



Updating Your Social Media Relationship Status

Soapbox time: social media, in my opinion, is one of the worst things that's ever happened to the world, and to artists in particular. I know, I know, *interconnectedness* etc., but y'all COME ON. This stuff is crazy-making. Most of the suffering I've experienced and that the authors I know are dealing with can often be traced back to something we saw or dealt with on social media.

A few quick examples:

- It's your pub day and only three people retweeted your tweet about your book being out. You're pretty sure it will go out of print tomorrow.
- You notice that your publisher is doing a super cool giveaway for a book that's not yours.
- You see that a bunch of authors in your genre – some of them your friends – made a list that you didn't know existed, but now are desperately sad you weren't included on.
- You accidentally get into a politically-charged argument with another author over bookish controversies and now you've lost your writing day and three years off your life by engaging in it.
- You feel a mania you didn't know you were capable of as you try to promote your book online, trying not to feel too gross about it and harboring the sinking feeling that none of this is doing anything.
- You see photos of a conference or festival you weren't invited to, panels you didn't get to be on, author signings you didn't have a chance at and now you're listening to Elliot Smith on repeat.
- You feel like an asshat because you just aren't clever or cool and no one cares about your posts and fuck this life.

Sound familiar?

It's a necessary evil, but 'necessary' is not synonymous with social media being central to your life. Here are some ways you can assess your relationship to social media and a few strategies for dealing with it as an author.

Assess

- For the next week, track how much time you're on social media. A simple way is to use the timer on your phone and let it keep a running time. You could totally nerd out and create a chart to fill in.
- Be mindful of how you feel before and after you're on social media. Jot this down somewhere.
- Take note of your intention: why did you jump on Twitter? What are the impulses behind your use of social media? Is it boredom, the hustle, what?
- Notice how often you're using it to post your own things versus looking at other people's posts. Note *why* you look at their posts and how you feel about it afterwards.
- If possible, assess what reach your activities had in terms of author promotion. What things got the most likes or retweets? Adjust accordingly.
- At the end of the week, take some time to journal about how you feel using social media, what it brings up in you (fear, insecurity, a burst of adrenaline), and try to weigh your use of it against its effect on your well-being.

Strategies

- Have a social media fast. For at least a day or two, but ideally a week. Note how this creates space inside you. Are you happier? More relaxed? Do you have a lot more perspective and contentment? What did you do with the time you would have spent on social media? After you got used to it not being in your life, did you stop caring about it?
- Schedule your social media use. Choose a specific time in your day (as in, note it in your planner) when you will mindfully sit down to use social media. Set a time limit and do not exceed it. *Literally set a timer*. No more falling down the rabbit hole. You're an artist - you don't have time for this plebeian bullshit.
- Be clear about your intention for using social media. Consider how the posts you make are in line with your author platform and the intention you set earlier about why you write. If what you're about to post isn't in line with that, consider if the post is worth it. If you're only posting something because you need approval from others - people thinking you're super cool because you did x, then consider whether or not you should actually post. Who are you trying to communicate to? What is the purpose of your words and images? In writing terms, what's the story you're telling about yourself, your work, and your life through these platforms? Think high vibe communication. The world has enough stupid chitchat.

- From your work during the week, you should have an idea of which kinds of posts and people bring up really “hot” or intense emotions in you. Guess what? You’re not going to look at their stuff anymore. At all. One thing I did was on Facebook, I made it so that I could still stay friends with people, but not have anyone in my feed. This way, I wouldn’t accidentally see that so-and-so got a book deal on a day my editor rejected my book. If I want to see anyone’s page, I have to make a point to go there. This is a game changer.
- Stop browsing. When you sit down to use social media, have clear parameters for yourself. Maybe you’re going to post on each of your sites and respond to anyone who has reached out to you and that’s it. Maybe you’re only going to look up posts related to a specific hashtag.
- Take social media apps off your phone. Or put them in a folder that is not on your home screen. Disable notifications. Otherwise, the temptation to take a quick peek will likely get the better of you.
- Only use the social media that you enjoy. That’s the advice I’ve gotten from my agent and my publishers. Don’t use Instagram if it’s not your thing. Don’t post all the time on Twitter if it stresses you out. I would recommend having a Twitter account because a lot of publishing news is on there and readers reach out to authors a lot via Twitter, but if it stresses you out, don’t bother. Readers can email you if they really want to.

Questions to journal about:

When am I hustling for my worth when I’m online?

Who am I trying to impress?

What are my strengths, and which social media suits them?

Which social media – and social media users – make me feel bad about myself or stressed?

Is social media important to me?

Is it important to my work?

How do I feel about myself in relation to the number of followers or likes I have?

Who are people that don’t use social media and get by?

Who do I know or admire who rocks at social media – what can I learn from them?

How can I be my authentic self while online?

How can I contribute meaningfully to conversations using my social media?

How can I approach my social media use with gentleness toward myself and healthy curiosity about others and the world?

In what ways has social media negatively impacted my life?

In what ways has it positively impacted my life?

What can I do today to have some more peace around my use of social media?

How will I keep myself accountable for any changes I make in how I use media and tech?

A Note On Authenticity

For me personally, I find that the people I connect to most on social media are showing up as their authentic selves, allowing their audience to enter into their lives. You'll have to decide what your boundaries are, of course—over shares aren't necessary, and no one likes TMI. But allowing your readers and fellow writers into your process can be really powerful. Author Victoria Schwab is fantastic at this—her Twitter and Instagram feeds are chock full of vulnerable awesomeness. It allows readers to get to know the real her, and shows writers that it's tough for even the most successful of writers.

Georgia Pettit of the Luminary Agency puts it this way: don't just share the highs of your life—share the process to getting there, which inevitably involved failures and tough breaks. This gives you an opportunity to inspire others. So, what went down before you got the book deal, the agent, the award? People love stories, so, as Pettit says, give them that. As writers, we need to think about the story we're telling the world about ourselves and our work—we are crafting a narrative. This requires us to show up, to be brave, to be real. Allow your social media to be that for you, and your audience. It will be so much more rewarding, and less of an obligation or marketing tool.

Connect. Always connect.

More resources can be found on the Inspiration Portal at heatherdemetrios.com



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