Spring 2023

Overusing, Overposting, Oversharing, Subtitle (Some Things are Better Left Unsaid)

Samantha Dandridge
Bard College

Recommended Citation

@ Samantha Dandridge

Overusing, Overposting, Oversharing

Some things are better left unsaid.

Overusing, Overposting, Oversharing

Some Things are Better Left Unsaid

Senior Project Submitted to
the Division of Social Studies of
Bard College

by
SAMANTHA DANDRIDGE

Bard Format Page, Not Project Cover Page

I would like to dedicate this adventure of a project to my creative, thoughtful, and endlessly supportive parents and brother, Tanner. The patience, sensitivity, and graciousness the three of you exude, particularly throughout this project is forever appreciated. XOXO

And to my dogs, Ellie and Chewy, for innocently interrupting long SPROJ sessions by giving me balls to play catch and rope for tug-o-war. Reminding me of the importance of allowing myself to take breaks.

THANK YOU

Participants, Thank you for your time, engagement and for trusting me, I wouldn't have a project without you.

YUVAL, I don't have the words to thank you enough for your your lifesaving SPROJ advice and support, along with your kindness, wisdom and philosophies as a professor, advisor (of four years!), author and person. Your teaching style, critical thinking and dedication played a substantial role in my academic and intellectual growth. Thank you for your unwavering, exceptional guidance and support.

JOMAIRA, thank you so much for your innovative and truly inspirational approach to Sociology. Having the pleasure of being your student and having you on my SPROJ board (thank you so, so much) has introduced me to a plethora of literature and concepts that are often overlooked.

JUSTIN, your ability to always find ways to incorporate my interest in psychology into sociological theory during classes, moderation and SPROJ has been immensely helpful, and always appreciated.

SHARIF, Thank you so much for absolutely everything. Your devotion, insight, and compassion as a dean is unmatched. Thank you most for reminding me that humanity within institutions and systems are possible.

MATT, LUCA, SAMAIRA, GRIFFIN and KASHERRI thank you, thank you, thank you. You're some of the most wonderful, encouraging and exceptional people I have met. The importance of my relationships with all of you are truly indescribable.

ALLISON, Thank you for sharing your knowledge, experience and research endeavors. Discussions, and classes with you are always extremely thought provoking. Your seminars, classes and readings played a substantial role in my understanding of sociology.

ERIN, Thank you for your advocacy and devotion to equity and human rights. Your hard work does not go unnoticed or appreciated.

IRONICALLY, THE BIOLOGY DEPARTMENT, without these encounters, I would be a weaker person.

Table Of Contents
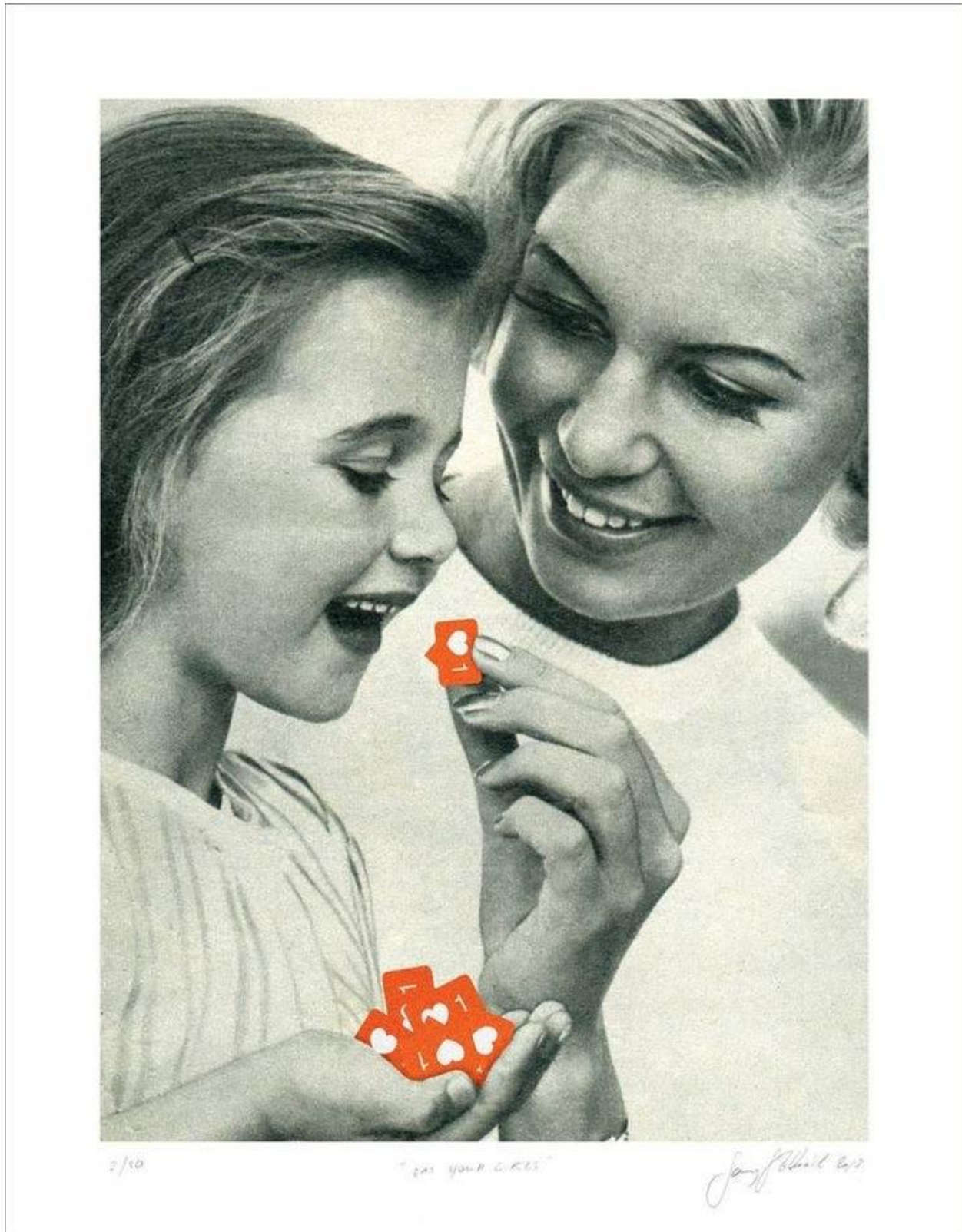
Slabbinck, Sammy,[artist] *"Eat Your Likes"*. Contemporary artwork. Belgium. C 2018.
From Slabbinck's website, https://www.sammyslabbinck.com/

I. INTRODUCTION

Wallen Diaz, [Graphic artist], "Social Media Issues, *Small Visual Experience Based on Social Media''* Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, December 2018. From Diaz's website, https://wallendiaz.com/ *this image is repeatedly used*

Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I relied on journaling to rant, decompress and reflect on my day and daily encounters, sometimes even unknowingly. It was a personal and dependable space for my thoughts, feelings, opinions, and experiences. I loved my journals and soon would grow quite the collection of completed notebooks, all piecing my childhood and adolescence together. As I entered middle school, I realized that part of what was so appealing and valuable about journaling to me was not having the constraints of others being privy to what I shared. I never censored myself and there was no fear of others' reactions or responses, or judgment because I was the only one who would ever read it. Simultaneously, as I began navigating middle school, Snapchat, ASK.fm, and Instagram became increasingly popular amongst pre-teens, and students at my school were no exception. Having any social media account whether it was on Snapchat, Facebook, ASK.fm or Instagram was an intimidating thought. As I slowly explored mainstream social media platforms through my friends and eventually my own accounts, I noticed parallels between thoughts I had written in my journals and posts and comments some of my classmates would publicly and often very nonchalantly share on social media.
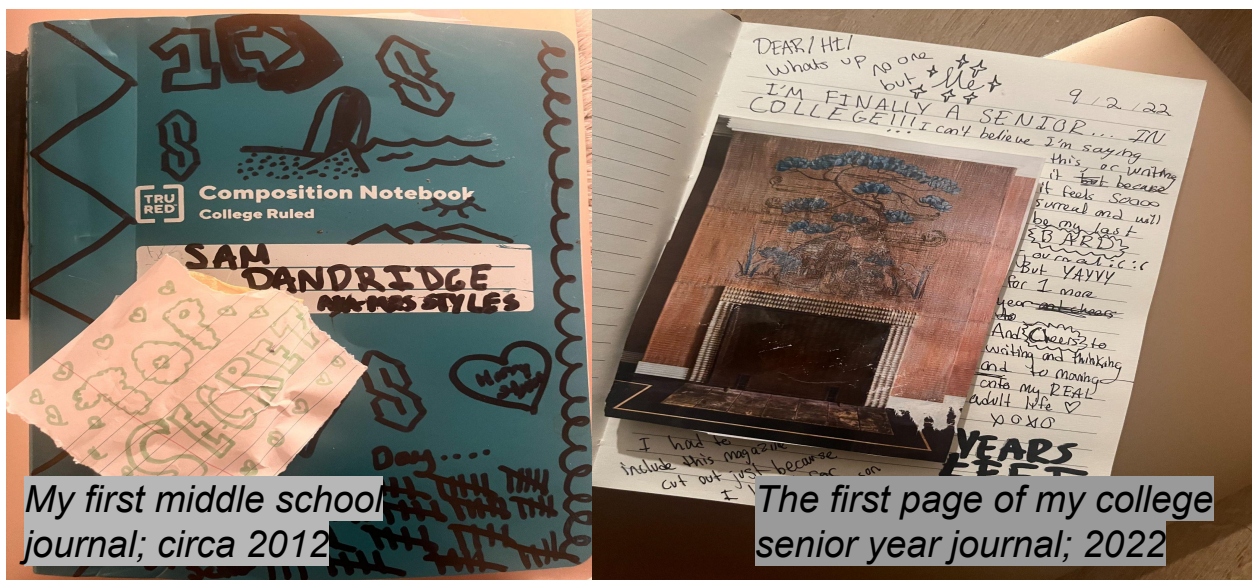
My first middle school journal; circa 2012

