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'It's complicated': Handling social media when your relationship implodes

By Sarah LeTrent, CNN

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What happens when a mobile society meets relationship disasters?

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

Popular social media outlets make breaking up even harder to do, and more public

Some people use social media as a way to keep tabs on potential partners

Source: If you trust your partner offline, you should as well online

(CNN) -- Back in the day, when couples began dating exclusively, they called it "going steady." Now, they're more likely to make it "Facebook official."

But when relationships go sour, instead of simply returning a varsity jacket or pin and letting the news trickle through the gossip grapevine, popular social media outlets make breaking up even harder to do -- and more public.

Enter the dreaded status change, or perhaps worse, the unfollow: an instantaneous way to let your "friends" and followers on the Web know of your relationship woes in this age of oversharing.

A single "what's on your mind" entry or 140-character tweet can quickly turn your Facebook mini-feed or Twitter stream into a virtual episode of "The Jerry Springer Show."

It's an online ordeal that Las Vegas resident Sharon Chayra knows all too well.

In May, Chayra and her boyfriend, who were "Facebook official,"

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called it quits. Aware that her friends would see the split when she changed her status back to "single," she immediately removed the update from her mini-feed.

Despite her attempts to minimize news of the breakup online, Chayra's ex-boyfriend launched a virtual tirade against her.

"I was able to read his page and did so for about maybe a few weeks after our split," she said. "Then I realized reading his wall was like taking a hammer to my fingers every time and rapping them to exquisite pain -- so I stopped."

Manhattan psychologist Joseph Cilona says people are more likely to share aspects of their love life when emotions are most heightened: during the "honeymoon phase" or when a relationship comes to an end.

"The reality is that there is always a very high possibility that any romantic relationship might not work out at some point, so it's really wise to think ahead and circumvent these kinds of problems," he said.

"Sharing information about personal life, particularly details about romantic relationships, is often related to needs for external validation, approval or admiration," Cilona added. "The underlying emotional subtext of this kind of behavior might be stated as trying to communicate the message: 'I am valuable because someone loves me.' "

Users should share personal information with those who are important to them through more direct and private means, he said.

But with more than 800 million active Facebook users, relationship disclosure is nothing out of the ordinary.

In fact, some people use social media as a way to keep tabs on potential partners. The [Facebook Breakup Notifier app](#) allows users to choose friends whose relationship status they'd like to track.

So what's a couple of normal social media-crossed lovers to do?

"Our advice to dating couples who break up -- and hopefully the breakup has occurred face-to-face and not from a status update or text -- is to unfriend or block the ex," said [Jason Krafsky](#), who co-wrote the book "Facebook and Your Marriage" with his wife, Kelli.

"We have heard too many horror stories of the one with a broken heart self-inflicting themselves with a longer bout of heartache by watching the every move of their ex on Facebook. By removing them from your Facebook life, this allows the necessary emotional healing to occur ... for both people."

It gets even trickier with location-based apps, Jason Krafsky said, where a virtual episode of "Jerry Springer" can quickly turn into a feature presentation of "Fatal Attraction" -- even if the relationship is still on good terms.

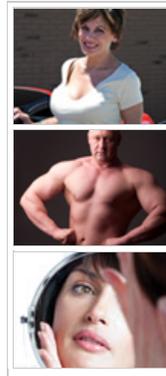
"Where things go south is when they are using the platform to monitor or stalk their mate's every move because they don't trust them," he said. "If this is surfacing in a person's relationship, stop using the feature, have a conversation with the mate to try working on the relationship, and give it some time before you start checking in

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online again."

Netiquette and relationship expert [Julie Spira](#) has the same perspective regarding micro-blogging forum Twitter: Trust is key.

"If you trust your partner offline, you should as well online," said Spira, author of "The Rules of Netiquette: How to Mind Your Manners on the Web."

"If you're not dating exclusively, I suggest taking a digital pass on following him or her. He might say he's at home sick for the evening, while you're gazing at his latest rendezvous in a TwitPic photo. When in doubt, don't. It's not worth a digital fight."

And if you're just an innocent bystander who wants to console your newly single friend, Spira said the polite thing to do is respect their privacy.

"Showing you care can be appreciated," she said, "but people feel uncomfortable when there's a breakup involved."

