

Married, Single, Dead: Facebook Status Change as a Contributing Stressor to Intimate Partner Violence and Femicide

Amanda Maitland*

Eisner Institute of Professional Studies, China

***Corresponding Author:** Amanda Maitland, Eisner Institute of Professional Studies, China.

Received: December 05, 2019; **Published:** January 03, 2020

Abstract

This article focuses on a preliminary study which has examined ways in which social media may help cause stalker murder by individuals with personality disorders and a strong sense of sexual propriety. The study suggests that a public display on social media (Facebook) by the intended victim may trigger interpersonal violence. It discusses the case of Hayley Jones and Brian Lewis where a woman was murdered shortly after changing her Facebook status to single. It also discusses how social media interaction and postings might cause rage fuelled by emotions of humiliation. It is argued that there is a preponderance of correlations between the social media postings, stalking behaviours, personality disorders, and the murder of an intimate partner. In addition to this, the article considers the struggle clients have in dealing with the: public, ambiguous, and unrelenting nature of social media postings.

Keywords: *Social Media; Borderline Personality; Murder; Cyberstalking; Intimate Partner Violence; Sexual Propriety; Facebook; Snapchat; Myspace*

Much has been written in recent years about the negative effects of Facebook on relationships. However, it is possible that Facebook does more than just meet the general accusations that it causes dissatisfaction and jealousy [1,2]. Facebook provides a public domain where perceived insults and humiliation may occur. Pinker [3] claims that these experiences lead to social pain. Social pain appears, in part, connected to the concept of reputation. Reputations are built on "common knowledge". In other words what people hear or read about them leads to individual and collective opinions of their moral characters and general competence. An attack on an individual's reputation according to Pinker [3] can result in: "contests of dominance" and the "urge for violent revenge" ([3], p. 516). Exchanges of data arguably form these dominance contests and play a significant part in creating a situation where violent responses are provoked. The simple fact that the information is public makes an individual more likely to act in violence. Thus, posting data in the public domain of social media creates an arena where dominance contests and vengeful violence are triggered.

In the last decade there have been several domestic murders where social media postings and Facebook status changes were a contributory factor. One example, taken from my study was the murder of Hayley Jones by her husband in her home in Wales in the United Kingdom. As their marriage unravelled Hayley Jones's husband carried out surveillance on his wife including her internet posts. Hayley eventually made a fatal post where she changed her marital status from "married" to "single" and within 24 hours Hayley was stabbed to death by husband Brian Lewis [4].

Social media is a mixed blessing. Darrell, Walsh and White [5] showed that, "social networking sites can increase interpersonal connections but also intensify: jealousy, envy, and surveillance behaviours." Before the internet news of break ups would trickle slowly through the communication grape vine through grooming and gossip leaving couples to have time to get used to the idea of rejection or infidelity.

Facebook and other social media platforms mean that large amounts of people gain knowledge of the end of a relationship at once maximizing the level of humiliation the rejected spouse or partner might feel. Pinker [3] reported that more people commit murder because of perceived humiliation than other associated reasons and emotions. Thus, social media presents platforms that create a fertile ground for humiliation and as a consequence violence and murder, generally perpetrated by men to women. In my study I found only 1 case where a woman murdered a man because of internet posts, that was in the case of Jodie Arias and Travis Alexander. It has been suggested that Jodie may have murdered Travis after reading online messages that said that Travis was taking another girlfriend on holiday to Mexico, Thus, although not a wholly male phenomenon, most social media associated murders are carried out by men.

The weakness of these platforms are that applications such as Facebook have users that create an “unrelenting” stream of social information leading users to often be compelled to perpetually process the data.

The data could possibly contain an infinite number of third party threats” ([6], p. 2). In other words internet postings can be both provocative and ambiguous, especially to a suspicious mind. A reader is required to make constant decisions on whether the social media postings demonstrate a personal threat, or provide information that shows them in a negative light, or is suggestive that there is a potential third party threat, a lover or potential lover, that could damage their relationship with a wife, girlfriend or partner. Imagined threats could lead to constant fears of infidelity and worries that he or she may lose a spouse, girlfriend, or partner.

