Social Computing Capstone

Day 6: Online Social Identity and Comparison

CSE 481p | Winter 2024

Amy X. Zhang
Instructor
Assistant Professor | University of Washington, Allen School of Computer Science & Engineering

Ruotong Wang
TA
Ph.D. Student | University of Washington, Allen School of Computer Science & Engineering

Schedule for today's class

- Short lecture + discuss reading (social identity and comparison) (30 min)

- Group work time on G2 (60 min)

  - Also start up of 1-on-1 check-ins this week with Ruotong (everyone will meet with her today since we have presentations on Thurs)

Announcements

- (before class) G1 is due! Let me know if you would like an extension. We'll leave comments in your doc, and then you can work on getting the text up onto your website as your first blog post.

- G2 is due Thursday - it is a 5 minute presentation by your group to the class. It should be in a "pitch" style - sell us on your project direction! Motivate your direction and ideas using your user research and summarize what you learned. Feel free to ask questions of the class to get feedback. All group members should participate in presenting.

- Thursday will be fully dedicated to presentations and feedback. Ruotong will be leading as I will be in DC for a workshop.

Online Social Identity and Comparison

How do we convey our identities online and compare ourselves to others?

- Self-presentation

- Context collapse

- Friendship paradox

- Authenticity and AI-MC (AI-mediated communication)

- Social comparison

- Alt accounts

"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."

Self-presentation:

"All the world's a stage and we are merely actors" - Shakespeare

Like actors, we oftentimes have a "front stage" (when we know people are looking) and "back stage" behavior that are different.

In the "front stage", we do things to improve our public self-image.

In the "back stage", we can relax and step out of character.

In the offline space, we do this naturally though actions like stepping in and out of the home. **Online, performativity becomes heightened and oftentimes quantified.** Do you ever feel stress about how you are choosing to present yourself on social media?

ERVING GOFFMAN

THE PRESENTATION OF SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE

"One of the most trenchant contributions to social psychology in this generation." —American Journal of Sociology

Self-presentation:
We are different people when we are in different spaces

We do not have a static set of behaviors that we perform in every environment.

Like actors, we change our behavior to guide the impressions that people form of us.

Our behaviors change as we enter different social environments.

It's not necessarily "inauthentic" to present different faces!

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Self-presentation:
We are different people when we are in different spaces

Amy in CSE 481p   teacher

Amy with Ph.D. students   advisor

Amy with Mochi   dog mom

Amy on social media   it's complicated

ERVING GOFFMAN

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Context collapse

First coined by danah boyd, it builds on Goffman to observe that social media sites often don't allow us to specify specific audiences when we post.

So a post you meant for your friends can be read by your coworkers. Your post with an in-joke can be reshared to a huge audience that doesn't get the context.

This can lead to "context collapse", which can lead to instances of public shaming because of a perceived norm violation.

