

www.cindy.com

BY DAVID SHEFF

Face time

with Cindy Crawford

THE INFORMATION SUPERMODEL TALKS ABOUT HER NEW WEB SITE, SEX, BEAUTY, AND THE JOYS AND PERILS OF GOING OUT ALONE ONLINE

Chats, e-mail, and faxes are all efficient, but there's still nothing like face time. Supermodel Cindy Crawford knows about face time after appearing on 400 magazine covers—and that doesn't include all that *body* time: She posed nude in an issue of *Playboy* last year that broke sales records, and her images have been downloaded more often than any software program we can think of. Indeed, Crawford, willing or not, has an enormous presence on the Web. She is the object of as many as 100,000 Web sites. On a recent Web21 listing of the most popular Web stars, she's No. 5, right after President Clinton. But now is the first time Crawford will be online of her own volition: She's launching her own site [www.cindy.com]. Crawford, in the wake of her less-than-spectacular ABC television special *Sex with Cindy Crawford*, sat down with *Y-Life* to talk about her site—and what she's learned about love, beauty, and sex. And, not incidentally, about dealing with false identities online, this issue's theme. >>

Y-LIFE: *What inspired Cindy.com?*

CRAWFORD: Models are seen as two-dimensional, which is logical; it's how you see us on a magazine page.

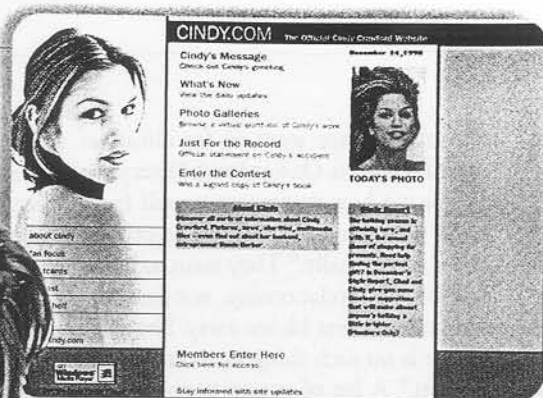
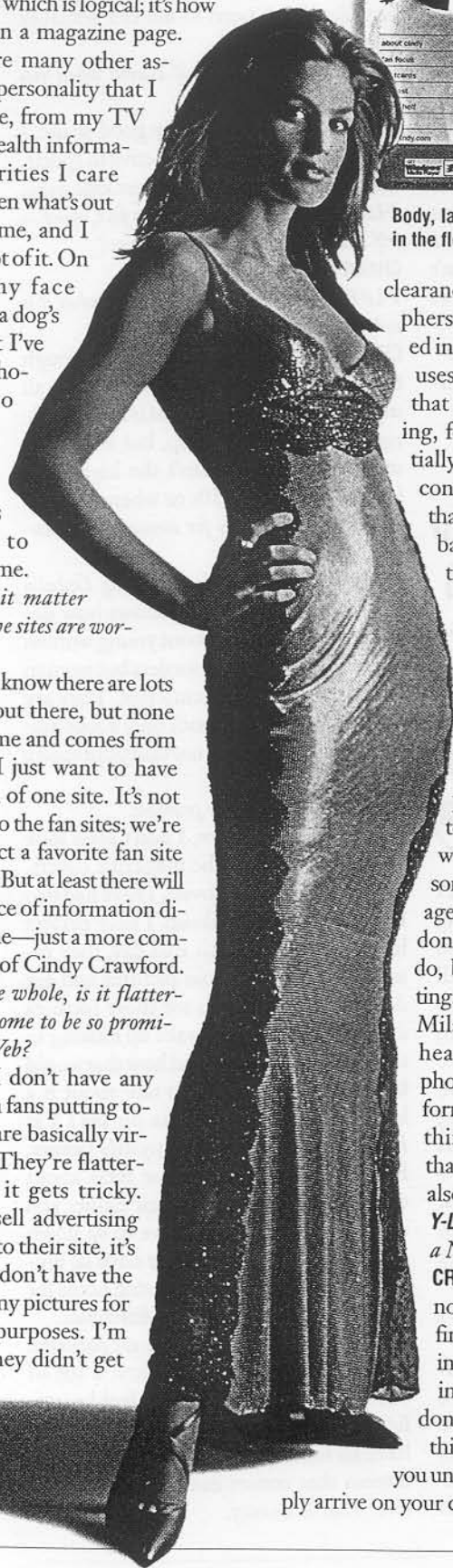
But there are many other aspects of my personality that I want to share, from my TV projects to health information to charities I care about. I've seen what's out there about me, and I don't like a lot of it. On one site, my face morphs into a dog's face. At least I've done nude photographs, so the people who like to manufacture nudes don't have to bother with me.

