

Dear Cute Tinder Guy: That's Not My Real Name

For the longest time I used pseudonyms online to protect myself. But could my self-enforced "third date rule" be the reason I'm single?

BY ANNA DAVIES PUBLISHED: AUG 20, 2014



IMAGE NO LONGER
AVAILABLE

I'm on a first date at a crowded bar, waiting for my date to come back with our drinks. When he arrives, he's not alone. A girl is standing by his side.

"It's so weird, my cousin is here!" He exclaims as he sets our drinks on the table. "Claire, this is Annabelle. Annabelle, Claire."

"Nice to meet you." I cringe as I offer my hand. Because, strictly speaking, my name is not Annabelle.

MORE FROM ELLE





To potential friends and employers, I'm Anna Davies from day one, but potential boyfriends only know me as Annabelle Kathryn until at least date three. I began using the name in my early twenties, when I realized just how many first dates were Googling me before we met and unearthing essays on topics ranging from why I love hooking up with guests at weddings to that time I told a guy I was moving to California just to get him to stop texting me. I was proud of the things I'd written—the story about my cross-country lie was published in *The New York Times*—but I also realized that these stories could seriously skew how a guy viewed me on a first date, especially if he didn't have similarly revealing search results. At best, it presented an uneven playing field—he knew nearly everything about me, while I knew almost nothing about him. At worst, he'd be so afraid I'd write about him that he wouldn't give me a chance.

So I started just not sharing my name, especially with guys I met online. It was surprisingly easy. I could often go through an entire date without even mentioning my first name. And just in case he asked for my e-mail address, I created an Annabelle Kathryn handle.

And I'm not the only woman who's done this. Kelly*, 32, also finds it easier not to share her full name. A writer as well, her work has touched on mental health issues within her family that she would much rather explain in real life rather than have him read. And Abby, 30, doesn't write for a living, but still prefers that a guy doesn't Google her prior to meeting up. "So many guys seem to be looking for their 'type.' They want a woman who's gone to a certain college, or works in the 'right' industry. It's like they want to see your résumé before they meet. I like to think that having some mystery can actually make you both get to know each other."

But savvy searchers can still find intel about you, even if you're trying to keep your ID on the DL, as Cara, a social media editor, found out when she got into an online debate about how easy it is to suss out someone's identity from an online dating site. Posting under an anonymous handle, Cara challenged another commenter to find her, mentioning the things she did share on dating sites: her first name, the fact that she covers travel and lifestyle in her job, and that she lives in New York. Minutes later, a Tweet to her real name popped up from the commenter—she'd been found.

Which is why dating coach Courtney Crosslin, founder of adatecoach.com, feels that deliberately hiding your identity isn't a failsafe technique—and you may as well let a potential partner know the real you sooner rather than later. Yes, just giving your first name prior to meeting is smart from a practical point of view: After all, you are meeting a stranger, and dating always comes with some risk. But if things seem to be going well, he seems to be genuine, there's no reason to actively conceal your identity long term.

"Providing a partial or different name to a date provides a false sense of security," she says. "The fact is, we live in a world where our lives are played out online. Instead of trying to hide who we are, I advise clients to do due diligence, and see what comes up in their Google search." Crosslin also explains that, in general, most people don't go beyond the second search page unless they're actually digging for dirt. "Most of my clients know that they'll be Googled, and I advise them to make sure that they like the things that come up in their first two pages of search results."

Following Crosslin's advice, I was pleased (and relieved) that the initial pages of my own search were NBD—and, actually, stuff that I'd be proud to have a guy see before he met me. Not crazy about what comes up on your own name check? Updating your LinkedIn and setting up a Google+ page can help bury anything controversial. And if people keep digging beyond that? Crosslin says it may be a sign they're the ones with issues.

"Everyone expects a certain amount of Googling prior to a date, but if he's bringing up specific things that you know are buried pretty deeply, then it may be a sign he's controlling," says Crosslin. "The right match will be intrigued by what he or she finds." And it's worth the reminder that it goes both ways:

If you don't want him to judge you for your late night Twitter rants, don't judge him for his emo Tumblr from a few years back. And as for me, I'll go back to introducing myself as Anna. I just hope that if my date from last

week searches "Annabelle Kathryn" and stumbles upon this article, he'll forgive me. But let's be serious: Was Claire really your cousin?

Related: [Would You Give Up Texting for Love?](#)

Related: [Subtle Eye Movements Determine Whether It's Love or Lust, New Study Finds](#)

Related: [Reinventing Myself One Online Dating Profile at a Time](#)