Article

new media & society
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I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience
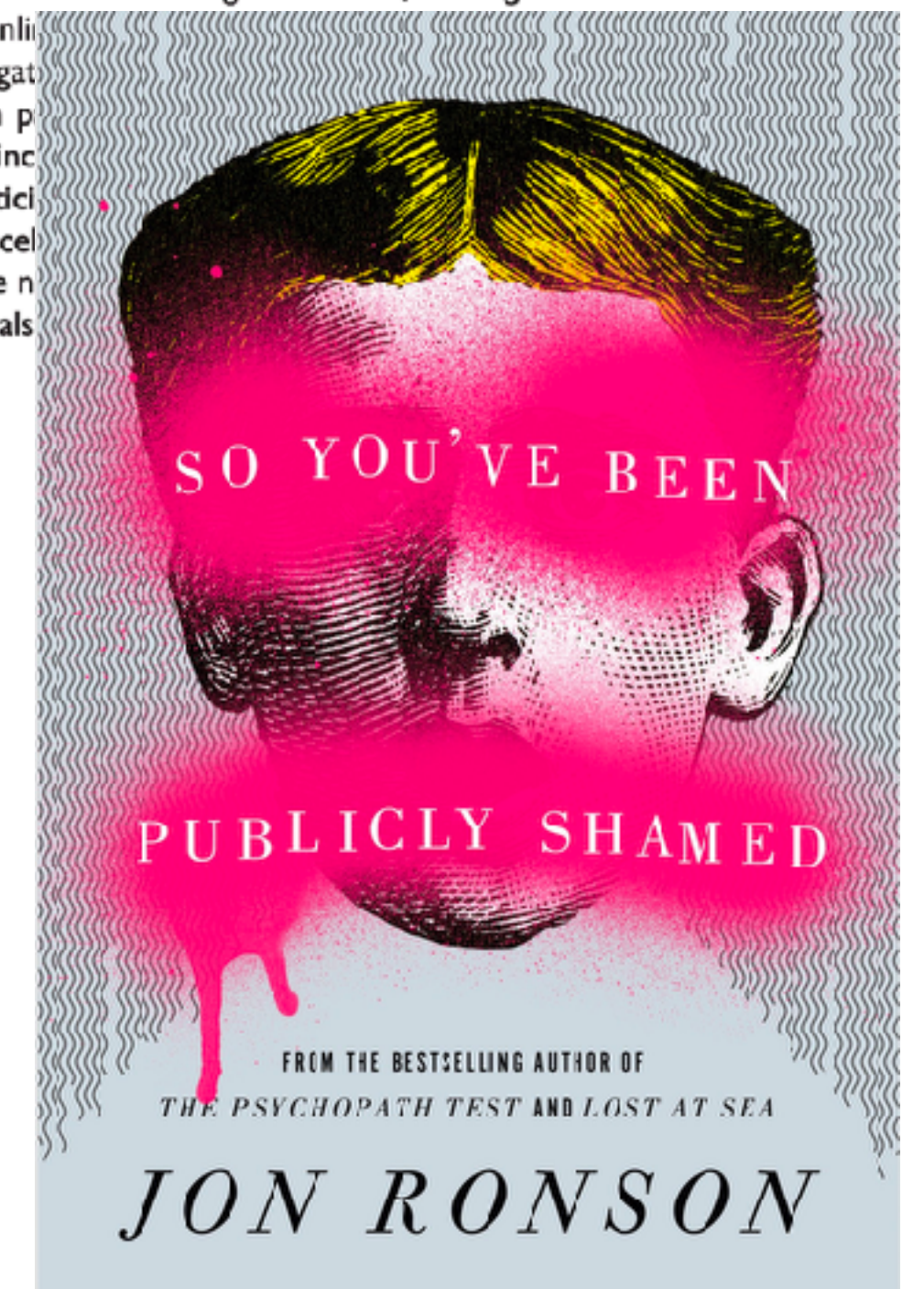
Alice E. Marwick
New York University, USA

danah boyd
Microsoft Research, USA

Abstract
Social media technologies collapse multiple audiences into single contexts, making it difficult for people to use the same techniques onli... in face-to-face conversation. This article investigat... 'imagined audiences' on Twitter. We talked with p... of followings to understand their techniques, inc... concealing subjects, and maintaining authentici... management resemble the practices of 'micro-cel... strategic self-commodification. Our model of the n... to-many communication through which individuals... evoked through their tweets.

SO YOU'VE BEEN

PUBLICLY SHAMED

FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
THE PSYCHOPATH TEST AND *LOST AT SEA*

JON RONSON

As one's followers grows beyond small groups, people may take a "lowest denominator approach" - posting what is most agreeable to the most/most important people in their audience. Or they self-censor. **How might this affect how you post?**

Then, say a lot of people are posting this way, how might this now warp your perception of reality...or even actually change reality by impacting broad cultural trends? (See our reading - what leads to "Instagram Face"?)

