Facebook, Identity, and Deception:
Explorations of Online Identity Construction

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project uses the social networking site Facebook to explore notions of personal identity: Its conception, construction, and expression. Students begin the assignment by creating a fictitious Facebook account. Second, students work to create an online identity through this account that is dissimilar from the way they perceive themselves. Students conclude by presenting their fictitious Facebook profiles to the rest of the class, discussing how/why it differs from their "real" identities, how/why they made the decisions they did, etc.

INSTRUCTIONAL PURPOSE

This project uses social networking technology to engage students in an academic manner. It also offers potential entry and discussion points for the instructor to clarify or expound upon claims made by students regarding the construction and performance of personal identity. Finally, it generates an environment of mutual respect, while promoting reflexivity beyond the classroom setting.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students will explore the concept of personal identity via online content.
2. Students will learn to navigate the internet and use social networking technologies for academic purposes.
3. Students will expand their learning processes beyond the classroom setting alone.
4. Students will critically reflect on the construction and performance of personal identity construction (particularly online identity).

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

1. Begin by instructing students to create a fictitious Facebook identity that is dissimilar to the way they perceive themselves. (If they already have a Facebook account, they can simply create a second profile by using a different email address).
2. Give students ample time outside of class to develop their fictitious profile, using whatever means they choose (photographs, wall posts, demographic information, etc.)
3. Once complete, have students present their newly created identities to the rest of the class, taking time to explain how/why it differs from the way they perceive themselves, how/why they made the decisions they did, etc.
4. Following the students' presentations, reflect as a class on the way(s) students worked to shape their fictitious identities. Specifically, which characteristics did they choose to change, in order to create the new identity? (e.g., gender, sexuality, religion, race/ethnicity, age, geographic location, etc.) Equally significant, which characteristics did they overlook or keep the same? What do these decisions say about the way we see ourselves and others? What possible themes emerge among students?

ESTIMATED TIME

- 10 minutes for the instructor to explain the assignment.
- 1 week for the students to create and complete their fictitious Facebook identities.
- 10-20 minutes for each student to present and discuss her/his profile to the rest of the class.

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