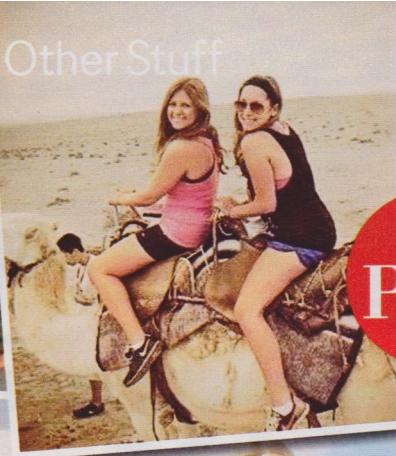
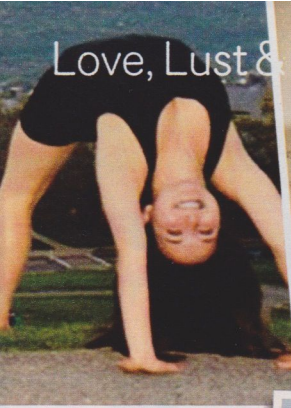


Love, Lust & Other Stuff



his
POV

what your

ONLINE-DATING PICS *say to guys*

...Or at least to one guy, who admits he overthinks them. But hey, at least he's honest.

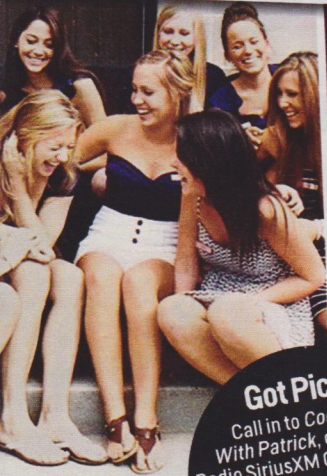
BY LOGAN HILL

As a child, my mom taught me not to make judgments based on appearances...especially about women. Then I started online dating.

On a dating site, the first, second, and third things every person looks at—male or female but probably especially male—are the photos. This is because it's human nature and also because the words people use to describe themselves—*laid-back, fun loving*—blur together, while photos trigger an instant reaction: cool, hot, obnoxious, adorable, scary. Don't judge a book by its cover? Then by what? Its adjectives?

Like everyone else, I grapple with that weird wrestling match between who I am (apparently, a superficial jerk who makes assumptions based on pixels) and who I feel I ought to be (an enlightened gentleman). As in real life, I see someone and can't help but feel attracted or not, and often, I even imagine a whole story—a voice, a personality, a date, sex, a life together—based on nothing but a blurry selfie. Only on a dating site, I'm not seeing someone as she naturally exists. I'm seeing the photos she picked—I'm seeing how she *wants* to be seen.

The vast majority of women's online-dating photos make them seem awesome: Everyone's smiling and happy and having fun with lots of friends—often while traveling, showing some skin, and holding a cocktail, pet, pal, or instrument. Sometimes, after clicking on hundreds of photos, I begin to see patterns emerging (my male friends admit to having similar observations). I know I probably overthink what these pictures mean (not *every* woman who posts pics like these fits my admittedly superficial profiling). **But here's my breakdown.** ➔



Got Pics?

Call in to *Cocktails With Patrick*, on Cosmo Radio SiriusXM Channel 108, on Thursday, August 29, at 4 p.m. ET, then send him your pic and he'll give you his perspective.





THE RACK

Ah, cleavage. The oldest trick in the book. Women who pose to show off their curves leave me thinking: *Wow, you must really think guys are stupid. Do guys really fall for this?* Right before I read her profile again and tell myself, "Well, we do both think a sense of humor is important...."



THE ETERNAL SORORITY GIRL

In every photo, she's surrounded by a gaggle of happy friends—all hugging and squeezing and smiling. At first, I have no idea which one is her. Then I find her in the crowd and worry that dating her will be like dating the whole sorority and everyone will gossip about us, always.