I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience
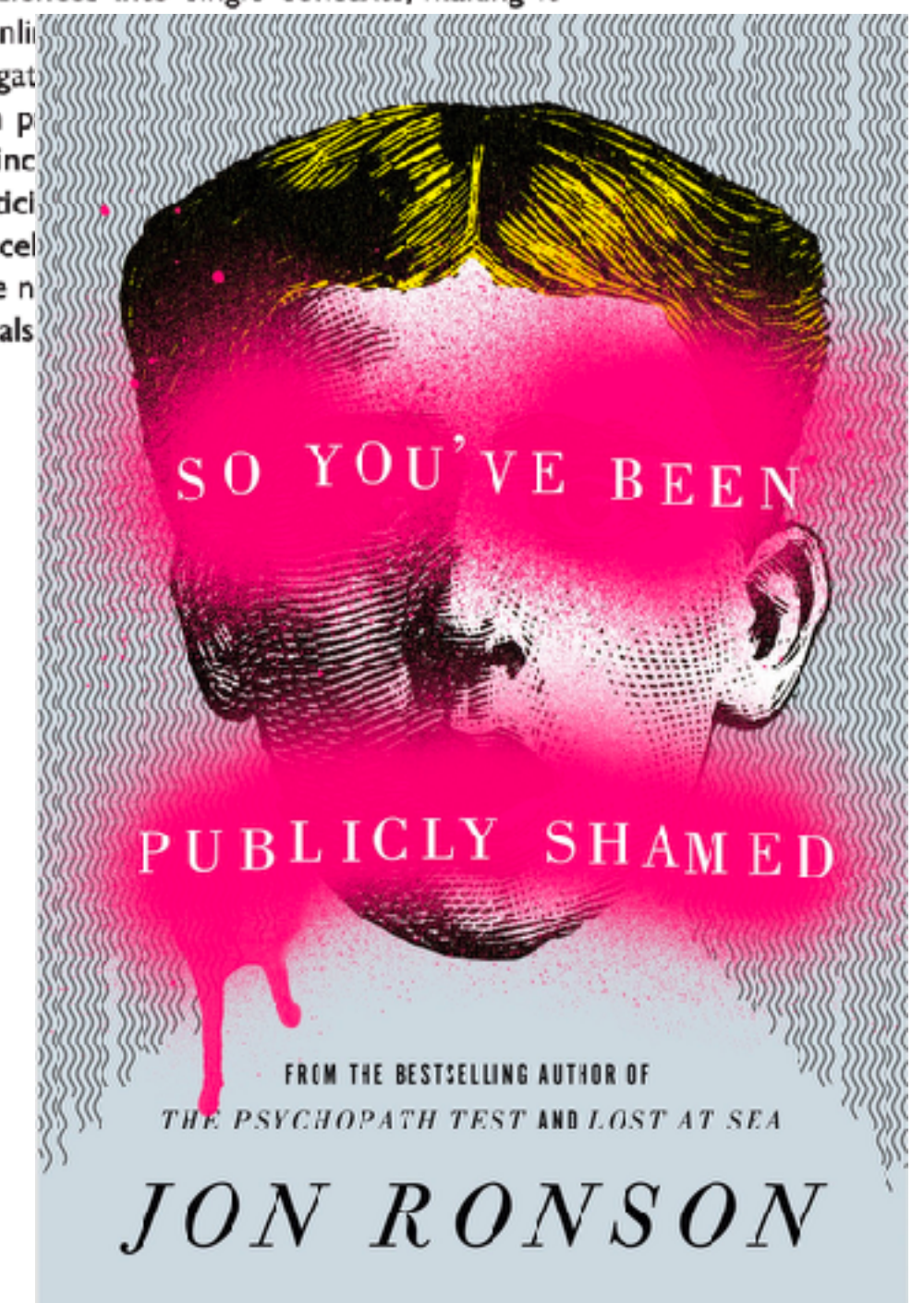
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Friendship paradox

Discovered by sociologist Scott Feld in 1991

Most people have fewer friends than their friends have, on average.

Why? It's a form of sampling bias in which people with more friends are more likely to be in one's own friend group. Or, one is less likely to be friends with someone who has very few friends.

