

“Perpetrators...”

# **Tens of Thousands of Perpetrators Exposed on Facebook, and They are on Instagram Too?**

A Study on Fake Accounts, and the Innocent Effected by  
the Platform We Trust.

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PREPARED FOR:  
INSTAGRAM INC.

PROJECT COMPLETED BY:

KATHLEEN K. WATERS, MS PSYCHOLOGY

COLONEL BRYAN DENNY (RET.), MA STRATEGIC STUDIES, AND MA MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

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## ABSTRACT

The research conducted is intended to show the inconsistency of Instagram’s recognition of fraudulent accounts. For example, not removing fake profiles but eliminating the authentic profiles. According to the IC3.gov 2019 report (Internet Crimes Complaint Center), there were 19,473 confidence Fraud/Romance complaints (980 more than the previous year), and the losses associated with those complaints exceeded \$475 million (a \$113 million dollar jump from the 2018 report.) The research will indicate the necessary action needed to improve Instagram’s authenticity protocols. As mentioned in the initial report to Facebook also conducted by Mrs. Kathy Waters and Col. Bryan Denny (Ret.), *Your Power, Our People, the Worlds Defense, in More Ways than One*, “Social media is a power, and with power comes abundant responsibility”.

## INTRO

“Connecting the World through Photos”, is an appropriate motto for Instagram, but frightening for those whose identities have been stolen and used as victim bait. Instagram is the platform known for sharing photographs, but also recognized as one of the “centers” for falsely created profiles.

After years of acknowledgement by Facebook/Instagram, there is minimal education and /or awareness dedicated on the subject of romance scams. As you will see in the following research, these platforms have not done a healthy job of preventing the erroneous accounts.

The following report is a peak into the world of Instagram reporting, findings and erroneous “take downs”. From the initial 2017 report, *Your Power, Our People, The Worlds Defense, In More Ways Than One*, written by Col. Bryan Denny (Ret.) and Kathy Waters on behalf of Facebooks online safety, the duo has been asked on several occasions, “what about Instagram?” Facebook and Instagram’s Platform Policies are closely related. It is understood to be “transparent about your identity and your app’s identity” and “don’t confuse deceive defraud, mislead, or harass anyone” (Instagram.com). So, where does the responsibility come in after the reporting?

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### BACK STORY

Col. Bryan Denny (Ret.) and Kathy Waters have been advocates against online romance scams for nearly four years, resulting in the formation of their non-profit, Advocating Against Romance Scammers. Bryan and Kathy have attended multiple meetings with a team at Facebook which also consisted of Instagram representatives. They have continued communication with the Facebook team, and along the way have attended meetings with congressional representatives, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Federal Trade Commission, Pentagon, and multiple media outlets.

Bryan’s photos were stolen and used to build thousands of fake profiles, Instagram being one of the top contributors. Kathy’s mother’s friend was one of “Bryan’s” scammed survivors. Together, Bryan and Kathy took on the job of trying to assist social media platforms in finding ways to help their members with regard to identity safety, education, and continued awareness on the issue of romance scams.

### TRIGGERED CONCERNS

There are multiple reasons why so many account holders today have lost trust in the social media platforms. For one, the amount of reported accounts on Instagram, on a daily basis, is astounding. What’s even more disconcerting is how many of the reported accounts that are “known fakes” are ruled by Instagram as *not going against the platform’s standards*. Per Instagram Community Guidelines *“Each of us is an important part of the Instagram community. If you see something that you think may violate our guidelines, please help us by using our [built-in reporting option](#). We have a global team that reviews these reports and works as quickly as possible to remove content that doesn’t meet our guidelines.”*, Instagram.com, 2020. As mentioned above, Instagram is a photo-based site.

