

**Fact or Fiction**  
**By**  
**Daniel E. White December 4, 2023**

During the World Series, Google advertised its new Smart Phone. Their method was to have photos taken, either as selfies or of some other person, in which one or more of the subjects of the photo presented a less-than-perfect visage. Maybe someone's eyes were shut, or the expression did not fit the image the taker of the picture was hoping for.

The camera, though, could be manipulated to replace the offending face with a new version, one that eliminated shut eyes or mopey faces. No photo lab needed. The camera contains within itself the software to perform the function. Is the camera too smart?

Simmering in the back reaches of my mind was the issue of Artificial Intelligence. In particular, a student I know of was recently disciplined by his school for using AI in the completion of an assignment. From what I learned about the incident, the student was forthcoming, the teacher was reasonable, and the response of the school measured and appropriate.

But, I thought, it took a teacher well-versed in the subject matter and the material covered in class, not to mention a sense of the writing capabilities of the student about the subject, to discern that AI had been used.

After seeing the camera commercial for the umpteenth time, I said out loud, "I'm glad I don't have kids today because how can I teach them how to tell between fact and fiction?"

The issue is not new. Photos have been manipulated since there have been photos, and few think twice about cropping a shot or photo-shopping in some other way to achieve the effect desired by the photographer. Likewise, there have always been plagiarists, willing to lift other people's words and call them their own or school buddies willing to write an essay or two for a friend.

The burden of discerning what is real or true or accurate has been the responsibility of individuals for a long time. More often than not, people have turned to trusted sources to help them verify what they have seen or read.

If we were dealing in the works of famous painters, there are experts trained over many years who are regularly hired to offer their judgments as to whether or not a "long-lost" painting by a legend in the field is real or a forgery. Likewise, there are scholars who are consulted to judge whether or not a folio of Shakespeare's works is a coveted First Folio or not. For that determination, there are specific hallmarks of the real thing that, apparently, cannot be duplicated.

To try to stop the widespread distribution of counterfeit money, the U.S. mint has used specialized paper and inks over time. These steps haven't been 100% effective in part

because not every person receiving a payment in knows enough to be able to identify the fake.

The point still stands. There are, and always have been, people intent on fooling other people for their own nefarious purposes.

It isn't just my mythical kids that I worry about. In our busy lives, a lot of people are prone take in information incessantly without taking the time to consider whether or not the information is true or accurate. The fractious nature of politics at the national level, if it hasn't turned people off to the political realm, tends to drive people to their respective silos. Each silo is serviced by specific sources of information that serve to reinforce one's choice of silo.

Recently, I heard a man who talked about the importance of small, local presses and created a foundation to support such institutions. He observed that, if the newspaper is writing about potholes in city streets or the run-down condition of public parks, it addresses matter that everyone in the community can observe to be real. There still might be debate over how to address the issues—whether to vote on a bond issue for road repair or create an “adopt-a-park” movement similar to the “adopt a highway” program—but the fact of the issue itself is obvious.

In smaller communities, one can often observe people collaborating to address problems without worrying about party affiliation. There is pragmatism evident: we have a problem; we need to fix it. Often, there is a self-renewing sense of pride whenever people come together to achieve a solution. It reflects a community-mindedness that nearly always shows up after a cataclysmic event like a major fire or earthquake.

That spirit shows up because there is within most of us a desire to make where we live better for all, an altruism that too often is overwhelmed by the noisy national news. So, the man concluded, supporting a local newspaper is an act of sustaining one's community.

Do any of the maxims about how to treat other people provide a standard for judging truth? How does what I hear measure up to The Golden Rule? The Five Pillars of Islam? The Commandment to Love One Another? The act of caring, simple human kindness? Rotary's Four-Way Test?

These measures will **NOT** help determine whether a photo has been shopped or AI employed to write something. We will still need to develop sources we believe to reliable to help us from time to time.

But they can help to bind us together, build and sustain trust. Maybe, just maybe, as trust builds, fewer people will be interested in fooling other people.

Click here to email your comments to Dan. [danwhitehi@gmail.com](mailto:danwhitehi@gmail.com)