This is just one example of how being in a social network can distort one's observations. Given the vast inequality in follow relationships online, this gets even more exacerbated!
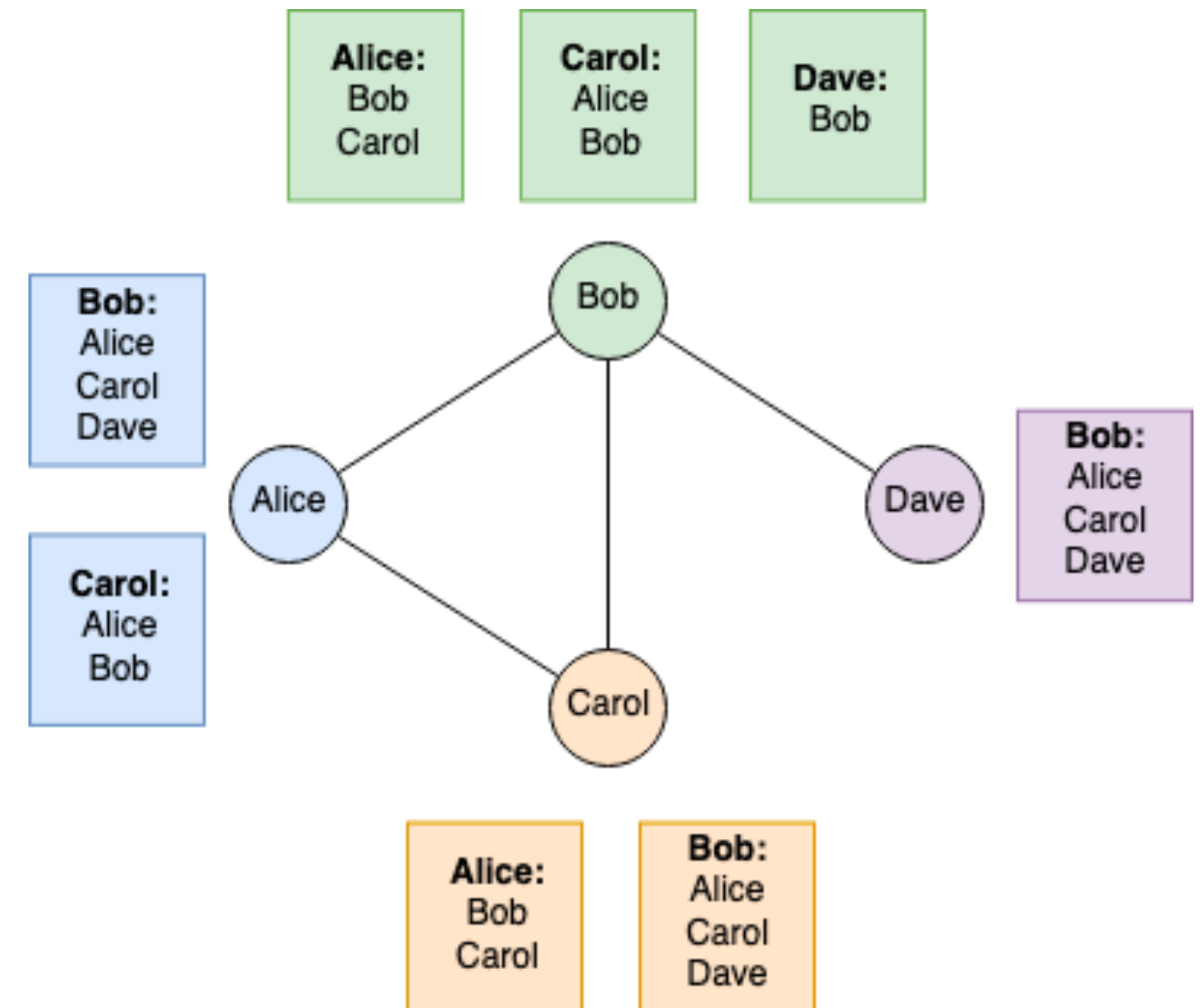
Authenticity and AI-Mediated Communication

Authenticity is an important part of communication. But what is considered "authentic" when communication is mediated through technology?

