Stay Away From Catfish And Have A Safe Tinder Valentine!

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Valentine’s Day is here! The most romantic day of the year is also the busiest for many people. Smithies are walking around with flowers in hand, florists downtown are working overtime and single folks are busy… swiping on Tinder. Love is in the air and Tinder is thriving. According to CEO of Tinder Sean Rad, the number of swipes, matches and messages on Tinder set an all-time record on Valentine’s Day. While it might be tempting for single people to find a last-minute dinner date on dating apps, it is also important to be extra careful as people might take advantage of this special day for nefarious purposes.

For college students, social distancing regulations and online classes have made it much more difficult for them to find connections and relationships on campus. According to a recent Pew Research Center survey, 48% of 18-to-29 year olds have used a dating app whether to find friends, soul mates, casual hookups or simply just to pass the time. The results from this survey also show that young women are often the target of online harassment. Female users aged 18 to 29 are twice as likely as men to receive a sexually explicit message or image they did not ask for (57% vs. 28%); or be called an offensive name (44% vs. 23%); or be threatened by someone on dating apps to physically harm them (19% vs. 9%).

“The first time it happened to me, I felt so angry and offended but it turns out I’m not the only one who experienced that. It’s almost like a universal experience at this point”, said Vibha Gogu, a senior at Smith. Being harassed or bullied online has become so common to Vibha and her friends that they are now desensitized to it.

Margaret Wier, another Smith student, expressed her frustration at the online dating culture, “I feel like I’m being treated like an object on these apps and there is absolutely nothing I can do about it. I just have to brush it off and switch to a different app where I still notice the same behaviors, maybe just not as frequent.” Receiving inappropriate messages from male users on dating apps, even if it’s a once-in-awhile occurrence, has raised Margaret’s concerns about meeting partners in person. “I feel like I don’t trust them because what if they have other intentions to take advantage of me that I am not aware of”.

Unlike the old-fashioned way of dating, dating apps take away the screening process that takes place when you meet someone in person. Therefore, before meeting potential partners in person, it is important for college students to take safety precautions including FaceTiming before the date, meeting in public places, letting your friends know who you are going to meet and, most importantly, trust your instincts. If at any point your date makes you uncomfortable or uneasy, then end the conversation and leave the setting. ASAP!