### WRONGFULLY REMOVED

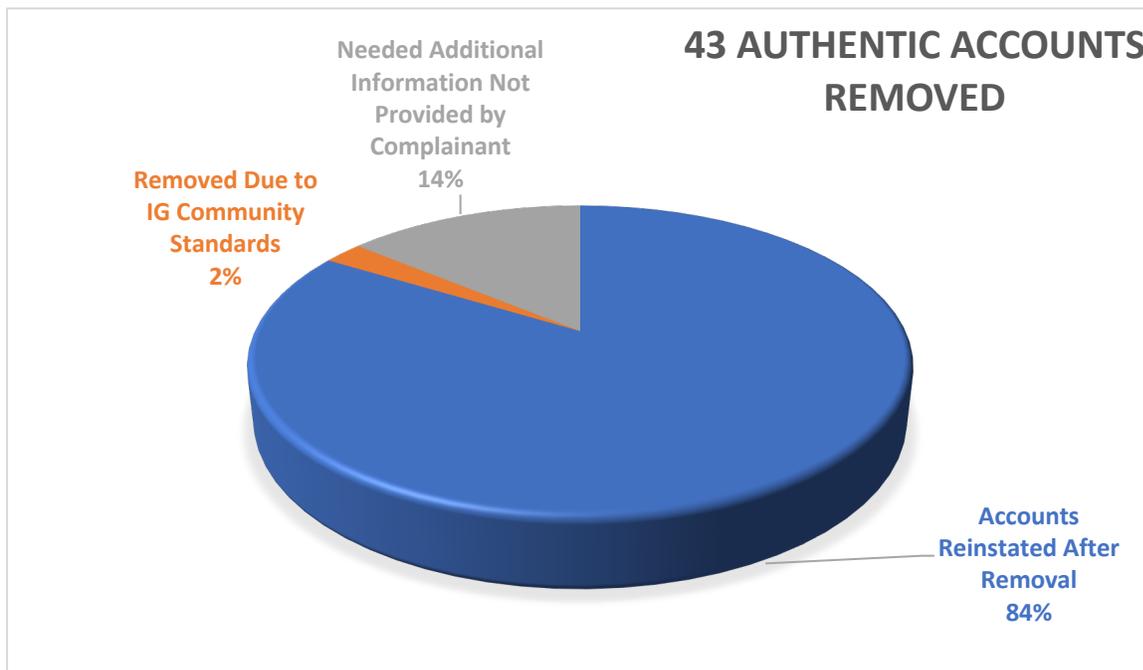
Since 2018, AARS has worked closely with a handful of Facebook/Instagram employees to help reinstate accounts of patrons that were wrongfully removed from their platforms. On February 26, 2020, AARS was issued a link to the *Government, Political and Advocacy* reporting system also known as GPAC. This link was to be utilized by AARS to report those who were unsuccessful with the standard “built-in reporting option” through Facebook and Instagram.

Through word of mouth, Facebook/Instagram account holders heard about AARS’s relationship with a Facebook/Instagram Team, and the ability to possibly help with account reinstatements.

From the initial assistance by Facebook/Instagram team beginning in 2018 to September 16, 2020 (when a report was submitted to GPAC and was seen to no longer exist), 43 Facebook/Instagram customers reported to AARS as wrongfully removed with the inability to

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be reinstated through the “normal” reporting process. 37 of these accounts had prior disputes regarding fraudulent accounts being created using their personal photos. Of the 43 accounts that were reported to the FB/Instagram reporting staff and GPAC link, 84% of the accounts were reinstated, 2% the decision was upheld, and 14% were closed for reasons such as discrepancies with the information given by the account holder, or “outside of the reporting departments scope”. The concern is, why 84% of the authentic accounts were taken down erroneously? What, or who, in the reporting process, is allowing the accounts to be recognized as fake and against Instagram’s “Standards”? How can we trust that Instagram can recognize a fake account, when they cannot identify a genuine profile?



#### INSTAGRAMS TERMS OF USE:

“You agree that we won't be responsible ("liable") for any lost profits, revenues, information, or data, or consequential, special, indirect, exemplary, punitive, or incidental damages arising out of or related to these Terms, even if we know they are possible. This includes when we delete your content, information, or account.”

<https://help.instagram.com/581066165581870>

The above language is alarming when accounts are taken down incorrectly and customer service is not in place to hear the concerns.

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### WRONGFULLY ACTIVE

On the other end of the spectrum, the reported fake accounts are not going down, so, account holders question the accuracy of the reporting process. How can a multitude of mistakes happen with trained eyes, and or the advanced algorithm program Facebook/Instagram claims to use? The study below will show the inaccuracy and lack of precision Facebook/Instagram claims to possess on the area of platform safety.

