# What's your relationship status on Facebook?

Facebook gives you as many as 11 options to define your relationship status. From single to in a domestic partnership, from married to widowed, it hopes to cover the entire relationship gamut. And users happily oblige. Because if it's not on Facebook, it's not official. Some might actually lead you to believe that their partner accepting the 'engaged' status on Facebook means more than the rock on their finger.
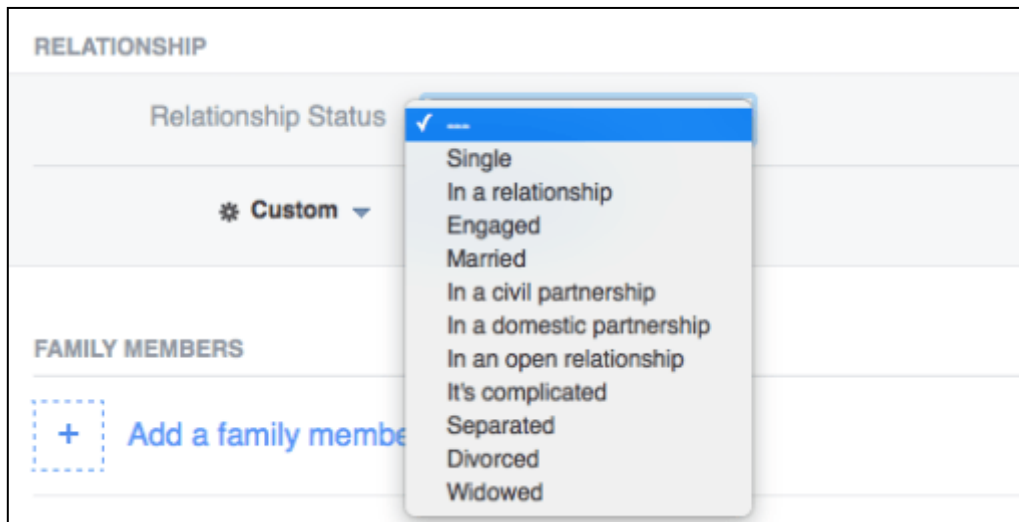
To what extent, though, does one divulge details of a romantic relationship on Facebook? Has an invisible line been drawn or do we let others view our romantic relationships up, close and personal on a screen?

Nikita Chopra (name changed on request) is a 27 year old Facebook user and Mumbai resident. When she tied the knot in August 2 years ago, she also changed her relationship status to 'married' on Facebook. However, that was not the case when the wedding had been fixed with her partner. According to her, "I didn't change my status to 'in a relationship' or 'engaged' immediately because I didn't want everybody to know. I was a little superstitious, I'll admit. The people in my actual life knew about it but I was not ready to make a public announcement."

Another 28 year old Facebook user, Hemal Parikh (name changed on request) "does not believe in flaunting her 'married' status on the social network". She does appear married, however, to her girlfriend, "and that is quite obviously a joke". "I don't give it that much importance. Neither does my spouse."

Akanksha Batra, Clinical Psychologist: Family & Relationships at ePsyCliic.com sheds some light on this behavior. She has couples coming to her, where the woman complains of the man not accepting her request to change the status to 'married' on Facebook. "The relationship status has caused so many fights amongst my clients. It boils down to how we want everyone to perceive us. Males prefer to appear single on social networking platforms, so they can send out more friend requests."

A relationship status change is the first straw in the fire. We have all been privy to couples' entire relationship journeys thanks to this social networking platform. Profile pictures, photo collages on birthdays and anniversaries, wall exchanges, wedding albums, trip photos, baby birth announcements, we've seen it all on our News Feed. And the best part is we've never even spoken to some of these couples.

Batra says, "We are so used to sharing our day to day lives on social media, we are definitely going to post a status update or a photo or something to Facebook. Everyone is a viewer of someone else's life. The funny thing is if these two people were to cross each other in a mall, they would be strangers who won't even say hi. At the same time, they'll expect the other to 'like' their Facebook post."

Hemal and Nikita have differing views on sharing their private photos on Facebook. Hemal didn't want to go through the cumbersome task of uploading her wedding album on a Google Drive and individually inviting everyone that featured in the photos. "It was obviously convenient to share it on Facebook. Everyone could see the photos and 'tag' themselves if they liked. I'm okay when my friends do the same thing." Nikita, however, has a 'limited profile' setting for most of her Facebook activities. She won't even "approve 'tag' requests until she's sure she wants to share the post with her friends."

Something that nobody denies, according to Hemal, "is the prevalence of Facebook in our most precious moments. Co-incidentally, my then boyfriend, now husband and I proposed marriage to each other within hours of each other on the same day. He was the first one to do so and he had posted a picture of my finger with the ring on Facebook. The accompanying comment is a blur at this moment. But it just goes to show how much importance we give a social network even in such a private moment."

Nirali Bhatia, a Counselling Psychologist says, "Humans are social beings and that's something Facebook completely leverages. Typically, we are all building a perception. When we are in a relationship, a romantic one at that, we are looking and feeling our best and we want to show everyone ourselves on our good days. We don't want to restrict it to just people close to us."

More important than that, Bhatia says, "is the ease of communicating virtually. Eventually, you're behind a screen and it's easy to dramatise praises as well as insults. We choose to communicate via Facebook for this very reason."

It's all well and good when happy, shiny couples on Facebook provide us with #relationshipgoals thanks to their activities. What happens when the same relationship goes awry? Facebook doesn't provide a 'break up' or 'split' button to make the difficult announcement. And with the new 'memories' feature, Facebook throws back stuff at you you don't necessarily want to remember.

Batra argues that, "it has become a fad to even post break up statuses. What's more is people liking those statuses and leaving comments. These comments range from 'he wasn't good for you' to 'you deserve someone better'. Friends are actually consoling them on a social network."

What then are the dos and don'ts of narrating our relationship stories virtually? Psychologists say we shouldn't act on impulse. They also say we shouldn't broadcast our feelings and private conversations.

Perhaps, that's why school kids are being educated on the use of social media. One real friend means more than 500 virtual friends. And a romantic relationship cannot be defined by 3 preset words. There's a lot more time and effort we could invest on making our relationships work rather than spending all that energy on Facebook. Whether "it's complicated" or a "domestic partnership", the clarity has to exist for the people in the relationship and it's okay if it's private.

Let's use social networking to network socially and not to provide the world a voyeuristic view of our personal lives and relationships.

*This feature was originally written for Mumbai Mirror but has been published here as I own the right to the content.