Due to the possible multiple readings of data, psychologically vulnerable individuals have difficulty in interacting with others on social media web sites. In particular, individuals with personality disorders and more so when their disorders have comorbidity. This is unsurprising as violence has been seen to occur more commonly in individuals with some form of comorbid combination of personality disorder: especially where the combination of disorders demonstrated elements of borderline personality, narcissism and psychopathy [7].

The social media postings may often be seen as an unrelenting series of threats, slights and insults. Thus, achieving an emotional balance when faced with these large quantities of “ambiguous”, and “decontextualized” information is a difficult task for some individuals. The social media postings sometimes lead to a vicious cycle of surveillance, anxiety and paranoia, stimulating “reactive” or “non reactive” jealousy.

Moreover, Facebook and Snapchat’s ability to create privacy Utz., *et al.* [8] and in effect rooms within rooms where people can communicate with specifically chosen individuals could cause anxiety and jealousy, especially when a partner is locked out or uninvited to a particular social media location.

Social media presents an interpretational and emotional challenge to even the most level headed and psychologically healthy individuals. Studies carried out on students showed that social media postings caused mild to moderate jealousy. Whereas, case studies carried out on individuals with personality and attachment disorders showed more extreme emotional and violent responses to social media postings [6,9].

My study noted that Facebook posts are causing the emergence of: “jealousy” through, “partner surveillance”, “partner monitoring”, or uncertainty reduction strategies, and online “stalking” behaviors which are promoted by social media usage [10,11]. The extreme emotional states of the murderers at the time of the killings and linked facebook postings were also noted highlighting ambiguous Facebook posts or relationship “grave dressing” and relationship termination online proved to be potential conflict points, which could have caused the murderers feelings of: rejection and humiliation and ultimately femicide.

The question now is how should mental health professionals support clients who are struggling with internet communication. Elphiston., *et al.* [6] suggested that therapists should discourage clients from using social media, but how practical is this in reality. Is it not better to support vulnerable users in dealing with their internet interactions and to educate users how to make secure posts and make it clear to

social media users that playing out their lives and making major declarations on social media could leave them at risk. Therapists should make it clear that the way that a spouse posts at the end of a relationship could trigger rage as in the case of Hayley Jones where a simple public status change cause her to go from married, to single and then dead in a matter of hours [12].

Bibliography

1. Dainton M. "Relationship maintenance on Facebook: Development of a measure relationship to general maintenance and relationship satisfaction". Department of Communication La Salle, Ph.D. dissertation, University Philadelphia (2016).
2. Papp L., *et al.* "Are we Facebook official. Implications of dating partners' facebook use and profiles for intimate relationship satisfaction". *Cyberpsychology, and Social Networking* 15.2 (2012).
3. Pinker S. "Better Angels the Better Angels of Our Nature, A history of violence and humanity". Penguin, Pearson (2011).
4. Married Single Dead. Facebook murder: The murder of Hayley Jones (Video file) (2016).
5. Darcell M., *et al.* "Facebook tells me so: Applying the theory of planned behavior to understand partner monitoring behavior in Facebook". *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 14.2 (2011).
6. Elphinston R and Noller P. "Time to face it! Facebook intrusion and the implications for romantic jealousy and relationship satisfaction". *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networks* 14.11 (2011).
7. Howard R. "Personality disorders and violence: what is the link?" *Borderline Personality Disorder and Emotion Dysregulation* 2 (2015):12.
8. Utz S., *et al.* "Snapchat Elicits More Jealousy than Facebook: A Comparison of Snapchat and Facebook Use". *Cyberpsychology, Behaviour and Social Networking* 18.3 (2015): 141-146.
9. Maitland A and Psych D. Dissertation. Eisner Institute of Professional Studies. Ventura, California (2016).
10. Fox J and Anderegg C. "Romantic relationship stages and social networking sites: Uncertainty reduction strategies and perceived relational norms on Facebook". *Cyberpsychology Behavior and Social Network* 17.11 (2014).
11. Fox J and Warber K. "Social networking sites in romantic relationships, and partner surveillance on Facebook". *Cyberpsychology Behavior, and Social Network* 17.1 (2014).
12. Hill C. "The stalking evidence Jodi Arias trial jurors won't see in court. Latinos disorders and violence: what is the link?" *Borderline Personality Disorder and Emotion Dysregulation* 2 (2013): 12.

Volume 9 Issue 2 February 2020

©All rights reserved by Amanda Maitland.