

Relationships and Social Media

Welcome.

Okay, Douglas. So, we have one of those questions that everybody is living, most people are talking about, and lots of us are trying to figure out how to fix. We are talking about relationships and social media.

Oh my

We're in a world now, where relationships literally play out in picture frames and sometimes video. Social media has made it such that when you're mad at your boyfriend, your girlfriend, your husband, even your kids these days, we all see it play out in real time in this new forum that is like everybody's mini TV Studio. The questions our audience had were like, how do you know how to do this thing? When to friend when to unfriend as an example? You know, how do you ensure that your whole life doesn't become one great big public drama? And I think that there are some generational factors associated with this as well. It seems that the younger people are the less they seem to be aware of the concept of a private life. That's just my perspective, per se, my observation? So, I wonder if you could speak to that too, what does that mean generationally for you? Because, you know, we planned doing this show because we had different perspectives from our generational experiences. And I'm curious to know, for your generation, what does this look like?

Well, of course, I speak digital as a second language, of course, which makes me a bit different from many in my generation. But, having said that, most of my friends and peers are living with the same set of issues that I'm living with. And that is, that social media is a fishbowl Everybody gets to see everything and hear everything and be witness to everything that's going on in your life, if you choose to participate, and sometimes even if you don't choose to participate. There's a certain degree of invasion of your privacy, simply by virtue of the people around you, who do participate and intentionally or inadvertently include you, in their social media sphere. They may make reference to you, comment about things that are going on in your life, or exchange messages with you in the open in one medium or another. So, I think it can be tremendously difficult to navigate relationships, when it's just the two of you, but when it's the two of you and everybody else, it is an order of magnitude greater.

That's right, it's an order of magnitude more difficult.

That is the one thing that strikes me as a big difference, and you spoke to this as a kind of generational difference, about privacy. I think there's a presumption in my generation, that one has the ability to decide what's private and what's not. But the minute you cross the divide into social media, another phenomenon takes hold. And I think this is a somewhat bigger issue, that has to do with the degree to which everyone's actions and reactions become instantaneous. There's no separation between something happening, and people reacting to that thing. So, let's say we're a couple and we're going through a rough patch. We have a fight. The likelihood

that it will show up in one way or another, in our social media feeds, is pretty high. In fact, there are some organizations that study this subject that claim they can detect your emotional frame of mind from the language and pictures in your social media feed. Whether that's true or not, I can't verify, but it would not surprise me, because I think we're all very good at detecting, even if we can't always put our finger on the specifics, the shifts in mood and tone on the part of our friends.

Oh, I would totally agree with you. There is an element of social media that we all have to remember is kabuki theater.

What a great way to describe it.

You know, it's the life, we want the world to see, so even if you control for an element of that, I do imagine that there's probably some psychological analysis or communication analysis that can be done that can speak to what the intended message is, perhaps to cover up something else. But what I do want to just kind of touch on momentarily is whether or not is you believe it's ever appropriate to talk about what's going on in your relationship on social media?

Well, no, in a word, I don't think it's ever appropriate. And here's my reasoning. Maybe I'm betraying my age. I think (discussing your relationship on social media) that's extending an invitation to the world to comment and join in a discussion that first and foremost should be between you and your significant other. It's none of anybody else's business. Once people believe they have an invitation to join in, they will and that leads to taking sides, to issues of right and wrong. I think going down that path, even a little bit, is an incredibly dangerous thing to do. And why would you want to do that, unless it's because you feel the need to validate something about your position or your feelings. If you need that validation, find a really good friend who you can trust, if you're not already in some kind of counseling. Find someone you can trust and confide in them and talk it out. Not necessarily to get their counsel, but just so that you get out the feelings and give them a voice so that you can then step back and think about it. To my point earlier, it's too easy to react too quickly to anything in our lives when we have this kind of an outlet, and one with which we are, to be honest, preoccupied.