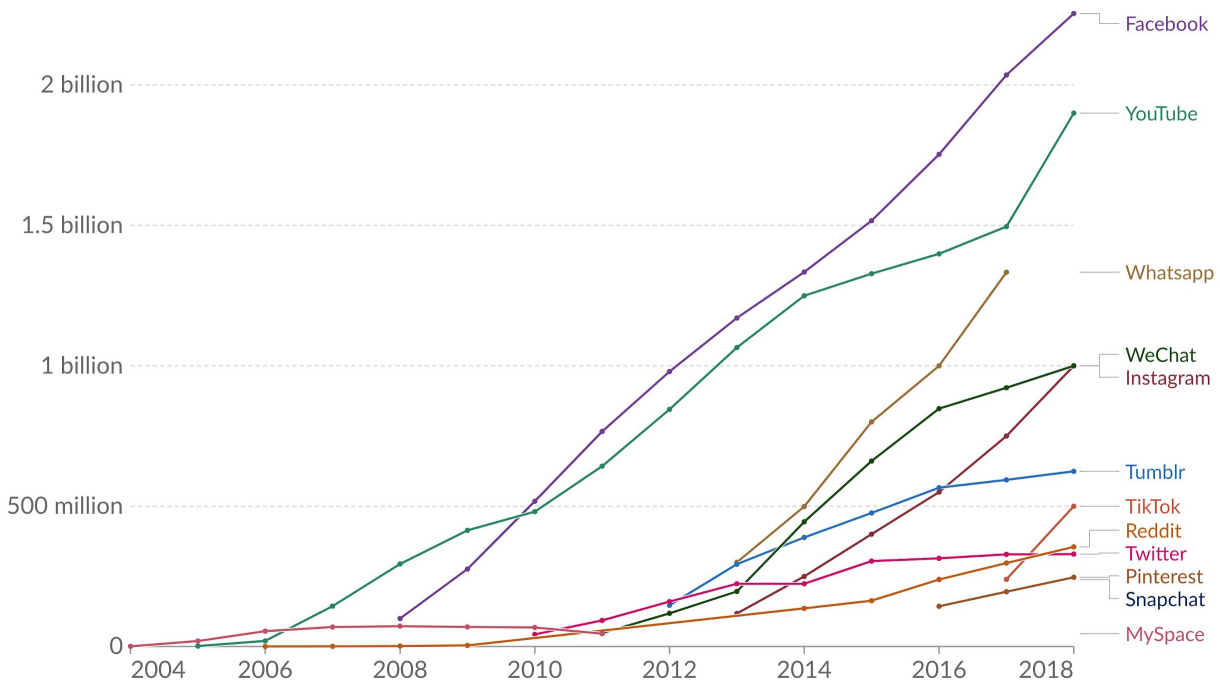*The first page of my college senior year journal; 2022*

Posts detailing interpersonal falling outs or quarrels between friends, expressing blatant dislike for particular peers, and deep, emotional thoughts regarding mental health challenges flooded my social media feeds. In my head, I quickly deemed and referred to this as "oversharing". While I commonly encountered posts of this nature and even had friends who "overshared", I never understood the desire or thought process of publicly sharing details about your life that to me, were intimate and private. I was especially intrigued because messages such as "Nothing on the internet is truly private" and "Even after deleting something, once it has been posted to the internet it lasts forever" we're constantly ingrained in our heads by parents and educators. As years passed, newer social media platforms were introduced, and older platforms' features became more sophisticated, allowing users to express themselves and share their thoughts in various ways they were unable to previously. In high school, the number of my peers who overshared and the amount of oversharing on social media drastically increased. I observed these posts often and was even more perplexed at the appeal of oversharing on social media once it became evident that posting certain information sometimes led to various negative consequences. My curiosity, and interest in what compels social media users, specifically adolescents and young adults, persisted throughout high school and into college. During my time at Bard, I was naturally drawn to sociology because of the emphasis on the study of understanding the development, structure, and dynamics of different communities and societies. As consistent journaling and social media continued to be a part of my college life, realized that oversharing on social media and social media in general is immensely sociological. This cognizant realization inspired me to explore and attempt to better understand societal norms concerning

posting, and what we, as a society, deem as "socially acceptable" to share with online friends,

followers and essentially the world. Throughout this project, my objective is to gain a

stronger understanding of what compels people to overshare on social media and the effects it

has on the poster, those around them and communities as a whole through the following

research questions; What compels young adults to overshare on social media? What are the

effects on the poster, those close to them, their following and social media in general? And,

What are the overall consequences these effects have? My project specifically sought to study

posts about personal or sensitive experiences or feelings, particularly about interpersonal

issues with others, mental health struggles, substance use and sexual activity, in detail on

social media platforms. I primarily will focus on oversharing on Facebook, Tik Tok and

Snapchat. and specifically Instagram.

  We use social media to update and share important milestones or happy moments with

family and friends, to communicate, network, meet new people and communities, and for a

multitude of other reasons. As a result, social media has become an integral part of society and

socialization. The affordances and various forms of communication social media offers

through instant access, messaging, posting and commenting impact social dynamics and in

person interactions(on micro, meso and macro levels). Having at least one social media

account has become our society's default for many teens and young adults. Although social

media is used as means of communication, and archiving photographic and videographic

memories, most users are very conscious of how their social media presence portrays

them.The effects and consequences of oversharing on social media are deeply sociological as

well, many of the negative impacts are often based on societies and one's community's

Number of people using social media platforms, 2004 to 2018

Estimates correspond to monthly active users (MAUs). Facebook, for example, measures MAUs as users that have logged in during the past 30 days. See source for more details.

Our World in Data

Facebook

2 billion

YouTube

1.5 billion

Whatsapp

WeChat
Instagram

1 billion

Tumblr

500 million

TikTok
Reddit
Twitter
Pinterest
Snapchat

0

MySpace

2004   2006   2008   2010   2012   2014   2016   2018

Source: Statista and TNW (2019)   OurWorldInData.org/internet • CC BY

response and treatment of social media "oversharers". Those who overshare on social media are often labeled derogatory terms including "crazy" or "attention whore" and can sometimes experience consequences in other aspects of their life besides personal and social. Additionally, depending on the content of the posts, others' perceptions of that person are completely jaded by information they simply should not know or would never know if the if the poster did not post about it. Due to the nature of some posts that constitute "oversharing", the poster can be at risk for potential legal consequences, breaking employment or school policies and preventing future enrollment or employment as well. Although some detrimental consequences of oversharing on social media originate from within the poster internally and stem from feelings of regret and vulnerability, the oversharer posts and how it affects micro and meso level social exchanges make it immensely sociological.

"What compels young adults to oversharе on social media? What are the effects on the poster, those close to them, their following and social media in general? What are the overall consequences of these effects?"

II. Literature Review

What Compels Users to Overshare on Social Media?

`

Social Media to begin with is blurring the lines of privacy and communication daily. Some researchers argue that oversharing on social media is a product of the "push to be authentic" (Boag, Simon and Skelly, 2023,). The message to be "authentic" and "yourself" likely influences the information users choose to post, even if it means including intimate life details or experiences they otherwise would choose not to share. The push to make one's Instagram aesthetic more casual and less curated, translates to written posts, captions and comments as well. The article additionally suggests that within the vulnerability of oversharing, a new form of self care and coping mechanism is developed by the user. However, the same researchers sometimes attribute this to narcissism. It is suggested that in some instances oversharing is an attempt to become "famous without much achievement behind it…(Boag, Simon, Skelly, 2023). Based on literature review, it is likely that many oversharers feel the need to entertain, amuse or maintain a character, or particular persona, especially when analyzing the findings through the looking glass-self theory. It is clear for some oversharers, the aim is the shock factor, what is outrageous and unheard of to post that will then result in attention, social media interaction or potential "fame" or "go viral". *Why Do People Overshare?* also mentions that apps such as FaceBook often ask users "What's on your mind?" or "How are you feeling today, (User's name)?",asking questions makes the experience more personal and for some users these questions invite and prompt users who take the questions seriously to engage in them potentially resulting in conscious

 or subconscious oversharing. The lines between personal journaling and public posting become

blurred, for some this is their diary or the "modern digital age diary". take the questions

seriously to engage in them potentially resulting in conscious or subconscious oversharing. The

lines between personal journaling and public posting become blurred, for some this is their diary

or the "modern digital age diary". The article mentions mental health as well, and that many,

including initiatives such as the #MeToo movement, are using social media as a tool to share

their stories of sexual harassment and assault while spreading awareness and becming social

activist, obviously this is not an easy thing to do and the recognition of courage, bravery and

strength people who overshare about sensitive topics such as mental health or discrimination

receive may influence people to "overshare" even under vastly different circumstances.