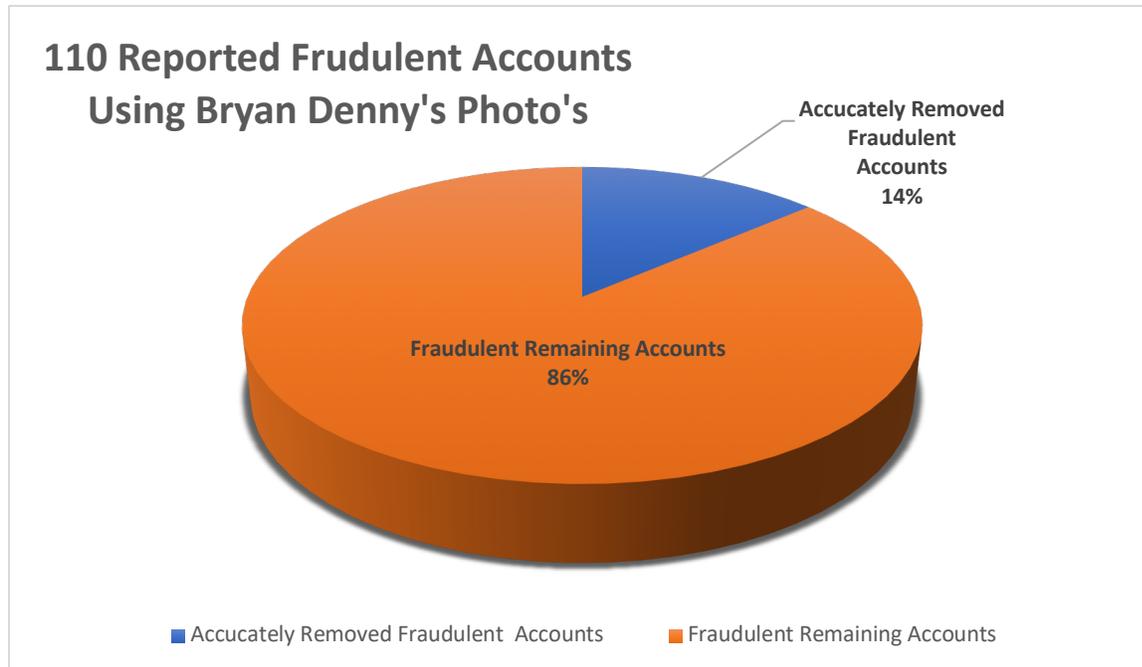
### STUDY ON BUILT-IN REPORTING OPTIONS

AARS conducted a study on the reported and removed false Instagram accounts found, that were using Col. Denny’s photographs. Account gathering began on April 1, 2018 ending on February 12, 2020. There was a total of 242 Instagram accounts found and documented using Col. Denny’s photos. After revisiting all documented accounts, 132 of the accounts had been taken down without AARS reporting. The actions of how the 132 were taken down is unknown. The remaining 110 accounts were reported on February 12, 2020. Each account was reported in the following steps:

1. It’s Inappropriate
2. Report Account
3. It’s Pretending to be Someone Else
4. Someone I know

After a final review on November 30, 2020, 15 accounts were taken down but 95 of the 110 accounts remain active resulting in a 13.6% accurate removal rate.

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On February 24, 2020, AARS had a meeting with Facebook/Instagram. The question was brought up as to why Col. Denny’s accounts were not removed upon reporting. The Instagram representative stated “It’s very hard to determine the fake accounts if the person whose photos were stole does not have a personal Instagram Account.” Col. Denny does possess an Instagram account; however, he has not been active on the platform for some time.

#### CONCULDING

“Our Service is provided "as is," and we can't guarantee it will be safe and secure or will work perfectly all the time.” (Instagram Data Policy, 7/18/2020). As seen in the report, Instagram has a great deal to work on in the name of safety for their account holders. In March, 2018, Facebook and Instagram’s CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, stated he would be hiring an additional 35,000 employees to focus on platform safety. On October 21, 2019, Facebook tweeted “we now have over 35,000 employees working on safety and security.” Are these employees shared with Instagram? If not, when will Instagram accounts become a priority? If they are, it’s apparent more work needs to be done.

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Many ideas have been brought to light on Instagram’s platform safety. The following are a few suggestions that may not only have promising results for user safety if implemented, but could help in regaining the trust of its users.

1. Authentic checkmark for all.
2. Removing the ability to create multiple accounts
3. Facial recognition program determining abusive/excessive use
4. Initial interactive educational start up course on internet safety for every new open account
5. Ongoing public service announcements on internet safety (commercials, ads, platform banners)
6. Required yearly safety in-service
7. Increase staff with a focus on platform safety, and online crimes.

For nearly 9 years, Instagram has aided and abetted online scamming. How you may ask? By not pursuing many of the above suggestions; by allowing the criminals to conduct their business upon your platform; by focusing on other subjects like purchasing planforms, creating dating sites, and building virtual reality. When will Instagram’s customers safety be a priority?

#### PERSONAL NOTE

Advocating Against Romance Scammers (AARS) was formed to help raise awareness and protect every platform user from being scammed romantically and financially failing, and offer ideas on how to help.

After our research some questions remain:

- Why are authentic accounts wrongly deleted?
- Why are fake accounts left as real?
- Why can’t your people and or programs figure out what is real and what is fake?
- Are you receiving some kind of compensation for keeping fake accounts?
- Are there repercussions of taking the fakes down, or is the system simply faulty?

Instagram users deserve an answer to and for their safety.

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