Oh, absolutely. And I mean, it is ruining relationships every day. I'm not trying to exaggerate in saying that, I can't tell you how often I get phone calls, text messages, emails that are about conflicts that are a byproduct of somebody mishandling their use of their social media. Whether you're arguing about something that she or he posted..... and it's often I will say in my experience women who are over sharing what is taking place inside of their relationships. We as women generally tend to be very community oriented anyway, A lot of us look to and lean on our girlfriends and the like counsel that you were referring to previously. With the advent of social media, we are treating it as if our 2000 fake friends are truly our girlfriends. And I mean that when I say fake friends, because if I, or you were in a real pickle, and needed 50 bucks, how many of those 2000 people would send you 50 bucks? How many of those 2000 people would show up at your, your doctor's appointment or sit with you as you're waiting for the news where your family is concerned? How many of those people would really be there for any

of that? These are not real friendships, but people orient to them as if they were. How many times we see the word expressions such as I love you love you so much, from people who don't even talk to each other outside of social? We're throwing around this word love as easily as we would use a conjunction and it has no meaning. It's completely hollow in social media. But it is penetrating our real lives, because a lot of us are treating our real relationships, just like our virtual ones. And that's exactly what social media relationships are. They are virtual relationships. Now, that's not to say that I think that social media is all bad. Because I think that it is wonderful in its essence being able to stay connected to people that you don't see.

I love the ideathis is not my expression, but one that I heard that perfectly encapsulates the benefit of social media. That it gives you a kind of peripheral vision, as to what's going on in the lives of people that you know, and care about to some degree, whether that's family, friends, whatever. That's The good part. You know, you talked earlier about friending people and having fake friends. So, I'm not an avid user of social media. But for a not very avid user of social media, I probably have accounts on more social media sites than most largely because of professional interest. Some of it isn't event that; I was asked to join something, and now I'm still there. But I don't spend a lot of time on them. It might be, I think, a whopping total of less than an hour a week. So, I'm certainly not a heavy user. But somewhere along the line I've acquired a few people who are, quote, friends, or associates. Now I have a strict policy that I put in place when I realized this, and that when someone asks to friend me, or to become a colleague on LinkedIn or another site, I really am very careful about adding them. Maybe I've offended people, but I find that 95% of the time, it's somebody who wants to sell me something or solicit something from me, rather than somebody who's genuinely interested in relationship. So, my answer is almost always no. But, I still have a few of those folks who are quote, friends and I've thought a number of times, why? Just unfriend them, because we never comment to each other. Why are we pretending? But I think there is a psychological barrier, I wouldn't want to offend anybody.

No, I totally understand that. And this is what our listeners mean when they are asking the question, how do you determine when you need to unfriend someone? To your point about not wanting to offend people, sometimes the beauty of social media is that you can also hide your feeds so if you don't want to see some of the things that people are doing or saying you can hide it and if choose to unfriend just know that some people might be a little bit sensitive to that, particularly if they don't have a lot of friends. They may be more aware when their numbers drop, because they see that relatively different from people who have 2000 3000 friends, who will not even notice that you unfriended them unless you have active interaction with each other. As a general rule, you should avoid using social media as counsel, It is not healthy or safe to do so. It does not benefit relationships in general, and it normally causes more problems than good. If you're looking for counsel, if you're looking for support, then reach out to people who have a real investment in you being happy, healthy and whole, but do not cast your pearls before swine. Do not look for social media friendship to be real friendship

I couldn't agree more. And speaking from your professional perspective and practice, seeing what you see, this is the kind of counsel folks you should take. I can certainly tell you not as a

practicing professional, but just as an individual, that I have seen way too much drama in my life in general and I have to say in the last five to eight years of my life more of it has an element of social media as an instigator or at least an adjunct. This is not a put down of social media but just a warning. Use it for what it's intended, but not as an outlet for your emotions.

That's another episode of LoveLife. Thank you, Kamaria and Todd. We want to tell you how to get in touch with us if you have a thought about this show or an idea for another. Please write to us at alvean@lovelife.digital or doug@lovelife.digital, and we'll be back with you next week.