Alyssa Milano, [Actress], posted to her twitter, October 15th, 2017

Social Media is also vastly different from in person or even phone call interactions. Sociologist believe that social media is appealing to users due to the various affordances, "the possibility for users to…" that come with most platforms including *Asynchronicity*, "communicate when it suits them, in real time (synchronously) or delayed (asynchronously) .", *Identifiability*, ability to decide what degree of anonymity they maintain (if any), *Cue manageability*, being able to conceal or directly show visual and auditory cues (body language, tone, facial expression, gestures) while communicating with others*, Accessibility,* being able to easily find information and reach others, *Scalability,* being able to select the size of audience and who has access to personal posts, *Replicability*, "copying and sharing existing online content (Piotrowski,Valkenburg, 2017, 221)." This reinforces that in addition to making social media appealing particularly to young people, these functions and features also affect oversharing, particularly, cue management, accessibility, and asynchronicity. Considering how asynchronicity is used in regards to social media, asynchronicity is likely enticing to oversharers because oversharing often appears to come from emotionally heightened states and impulses. Being able
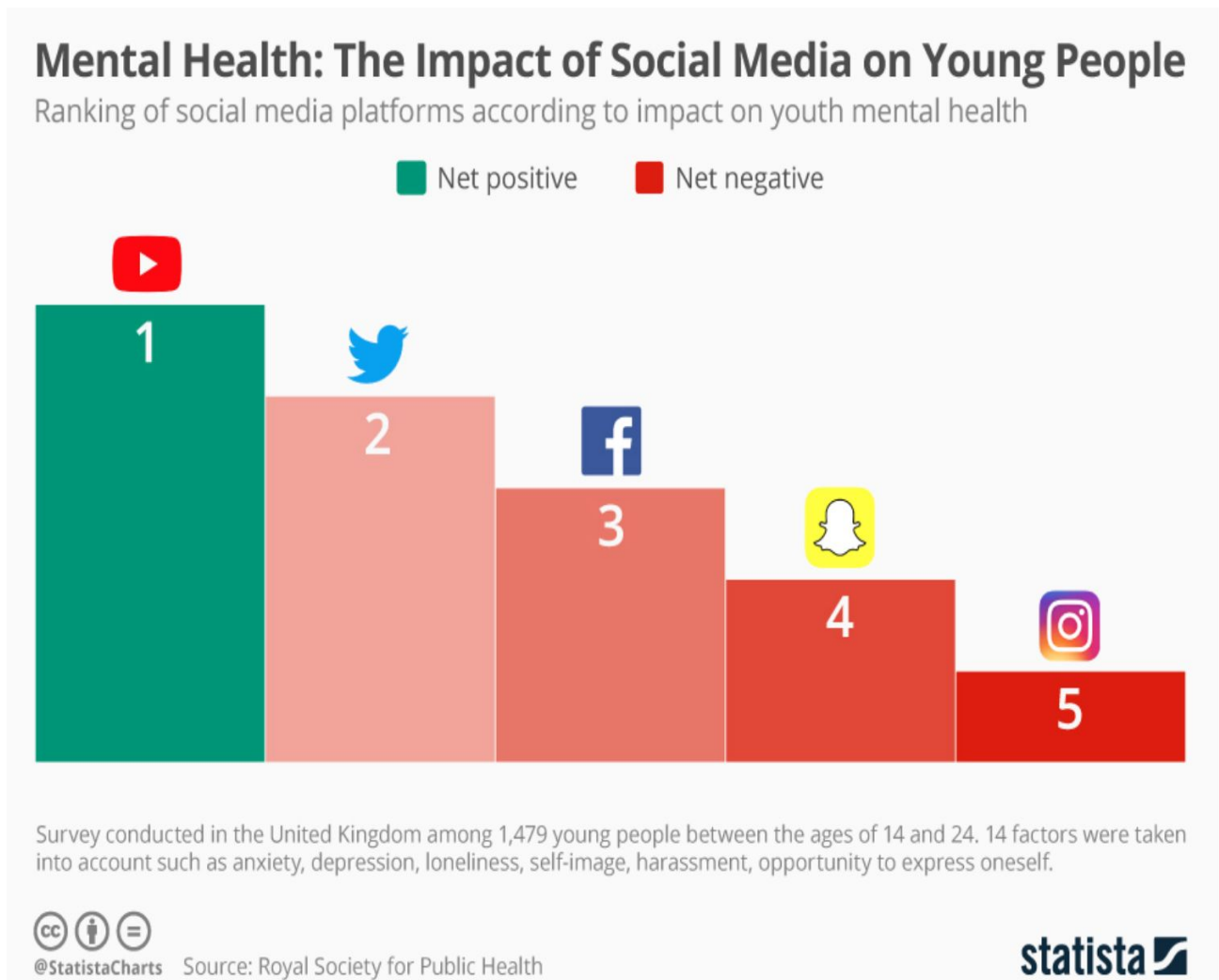
to communicate and express your thoughts whenever prevents the individual from having time to reflect or think about the consequences of what they're posting. Without instant and live posting, some who overshare may have chosen to have not posted after calming down or reflecting. Concluding literature review, it is evident that cue management and being able to conceal auditory and body language creates a feeling of distance and disconnect, typing and posting what you're writing feels vastly different and almost less real, in addition of being unable to tell their followers facial expressions, body language and full reaction (as they would in person).

As a result of the significance society has placed on social media, considering prior research and literature review, it is likely that many adolescent users unfortunately attribute their social media activity (amount of followers or friends, amount of likes and comments, what photos they post) to their self-worth because of Charles Cooley's looking-glass self theory ; "The idea attributed to Cooley (1902) that our self-concepts are formed as reflections of the responses and evaluations of others in our environment is close to being an axiom within sociology(Gecas, Schwalbe, 1983, 77) ." When applying this theory to oversharing online, it indicates that some oversharing on social media may be an attempt to fulfill the image they believe others will not only approve of but think is "cool" along with reinforcing the sociological undertones of social media and oversharing. When applied to oversharing on social media, when the looking-glass self theory is embodied, the individual (oversharing on social media) additionally surrenders power and agency over their identity, how they present themselves to others and their overall interactions through socialization.

How Does Oversharing affect the Poster?

Regret from the overposter is a repeated pattern, an emotion usually deeply connected to an individuals emotional wellbeing, in a 2013 study, the findings revealed that 59% of respondents have "deleted or edited something that they posted in the past", 53% have deleted "comments from others on their profile or account" 45% of respondents had removed their "name from photos that had been tagged to identify them", 31% have deleted an entire account and 19% of respondents "posted updates, comments, photos or videos that they later regretted sharing (Beaton, Cortesi, Duggan, Gasser, Lenhart, Madden and Smith, 2013)." Although only 19% of respondents report regretting posting something, some of the other self reported actions such as editing or deleting posts, and removing comments can be indications of oversharing or no longer wishing to have their profile associated with that post, particularly since a large amount of oversharing is posted from adolescent users in a heightened state of emotion (Buzzetto-More, Johnson and Elobaid). Receiving unwanted, damaging or harmful responses is another potential consequence of oversharing online. By disclosing personal or sensitive information, other users can weaponize and use it against the oversharer. It can also lead to feelings of rejection "The other side of the coin of course, is rejection of the malevolence of trolls, consequences, post-post anxiety…and that indelible tattoo (Boag, Simon, Skelly, 2023)." This quote reinforces that the response (or lack of) is a

crucial part of why users overshare. If the response is seemingly positive and or reaffirming it may encourage the person to turn to oversharing as a coping mechanism. If the response draws attention (likes, comments, shares, reposts, messages, etc) this may also encourage them to continue. However, if one is receiving little to no responses or being made fun of it can lead to feelings of not being cared about or make the poster feel worse.

Mental Health: The Impact of Social Media on Young People
Ranking of social media platforms according to impact on youth mental health

■ Net positive   ■ Net negative

1
2
3
4
5

Survey conducted in the United Kingdom among 1,479 young people between the ages of 14 and 24. 14 factors were taken into account such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, self-image, harassment, opportunity to express oneself.

@StatistaCharts   Source: Royal Society for Public Health

statista

Self esteem and self-worth have also been heavily linked to oversharing. Rui and Stefanone (2013) found that the "drive for self-worth via public evaluations increased the intensity of social media posts and photo sharing (More,Johnson, Elobaid, 2015, 50)". As

adolescents are more likely to overshare, they are additionally at risk of jeopardizing college admission, scholarships and internships-resulting in their mental health being jeopardized. However, as previously stated, certain "oversharing", perhaps about a mental health struggle, or experience being a survivor of intimate partner violence, can lead to a plethora of positive responses and good impressions. It can convey bravery, strength, willingness to be vulnerable and can be viewed as inspirational or helpful to others by being open about and sharing their story despite it maybe being considered "oversharing". For some, it can land them a larger platform to raise awareness or make a positive impact, or a career out of it. Online vulnerability and oversharing through social media has resulted in some even finding their passion or "calling". And serve as a catalyst for social change, open communication, transparency and larger discussions and discourse that would not have been delayed or simply not happen without people breaking social media norms and shattering the stigmatization that often accompanies straying from social or social media norms.

  Self esteem and self-worth have also been heavily linked to oversharing. Rui and Stefanone (2013) found that the "drive for self-worth via public evaluations increased the intensity of social media posts and photo sharing (More,Johnson, Elobaid,2013)." As adolescents are more likely to overshare, they are additionally at risk of jeopardizing college admission, scholarships and internships-resulting in their mental health being jeopardized. However, as previously stated, certain "oversharing", perhaps about a mental health struggle, or experience being a survivor of intimate partner violence, can lead to a plethora of positive responses and good impressions. It can convey bravery, strength, willingness to be vulnerable and can be viewed as inspirational or helpful to others by being open about and sharing their story despite it maybe being considered "oversharing". For some, it can land them a larger platform to raise awareness or make a positive impact.

What are the micro, meso and macro level consequences of oversharing?

The largest consequences originating from oversharing stem from the fact that there is always a chance it can be saved, downloaded or traced to the user even if it is made private, archived or deleted. Although some (Boag, Simon, Skelly, 2023) embrace the positive aspects of (public) vulnerability of "oversharing", revealing too much, it is not uncommon that it also makes oversharers feel exposed or vulnerable in an uncomfortable way. In *Online Communication and Adolescent Relationships: The Future of our Children 18, no 1*, Subrahmanyam and Greenfield explain how privacy features are commonly used amongst adolescents, "Privacy measures have given adolescent users a great deal of control over who views their profiles, who views the content that they upload, and with whom they interact on these online forums (Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, 2008, 123)." Despite this making social media safer, and more private for adolescents, this may send the message to those inclined to overshare, that the information they chose to overshare is significantly more controlled and private than they actually realize, providing a false sense of security. Although users who utilize privacy functions initially control who sees it, the post can be re posted or uploaded (oftentimes without their permission), saved or screenshotted, or physically shown to a number of people they did not consent to sharing the post with. Facebook additionally keeps record of all user information, they have records of deleted posts/lives, when someone untags, hides or removes themselves from a post, status updates and profile changes (Buzzetto-Moore, Johnson, Elobaid, 2015, 49). Therefore, once the post is uploaded regardless of profile privacy settings, it can be and is out there forever.

Research has additionally shown that, those who overshare can possibly put career, educational or other opportunities in jeopardy. As a result of oversharing often coming from an emotionally heightened, sometimes impulsive state, the poster likely is

not thinking of potential institutional or employment policies and rules. In addition to violating and facing potential consequences at work, or school, divulging certain personal information online puts potential employment and enrollment at at risk as well.

In 2005, an Ivy League university was considering the application of a young black man from South Central Los Angeles. The applicant had written a phenomenal essay about how he wanted to walk away from the gangs in his community and attend the esteemed institution. The admissions officers were impressed: a student who overcomes such hurdles is exactly what they like seeing. In an effort to learn more about him, the committee members Googled him. They found his MySpace profile. It was filled with gang symbolism, crass language, and references to gang activities. They recoiled.

The existence of a "digital footprint", a trail and documented history of one's online activity, is
    Boyd, 2014, 29
often forgotten by many young adults. This particular example, also reinforces oversharing bleeding into meso-level and macro social interactions and it additionally implies "oversharing" amongst adolescents is common enough for institutions to particularly look for it amongst applicants and use it as a contributing factor in their admissions decision process.