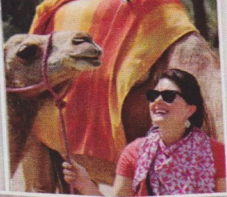
THE CAT LADY

The girl is cute, but that cat's adorable. There it is again! Does this woman have human friends? It's hard to tell with the cat in the foreground in every shot.



THE WOMAN WITH THE CUTE GUY FRIEND

Is he there because he looks like the guy she wants to date? And if so, is she carrying an unrequited crush? Is he competition? Or is he just photo-bombing all her pictures because he's a stalker?



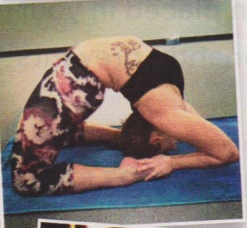
THE WORLD TRAVELER

On a camel, on the top of a mountain, on a beach, on a boat... I admire the adventurous spirit, but will I be able to keep up with her? Is she ever at home? What's she running away from—him?



THE BRIDESMAID

Some women are literally always a bridesmaid: A different satin dress and matching flower arrangement in every shot. No matter how happy she looks, I'm always worried I'll have to propose within a month or she'll throw rice in my face.



THE YOGA PRETZEL

Then there are women who post photos showing how crazy flexible they are. It's virtually impossible not to have dirty thoughts as you're looking at a girl down-dogging in tight Lululemon. Are these pics proof of spiritual depth or ads for a twisty bod? I see them as soulful pinups.



THE GIRL WITH THE CROPPED-OUT MAN

Who is he? Did she go to the extra trouble of blurring out his face because she loved this blurry shot of herself so much? Or did she not have any photos *without* him?

In reality, I've found that my impressions of a woman's photos only sometimes match up with her personality: The one with the big smile turns out to be depressed. The one with the scowl turns out to be lovely. One woman with goofy photos turned out to be serious; another turned out to be an as-advertised spaz. Basically, I think we just overthink other people's photos because they're all we have to go on—but we don't think much about our own. This hit me about a year ago during a "fishing for compliments ceremony"—that sacred exchange that occurs on the second or third date, when one person asks, "So why'd you e-mail me?" Which translates as: Tell me why you want me.

So when a lovely woman I'd somehow snookered into a second date asked that of me, I rambled on about how she was Southern like me and had a kid from a previous relationship like me—"But, yeah," I admitted, "it was the photos."

Her photos were artsy—fuzzed-out just enough that I could tell she was pretty, but they were a bit mysterious too. Her face was obscured behind wild, curly blonde hair and big sunglasses. The photos led me to believe that she was upbeat, stylish, fun. In person, she was flat-out stunning: a mile-a-day swimmer with such cool fashion sense that she's a regular on street-style blogs. "I asked you out because I thought you might be gorgeous," I told her, "but I never expected this." I may have placed my hand on her thigh. Corny, I know.

Then I fished for my compliment. "I thought that photo of you was so funny," she told me.

"Ah, the skeleton..." I said. Not the flattery I was looking for, but it was a killer Halloween costume.

"No...the one of you in your jeans!"

I was confused. In that one, I'm just standing barefoot in my living room, wearing a tee shirt and jeans, as I do almost every day. I'd picked it because it felt the most like me (and yes, it was taken in that too-brief period during which I was doing lots of push-ups). "Wait, what was funny about it?"

She laughed. "You know...."

I did not know.

"You really don't know?"

I really did not know.

"I thought it was a joke!" She's giggling now. "You were just smiling and—wait, you really don't know? Your fly was unzipped!"

She thought I'd been making fun of myself and the online-dating thing. Nope. I was just an idiot.

All that time, I'd been overthinking everything about everyone else's photos. But I hadn't even taken a second look at my own. I realized how absurd all my overthinking had been...and I just felt lucky to have met a lovely woman who, yes, truly had a great sense of humor. So I ordered another round of drinks, and we had a blast.

The lesson I learned: Don't overthink people's photos. Don't overthink anything. If someone strikes you—for whatever reason—just go out, hope for the best, enjoy a drink, and see what happens. ■