- Is using spell-check or auto-complete still you being authentic?

- What about a filter like FaceTune or Photoshop?

- What if you used ChatGPT to compose your writing? What about improving your writing?

When does authenticity matter? When does using technology as a personal aid feel duplicitous vs not? What are the societal implications of widespread use (e.g., distorting our view of the world)?

Home > News > Artificial Intelligence

University Apologizes for Using AI to Write Letter to Students About Shooting

Vanderbilt University's Peabody College was caught using AI chatbot ChatGPT to write a letter to the students about the shooting at Michigan State University.

By Michael Kan   February 21, 2023   f   y   ⧉   ...

(Photo by Leon Neal/Getty Images)

Last week, staff at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee wrote a thoughtful and heartfelt letter about

Impact of social comparison online?

Research is still unclear. From Facebook's own leaked study: "**30% of teen girls felt Instagram made them feel worse about their bodies**" but these are self-reports [1].

Studies connecting usage with objective measures aren't able to find a clear link [2]. Also, some studies show use of social media make people feel better when they're depressed, stressed, etc.

It may depend to a degree *how* you use social media [3], as the term is so broad now to encompass so many activities. Lurking and scrolling is quite different from DMing friends.

[1] https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739
[2] George MJ, Jensen MR, Russell MA, Gassman-Pines A, Copeland WE, Hoyle RH, Odgers CL. Young Adolescents' Digital Technology Use, Perceived Impairments, and Well-Being in a Representative Sample. J Pediatr. 2020 Apr;219:180-187. doi: 10.1016/j.jpeds.2019.12.002. Epub 2020 Feb 11. PMID: 32057438; PMCID: PMC7570431.
[3] Burke, Moira, Cameron Marlow, and Thomas Lento. "Social network activity and social well-being." *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on human factors in computing systems*. 2010.

"One in five respondents recalled recently seeing a post that made them feel worse about themselves but reported conflicting views: **half wished they hadn't seen the post, while a third felt very happy for the poster**. Design opportunities are discussed, including hiding feedback counts, filters for topics and people, and supporting meaningful interactions, so that when comparisons do occur, people are less affected by them." [1]

Hide like count?

Instagram ran a 2 year experiment with mixed results.

After more than two years of testing, today Instagram announced what it found: removing likes doesn't seem to meaningfully depressurize Instagram, for young people or anyone else, and so likes will remain publicly viewable by default. But all users will now get the ability to switch them off if they like, either for their whole feed or on a per-post basis.

