

## **Authenticity in Online Communication**

By Ariel Miller

Since the beginning of email and instant messaging, people have talked online. Social networking sites and dating apps have fostered online connections. In the realm of social networking and online dating, some people are “themselves,” while others lie and/or put on personas. It is important to be aware that deception exists everywhere, especially in the dating world.

Honesty online depends on a few factors: the communication venue, the communicator’s personality and intentions, the length of communication, and if the people communicating plan to meet in person. The degree of authenticity in cyberspace varies from person to person. In her article, “Can You Really Trust the People You Meet Online,” Gwendolyn Seidman explains that research has shown online communication can lead to a person expressing their true self. The veil of the computer screen may make it easier for people to be authentic. For some, online connections remove the pressure of face-to-face interactions, allowing for honest communication. Seidman states that on social networking sites, people present information about themselves to their real-life and thus, usually represent themselves authentically.

Alternatively, in digital communication, online dating is most prone to deception. On dating apps, where people present information about themselves to strangers, people are more likely to fib. Seidman explains: “In general, *no matter the setting*, people are more likely to lie when looking for a date than in other social situations.” In some ways, online dating mirrors dating in the real world. Whether you meet your significant other online or in a real-life setting, dating can involve some deception. A New York Times article, “Love, Lies, and What They Learned” quotes Facebook data scientist, Andrew Fiore, “As more and more of life happens online, it’s less and less the case that online is a vacuum. It is life.” While some view the cyber world as separate from the real one, the Internet is actually a microcosm of reality.

When speaking to people online, one will find those who misrepresent themselves and others who are truthful. On the MTV reality show, *Catfish*, Spencer Morrill thought he was dating the singer, Katy Perry, with whom he talked to online for years. However, he was really talking to a young woman in England. Though instances like those on *Catfish* are rare, while talking to strangers online, it is important to be a bit guarded initially.

In spite of these deceptions, not everyone on the Internet lies. Seidman notes that research suggests we should give people we meet online a chance because some are genuine. A New York Times article, “The Tinder Dating Pool Isn’t Completely Shallow” discusses the marriage of Rachel Honowitz and Jason Congrove, who met on the dating app, Tinder. Despite claims that Tinder will cause the dating apocalypse, people are forming meaningful connections online. In this way, deception is conditional in cyberspace.

Like life, cyberspace is unpredictable. On the Internet, you will find people who lie and others who are genuine. And, in fact, there is an advantage of a little misleading. A bit of

deception modifies your idealized and true sense of self, which in such a way can make you act more authentically.