

Chapter 7: Friendship

Discussion case #1

Julia and Adam are old friends. Adam is an avid gamer and spends hours every night playing World of Warcraft. His online friendships span continents. He plays with a large group of online friends, and they've developed inside jokes, mutual support systems, and even hard-hitting discussions about depression, family loss, and job struggles. They've been in the same guild for years.

But Adam casually admits to Julia that he's been lying to these online friends for the length of the friendships.

He tells them that he's 35 (he's actually 21), lives in San Diego (he lives in rural Michigan), and teaches Spanish at a local high school (he's studying ancient Greek philosophy). He defends himself by saying that they'll never discover the truth and that online isn't real life.

Julia is stunned. She knows she'd feel so guilty for lying to friends for years. Adam says he doesn't. He thinks that it is good enough that he listens to his friends vent; he doesn't think that he owes them the truth about himself. If pressed on the issue, Adam says that he is simply roleplaying. But Julia worries that he's not treating his online friends well and certainly not as *friends* deserve.

1. Is Adam wronging his friends? Can we even truly call them his friends?
2. Do we owe people online information about ourselves, especially if we consider them friends?
3. Should different rules govern offline and online friendships?

Discussion case #2

Ana maintains a very active social-media presence, and every year, on her birthday, she receives tons of Facebook comments and messages: "happy birthday, Ana" and "HBD". But that's *all* she receives, pretty much. Virtually nobody calls her to wish her a happy birthday. Even the people she considered good friends sent her just a few emojis. Since nobody has made any plans to spend time with her, she ends up spending her birthday alone. She feels like all of these so-called friendships are hollow, and she's disappointed.

1. Is Ana right to feel disappointed? Is there something missing from online friendships like this one?
2. Is it fair to say that social media apps reward brief engagement and therefore promote only shallow ties to other people, rather than facilitating emotionally rich "real" friendships?