Oversharing tends to affect those who participate in numerous ways, however, most of them are negative. Depending on the information shared (engaging in illegal activity, discriminatory or hateful posts or "jokes", complaining about job or company, vicious online disputes) certain posts can lead to the oversharer being terminated by their employers as it may violate the companies policy or break contract. Social media presence and means digital footprint, is often additionally looked into by employers during hiring processes and even human resource managers can get involved (Buzzetto-More, Johnson and Elobaid, 2015, 49). Not only

@Whisperally <3, [Pinterest Blogger and digital creator]," 👀👀👀", Circa February 2023. From Whisperally's Pinterest, https://www.pinterest.com/pin/61924563618678951/feedback/?invite_code=2b60e7d030f54ab59e950b00d15ff4d8&sender_id=645070484035143773

does oversharing have the potential to jeopardize one's career or education but also negatively

impacts relationships with those around them, including their work space. When oversharers post

about interactions or experiences, specifically negative or personal ones, it may result in the other

person feeling betrayed, as if they can not trust the poster, embarrassed or angry. However,

negative interpersonal and social consequences are far more commonly experienced and occur on

a more regular basis than complications or termination of employment, yet these risks still exist as

Boyd's research clearly proves.

Don't let social media

dictate your worth.

@NotesbyThalia [Blogger], *"Don't let social media dictate your worth",* December 2021. Found on Thalia's pinterest https://www.pinterest.com/pin/366832332158758107/ and website, https://notesbythalia.com/blog/

III.Research Questions

The main findings my literature review yielded, along with common social media dynamics lead me to approach my project by attempting to answer the following research questions; What compels users to overshare on social media?, What are the general effects?, and how do these consequences effect the poster, those around them and people in general. The first question, understanding what motivates or leads people to overshare on social media is critical; not only will provide answers in regard to what causes this behavior but can additionally shed light on the climate or environment of social media- what aspects of typical social media dynamics amongst young adults encourages, enables or tolerates oversharing. Regardless of the climate of any user's social media, it is evident that oversharing on social media often leads to a plethora of consequences-both positive and negative. Prior research conducted on oversharing via social media platforms indicates that the consequences are usually overwhelmingly negative, however, I am interested in further exploring the general consequences of oversharing primarily because I theorize that it is tightly correlated to my first research question. Oversharing particularly sensitive, provocative or intimate information through personal social media accounts has become a familiar and "normal" part of many college aged users' feeds likely normalizing and desensitizing it; potentially distorting user's perception or judgment when sharing.

I strongly believe that the consequences of oversharing depend on the particular user's social media climate and how normalized their audience is to oversharing. Lastly, understanding the impact oversharing on social media directly has on the oversharers emotional and mental wellbeing is imperative. Researchers have found that a significant amount of oversharing from adolescents and young adults is posted while in a heightened state of emotion. Considering this,

in addition to how their posts are received, interacted with (or not), and the general consequences of their posts, it is likely the oversharers mental and emotional health is impacted, specifically if the content of what they are digitally sharing is related to their emotions or mental state.

To adequately attempt to answer all three research questions, I have decided to approach my methodology and extract qualitative data through an original Instagram study along with a follow up questionnaire. I conducted a month-long Instagram study recruiting active social media users between the ages of 18-24 to authentically interact with posts that resemble oversharing on social media on an entirely faux Instagram account and persona created by me, the researcher. While the account is designed to accurately portray a college aged Instagram user who frequently overshares, all participants will be informed prior to agreeing to participate that the account persona and posts are entirely created for my senior project and are not indicative or based off of any real person's posts, feelings, experiences or life. The Instagram account used for my study will overshare by posting about a variety of topics one to three times a day for four weeks, participants are simply instructed to engage (or not, if they would not in real life) with the posts as if they are a real friend or acquaintance posting them. After the study has concluded, participants will be asked to complete a five question survey about their experience participating in the study along with content they frequently come across on their own social media feeds. The objectives of this study are to further understand the social consequences of oversharing (by receiving genuine responses and reactions from participants, along with analyzing any patterns or commonalities in engagement), gain further insight into potential aspects of social media culture that encourage or discourage users from oversharing online and to adequately answer my research questions.

IV. Methodology

Instagram Study Overview

As previously mentioned, I incorporated a qualitative, interactive study through Instagram as my main methodology. Through a private instagram account under a false alias (despite using images of myself) uploading content resembling posts that are considered oversharing, I asked participants to interact with the account as if it were real. However, through the recruitment flier and the consent form, participants clearly understood that the content they will be viewing and engaging with is completely created in addition to their rights as a participant, what is being asked of them and the process of the Instagram study. During the recruitment process, I recruited thirty five participants between 18 and 24 years of age through flyers and snowball sampling. I posted my recruitment ad on my Instagram story (along with asking others to repost), put physical fliers up around campus, snowball sampling and by asking individuals who have previously expressed specific interest in social media dynamics and structures. I intentionally recruited participants of all genders, race, sexuality, religion, or identity. While participants are asked in the consent form to authentically engage with the account as if it was real, they are instructed to interact (at least actively view, if they're not commenting, liking or engaging otherwise) at least three times a week with material on the account. The study ran from December 28th, 2022 to January 27th, 2023. While Loren, the fictitious persona behind the study account posted about once a day on average throughout the thirty day study accumulating thirty six posts by the end of the study, I will only be analyzing data from select posts. The content of the posts I uploaded to the study account are organized into the following categories (and have included a few tentative post examples for each category), Interpersonal, Mental and Emotional Wellbeing, Academic/Work, Romantic/Sexual Relationships, Substance Use and Miscellaneous.

Are you 18-24 and active on Social Media?

Potentially curious about the concept of "oversharing" on Social Media?

If so, I invite you to participate in a study for my SPROJ that includes interacting with a fictional persona's Instagram *created solely for research*.

For my SPROJ, I am exploring digital oversharing as a social phenomena, its impacts on Social Media dynamics & social norms. Participants will engage with an Instagram account that frequently uploads posts most would consider oversharing. While participants know the content is not indicative or based off of any real persons experiences or life participants are asked to engage with the account authentically, as if it was a real acquaintance or friends account. The study is anonymous & participants identity will be protected. If you are interested, or have any questions please feel free to reach out for further details & share this flier with anyone you think may be interested. Thank You!

SAMANTHA DANDRIDGE '23 (SHE/HER)

sd8926@bard.edu

Instagram Study Recruitment Flier

Participant Demographic Chart

1. Burner Used	She/her	21
2. Burner Used	She/her	21
3. Main Personal Account used	He/him	21
4. Main Personal Account used	They/Them	20
5.. Main Personal Account used	She/Her	23
6. Main Personal Account used	He/Him	18
7. Burner Used	She/Her	21
8. Main Personal Account used	He/Him	20
9. Main Personal Account used	She/Her	21
10. Personal Spam/Finsta Used	She/Her/They/Them/He/Him	19
11. Personal Main Account Used	She/Her	19
12. Personal Main Account Used	He/Him	22
13. Personal Main Account Used	He/Him	20
14. Personal Spam/Finsta Used	They/Them	24
15. Burner Used	She/Her	18
16. Burner Used	He/Him	19
17. Personal Spam/Finsta Used	She/They	22
18. Main Personal Account Used	They/Them	21
19. Main Personal Account Used	She/Her	21
20. Main Personal Account used	He/Him	18
21. Personal Spam/Finsta Used	She/Her	19
22. Main Personal Account Used	He/Him	22
23. Burner Used	He/Him	20
24. Main Personal Account Used	She/Her	20
25. Burner Used	They/Them	18
26. Burner Used	He/They	20
27. Main Personal Account used	He/Him	23
28. Burner Used	She/her/they/them/he/him	22
29. Personal Spam/Finsta used	She/They	21
30.Burner Used	She/Her	20
31. Main Personal Account Used	He/Him	24
32. Burner Account	They/Them	19
33. Burner Account	She/Her	23
34. Main Personal Account Used	He/Him	24
35. Burner Used	She/Her	21

Follow Up Questionnaire Overview

In addition to participating in the Instagram study, the same cohort of participants were asked to complete a five question follow-up questionnaire regarding their participation, insight to their engagement and experiences with oversharing. While their engagement, particularly their comments, yielded substantial data on its own, the questionnaire supplemented their engagement. By providing explanation to their engagement approach, their own opinions, history, experiences encountering oversharing online and their overall experience participating in the study, I was able to form and identify more accurate and precise patterns and theory within my findings. My second and third research questions, "What are the effects on the poster, those close to them, their following and social media in general?" And, "What consequences do these effects have on the poster, those close to them, their following and social media as a whole?" were additionally more clearly through the questionnaire. Although participants' sole engagement can be used to make inferences or provide partial answers to my last two research questions, collecting and analyzing participants responses to direct questions regarding oversharing and their engagement leaves less room for assumptions and provides direct clarity**. The questionnaire asked participants five questions, 1. Describe your overall experience participating in this project and engaging with this account, 2. Did you consider most of the posts on the study account to be examples of oversharing? Did you consider them to be realistic? Why or why not? 3.Do you believe you authentically engaged with the account as if you would in real life? 4. Do you frequently see similar posts from friends or acquaintances? And lastly the fifth question, 5. How do viewing posts from friends or peers resembling the ones posted on the account study impact relationships, perception of**

interactions with those people? Despite asking five questions in the questionnaire, I have selected to only use data and participants' responses from questions four and five. Through participants' answers to these questions, I was not only able to contextualize engagement further but also learn more about the frequency of oversharing and how it affects their mental health, relationships and their own social media activity.

Important Terminology

Throughout the study and subsequent writing, one of my main initiatives was to make the content of my study, findings and conclusion as accessible as possible. If you're active on social media, you likely are familiar with popularly used acronyms such as LOL (laugh out loud or Lots of Laughs), or OMW/OTW (on my/the way). As interactions through social media have become more reminiscent of traditional in person communication, and more integral to the human experience, 'text language' and seemingly random acronyms have become rampant in not only social media relations but offline socialization as well. While creating the study account and persona, Loren, my goal was to appear as real and authentic as possible. A critical piece to this was making specifically Loren's captions and comments as realistic as possible, considering that arguably excessive acronyms and abbreviations were necessary. In an attempt to make my language and content easily accessible, I have included an index of acronyms, abbreviations and various social media terms.

1. **FR/FRFR:** For Real/For Real For Real; meaning "honestly" or "be real"
2. **Finsta**: "Fake Instagram" typically refers to a more private, uncensored glimpse into someone's life. It typically is a private account designed for close friends and does not have the same social expectations as an official personal Instagram account.
3. **DM**: **Direct Message**: a feature through Instagram that allows users to send and receive private messages, similar to texting.