Y-LIFE: *Does it matter that most of the sites are worshipful?*

CRAWFORD: I know there are lots of nice sites out there, but none that reflects me and comes from me. I guess I just want to have some control of one site. It's not that I object to the fan sites; we're going to select a favorite fan site of the month. But at least there will also be a source of information directly from me—just a more complete picture of Cindy Crawford.

Y-LIFE: *On the whole, is it flattering or bothersome to be so prominent on the Web?*

CRAWFORD: I don't have any problem with fans putting together what are basically virtual shrines. They're flattering, though it gets tricky. When they sell advertising or sell access to their site, it's illegal. They don't have the rights to use my pictures for commercial purposes. I'm pretty sure they didn't get



Body, language: A model citizen in the flesh and on the Web

clearances from the photographers, either. It's complicated in other ways. If someone uses my picture on a site that has cigarette advertising, for instance, it's potentially damaging to me. My contract with Revlon says that I will not advertise tobacco. Generally I don't think that other people should be able to make money off me without my permission.

Y-LIFE: *But would you censor the Net?*

CRAWFORD: No, though privacy and property laws still need to apply. In addition, it would really upset me if someone had taken an image of me and altered it. I don't know what you can do, but it would be upsetting. They did it with Alyssa Milano. They added her head to a pornographic photograph, someone performing oral sex. I don't think anyone can think that is all right. Privacy is also an issue.

Y-LIFE: *In general, are you a Net fan?*

CRAWFORD: I'm using it now. I was very pleased to find a movie in L.A. using www.movielink.com, for instance. I send e-mail. I don't, however, like how things can just be sent to you unsolicited, and they simply arrive on your computer. I don't open

my door if a stranger knocks, but if anyone gets your e-mail address—no matter how they get it—they can arrive in your living room. But that's not my biggest gripe about the Net. The worst part is that it seems isolating. It gives

you the illusion of being with people—you're out there on the World Wide Web—but you are really just sitting by yourself at home. To me, that's lonely.

Y-LIFE: *Yet online communities, chat rooms, and discussion groups alleviate the loneliness of many people.*

CRAWFORD: But it's not real human interaction, in my opinion. Also, how many people have false relationships? People make themselves up, pump themselves up a little bit. It is not reality.

Y-LIFE: *Have you seen chat rooms firsthand?*

CRAWFORD: When we first got our computer, I tried one to see what all the hoopla was about. I felt like I was in there with Beavis and Butt-Head. Maybe I was in a bad chat room, but it's not somewhere I'd choose to spend my time. On the other hand, my cousin helped me set up a buddy list, so now I can talk to my grandmother and other people in my family. That's fun. I know everyone in the room. Others may want to use the Net to meet people, and I can't be judgmental. If they get off on it, fine. I wouldn't do what some people do, though. A friend met someone online at four one morning. The guy said he looked like Tom Cruise and said, "Come on over." They both lived in the L.A. area, and so my friend arrived at this person's house at four o'clock in the morning. That's just plain stupid. My friend drove down a long street to a cul-de-sac where every house was dark except for one. There was a naked man—not Tom Cruise—sitting in front of his computer [in his living room], lit only by the glow from the computer screen. Fortunately, my friend was smart enough to turn around and go home. But that's not my idea of healthy relationship skills.

Y-LIFE: *That is stupid, yet many people are more cautious and have had good results.*

CRAWFORD: I know people who have met online, and it went well. But I just think

it creates a false sense of security and intimacy. People at home in front of their computers reveal things about themselves that they wouldn't on a first date. I would try to use the same guidelines you'd use on a first meeting, because you don't really know who you're talking to. You need to be careful. I know why the Net appeals. First of all, no matter what technology is available, people still have a hard time meeting people, at least the right people. So here's something new to try. For people tired of bars and blind dates, the people you meet online get a first impression other than a face. A lot of people like the idea of being judged for who they are, not what they look like. There are a couple of problems, though. How do you know that the person you're talking to online is genuine? We've all heard stories of people who lie. There are a lot of "Tom Cruises" out there. Beyond people lying about their looks, they lie about their gender, their marital status, and more. And even if you were to meet someone online who was sincere, what about chemistry? Chemistry is part of what will make a relationship work. Standing next to someone may tell you more than talking to them on a computer. Pheromones don't travel over computer networks.

