

# the dangers of facebook friending your old flame

By Marjie Killeen



With the explosive growth of Facebook, reconnecting with an old flame is temptingly easy. Over 140 million Americans have Facebook accounts and 30 percent of them are over age 35. If you're on Facebook, chances are your old high school or college sweetheart is, too.

In the old days (like, back in 2007) if you wanted to reconnect with an old boyfriend, you'd have to do something overt and embarrassing like call him on the phone or send an email. But with Facebook, you can send a friend request so generic and casual it doesn't carry any pressure.

SO, HERE'S THE DILEMMA: DO YOU FRIEND YOUR OLD FLAME?

In an unscientific survey, North Shore residents resoundingly pronounced ... it depends.

Susan from Wilmette is friends with several of her ex-boyfriends and even sees them from time to time. Her

husband of 24 years is fine with it. "Both Brad and I are confident in the strength of our relationship," she says.

Petra, who lives in Evanston, isn't sure: "I know several marriages that have collapsed because people reconnected with old flames. My mom has always said, 'avoid the occasion to sin.'" Petra and her mom have a point.

ACCORDING TO THE EXPERTS, RECONNECTING WITH AN OLD LOVE ONLINE CAN UNDERMINE A MARRIAGE.

Elissa Geier, a Northbrook-based clinical psychologist, has a number of clients struggling with the fallout from emotional and physical affairs that started on Facebook. Geier says it's easy to get caught up in an online relationship—even if you're happily married.

"Women may start chatting with an old boyfriend because they're bored, lonely or curious," she says. It starts off as fun and flattering—it's nice to have

someone show interest—but then the flirting becomes exciting and even addictive. Geier says the excitement and intimacy of the new relationship can make a person disconnect from his or her spouse and become critical of a marriage that, up until that point, satisfied them.

**ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES, RELATIONSHIPS CAN REIGNITE IN A FLASH.**

The ease of online response and privacy means things can heat up quickly. Throw in feeling youthful and desirable again, combined with the fact that you've already been intimate, and it's like mixing up a potent, dangerous cocktail.

Highland Park couples therapist Pam Meyerson compares the rush people get from these affairs to a drug. "The thrill of the affair can make you feel high," she says. "It's exciting, it lowers stress and anxiety, and makes people feel young again. You feel much better about yourself than in a real relationship."

Meyerson had a client who connected with an old boyfriend on Facebook; they left their respective spouses for each other before ever sleeping together. Others arrange trysts with their old loves and often wind up extremely disappointed.

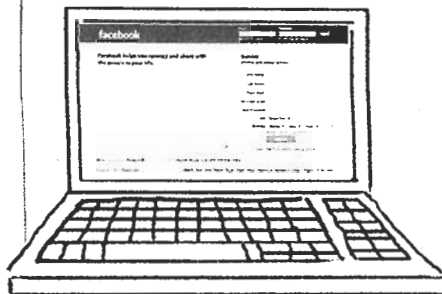
**AFTER ALL, YOU'VE BOTH CHANGED SINCE HIGH SCHOOL, RIGHT?**

Even though you remember the relationship fondly, you broke up for a reason. "You don't really know that person anymore," Meyerson says.

Still, for many former couples, staying in touch is fun, fulfilling and really no big deal. Like my North Shore survey results said: It really depends. But if you find yourself slipping into behaviors that detract from your marriage, it's time to consider clicking the "unfriend" button.

**signs your online relationship has crossed the line:**

- You think about it all the time, and are constantly waiting for emails and texts
- You fantasize about your ex, and find ways to bring him or her up in conversation
- You see your marriage differently; feel it's lacking, begin to find fault with YOUR spouse
- You wonder if you and your old flame were really meant to be
- You keep your relationship secret from your spouse
- You make plans to meet your ex in person



**meet the author**



Marjie Killeen, Wilmette  
This summer, Marjie is looking forward to naps in the

hammock, cookouts on the patio, and meandering walks through the 'hood. [makeitbetter.net/meet-our-writers](http://makeitbetter.net/meet-our-writers)

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