4. Burner Account: Anonymous, incognito account. For the context of this paper, it refers to participants who engaged under an anonymous account solely to participate in this study.

5. W/: With

6. IDT: I don't think

7. Felt: Common phrase used to indicate that something is relatable or that the post or caption was "felt by" the person using the phrase.

8. Ur: Text language for your or you're

9. HMU: Hit me up- a commonly used phrase meaning text or get in touch with me.

10. Finsta: "Fake Instagram" typically refers to a more private, uncensored glimpse into someone's life. It typically is a private account designed for close friends and does not have the same social expectations as an official personal Instagram account.

11. JMO: "Just my opinion"

12. TBH: "To be honest"

13. Spam/Spam Account: Sometimes used interchangeably with finsta, but often referencing accounts that spam their followers via mass, excessive posting, typically regarding miniscule and more personal life updates along with rants, thoughts and opinions.

14. IYKYK: "If you know, you know" a phrase used after making or writing a typically vague or ambiguous comment indicating that only a select group of people will understand the reference or joke.

15. Abt: "About"

16. OMG: Oh my god/gosh

17. Haul: When referenced in this study, it is referring to the following definition, making a video or social media posts discussing, reviewing and critiquing recently purchased items, in this case, clothing.

18. Evr: Ever

19. Rlly/Rly: Really

20. AF: "As fuck", used to emphasize a point

V. Findings and Data Analysis

The Instagram study aims to examine the interactions and responses from oversharing, the results can be used as inferences to further understand what compels users to overshare. After the Instagram study concluded, I was left with an overwhelmingly excessive amount of data, fortunately, this resulted in a plethora of findings and certainly an abundance of Instagram notifications. After combing through numerous posts with a variety of comments, along with evident engagement patterns amongst participants, I proceeded by organizing and presenting my data from the study by categorizing participants with similar engagement habits into groups. After noticing that there were several "types" of followers (participants) who all approached interactions with Loren differently. I began by identifying the main, distinguishing engagement approaches and characteristics and then proceeded to group participants with similar engagement patterns and characteristics together. While all five participant engagement groups (with the exception of 'the Scroll and Roll' Outlier category), appeared to want to be supportive in some fashion, however, participants' methods of support and overall engagement approaches varied. Organizing and categorizing participants findings by their similarities in approach as the most coherent and strategic structural and methodological decision.

Instagram Study Data
The Responsible, Helpful, Friend

Between coming of age movies, talk shows and mainstream news segments, we are constantly reminded of the unfortunate yet common negative experiences including cyber bullying, harassment, discrimination and verbal abuse young adults frequently endure on social media. Despite the plethora of factors differentiating social media from real life, in person interaction, many researchers attribute cyberbullying and other forms of digital harassment to anonymity, "Thus, cyberbullying and 'shitstorms', for example, flourish under the protection of anonymity, (Wawra, 2015, 241.") As a result of technology and social medias rapid sophistication, anonymity, direct messaging (DM), and other affordances social media platforms

feature, have led to cyberbullying affecting a disturbing number of young adults. A nationwide study recently found that both being targeted online and becoming the cyberbully were equally as common amongst their participant pool, "more than half of teenage students have either experienced or engaged in cyberbullying (Sullivan, 201, 35,)." While the internet and social networking platforms have the ability to create and foster a hostile environment or culture, the positive effects, interactions and experiences teens and young adults have are often seemingly forgotten and excluded from a majority of mainstream discussions, depictions and narratives.

A majority of my study's participant categories reinforce most social media platforms' proclaimed purpose, to connect and share moments or visual content with friends and family. This first category, *The Responsible, Helpful Friend* particularly confirms that despite social media affordances potentially being the cause of an increase in cyberbullying, there still are kind, and supportive young social media users.

This particular category was an outlier, coined the "Responsible, Helpful Friend", participants in this category consistently extended support and kindness towards Loren through a variety of techniques. While other categories were supportive, what defined this group was the participants' mature, practical and obliging engagement. Participants primarily expressed support in four ways, encouraging and offering verbal support, gently communicating concern regarding choices or comments Loren would make, reminding Loren they are there to talk or hang out and lastly, offering practical advice, problem solving and productive solutions. Although participants' approaches were all supportive and helpful, they had different purposes and impacts but were all responsible, helpful, supportive and reasonable.

I primarily noticed two main types of responses from this category:ones that attempt to problem solve, offer positive advice, offer support, and express concern, the second type consisted of comments that encouraged Loren when she posted something positive and healthy.

Several of the categories of participants were supportive, however, what separated this category from others was the participants responses, although they frequently offered Loren verbal support, many of their responses were rooted in problem solving through advice. One particular participant in this category, who we will refer to as Alexa, is a 21 year old (she/her), who used a burner account and frequently would offer direct problem solving through advice or friendly suggestions to Loren. For instance after Loren was fired from her job for using a cannabis vape in the bathroom on shift, Alexa offered to give Loren names of places that were hiring; "omg no!!! I heard of some places hiring so dm [direct message] me if you want suggestions for a new job." Another participant, 'Jordyn', a twenty four year old (he/him) using a prior spam account to participate chose to be productively supportive by always expressing willingness to talk and condemning negative or destructive behavior or choices on Lorens end. In response to Loren stating she felt "sad and alone" and as if "Everyone is fake af", Jordyn left the following comments "You can always text me :)))", "I'm here for you" and the third was simply three yellow emoji hearts. Jordyn continuously offered support through hanging out, talking and reminding Loren that she was not alone and that what she was feeling or going through was experienced by others as well.

The most common approach amongst not only participants in this category but throughout all categories was to express support through simple verbal encouragement and support. Frequently, this approach was used in shorter exchanges, often with less personal phrases including "I am here for you" and "You'll do great! Don't worry!" accompanied with an accumulation of different emojis. Most of this category's engagement, especially more in depth and detailed interactions, were approached through the other three techniques this group used. However, short but sweet messages to let Loren know she had support were often used as a
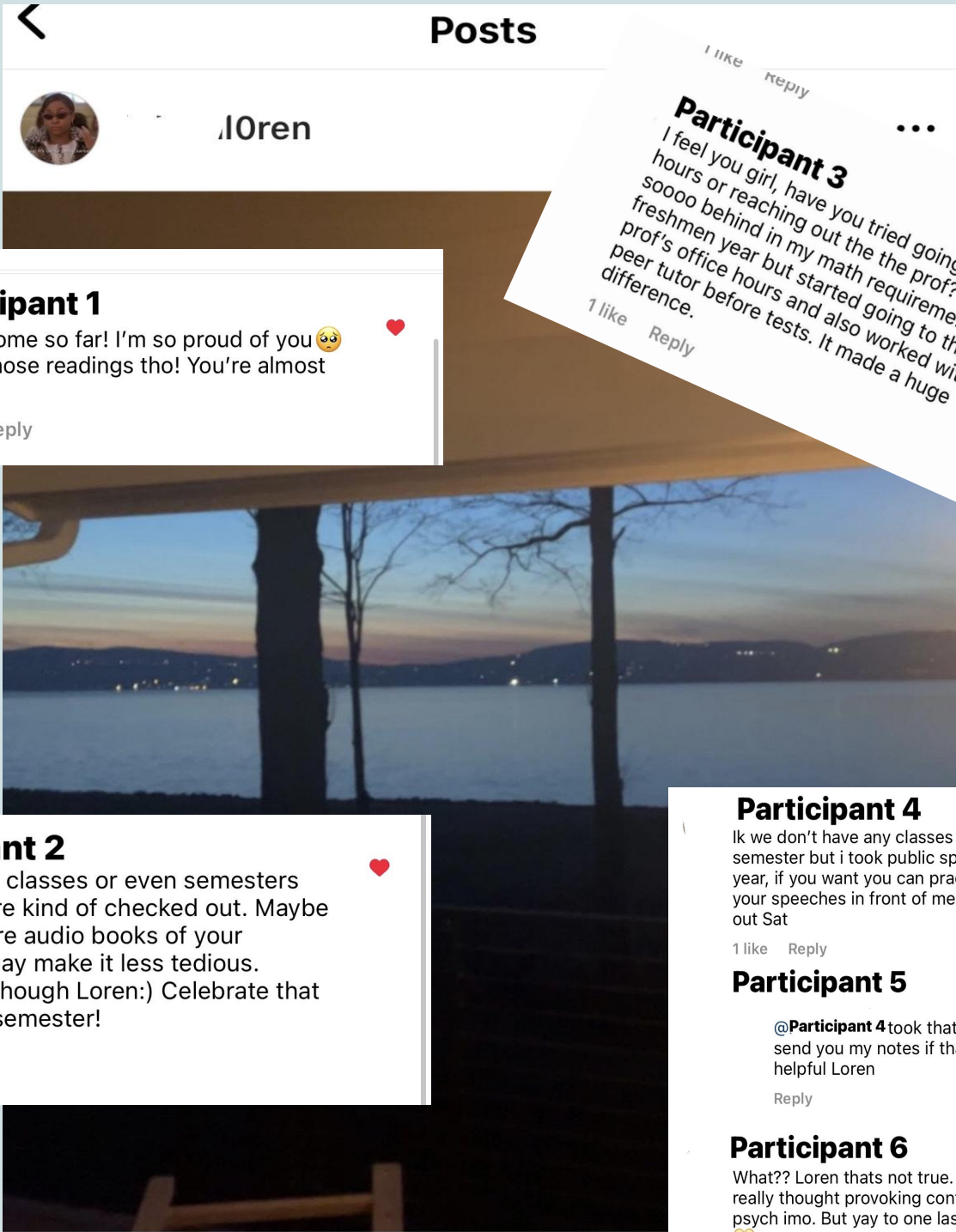
.l0ren

Participant 1

You've come so far! I'm so proud of you 🥺
Get on those readings tho! You're almost done!!

1 like   Reply

Participant 3

I feel you girl, have you tried going to office hours or reaching out the the prof? I was soooo behind in my math requirement freshmen year but started going to the prof's office hours and also worked with a peer tutor before tests. It made a huge difference.

1 like   Reply

Participant 2

Everyone has classes or even semesters where they are kind of checked out. Maybe see if there are audio books of your readings, it may make it less tedious. You're good though Loren:) Celebrate that it's your last semester!

