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SPOTLIGHT  
By Brian Baker



# Claudia Opdenkelder

## She's a cougar and proud of it

PHOTO: TOM BELDING

**But don't classify Claudia Opdenkelder, CEO of online dating service Cougar Life, under the negative stereotype: sitting in dimly lit bars with claws out.**

*"I just don't like anybody thinking it's a whole prowling thing," the 39-year-old says. "It makes it sound so seedy and just sexual - it's not about that at all." It's all about the strong, confident women who know what they want in life.*

With over 200,000 personals from both women 35 and up and men starting in their early 20s from North America, Australia and the U.K., Opdenkelder hopes to expand the website into Europe by year's end.

But what is it exactly that draws Opdenkelder to younger men? *"I find that guys our own age or older are very set in their ways: they come with a lot of baggage or they have ego issues with who's making more money," she says. "So, it's really drama free."*

*"The younger guys enjoy dating older women because of the fact they don't have to deal with all the game-playing," she adds. "They can still search for their own path in their career, and do their own thing and not have to worry about taking care of us as well."*

When she's not trying to rectify the cougar image, Opdenkelder runs her 17-year-old Professional Promotions business.

In 2005, Opdenkelder's co-workers gave her the idea that would lead her website. Dean Blundell of the Toronto radio station Edge 102.1 asked female listeners to enter *"The Cougar Hunt"*, where the winner would win a big prize.

*"At first I was like, What, cougar? because I had that old-school image in mind, and then I looked into it some more and I ended up doing the contest, and I won," she says. "From that point on I just started embracing the term a little bit, thinking I needed to make this positive because I definitely don't want to be embarrassed by the whole thing."*

As for people who get their fur up over the Demi Moore-Ashton Kutcher scene, Opdenkelder says they just need to get comfortable with the lifestyle choice. *"With anything, people need to take some time to adjust," she says. "I think it's become a lot more popular and people are a lot more accepting."*

That doesn't mean there's no thrill in pursuing fresh meat.

*"The hunt part definitely comes into play because women at this age know what they want and therefore there's no more time for the game-playing," she says. "It's not like we're literally going on the hunt, but I think that we are still the ones that may make the first approach."*

For those young men - or cougar cubs - out there interested, unfortunately Opdenkelder already has herself a catch: *"25 year-old Paul"*.