

## ACTIVITY 24

# Real Life vs. Online Identity

**Purpose:** Deepen the exploration of online versus “real life” identities by examining how the ways in which individuals present themselves on social media can emphasize some aspects of their identities while minimizing or hiding others.

## ADVISOR NOTES:

### 1. Prepare for the Gallery Walk

Before the advisory meeting, familiarize yourself with the **Gallery Walk** and **Big Paper** strategies, which are available at [facinghistory.org/advisory-media](http://facinghistory.org/advisory-media). Copy, cut out, and tape each excerpt from the reading **Creating Ourselves Online and in “Real Life”** on a separate piece of chart paper or butcher paper and post them around the room in preparation for the **Big Paper** gallery walk.

#### APPROXIMATE TIME:

45 minutes

#### MATERIALS:

##### READING

**Creating Ourselves Online and in “Real Life”**

Chart paper and markers

## PROCEDURE:

### 1. Reflect on Your Real Life versus Online Identity

- Explain to advisees that this activity includes excerpts from interviews with teens, conducted by the Pew Research Center, about how young people share their identities online.
- Start by asking advisees to make a T-chart in their journals. Have them write the heading “In Real Life” in the left-hand column. Then ask them to make a list of all the labels and assumptions a total stranger might make about them based on how they look and act “in real life.”
- Next, have advisees write the heading “Social Media” in the right-hand column. Under that heading, they should list all the labels and assumptions a stranger might make about them based *only* on their social media persona.
- Finally, give advisees two minutes to respond to the following prompt in their journals:

When I look at the two lists, I notice that my “real life” and “online” identities are \_\_\_\_\_.

You might facilitate a brief discussion about this prompt or ask advisees to turn and talk with a partner.

## 2. Explore How Advisees Represent Themselves Online

- If your advisees watched the video **Online vs. Offline Self: Who Is the Real You?** in Activity 23, remind them or ask them to explain how the profiles we create, the comments we make, and the posts of others that we “like” all contribute to an online identity that is often similar to—but sometimes very different from—our identity in “real life.” If your advisees did not watch the short video, you might show it before the gallery walk.
- Then invite advisees to respond in writing to the texts hanging around the room from the reading **Creating Ourselves Online and in “Real Life”** in a **gallery walk** (visit [facinghistory.org/advisory-media](http://facinghistory.org/advisory-media) to learn about this teaching strategy). You might have advisees respond in one or more of the following ways:
  - Read the excerpts and circle places where the speaker talks about choices he or she made about his or her online identity.
  - Draw an arrow that points to an idea that resonates, and write a brief explanation of why it does so.
  - Pose questions in reaction to the speaker’s ideas.

## 3. Discuss Online versus Real Identity

- As a group, take some time to read what everyone wrote in response to the teenagers’ comments about how they represent themselves online.
- Divide your advisees into groups of three to four and ask them to discuss the following questions:
  - What were some of the concerns that advisees raised about how their identity was expressed online?
  - How did other people’s opinions of them affect what they chose to share or not share? Where would their choices fit on this one-to-ten scale?
    - 1 = choices based solely on personal desires and wishes
    - 10 = choices based entirely on what other people think
  - What advice would you give to someone who is creating their first social media profile?
  - How can the choices we make about our social media profiles and online personas influence how we see ourselves? How others see us?



# Creating Ourselves Online and in “Real Life”

In 2012, the Pew Research Center surveyed young people to learn about how they represented themselves online. The following are excerpts from interviews Pew conducted with teenagers.

- 1. Female (age 14):** “OK, so I do post a good amount of pictures, I think. Sometimes it’s a very stressful thing when it comes to your profile picture. Because one should be better than the last, but it’s so hard. So . . . I will message [my friends] a ton of pictures. And be like which one should I make my profile? And then they’ll help me out. And that kind of takes the pressure off me. And it’s like a very big thing.”
- 2. Female (age 14):** “I think I wouldn’t [become Facebook friends with my teachers]. Just because I’m such a different person online. I’m more free. And obviously, I care about certain things, but I’m going to post what I want. I wouldn’t necessarily post anything bad that I wouldn’t want them to see, but it would just be different. And I feel like in the classroom, I’m more professional [at] school. I’m not going to scream across the room oh my God, I want to dance! Or stuff like that. So I feel if they saw my Facebook they would think differently of me. And that would probably be kind of uncomfortable. So I probably would not be friends with them.”
- 3. Male (age 18):** “Yeah, I go to church and all, so I don’t want to post certain things because I don’t want the preacher looking at my Facebook. Because I go to church with her. So then if she sees me, yeah, baby, and yeah. I feel like it does affect the way you use social [media]. You have that respect for something or for a group that you’re into or anything, like . . . yourself, because maybe that’s who you are, but at the same time, you love that group and you never want to disrespect them. So at that point, I feel like it does affect you. Sometimes affecting you doesn’t always mean negatively. It can sometime[s] be positively, you know?”
- 4. Male (age 18):** “Yeah, I have some teachers who have connections that you might want to use in the future, so I feel like you always have an image to uphold. Whether I’m a person that likes to have fun and go crazy and go all out, but I don’t let people see that side of me because maybe it changes the judgment on me. So you post what you want people to think of you, basically.”

- 5. Female (age 16):** "I deleted it [my Facebook account] when I was 15, because I think it [Facebook] was just too much for me with all the gossip and all the cliques and how it was so important to be—have so many friends—I was just like it's too stressful to have a Facebook, if that's what it has to take to stay in contact with just a little people. It was just too strong, so I just deleted it. And I've been great ever since."
- 6. Female (age 16):** "And our SRO [School Resource Officer], he has information. He can see anything that we do, basically, because he's part of the police department. And so he's talked to my friends and I before. And he was like, anything you do, I can pull up. So if y'all tweet about a party, while you're there, just don't be surprised when it gets busted."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mary Madden and Amanda Lenhart, "What teens said about social media, privacy, and online identity," Pew Research Center, May 21, 2013, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/05/21/what-teens-said-about-social-media-privacy-and-online-identity/>.