1 like   Reply

Participant 4

Ik we don't have any classes together this semester but i took public speaking last year, if you want you can practise some of your speeches in front of me before we go out Sat

1 like   Reply

Participant 5

@Participant 4 took that too, I can send you my notes if that would be helpful Loren

Reply

Participant 6

What?? Loren thats not true. You make really thought provoking contributions in psych imo. But yay to one last semester!! 💛

1 like   Reply

❤️ 🙌 🔥 👏 😢 😍 😮 😂

Liked by   and 16 othe

l0ren Cheers to only one more semester of going to classes i never do the readings for and am always confused in 🥂 🙏 😘

Comments from various Helpful, Responsible Friend comments depicting an accurate portrayal of their engagement approach

segway or transition to the other approaches or when interacting with less serious content.

As technology, particularly social media have seeped into the average person's social experience, social media platforms and virtual alternative forms of communication such as Facetime, text messaging, and email have replaced traditional, in person conversation and communication. While a majority of the support these participants showed was through Instagram, one repeated approach used by this category was to ask or remind Loren that they were available to hang out in person. Despite it not being an instant solution, or immediate support, it communicates that the poster is cared about enough to make time and a larger effort to see and communicate with them. It also was used by participants in some circumstances additionally as a problem solving approach. In response to Loren posting about being left out; "When u find out ur supposed best friends went to a party downtown w/ out inviting you even when you said you had nothing planned that night iykyk.", a participant responded with, "Aww i'm sorry! Would you want to hang tomorrow night?:)".In addition to validating Loren's disappointing experience, this participant not only lets Loren know she's thinking and cares about her enough to have an in person relationship,

but as well
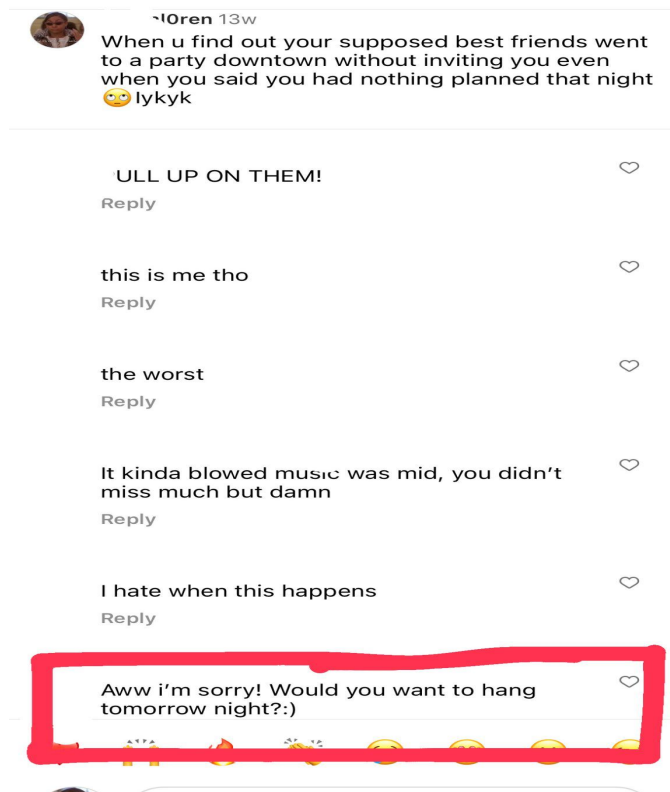
as helped her problem solve by moving on and not wallowing in her current predicament or handling it destructively. This approach uniquely merges verbal digital support, in person support and time and problem solving to express support and concern.

One of the most defining responses from this group were participants gently and politely expressing concern regarding Loren's welfare and overall judgment. While other categories encouraged or did not acknowledge some of Loren's questionable behavior, this category repeatedly reminded Loren that some of her thought processes and decisions could potentially have negative consequences, without being condescending and phrasing it in a manner that still radiates support. For instance, Loren shared with her followers that she wanted to stop taking ADHD medication without the care of her psychiatrist, "Woke up and decided I'm gonna stop taking all prescribed meds from my psychiatrist. They literally are useless and do nothing". While the comment section was quite diverse, two participants in the "Responsible, Helpful Friend" category's responses were consistent with this approach. One participant replied, "I know it's important to lower dose overtime instead of just dropping all meds to avoid more complications. Be safe [red heart emoji]." While another commented, "Omg no cold turkey is risky!!!!! Look up the best ways to go off them." Both responses are supportive because they clearly are communicating concern and care towards Loren, however, they are not blindly supporting her decisions-gently encouraging her to reconsider her choices or reminding her of the consequences they may bring is still supportive but through a rather more responsible and genuinely helpful approach. By including "be safe" and heart emojis, despite Loren's judgment being slightly challenged, she is additionally receiving verbal support in addition to others' perspective. Frequently, participants used this approach and form of support as a vehicle to incorporate problem solving and practical advice into their responses.

The second significant characteristic unique to the "Responsible Helpful Friend" category is being supportive through proactivity, realistic problem solving and genuine advice. This approach was often used in conjunction with or followed the previous technique of attempting to have Loren reevaluate impulsive or questionable decisions, particularly after the decision had been made and Loren was reeking the consequences. One participant replied, "Omg no!! I heard of some places hiring so dm me if you want suggestions for a new job" in response to the following post from Loren, "Hmu to hang out, I just got fired for hitting my dab pen in the bathroom on shift." While it is helpful and reassuring to offer verbal encouragement or to check in on a friend, adding productivity and direct problem solving adds a layer of effectivity in addition to solely verbal support. This participant's response was particularly strong because they acknowledged and recognized that it was a less than ideal situation ("oh no!!") providing validation yet also offering a direct solution to the problem instead of condemning her job, wallowing with Loren about how unfair it was, or ignoring the problem and just hanging out with her verbal support and encouragement may make someone feel better, it can be supportive of their emotions, however, problem solving or lending advice is more supportive of finding a solution, and the dilemma or concern in question. Both attempts aim to signify support, however, problem solving seeks to be supportive of the person finding a solution and making change, while verbal support aims to be supportive of one's feelings, and emotional well being.

The "That's so Me" Friend

Social media platforms, influencers and creators, have been accused of curating unobtainable, "picture perfect" lives to their following, often pushing them towards creators and

accounts that are more authentic.Consequently, through studies, researchers have concluded that "there's a new value in vulnerability and spilling your guts. It's what some are calling contagious vulnerability, and part of a new language of mental self-care (Boag, Simon, Skelly, 2023)". While oversharing and allowing yourself to be vulnerable online can be a form of self-care for the poster, it also is far more likely to be viewed as relatable, genuine and authentic by their followers. Particularly, when sharing sensitive, personal or socially unacceptable experiences and feelings to an online audience, it creates a feeling of relatability in ways other online presences lack despite the continuous push for authenticity on social media. Throughout Loren's account, there were a number of posts my study participants found relatable, however, there additionally was a very clear group of participants who found Loren to be remarkably relatable and did not hesitate to tell her that, reinforcing the increasing trend of overindulging in sharing information virtually.

Throughout the duration of the study, there was a cohort of participants who fit a category I labeled; "That's so Me". This group consisted of a diverse demographic of participants who frequently expressed relatability towards Loren through attempting to use humor to bond over less than ideal predicaments, simple yet short vague comments communicating solidarity, and venting about something personal by sharing similar experience. Regardless of embodying supportive relatability in various ways from this category, they differ from other participant categories because their response and types of engagement are centralized around solidarity and reliability- both of which were rarely observed from the other groups.

The "That's So Me" category's engagement was riddled with patterns relating to Loren and what she was going through, however, while there were striking similarities, participants

related in a large variety of ways. After reading this group's questionnaire responses, fortunately, many participants' motives, reasoning, explanation and additional insight was further clarified through their written questionnaire responses. Through the duration of the analysis of the study data, it was immensely beneficial to contextualize and interpret their engagement with the additional insight of their questionnaire responses. Taking this category's questionnaire responses into account it remained evident that their main intent and purpose of engagement was to express solidarity and remind Loren that she's not the only one to have a specific experience, relatability and shared experience was communicated differently. Primarily through simple one or two word phrases such as "felt","me", or "relatable", sharing comments stating that they are going through or have gone through what Loren is enduring, and by storytelling, at times recounting and sharing their own personal similar experience in detail. While responding by expressing solidarity and relating to Loren in different ways, all three approaches have the same common denominator; aiming to communicate to Loren that they themselves, in some fashion understand what she is going through. Despite this, data collected from the post study questionnaire and particular interactions on the account indicated additional motives or reasons for publicly relating to often personal or less than ideal dilemmas Loren found herself in**.** While their engagement reinforced this insight and explanation behind intent and approach logic, participants in this category offered their engagement and response process, contextualizing how they chose to relate.

Through the duration of the analysis of the study data, it was immensely beneficial to contextualize and interpret their engagement with the additional insight of their questionnaire responses. Taking this category's questionnaire responses into account it remained evident that their main intent and purpose of engagement was to express solidarity and remind Loren that she's not the only one to have a specific experience, relatability and shared experience was

communicated differently. Primarily through simple one or two word phrases such as "felt","me", or "relatable", sharing comments stating that they are going through or have gone through what Loren is enduring, and by storytelling, at times recounting and sharing their own personal similar experience in detail. While responding by expressing solidarity and relating to Loren in different ways, all three approaches have the same common denominator; aiming to communicate to Loren that they themselves, in some fashion understand what she is going through. Despite this, data collected from the post study questionnaire and particular interactions on the account indicated additional motives or reasons for publicly relating to often personal or less than ideal dilemmas Loren found herself in**.** While their engagement reinforced this insight and explanation behind intent and approach logic, participants in this category offered their engagement and response process, contextualizing how they chose to relate.

