you are a person of high moral standards and you hold a personal Christian faith. You're not looking for the proverbial "hookup"; you're not cruising the club scene. You're holding out for the very best that God has for you. And it's our heartfelt prayer that you will find it—soon. This book is dedicated to helping you do just that.

With every good wish and prayer,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Les & Leslie". The signature is written in a fluid, connected style with a small ampersand between the names.

—Les and Leslie Parrott
Seattle, Washington

Part 1

The Six Big Myths of Online Dating

Online
dating has
revolutionized
the way people
find and pursue
potential mates.
—ELLEN MCCARTHY

1

Myth: Online Dating Carries an Embarrassing Stigma

People hear success stories, try it for themselves, shed the stigma, and later proudly announce: “We met on an online dating service.”

—JOE TRACY¹

IT STARTED WITH the very first couple to ever meet online. The year was 1982 when Chris Dunn met Pam Jensen on a CompuServe CB Simulator program. Computer users nationwide were able to be connected in an early version of a chat room. After a few months of virtual chatting, Chris flew from New York to Chicago to meet Pam face-to-face. People said it wouldn't last, and even Chris's father thought it was a joke. But a year later, Chris and Pam exchanged wedding vows.

Their courtship and wedding were featured on numerous television programs and in newspaper

articles, including a *New York Times* story titled “Of Bytes and Bulletin Boards.”² That was more than twenty-five years ago, and Chris and Pam are still in love and happily married.

These days, of course, a couple falling in love online is hardly newsworthy. But Pam and Chris were charting new territory. “At the time,” Pam recalls, “computers weren’t as pervasive in our homes and our daily life. To a lot of people, especially my parents’ generation and their friends, it seemed very alien, a very suspicious concept to even be communicating like that.”

Today the couple lives on the north side of Chicago. “If it weren’t for the way we met, I think we could be any other married couple,” says Chris. “I’ve always adored her. She adores me. It’s very easy to love my wife.”³

That part may be easy, but from the start, Chris and Pam had to put up with a great deal of suspicion from others. And so have a lot of other couples who have sometimes felt compelled to hide the fact that they met online.

It’s Called “Stigma”

“How did you two meet?” The question was posed to a group of newlywed wives at a Sunday school function.

Going around the circle, each took a moment to tell her romantic story. Then it was time for Tracy to speak up: “We met over the Internet.”

There was a moment of silence.

Then the teacher commented, “Really! Why would an attractive, outgoing girl like you need to resort to such drastic measures?”

That’s “stigma”—a socially discrediting means of classifying others as going against the norm. It’s an undesirable stereotype. It conjures up disapproval, disgrace, and shame, and it’s based on uninformed impressions.

This Sunday school teacher is a perfect example of someone who perpetuates an uneducated social stigma of online dating. But truth be told, the above exchange took place more than a decade ago. Today, these misinformed impressions about online dating are few and far between.

So if you’re embarrassed by an out-of-date stigma of online dating, you’ve somehow gotten stuck in a fleeting notion that died out years ago. Yes, it used to be that finding love online was looked at with suspicion. But so was nearly everything else about the Internet. After all, this newfangled mechanism is not that old. It was only August 6, 1991, when the first Web site was built to explain what the World Wide Web was and how you could own a browser and set up

a Web server. *What?* Most people scoffed at the visionary idea of using our computers to buy shoes, download music, or book a hotel room. So why in the world would anyone look to the Internet to find love?

Of course, that was then. This is now. And today, the stigma of online dating has all but vanished. Everyone knows someone who has found the love of his or her life online. Even well-known celebrities talk about using matching sites to find love. We do enough marriage seminars in churches around the country to know that in every congregation there are couples who proudly identify themselves as having been matched online. Sure, some uninformed holdouts still insist on perpetuating the stigma, but their numbers are dwindling quickly.

Your Grandmother's Internet?

If you're looking for evidence that online dating has all but shaken off any remnants of embarrassing stigma, just look at the generation before yours. You may think that some older people rarely even turn on a computer, but you'd be wrong. We all know how popular online dating is for younger generations, but—are you ready for this?—the fastest-growing group to use online dating sites is single seniors.⁴

When seventy-year-old Hilda Gottlieb's husband

passed away six years ago, she was determined not to let her loss get the best of her. So she turned to online dating.

“I was 64 when my husband died, and I knew I was not going to be alone for the rest of my life,” Gottlieb told the *Palm Beach Post*.⁵

Gottlieb stumbled upon the profile of then-seventy-two-year-old Marv Cohen and decided to e-mail him. That e-mail led to an in-person meeting and an eventual romantic relationship. They have been enjoying doing things together ever since.

The point is that online dating these days is viewed as socially acceptable even among many of the people who were perhaps the most suspicious of it a few short years ago.

