

maleCall

This month we consider how to read between the lines of an Internet dating ad and thus discover the person behind the facade.



JAMES ROBERTS

Phoenix

At the risk of sounding all scholarly and stuff, I'd like to point out that a basic principle of communication theory is that for information to be conveyed there must be an alternative or an element of uncertainty. If you already know the answer, nothing new has been learned. In practice, you want to know what the speaker or writer *could* have said, but chose *not* to, for whatever reason.

A good way to tease this out is to always be asking "as opposed to what?"

Students of my method read the Sunday "Dear Abby" columns closely to figure out what the writer is *not* saying...or why the writer chose particular things to relate instead of some others (most of which Drabby misses anyway since she takes everything at face value).

But when you're looking at an Internet dating ad, you should ask yourself: "What is this person *not* saying and what is this person *not* showing?"

For example, a man's picture shows him wearing a ball cap in all his photos. What is he not showing? His head. Conclusion: no hair. All men wearing baseball caps in photos are balding. No exceptions; ever.

By the same token, a woman showing herself from the face up only is, shall we say...plus-sized. No exceptions.

Next principle: Most profiles tell more about what the person's *last* partner was like than them. Yep. For most profiles, you can pretty much identify what went wrong in the last relationship by seeing what the person emphasizes.

Does she insist on "faithfulness

and honesty"? Guess what her last partner did?

Does the person demand "no game players" or "no head games"? Guess what happened last time?

Do they say "no couch potatoes"? We can take it that the last partner watched a lot of TV.

The gal says "you need to be able to handle an intelligent, independent woman"...it's a pretty good bet her last partner was clingy and controlling.

"No baggage" means the last pard had a truckload.

Now let's take it one more step. If someone says they "love life" or "love to laugh" you now know to ask: "as opposed to, say, *hating* life, or just hating anything funny?" This person hasn't told you a single informative thing...other than you're going to have to be the one bringing the funny. Because someone who loves to laugh doesn't necessarily love to make you laugh. They just want to be entertained.

Sometimes you can simply reverse the statement to get the meaning:

"I do not want to sound bitter" equals "I am bitter."

"I look much younger than my years" equals "I delude myself by believing everything I hear."

Then there's the case of the college-educated guy who says "I can't wait to start skiing when the snow flies."

I just hope they don't bite.

And the "highly successful businessman" whose Last Thing Read was the back of a Cocoa Pebbles box.

Don't go crazy reading between the lines. Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar.

James Roberts is a significantly over-40-something Phoenix-based writer, author of "On Being Eight Again" and "The Tao of Coyote." Divorced with no children, he has been exploring the dating scene and collecting tales of woe for many years. Need a guy's perspective? Jot a note to Male Call at jrobertpenn@aol.com.