Despite most participants in this category developing a wide range of consistent forms of engagement through solidarity, all participants in the "That's So Me" category related at some point through short, commonly used social media terms to express that you relate to someone without elaborating or expressing interests or eliciting details from the poster. The study posts ranged in content, length and detail, however, I found that terse, yet casual and relatable comments were the most common approach to shorter, less detailed posts. In response to a meme Loren posted about being ghosted by a guy,

Loren's post including a screenshot from a popular meme page
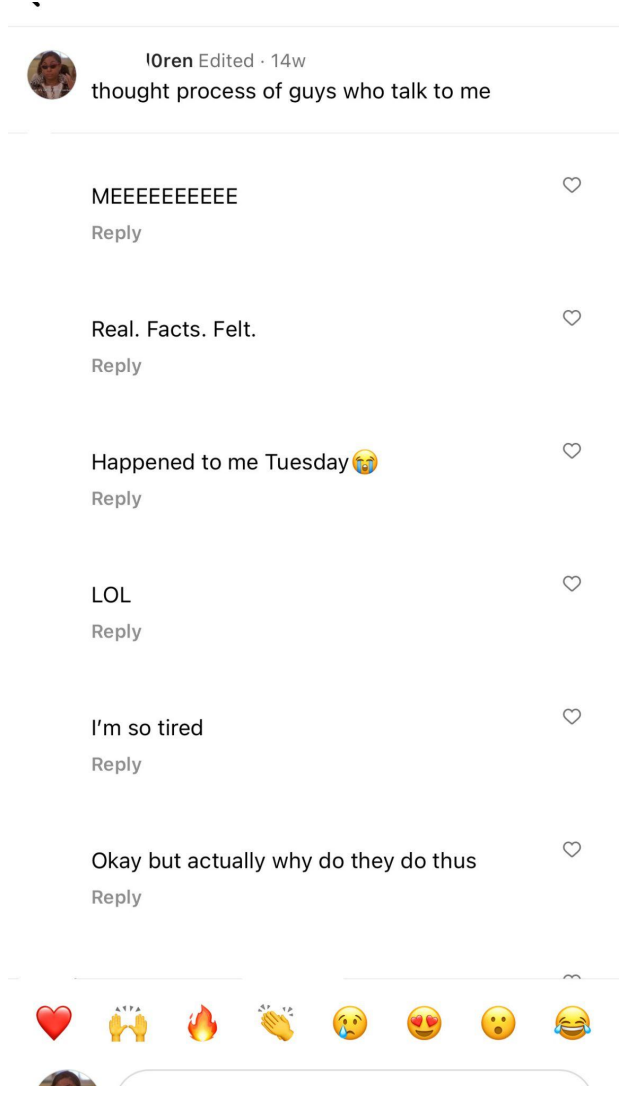
Screenshot of a section of the same posts comment section

one participant replied "MEEEEEEEEE" while another commented "Real. Facts. Felt." While

displaying solidarity, this approach did not rely or resort to consolation, humor, communicating

interest or verbal support. This specific approach, frequently observed within the "Thats so Me

Category", was also a commonly used technique from the "Cool, but Friendly" follower

category. While friendly, a shorter one word response does not convey the same amount of

support or level of intimacy between the participant and the poster. However, participants that

were more open and expressive often related through engaging by sharing similar or shared

experiences. Approaching oversharing through storytelling was often used in conjunction with some of the shorter phrases discussed above; they varied in detail, length, and content. Additionally, this method of engagement would often give participants the opportunity to cope or 'lighten the mood' by weaving humor in their comment.

Several of Loren's posts evoked personal, vivid descriptions, perceptions and experiences, from the "Thats so Me Category". Observationally, the more intimate, shocking and dramatic Loren's post was, the more graphic, personal and shockworthy responses from this category were. It appeared Loren's vulnerability was perceived as an unwritten invitation to share, vent or allow oneself to be vulnerable. Interestingly, this was directly confirmed by three of the "That's so Me" engagement category through their responses in the follow up questionnaire. One evening, Loren posted "Woke up and decided I'm gonna stop taking all prescribed meds from my psychiatrist. They literally are useless and do nothing." Within ten minutes of uploading the post, a participant responded "Okay thought about this the other day and had to share: I did that and I literally had the worst reaction. I was getting headaches and apparently it was rlly dangerous to quit like that. My psychiatrist lowkey was mad so I just switched drs bc yk me I can't handle people yelling at me lol [crying laughing emoji], [skull emoji]." While the comment section was rich and diverse in regards to reactions, and approaches, a vast majority of participants regardless of their deemed category were disapproving of this idea. However, this particular response is particularly effective because the participant did not simply tell Loren it was a bad idea but used their own personal experience to be helpful in multiple ways; they're communicating solidarity and shared experience, they're advising her it may not be the best choice and explaining why and lastly, they used their own personal, bad experience to convey the severity and extent of consequences Loren could face. While the specifically unique and supportive attributes to this comment made it exceptionally productive and genuinely helpful, the strong presence of humor was undeniable.

Humor and rather surface level comedic comments were a frequently used engagement method, often used subsequently or simultaneously with story-telling comments. The content and substance of Loren's life through her Instagram account spanned a wide spectrum of content, severity and sensitivity, resulting in humor being a commonly used tactic throughout the study, especially when Loren was clearly upset or feeling down. While just humor alone was never used, humor paired with solidarity , uriosity, advice and problem solving was often used in attempts to make Loren feel better and to "lighten the mood", again, this was insight learned through the questionnaire after the study had concluded. One participant consistently engaged through commenting jokes expressing solidarity, or "memeing", making fun of, the topic at hand. Humorously sympathetic, the participant commented "[Sparkle Emoji] Problem kids club [three crying emojis]."In response to a long rant Loren posted describing feeling as if she failed to meet her parents academic expectations and was disproportionately getting in trouble with her parents in comparison to her siblings.

Theory	Origins/Authors	Explanation
Superiority Theory	From the ancient Greek philosophers, including Plato	We laugh at others' misfortune and earlier versions of ourselves because that makes us feel superior (Sabato 5).
Release/Relief Theory	18th century/ Sigmund Freud (unstated in Sabato, but this theory worked to debunk the Superiority Theory, which represented the dominant view of humor)	We laugh to let off steam or "nervous energy" that taboo topics might elicit (Sabato 5).
Incongruity Theory	Unstated in Sabato (one philosopher who theorized incongruence was Arthur Schopenhauer); Critchley	We laugh when two incompatible concepts are juxtaposed (Sabato 5-6). Critchley, see below, positions his argument within this theoretical framework. He writes, "The incongruities of humour both speak out of a massive congruence between joke structure and social structure…" (22).

University of California San Diego [University], "The Theories of Humor", San Diego, California. 2021/2022 academic year

A chart of the three main sociological theories explaining humor; the Relief theory is likely most applicable to numerous participants approaching Loren's posts with humor. By introducing comedy into any dialogue, especially strained ones, tension, anxiety and nerves often subside because of the social benefits such as positive affirmation and the more relaxed temperament incorporating humor implements (Rossing, 2016, 10).

I theorize that when responding through relatability to any sensitive or potentially uncomfortable topic, in hopes of avoiding making things 'awkward' many rely on humor. An additional theory developed by reviewing and analyzing data was that humor was used as a coping mechanism for the participant as well as the poster. As opposed to simply relating and discussing shared unfortunate experiences, including humor can detract from the sometimes depressing or uncomfortable discussion and make it easier for both parties to engage in. While using comedy as a coping tool can be effective, beneficial and even healthy, certain comments, including the "Problems Kids Club" one have the potential of romanticizing,or glorifying bad or even traumatic experiences, poor judgment, and impulsivity particularly regarding social media accounts reminiscent of Loren's.

Expressing interest or curiosity via comments, the final consistent engagement approach from this category, initially appears to stray from prior engagement patterns. While this category's primary engagement patterns tended to connect themselves or their own experience or opinion to Loren's posts, engaging through asking more details or questions would be considered an outlier within their engagement. One morning Loren posted "My sister and mom are in a screaming match. Can't wait to go back to school. I may not be the kid who got my parents an honor roll bumper sticker but at least i'm not the kid whos abt to have police called to our house for screaming holy shit.", responding, a participant contributed the following, "But why could this post literally be about my family haha lmao. Which sister is it lol?" While still choosing to include themselves and their personal life, they not only expressed solidarity and used humor but showed curiosity by asking for details.

Participant 4 16w
Lmao we all know who this is about😭💀
6 likes   Reply
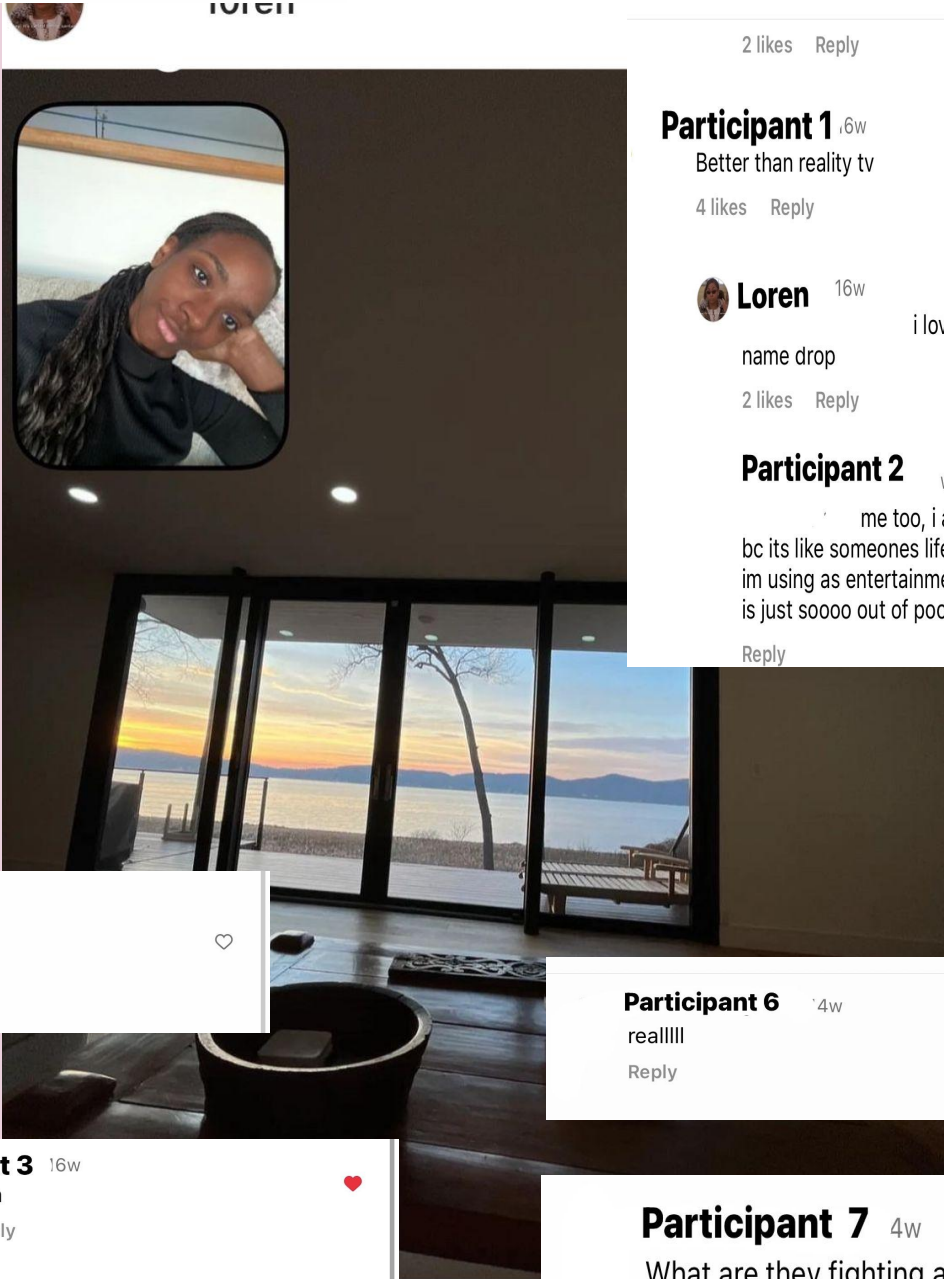
2 likes   Reply

