

The Psychology Behind Status Updates



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A few days ago a guy I was friendly with in college changed his status from 'single' to 'in a relationship.' The flurry of speculative phone calls that followed reached epic proportions. "I didn't even know he was divorced," cried one friend. "Who would marry him?," asked his ex-girlfriend from college.

There were a couple of real ironic things about this surge of interest; first, it reconnected me with college friends I had not spoken to in a while. As you can imagine, the conjecture-laden conversation turned from hypothesis about him, to catch-up about us. Secondly, while this gentleman was a good friend in college, time and distance weakened the bond between us.

In reality, none of my friends really spoke with him except through *Facebook* and even then contact was indirect (i.e. an occasional 'Like' regarding a posting he'd made).

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"So," I wondered, "why all the interest?" I mean it was very unlikely that any of us even knew his new love!

I think the answer lies in part in human nature. We are biologically programmed to be a curious bunch. Perhaps boredom contributes to our interest as well. We are all looking for a way to connect, to interact interpersonally.

Status updates can break the hum-drum routine of daily living.

They offer us an excuse, an opportunity to reconnect and refocus. They may even provide us with an opportunity to live vicariously through other's life experiences and events.

For some reason, the lives of others can often sound more exciting and thrilling than our own. Status updates can however generate gossip, rumors and out right raucous lies. This can happen quickly.

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Posted comments can contribute to creating rumors as well. I remember not too long ago a friend of mine posted a sarcastic comment in response to one of my postings. I thought it was hilarious because it related to an inside joke we have.

What was surprising to me however, were the host of direct messages, and even a few phone calls assuming the posting was true. One friend suggested I was the victim of bullying!

While I understood where she was coming from, the thought had never crossed my mind as I knew the comment was not meant to be mean spirited. One seemingly innocent comment however, was enough to generate various reactions and assumptions. I think it was in that moment that I truly began to understand the power and potential of social networking. Another thing to keep in mind is that research indicates that neutral comments are often interpreted as hostile. What does that say about human nature?

Some final thoughts:

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- If you post it they will talk! And some of the talk maybe downright ridiculous gossip!
- If you post it, or someone posts it about you, they will contact you. Hey, it's a great way to reconnect with friends you haven't talked to in a while.

- Be mindful about the comments you post about others. An inside joke or neutral comment can easily be misconstrued.
- If you are bored log on to a social networking site you are sure to be quickly amused. You may learn something interesting or exciting about a friend of a friend of a friend. The question is, do you really care?
- While you may be enthralled or even envious of the lives of your Facebook friends as read their postings and status updates, take a step back. The grass often seems greener on the other side. The reality: people's lives often sound more exciting than they really are. It's a good life, enjoy and appreciate it!