

## Chapter 3

# Consider Four Types of Online Identities for Teaching and Modeling Online Behavior

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this chapter is to provide data and suggestions to educators for teaching and modeling concepts and practices related to online identity. The capabilities introduced by Web 2.0 have changed the potential benefits and liabilities of using online identities. Because online identities can be different from a person's real, offline self, approaches for teaching online self-presentation will differ from the traditional methods of teaching about social interaction. The authors present two theoretical foundations to frame the concept of online self. After a discussion of issues and problems associated with online identities, the authors apply the findings from a recent study to help educators model and teach about online identities. The primary findings are the identification of four types of online identities that include real, desired, enhanced, and deceptive. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future studies to further this topic and extend the current research.*

### INTRODUCTION

As social interaction within networked computing environments (i.e. the Internet) continues to expand, the importance of online identity increases as well. Any one individual may present multiple online identities, and as this number rapidly grows, educators need to develop and refine their understanding of online identities so that they can engage in effective teaching and model best practices in social interaction, citizenship, and network safety. Schmidt and Cohen (2013) predicted that the number of online identities will soon exceed earth's population. This prediction adds to Hollandsworth, Dowdy,

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and Donovan's (2011) stated sense of urgency for educators to keep up with the speed of technological advancements in the realm of digital citizenship.

To help teachers understand student perspectives regarding online self-presentation, Koh-Herlong (2015) conducted a study with recent high school graduates who identified four types of online identities that spanned a spectrum ranging from deliberately honest to deliberately deceptive. The four types of identities are *real*, *desired*, *enhanced*, and *deceptive*. Educators should consider incorporating this information into K-12 classroom instruction. It is necessary for students to understand how these different types of identity are used within various online applications and settings, in general discussions about technology use, in modeling behavior, and in teaching digital citizenship.

The objectives of this chapter are to:

1. Present a brief background and theoretical framework for the teaching of online identities,
2. Outline several issues and problems that point to the need for teaching about online identities so that educators understand its importance and relevance,
3. Provide a synopsis of Koh-Herlong's (2015) study which resulted in the emergence of four types of online identities,
4. Offer a starting point for educators to begin incorporating modeling and teaching the four types of online identities, and
5. Propose future research opportunities to broaden the literature base on this topic

## **BACKGROUND**

The concept of online identity is not new. There are studies published in peer-reviewed journals from the 1980s such as Myers's (1987) study on online identities within an electronic bulletin board environment. Today's relative newness of the concept of online identity stems from the potential uses that Web 2.0 introduced. When advanced online technological capabilities launched in the early 2000s, the Internet environment offered a new generation of opportunities, which spawned the term Web 2.0. The capabilities of Web 2.0 changed the face of the Internet from being a database of information to being a dynamically changing platform (Downes, 2005). The Internet became a place for collective collaboration, dynamic editing by many, and sharing information with a limitless number of users (Downes, 2005). This change meant that applications enabled users to be community based, social, interactive, and self-expressive, while employing user-created, customized content with media-rich options (Skiba, 2006). In the educational literature, there are a few early adopters of Web 2.0, such as Bergin's (2002) discussion of teaching with wikis. The majority of studies and conversations about Web 2.0 in the classroom began after 2005 (e.g., Parker & Chao, 2007; Rosenfeld, 2007; Skiba, 2006). Web 2.0 introduced an innovative way to use and create online identities.

This new opportunity needs a new model for educators to teach *self* (Seery, 2010). Seery (2010) stated that the traditional ways of teaching about self do not work for teaching about self in the online world. Instead, educators need a new method that applies to the online world. The traditional practice of developing self within a group relies on being with others in the same place and relies on the senses of touch, sight, sound, and even scent (Seery, 2010). In contrast, according to Seery, social gatherings online, such as social networking pages, do not contain those same variables. Creating different online identities may offer positive benefits, but the opportunity has to balance with safety concerns (Ohler,

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