



Are Virtual Relationships Real?



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Opinion

In order to answer this question we have to think about what we mean when we say "relationship"?

Are we thinking about an emotional bond, a cognitive bond or a practical "doing" bond?

Does it include "exchange" and "participation" from both sides or if there are more than two participants, from all participants?

Virtual Relationships in our Global Village have interested me for several years ever since my first client with print-outs of a virtual love affair showed up in my office requesting my help in sorting out the real and authentic from the imagination, aspirations and desires. When it is a virtual business relationship or professional bond such as those created and developed in linked-in it is very easy, clean and clear. Both sides present their letters of introduction, their videos on you tube, Ted talks, articles that have been published, advertisements on Google and their wishes for co-operation and exposure. It is sort of like a friendly chess game or an invitation to a party, an attempt to get to know each other. You have to be careful about money exchanges and contracts, but usually the relationships are quite honest without hidden agendas and are really satisfactory for both sides. These relationships are win-win for both participants and are based mostly on cognition and cognitive elements.

The problems arise when at least one side makes it a personal relationship. Then a person, man or woman, has to be careful and recognize the red alarm signals, such as asking for money, needing money for a lawyer, asking for a loan, asking for a bank number, a credit card number just this once, or need of money for insurance or a doctor or a plane trip to meet you. Your virtual friend or lover must have your home address, identity number, or perhaps demonstrates abnormal behavior like falling deeply in love after five emails, wanting to meet physically in real life before a common ground of familiarity or friendship has been built, or love-sick phone conversations. One must always be aware of the dangers and keep

boundaries. You do not really know who is out there. He/she could be at one extreme violent, a terrorist, a kidnapper or simply a con woman or con man out to get your money. If the correspondence included talks of an inheritance, big money to come in, an oil mogul father, then beware. Another possibility is that your virtual friend or lover is a psychopath, needs a psychiatrist or psychologist and not a friend or lover. Things to be aware of include: discrepancies in information and in language use; maybe the emails are written by two people or partially copied. When your virtual friend refuses to be seen on Skype or on what's App video and is only willing to communicate via email or speaking on what's App, this is suspicious and provides food for thought. When the first email includes "I hate lies and deceits," beware!

Be wary of someone who is too "something": too beautiful, too handsome, too rich, too successful, too young. Most of us are rather mediocre. If you cannot see the other side while communicating, you might be in for a big surprise as was a client of mine, a man 65 years old who was in a virtual relationship with a beautiful young woman who sent him her picture (who knows where the picture came from), a picture of a Canadian passport (who knows if it was forged or stolen), a story that she is an heiress and will be rich one day, and a picture from a magazine showing her as a model. When he asked me if it all is authentic, I answered that I do not have a clue. The only thing I know is that we have to work on his need of this fairy tale and virtual love affair. After several months of love letters and hot virtual sex, she asked him to send her money for a plane ticket to visit him as she was temporarily estranged from her rich father. He was almost ready to send her the money. Imagine that. We had a lot to work on regarding his need for fantasies.

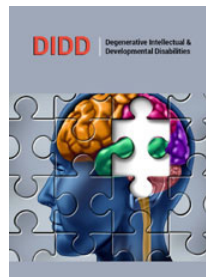
But in spite of all these warnings, sometimes there is a normal lonely soul out there in the virtual world who is looking for somebody just like you. Life is full of surprises and sometimes there are gold nuggets just waiting to be found. Go for it, but carefully!



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