Y-LIFE: *Yet people have met and fallen in love.*

CRAWFORD: It's possible to meet someone online, find similar interests and some intellectual connection, and they didn't care if you were 10 pounds overweight or whatever. That's the good news. But it's still very difficult. The Internet can be used as a tool, but I would just use it as a tool combined with common sense.

Y-LIFE: *In general, how are love and sex changing? Did you gain insights when you researched your TV special Sex with Cindy Crawford?*

CRAWFORD: People were very open about sex—in fact, they wanted to talk about it. Particularly couples in their fifties and sixties wanted to share what they knew, because they suffered earlier because no one talked about sex. We all learned how much less puritanical and prudish people are than was expected throughout the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. The last election showed how Americans really feel. They feel, "What's the big deal?" We interviewed a bunch of teenagers and found them extremely well educated. I was very

impressed. They were so far ahead of where I was at 16. One girl said, "Everyone teaches me how to protect myself from AIDS, but no one teaches how to protect myself emotionally." They want to know how to have a relationship, not just how to have sex. I was blown away. She said, "There is no such thing as an emotional condom." A lot of young people come from broken homes—single-parent homes—and don't know how to have a good relationship, because they haven't seen one. They want that information to go along with the sex education.

Y-LIFE: *Why were you less informed at 16?*

CRAWFORD: The whole climate of sexu-

“Standing next to someone may tell you more than talking to them on a computer. Pheromones don't travel over computer networks”

ality was different then. AIDS wasn't around yet. Our biggest fear was getting pregnant and losing your reputation. So in some ways, things haven't changed all that much. If a girl "did it," she was considered loose, and boys got a notch in their belts. That doesn't seem to have changed much. But one girl, still a virgin, said, "I just know that sex is a really big deal." She said, "In some ways, it seems like more trouble than it's worth; I know it will change my relationship, and I'm not sure I'm ready for those changes." Just to be able to talk in that kind of way shows a great deal of maturity.

Y-LIFE: *Has that attitude been influenced by the conservative, pro-abstinence campaigns?*

CRAWFORD: Teaching abstinence is ridiculous. It's not why kids make good decisions. The kids who believed in abstinence were from families that were supportive of them. One girl was from a Christian family and had a very close relationship with

her mother. She had very high self-esteem, and her mother really supported her. She didn't need to use her sexuality to prove anything.

Y-LIFE: *How was your self-esteem when you were a teenager?*

CRAWFORD: I was in pretty good shape. I was good in school. I was active in sports. But I wasn't as together as these kids were.

Y-LIFE: *Are kids any less—or, in fact, more—self-conscious about their looks now?*

CRAWFORD: Probably more.

Y-LIFE: *Is there a changing sense of what it is to be beautiful?*

CRAWFORD: It's always changing, though there is no less of a sense of what we're all supposed to look like. What is fashionable right now is less makeup, but it is still a studied look. It just isn't the high-glam look of the '80s or '50s or whenever.

Y-LIFE: *Do you worry for teenagers preoccupied by beauty?*

CRAWFORD: Definitely. *Reviving Ophelia* [Ballantine Books, 1995] shows how destructive it is. It talks about young women not only with eating disorders but women who are mutilating themselves. They are so lost. I don't think that's only about aesthetics, but there is an unrealistic pressure to look a certain way.

Y-LIFE: *Which you help promote.*

CRAWFORD: You know, I don't even look like my pictures on the magazine covers. When I shoot those covers, I have had two hours of hair and makeup. I have perfect lighting. If I have a zit that day, they retouch it. I look at those pictures and get depressed. Young girls see those pictures and think that's how I wake up looking in the morning. I understand how that would be disheartening. I try to talk about it a lot. I did that when I was on [MTV's] *House of Style*, tried to demystify beauty. But most of how someone feels about themselves comes from their family and their home life. People have to sit down and talk to their kids. They have to create a nurturing, accepting, loving home for them. That's what makes a difference.

Y-LIFE: *But those media images are powerful.*

CRAWFORD: Yeah, but I know a lot of beautiful women who don't feel beautiful, and I know a lot of normal people who have an inner passion and an inner self-esteem that comes out. It's very attractive. *That is beauty.* ☑