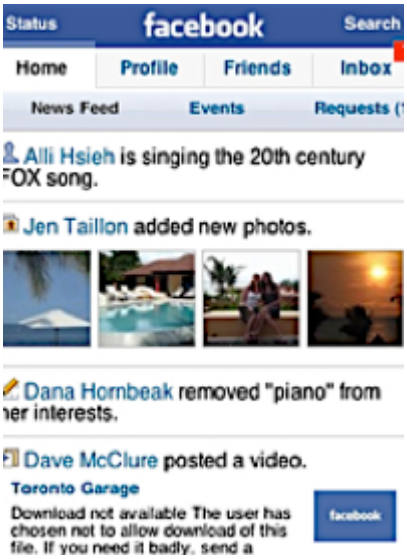
Written by **Dave Bohon** on March 7, 2011

Survey Shows Facebook an Increasing Factor in Divorce



A recent study by a group representing America's divorce lawyers has revealed that the social networking phenomenon Facebook may be responsible for up to 20 percent of divorces in the nation.

According to the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, more than 80 percent of the nation's divorce attorneys say they have seen an increase in the number of cases over the past five years in which evidence has been drawn from social networking sites. In fact, 66 percent of attorneys said that for cases that do include evidence culled from such websites, Facebook is by far the biggest gold mine of information, followed by MySpace at 15 percent, and Twitter at five percent. A 2008 survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project found that one in five adults has used Facebook for flirting.

Christopher Melcher, a Los Angeles family law attorney, said that anything a spouse might post on his or her personal Facebook page is fair game as evidence in a divorce proceeding. "In court, they put on their best face, but their true beliefs and character are often unmasked in their social media communications," said Melcher. "One client, who thought she had a solid marriage, found out that her husband had been matched on eHarmony with her friend, claiming his status to be 'single.'"

Dr. Steven Kimmons, a licensed clinical psychologist at Loyola University Medical Center in Illinois, said that he and other counselors are seeing an increasing number of cases in which marital problems are tied to the social networking site. Often, he said, the beginnings of the problems are innocent enough. "One spouse connects online with someone they knew from high school," Kimmons explained. "The person is emotionally available and they start communicating through Facebook. Within a short amount of time, the sharing of personal stories can lead to a deepened sense of intimacy, which in turn can point the couple in the direction of physical contact."

Kimmons said most married individuals don't connect with others online with the intention of cheating on a spouse. "I don't think these people typically set out to have affairs," he said. "A lot of it is curiosity. They see an old friend or someone they dated and decide to say 'hello' and catch up on where that person is and how they're doing."

There are some warning signs, however, that a married person may be crossing the line. "Look at the population of the people who are your online friends," Kimmons advised. "Is it a good mixture of men and women? Do you spend more time talking to females versus males or do you favor a certain type of friend over another? That can tell you something about how you're using social networks. You may not even be aware that you're heading down a road that can quickly get pretty dangerous, pretty fast to

your marriage."

Also, how much time a person spends on Facebook, and when, can be an indicator of an unhealthy trend. "If you're doing this at 2 o'clock in the morning with no one watching because you don't want anyone else to know about it, that should be a signal to you that this is something approaching a boundary line or you're at least moving in that direction," Kimmons said.

Kimmons suggested that from the start, married individuals should set clear boundaries with those they are contacting through Facebook. "From the start tell your online friend that you're not looking for anything more than establishing old contacts with people to find out how they're doing," he said.

If husband and wife have individual Facebook accounts, each should consider allowing the other access to their site for accountability's sake. "It's not that people are going to read what you're writing," Kimmons said, "but they'll see what you're doing. Then it's not a secret."

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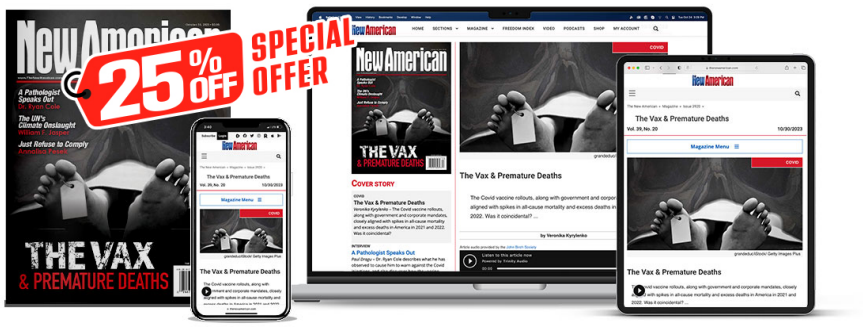

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