Online Dating Is Now Hypermainstream

“The stigma [of online dating] has definitely dropped because people are advocating for it, talking with their friends [about it], sharing stories with families,” says Lija Jarvis, director of a large survey study on Internet dating.⁶ Another study, conducted by the research firm Chadwick Martin Bailey, shows how quickly online dating—in existence for less than two decades—has revolutionized the way people find and pursue potential mates.

“It does seem to have displaced all other forms of dating,” says Susan Frohlick, a cultural anthropologist at the University of Manitoba who has studied online dating. “I would say that it’s been in the last five years that it’s become hypermainstream.”⁷

So if you are embarrassed by a passé prejudice against online dating, do your best to move beyond it. Swallow your irrational pride, and the outdated stigma you’re holding on to will disappear.

Remember This

Any remaining stigma about online dating you may still hold is only going to weigh you down in this process. So here are some tips for getting beyond it.

Talk to fellow cyberdaters: If you think that dating online means you’re doing something reprehensible—something that’s simply not done—you need to talk with some of the millions of others who are doing it. The more you talk to others who are dating online, the more you will see how normal it can be.

Talk to some dot-com-dating success stories: Just as talking to some online

daters may help you see this process for what it is, so will talking with some couples who have found their soul mates online. You'll find them in any church. Just ask around. Nearly everyone knows someone who has gotten married as a result of meeting online. Ask some of these people how the process was for them. If they are like most online matches, they will be thrilled to tell you their stories and relate their experiences.

Check out online dating books: If you need further evidence of how mainstream cyberdating is, peruse the relationship section of any major bookstore. You'll see countless books on finding online love. In fact, there are so many that some are even directed toward specific groups, such as baby boomers or widows and so on.

Finale

Why We Cofounded MyRightSomeone.com

Never be afraid to try something new. Remember, amateurs built the ark. Professionals built the Titanic.

—ANONYMOUS

AT THE START of this book we told you that after years of studying the online dating experience, after years of researching what works best, we felt compelled to do more than write a book about it. We decided to launch an online matching site that would do everything we wanted it to. In the end, in fact, the decision to launch such a site became more of a calling, or even a compulsion.

We've dedicated much of our professional lives to helping couples build strong and fulfilling marriages. That began many years ago when we wrote a book

called *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*. Hundreds of thousands of couples have used this resource to prepare for married life together. The success of that book led to others, such as *Love Talk*, as well as efforts such as our Marriage Mentoring initiative that links seasoned couples with less-experienced couples in the local church. So it seemed only natural that our work would bring us to the place of launching an online matching site for Christian singles.

Our ministry is dedicated to seeing the divorce rate reduced dramatically in our lifetime and seeing stronger and more vibrant marriages, particularly among Christians. Nearly all our efforts are funneled toward this end. That's why the launch of this Web site, MyRightSomeone.com, is so important to us. You see, how well a couple matches—how two unique personalities come together and find love—can literally make or break that couple's chances for a meaningful and rewarding lifelong marriage together. So, as we said, we eventually felt compelled and called to launch MyRightSomeone.com.

The following characteristics are what make our site distinctive:

- MyRightSomeone is first and foremost thoroughly Christian. We are not inviting

anyone and everyone to use this site. It is dedicated specifically for those singles who hold a personal faith in God and have committed themselves to walking with Jesus.

- The site is grounded not only on God's Word but also on academic understanding. That is, we aren't simply placing the proverbial "God sticker" on our efforts and calling it the Lord's work. We are drilling down on what research reveals about God's truth in this effort to match well and to build a successful relationship that honors Christ.
- The site is dedicated to more serious relationships. We are not about helping people mix and mingle just so they have dates on Friday night (though that will obviously be a part of this). We're invested in helping our users find love. That means we aren't about simply finding "someone" to fill a void. No. We are about finding the "*right* someone" to fill a lifetime.
- The site is not only dedicated to helping you find the right someone, but it's also focused on helping you *become* the "right someone." Why? Because it's not enough to simply find another single who meets your expectations and preferences. This is the number one

mistake singles make, and it's the reason so many singles never find what they're looking for. They've neglected to focus on *who they are* as well as on what they want.

- Along these same lines, we are also dedicated to helping you hone the skills you need for a relationship that is all you want it to be. That is, we help you increase your odds of finding lifelong love by giving you the skills that research shows are critical to success.

All this may sound like a tall order, and it is. But that's why we have dedicated so much to making this service happen. If there were another site that did all of these things, we'd be pointing you to it. But since we couldn't find one, we've built it ourselves.

As you might imagine, launching this site was not a simple decision or an easy undertaking. It required an investment of time and money, along with a team of people who understood the mission and who had the expertise to help us build what we had in mind. Of course, it also required a lot of prayer.

And our prayer for you, whether you sign on to MyRightSomeone.com or not, is that you find the love God has planned for you and your life.

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