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# Romance scams proliferate on the Internet



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The number of older singles ripped off by Internet "Sweetheart Scams" is increasing as these scams proliferate.

"Cyber-seduced" was the topic of this column on July 18. Dianne, a 68-year-old woman, was ready to hop in the sack with a 51-year-old East Coast man she had never met. Thankfully, she came to her senses and realized she was being set up, and severed the relationship before getting hurt or taken financially.

And now Vicki asks for Internet dating advice: "I'm very naïve. What warning signs for unscrupulous characters should I be on the lookout for?"

So many people have been taken by Internet sweetheart scams that a free Yahoo group was formed called "Romance Scams" (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/romancescams/>).

As of this writing, more than 569 people have joined and posted 2,319 messages describing Internet-dating scams and experiences. Photos of suspected scammers are posted as well, and there is a chat room for conversations.

Naïve singles like Dianne and Vicki think they've found the love of their life because some guy responds or contacts them by e-mail and expresses an interest in them. Sometimes these guys will send flowers or chocolates that may have been purchased with stolen credit cards. The scammers can be on any reputable Internet site or in any chat room without the site knowing what's going on. Even Christian sites, where participants don't expect fraud and tend to be a bit more trusting, can be affected.

Loneliness consumes many older singles, making them vulnerable to scammers. They correspond with these con artists, for weeks, months, or even a year or more, eventually lowering their guard. The scammers make some excuse about being out of the country on a work assignment and they need help. Nigeria seems to be the in-vogue country from which sweetheart scams originate these days.

The scammers ask their newfound love for a favor, and it usually has to do with money. Often, the favor is to cash money orders and wire the money to them. Later, the bank calls, telling them that the money order was bogus and their account is being charged for whatever the total was.

Men can be victims, also. On the Yahoo RomanceScams site, one man says he thought he was doing a Nigerian woman a favor and forwarded a package to Nigeria for her. He has been informed by authorities that what he did was illegal. Innocent people can even be prosecuted for aiding a fraud. That's a pretty big shock when they're acting in the name of love and think they're helping a lover.

Any single seeking love on the Internet should peruse the site and learn from it.

Singles need to trust their instincts and make themselves more knowledgeable about Internet rip-offs. When that long-lost love suddenly appears on a person's computer screen and sounds too good to be true, it's best to hit the delete button. That's not easy to do when haunted by loneliness and thinking there's somebody out there who cares.

For every Internet dating success story, there seems an even larger number of Internet horror stories, and the numbers grow everyday as more singles go online.

It's sad, and not fair to the honest people living in Nigeria, but the word "Nigeria" should be a huge red flag to Internet daters.

From:

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