If you're the newly single friend, Spira suggests exercising your executive veto power over posts from those well-meaning bystanders.

"Any comments on your status change on Facebook that make you feel bad or sad should be deleted from your feed. It's best to send the commenter a private message on Facebook and let them know why you deleted their comment," Spira advised. "After all, you do want to have supportive friends, both online and offline."

"We're developing relationships online and connecting with people from our past," she said. "Our social media friends become our digital cheerleaders, which I believe is a good thing -- in moderation."

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saxophone31



If you don't want some people to know about your relationships or they would say something hurtful, why are they friends with them? It's simple; only friend people you would normally share that kind of info with anyway.

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BiasObserver

who reads these things anyway. internet friends lost and a few people from school.

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fretlessbass

Don't try and tell me how to handle my break-ups. These self-appointed "experts" in a media that hasn't been around for all that long are so self-righteous. Who died and named them all-knowledgeable?

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celtsrock

Facebook as other forms of social and professional sharing and networking has it's uses, but as with anything in life, there are many who misuse it. The misuse is the problem, not the venue.

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Limer

Crank tunes ! ! ! !

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RasterMaster

My advice is to not use Facebook. Its an addictive waste of time, similar to MMORPG, MUD, BBS, and other predecessors.

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Luxxy

and the CNN comment section?

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Synth655321

Nobody Uses Social Media.

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Randomdude21

this is funny, since the last CNN article i read on this topic said that "de-friending" an ex was the most immature and worst thing you could do, and this one says it's the best thing to do....

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DenizenKate

There's actually a book called "Facebook and Your Marriage"? Sheesh! This really is the "age of oversharing" as the article suggests. Following an ex on Facebook and Twitter sounds like a good way to fall down into a deep, dark depression. If a relationship didn't work, let it go and move on to the ... [more](#)

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Shellyanne

My ex, whom I loved deeply, became paranoid I was trying to deceive him in every way (underlying issues he refused or was unable to acknowledge), and broke up with me via TEXT. The whole thing was insulting and hurt like hell, but in retrospect (who am I kidding, I knew as soon as it happened) was ... [more](#)

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StayPuft

facebook is for loser people who have no lives... go read a book you nothing nobody people...if you disappeared today, nobody would really care...

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lurgy

You should take time to read a book (dictionary).

*disappeared

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SaintPaco

Does this mean you will not be my facebook friend, then?

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iceman80231

Amen.

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KatyLA213

My suggestion, just don't use the relationship status. Just don't mark yourself as anything at all. It will keep prospects wondering if you are single or not, (I don't condone playing games, but let your prospect wonder and find out for themselves).Then if you are in a relationship, STILL don't do... [more](#)

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chef

Anyone who takes Facebook and the other crap seriously deserves anything they get. What a tremendous waste of time. On the other hand, if you only have half a brain you do need something to keep you occupied.

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CatMagnet

For me, it's a tool to use to connect with friends all over the world. My information is only viewable by them, and I don't show my relationship status. If I want my friends to know my relationship status, I'll inform them in a more personal manner.

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Kyza

Wasn't your time, partner.

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jdr24

It's a tool and, like any tool, it can be misused. I agree that many people use it to screw around and showboat, but that only reflects who they are in real life. That doesn't mean it can't be used productively.

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Binky42

So, Facebook is a waste of time, but posting on CNN forums isn't? I find that most anti-Facebook people just don't have any friends to add.

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Binky42

The only thing that has changed is the format. People used to write gossip letters, then gossiped on the phone, then gossiped on ICQ and email, then gossiped in texts, and now they gossip on Facebook and Twitter. So what?

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themoi

Better yet never sign up Facebook or Twitter at all. They don't value your privacy and do you really want the whole world to know ALL your business? Guess what? The whole world DOESN'T CARE about your business. The only person who cares about your page is you.

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KCalif

Your relationship should not be all over social media. I had a two-year relationship with a professional colleague, and the only people who knew were my two closest friends. None of our colleagues had a clue, either while we were together or after we broke up. Nor will they ever know.

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KCalif

Yes, it was a relationship. There was a lot more to it than sex. However, we did not believe that our private lives were the business of our colleagues, and thus kept it quiet rather than become the subject of gossip, and part of that was to also not discuss it with friends who knew any of our col... [more](#)

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By Sarah LeTrent , CNN
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