



THE SHY GIRL'S DATING CHALLENGE

O's senior features writer, Deidre Donnelly, braved four different dating methods. Read on for her tips on where you could meet your own Dishy Dad or Mr. Super Speller...

WE'RE IN O'S boardroom, brainstorming story ideas for this issue, and I've just been put forward to try out new ways to date.

"But I'm shy," I plead.

"We'll call it 'The Shy Girl's Dating Challenge,'" winks *O's* features editor, Norma Young.

Gulp.

Later that day, I stop to check in with myself. Beneath the apprehension, I feel something else: excitement? Yes, that's what it is. So what am I hiding from? I have been single for five years. That's not to say life has been librarian dull; like any spectacle-wearing "shy," I have a handy alter ego: Dancing Queen. But though she has segued me through Cape Town's social scene, she has only introduced me to men too fresh-faced or free-spirited for commitment. But now that I have a mission to accomplish on behalf of the bashful, it's time to ditch the dress-up disguises; to shake off schoolgirl self-consciousness and talk to some men.

Strength in Numbers

What: Kayak Fit (Sugar Snap Events)

Cost: R380 per month (four sessions)

Great for: Mingling on the go.

Cons: The focus is not purely on dating, so it's a long-term route to romance.

I have some insider information: There are apparently loads of eligible men in sporty circles. And because I like multitasking, getting fit while making new friends and meeting potential partners, this appeals to me. So in a bold start, I've signed up for Kayak Fit, one of many activities for single professionals in Cape Town offered by Sugar Snap Events. On the first day, though I feel dorkish wearing my morning face, the enthusiasm of the other single women kayakers is infectious, and the activity takes the pressure off small talk. Unfortunately, on day one the male contingent is low, and I row with Tracy Fincham, from Kaskazi Kayaks. But as she talks about an upcoming diving weekend away, I feel a sense of possibility: There's a world of experiences waiting for me. In the following weeks, more men join us, and the seasoned paddlers get head of us girls. I make a note to get to gym: This amount of chasing requires serious upper body

strength. But I am smitten with the sights and sounds of the sea, and in my last session, there are some male newcomers, too. I think I could get to know this sporty girl alter ego better, as she gets to know outdoorsy types.



"I'm smitten with the sights and sounds of the sea!"

Lifting the Virtual Veil

What: speeddate.com

Cost: Free (limited service); R39,95 (monthly membership).

Great for: Finding other lonely hearts in hiding.

Cons: It's a whole job in itself.

After conquering the ocean, I brace myself to surf the net. As a romantic technophobe, I have always dismissed it – too strategic, single-minded and impersonal. But I have heard success stories, and I can see how it may suit introverts: Safe behind my screen, without the risk of silences and gaffes, I can control the chit-chat. Create a profile, and you have five minutes to type-chat with on-screen suitors – webcam optional. Within 10 minutes, I have two requests to speed date. Soon, I'm juggling seven conversations – quite a rush, but a struggle to remember who said what. As a word-lover, I'm at an advantage. Mostly, it's a series of false starts, silences (polite rejection) and weeding out the bad spellers. But be warned: Because it flatters the ego, online dating can be addictive. A day after joining *speeddate.com*, 71 men have viewed my profile, and over the next week, I start looking forward to my "good morning" messages. I've stacked up "favourites" – and I've kept a few e-mail conversations going. A (single) Dishy Dad has asked me out on a date, and another – an excellent speller – invited me to "talk books over coffee."

A Handy Start?

What: Flirtomatic App

Cost: Free (you pay for "premium services").

Great for: Shameless global flirting.

Cons: Exposure to the bottom feeders of the dating scene.

I'm having fun with online dating, but the more I keep conversations going, the more I wonder, Am I falling for seasoned charmers? When should I meet potentials in person? How will I give and receive rejection? I put these worries aside to find another techie way to get the instant rush of first contact: The phone App, Flirtomatic. Like most dating sites, it features your profile page and inbox, with a search function. Ignoring internal alarm bells at the cheesy animated images littering the site's homepage, I sign up right

away. I squash my instincts again when every possible variation on my name is already taken, leaving me to settle on a silly-sounding nickname. But when I'm asked to pay extra to define my geographic area, I press the brakes. And just in time. I have

two very indecent proposals in my inbox, and I haven't even posted a picture. Feeling sullied, I close the App. I'm shy, not stupid.

Look to the Stars

What: astrodate.co.za

Cost: R125 to sign up; R195 to book your place on the group date; plus the cost of your meal.

Great for: A fun night out with a touch of mystery.

Cons: Frequency depends on availability of astrological matches (and budget).

As a teen, "what's your star sign" was a standard girl-meets-boy question. So I am intrigued by Astrodating, which takes the concept to a more adult level. I choose the group date option: Three men dine with three women, and though you're all potential matches, it's up to you to bring out each other's stellar sparkle. There's less one-on-one pressure to keep up small talk, but if the others at the table are outgoing, I could fade into the distance. Fortunately, astrologer Babett Baer is there for introductions, and giving insight into our charts and characters is a great ice breaker. It's fun working out how I might match with each man. The well-dressed guy on my left is even shier than me. Apparently, both our charts suggest we're intuitive, perhaps psychic? When Babett analyses his introversion, I blush with him. As the meal progresses and the girls switch places, we all get to know each other. The conversation is super-charged and at times I feel a bit out of my depth. But the evening is so stimulating; I'd definitely do it again. In the next few days, I think of Shy Guy: Usually drawn to extroverts, I imagine going out with a reticent man. Perhaps that is my perfect challenge?

Since I've discovered that there are plenty singles out there, even if they're mostly online, I'm feeling more relaxed about dating. Mostly, I've connected with parts of myself that were waiting to be discovered – once Dancing Queen stopped hogging the spotlight. Flexing my social, physical and intellectual muscles has made me want to get stronger in all three areas. I am back at gym, I'm eager to kayak and I wouldn't hesitate to join another Sugar Snap outing. In a way, in hiding from meeting new people, I was missing out on life. And if love one day follows as a result of me living a bit more, I won't shy away. ☐