Why aren't we "In a Relationship" online? [1]

Hello Alice,

I've been dating my boyfriend for over half a year now and we have had our share of ups and downs, yet there has always been an issue that has been bothering me throughout our relationship together. My boyfriend has never once posted any pictures of me and him together as a couple. I've asked him on multiple occasions for a picture of us together to be posted on Facebook, yet he continuously refuses to do so, and when asked why not, he gives an explanation of desiring privacy and believing that relationships should not be made public as it appears arrogant. So I let the issue go, as well as the other issue of him never having posted a "In a Relationship" status. His status has never existed and I was initially fine with this until I noticed that there were more pictures of other girl friends rather than of me. This upset me, and I began to have growing concerns as to maybe there was another hidden reason, such as him wanting to appear available and if he were ashamed of me. Should I be concerned or am I analyzing this issue too much?

Answer

Dear Reader,

The advent of social networking websites has forced many people to redefine relationships, friendships, and other social connections in a new virtual realm. Along with myriad questions like yours that have arisen with this shift, these websites have also allowed people a great deal of freedom to craft their online identities. This includes posting personal photos, sharing comments and links, and publicizing connections with other people, all of which include disclosing private details, which for some may seem threatening or invasive. What people like your boyfriend choose to broadcast on these sites is up to them, but your concerns are certainly valid.

One thing to consider is that, even with security checks that many social networking sites are implementing, the information you post is public. Humans are innately social creatures and people don't live in a vacuum. Social networking sites have made this even more the case, and some fear that their personal information will be viewed by either people they don't know or will become fodder for gossip or water cooler conversations. For some people, perhaps your boyfriend included, this idea is very disturbing and may influence what they choose to share online.

When it comes to publicizing a romantic relationship specifically, people have varying opinions...
on how and when it should be done, especially now that it may be done in such a public forum as the internet. Some believe that a relationship isn't official until both partners' social networking profiles list them as “In a Relationship.” This sounds to be your leaning, but that you and your boyfriend aren't necessarily on the same page. Consider asking yourself why this new age milestone is important to you. Once you understand this, it may allow you to further your conversation with him about how you view your relationship and where it is going. Being on the same wavelength with a partner is a component of a healthy relationship and this may help you figure out if you're in sync.

As for the photos of your boyfriend with his other female friends, you may post pictures of the two of you on your profile. But ask yourself, what about him posting pictures is important for you? What does it signify to you? If you feel that what it signifies (i.e., commitment, exclusivity) is lacking in your relationship, perhaps framing a conversation with him in those terms may help get to the root of what is concerning you.

The bottom line is that healthy relationships involve open communication and mutual satisfaction for both partners. If you're lacking either of these, you and your partner may want to consider discussing the future of your relationship. Once you know the underlying concerns you have and bring them out of the virtual world and onto the table, you may better understand and communicate what is bothering you. If you need help getting this conversation started, consider speaking with a health care provider who may offer additional suggestions.

With social networking sites becoming mainstays in interpersonal relationships, the terms and milestones used to define them are changing, but the need for clear and open communication is and will always be paramount.

Love always,

Alice!
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