"What we heard from people and experts was that not seeing like counts was beneficial for some, and annoying to others, particularly because people use like counts to get a sense for what's trending or popular, so we're giving you the choice," the company said in a blog post.
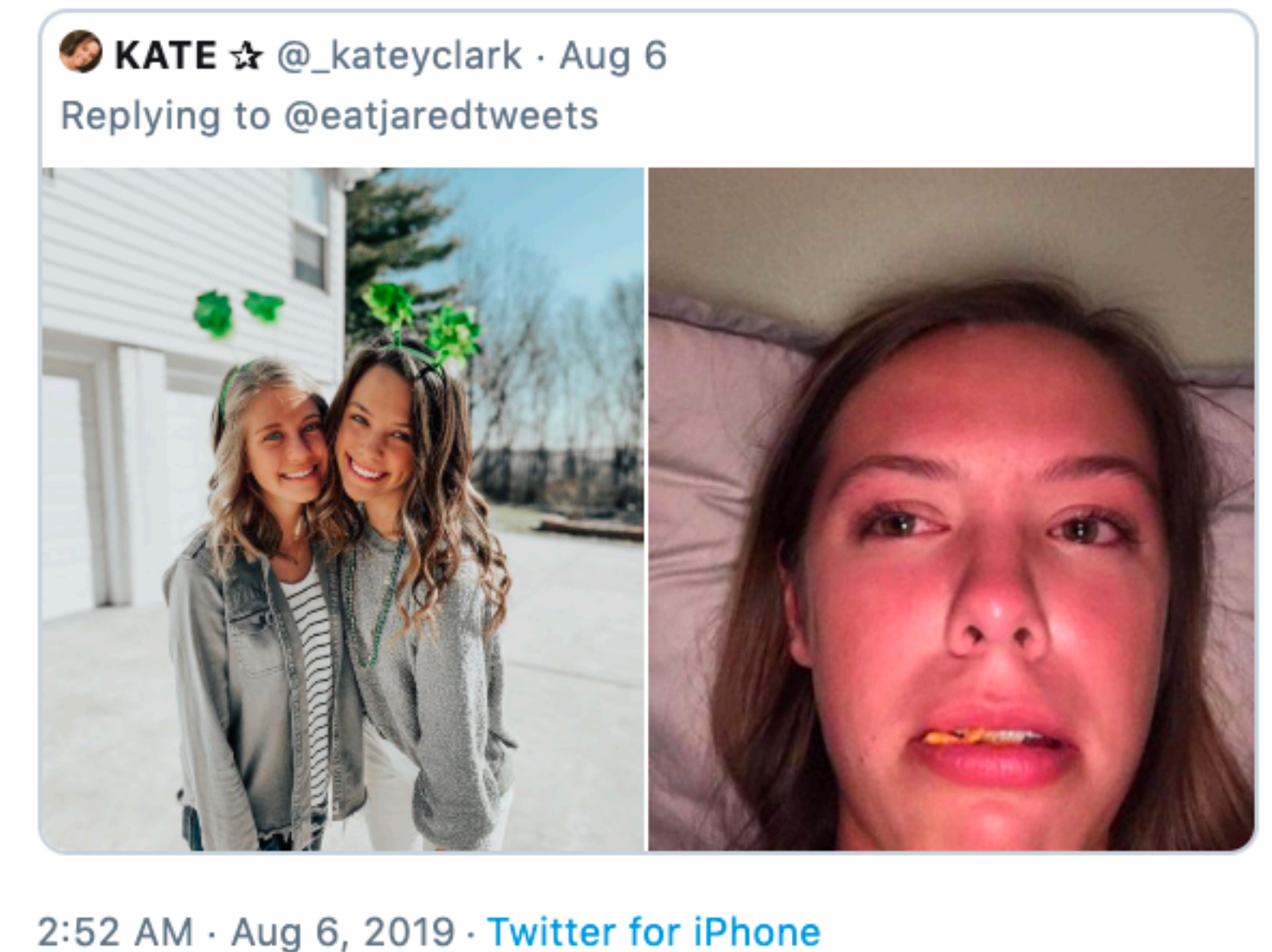
Would you want to hide your like count?

[1] Burke, Moira, Justin Cheng, and Bethany de Gant. "Social comparison and Facebook: Feedback, positivity, and opportunities for comparison." *Proceedings of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. 2020.

Alt accounts/BeReal

sam ♀♡☐
@sipsumsam

" post a pic from your insta next to one from your finsta " this how it really be 😹😹😹

KATE ☆ @_kateyclark · Aug 6
Replying to @eatjaredtweets

2:52 AM · Aug 6, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

Eric Morrow ✓
@morroweric

Sen. Blumenthal asks Facebook "Will you commit to ending Finsta?"

Facebook's safety chief has to explain that Finsta is slang for a fake account.

Watch on Twitter

10:27 AM · Sep 30, 2021

♡ 36.1K   ⟳ Reply   🔗 Copy link to Tweet

Read 1.4K replies

Having a finsta alleviates social pressure for people. This put into place Goffman's "front stage" vs "back stage" behavior + reduces context collapse.

But it's tricky because these alt accounts/casual Instagram can also start to become performative but in a different way. It's like how counterculture becomes mainstream culture and cycles around.

Maybe it's not really possible to make something like a social network be "back stage" in a way that small-N group chats/Snapchat groups are?