

# Opinion: Cyber relationships could destroy real ones

By Amanda Strong

After an exhausting day, all you want to do is put your feet up and spend time with the person you care about the most ... and then your spouse walks into the room. Upon their arrival, you close your computer hoping you don't appear too startled to raise suspicion.

Sharing intimate details of your life on Facebook with someone else probably wouldn't go over so well with your significant other. Your relief is temporary, because this will likely become a reoccurring theme when you continue to "network" with that special person.

This deception happens every day when a person decides to carry on an affair, especially one where social media plays a prime role. With more than 700 million users on Facebook, many of those ask themselves, "am I crossing the line?" when they carry on with another "friend" either new or old.

Things become foggy when you're consistently tempted to look up an ex or confirm a friend who may not be the greatest choice to allow back into your life. The lines begin to blur and lies turn into infidelity. Before becoming just another statistic, ask yourself these three questions:

**Is the relationship real?** Cyber relationships are tricky. Either you begin to correspond or communicate with someone after a reconnection or you meet someone entirely new. This excitement or newness resembles the easier days without responsibilities, work, and children. You feel special from all the attention solely focused on you, swept away with the thought of a less complicated life.

The reality may be difficult to swallow when you realize that the person you make that connection with a. may not be the person you thought you knew or b. turns out to be very similar to the person you're currently with when the fun times fade and reality slaps you in the face. Social networking hands you the opportunity to be anyone you want to be. Someone living in a fantasy may not grasp the impact on their family and themselves. Their new relationship is real to them, but could it be masked by all the hype that surrounds social networking. When you take away Facebook, and you're just one on one, can you look at the person and feel your new reality will stand the test of time?

**What is life like?** Lonely or feeling like you want more out of life? Vulnerability, mixed with the ease of connecting (or reconnecting) with people, is a recipe that may derail one's path. A person may feel they're receiving more support from a friend than a spouse. This attention sometimes leads to a tighter bond with your social media "friend" than the person you sleep next to at night. But is this new relationship based on finding the support, more so than the person giving it?

Sometimes the relationship is not about the attraction or compatibility but the needed strength to get out of a difficult or lonely situation. Ask yourself, are you using this new relationship as an out? Do you truly believe this person will be around in six months? Be honest with yourself with where you are in life, and why you've pursued another relationship in the first place.

**Why take the risk?** Some people are going to cheat, whether facilitated by cyber relationships or not. Others may look for their ex and get into trouble pursuing the past or innocently be struck out of the blue with a connection they never thought would happen. Are you impulsive and want to just go for it? Have you thought about the consequences and decided to cross the line anyway? Ask yourself, are you risking your marriage or relationship because you found a more exciting and

passionate person; think this is your soul mate; or feel this is your way out of your current situation?

Even if you get wrapped up in the hype and the temptation seems too much to handle, there's always that split second before you post something or encourage communication when you know you shouldn't. Your actions could destroy the ones you love and change your life completely. Ask yourself, why would I choose to face those consequences? If you deal with the truth before you cross the line, you may save yourself from making a huge mistake.

Couples are now citing Facebook on their divorce papers as one of the reasons their marriage fell apart. Can social media be blamed for giving everyone such an easy tool to cheat? Words of advice, be honest with yourself, because your decisions are yours, and only yours, to make.

Social networking sites aren't losing sleep over your choices, that job is solely your responsibility.

*Amanda Strong is the author of "With Just One Click", the first of its kind about the complexity of Facebook relationships.*