Participant 1 16w
Better than reality tv
4 likes   Reply

Loren 16w
i love when ppl name drop
2 likes   Reply

Participant 2 w
me too, i always feel bad bc its like someones life and problems im using as entertainment but her shit is just soooo out of pocket
Reply

Participant 5
Whose side are u on?
Reply

Participant 6 4w
realllll
Reply

Participant 3 16w
And childish
6 likes   Reply

Participant 3 16w
They look dumb af
6 likes   Reply

Participant 7 4w
What are they fighting about👀
Reply

and **16 others**

.l0ren i love watching people ik irl get into drama on fb/spams/twitter 🍿

View all 6 comments

Examples of using Humor, curiosity and solidarity in conjunction; participant two additionally, touches on one of the main findings, viewing oversharing on social media as entertainment

 After Loren responded by answering which sister it was, she provided more context regarding the details of the fight between her mother and sister leading to the following reply from the same participant, "OMG, girl. We [referring to themself and Loren's sister] argue about internships/adulting all the time. It's frustrating asl cuz they went to school years ago and did all of this so long ago and dont realize how hard it is in the twenty-first century. Especially my parents they are hella old we always have generational difference issues. Sorry ugh rant over but hey apparently at least im not the only one whose parents dont get it". While this participant's demonstrated curiosity The act of asking a question- asking someone for further information shows care, attention, consideration and genuine interest, which is all supportive. However, as the comment thread continued and then comparing it to similar ones, it became evident that asking questions or expressing curiosity was sometimes used as a vehicle to obtain more information, in hopes of gaining additional material to relate or connect to themselves through.

 After Loren responded by answering which sister it was, she provided more context regarding the details of the fight between her mother and sister leading to the following reply from the same participant, "OMG, girl. We [referring to themself and Loren's sister] argue about internships/adulting all the time. It's frustrating asl cuz they went to school years ago and did all of this so long ago and dont realize how hard it is in the twenty-first century. Especially my parents they are hella old we always have generational difference issues. Sorry ugh rant over bu hey apparently at least im not the only one whose parents dont get it". While this participant's demonstrated curiosity may have been genuine, it ultimately was used to shift the conversation into what the participant wanted and felt they could respond (maybe they felt as if they could only respond through solidarity or sharing their own experiences) and relate to most.

The "That's So Me" group tended to on average moderately engage with all content, however, engaged significantly more (more comments, more likes) with posts they could relate to through particularly the comment section. The comments overwhelmingly expressed the post's relatability and appeared particularly genuine as participants in this category would only comment that they related to posts with the same or similar theme. Posts related to academic, romantic and interpersonal matters were engaged with the most by this group. Midway through the study, Loren posted "Smh I have the worst luck with guys smh smh smh.",the post received eighteen likes and garnered nine comments. All eight participants that belonged in this category liked the post and four of them commented. A twenty year old participant (she/her) in the "That's so me" category, who we will call Adrianna commented "Same girl, I've been cursed since you know who and I broke up [eye roll emoji]." Adrianna repeatedly referenced this break up and her shared experience of encountering "flakey" guys she was romantically involved with. A second comment from an eighteen year old (he/him), also in this participant category commented "oop me." A more detailed comment came from a twenty four year old (they/them) that included both commonality and also advice "It's okay, it's his loss [crying laughing emoji, upside down smiley emoji], this has happened to me so many times. Try to not take it very personally even though I do all the time lol (laughing out loud)." This comment is one of many examples of participants and specifically comments that overlapped participant engagement categories. I believe the intentions of the "That's so Me" groups comments were mixed, I believe some were to make Loren feel less alone, others were out of relief- being happy and finding comfort in seeing someone with a shared feeling or experience, to use it as a launching pad to start a conversation with Loren and potentially to have Loren, or others

reading the comments that they may need support or someone to talk to (depending on what the post content was).

This was particularly intriguing to me because this group's engagement demonstrated a clear line of what people are willing to relate or say they struggle online and what they will not. There was unanimous reluctance to relate similarly to posts about emotional well being and there were only two participants who commented that they related to posts regarding emotional well being, and substance use. However, I am unclear how exact this is, considering the study guidelines, I ponder that maybe some participants specifically in this category chose to not comment in fear of breaking the rules or IRB standards. Currently, I am leaning towards it being a combination of multiple factors; not feeling comfortable sharing about more intimate or less talked about subjects, eagerness to adhere to perceived social standards, and also attempting to follow all study guidelines- while participants were permitted to comment about their emotional well being or substance use in the comments, they were asked to use one of the assigned emojis serving as content warnings (champagne glass emoji indicated alcohol reference, leaf emoji indicated drug use, primarily references to cannabis. Discomfort in sharing personal, sensitive or questionable content online may also be symbolic of performance. Performing disdain and strong disapproval towards drugs and alcohol, are perhaps an attempt to appear less likely to partake in or be privy to these activities, in addition to enacting perceived socially acceptable roles and performances.

The Ride or Dies

Oversharing on social media likely stems from a variety of personal and environmental factors. Frequently, oversharers are labeled as "attention seekers", however, oversharing has been attributed to far more, "Anxiety, attention-seeking, and social media addiction were significantly associated with elevated levels of online sharing (Shabahang, Shim, Aruguete, Zsila, 2022, 1-2)." Despite Loren's intent or hopes while oversharing, it is reasonable to theorize that positive attention and engagement from her followers was a motivating factor or at the least, a benefit to oversharing. The Ride or Die follower participant category was by far the most attentive by engaging with a large majority if not every post, and most importantly, it was positive attention filled with encouragement, kindness and interest.

The Ride or Die followers were the most consistently active, attentive and versatile while engaging.This group is described by followers who gave the impression that they were not only close friends with Loren but supporting her every move, comforting her and constantly giving her positive attention. This group collectively and individually interacted and approached engagement through the following methods; extending endless forms of support towards Loren regardless of situational circumstances or their personal opinions, presented their relationship with Loren as a very close one, and repeatedly showing long-term interest and curiosity about previously shared comments Loren had posted. These three forms of engagement along with the severity, high frequency and intensity of their engagement easily made the 'Ride or Dies'- quite literally Loren's Ride or Die's.

Support and solidarity, particularly verbal support, was one of the sole consistent common denominators amongst the participant engagement categories. Overall the support from the 'Ride or Die' group was a significant outsider. In theory, support is intended to have a beneficial, productive and positive impact on all involved, even though support may not always be or appear to be what the receiver wants or understands as support in that moment. However, while it was evident that the 'Ride or Die' participants' intent was to come across as supportive, helpful and caring to Loren, their support was unwavering. Regardless of the severity, sensitivity or blatantly problematic post or comment made by Loren was encouraged, justified or praised; even when what they are seemingly supporting is objectively destructive towards Loren and others. This finding was reinforced in the comment section, under Loren's post describing getting fired from her job, "Hmu to hang out, I just got fired for hitting my dab pen in the bathroom on shift." Comments from the "Ride or Dies" varied from "Lmfao u hated working there and never got Saturdays off", "Let's hang" and "OMG no make a fake med card", while hypothetically this likely would have resulted in Loren feeling validated, and likely temporarily better but with little to no long lasting impact. While impossible to know the authenticity of these participants' support solely from their participation commentary, their perceived idea of support did not always ring true to the definition. Ever heard the phrase impact over intent?

Posts
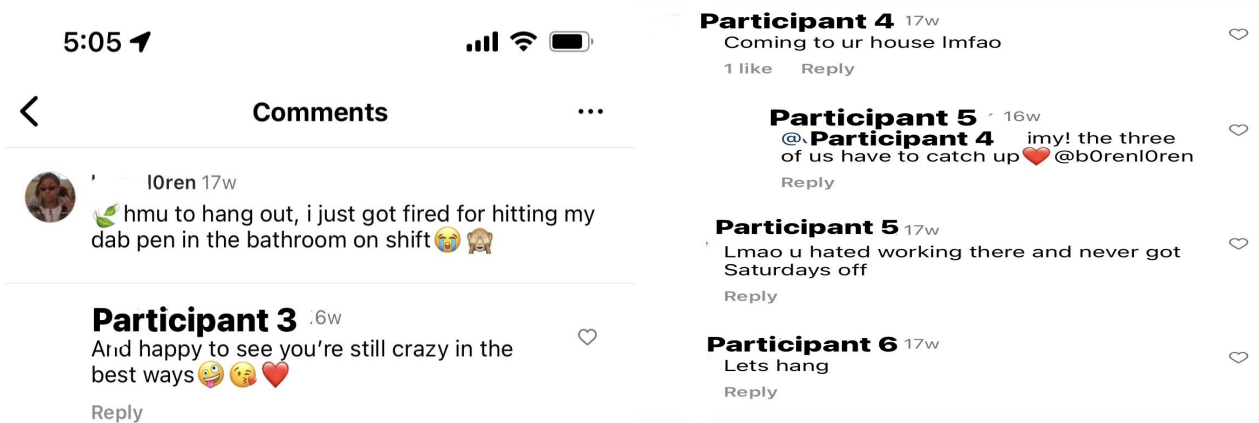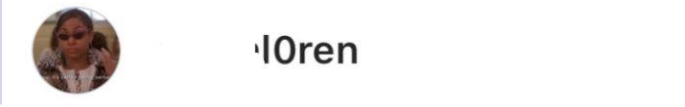
l0ren
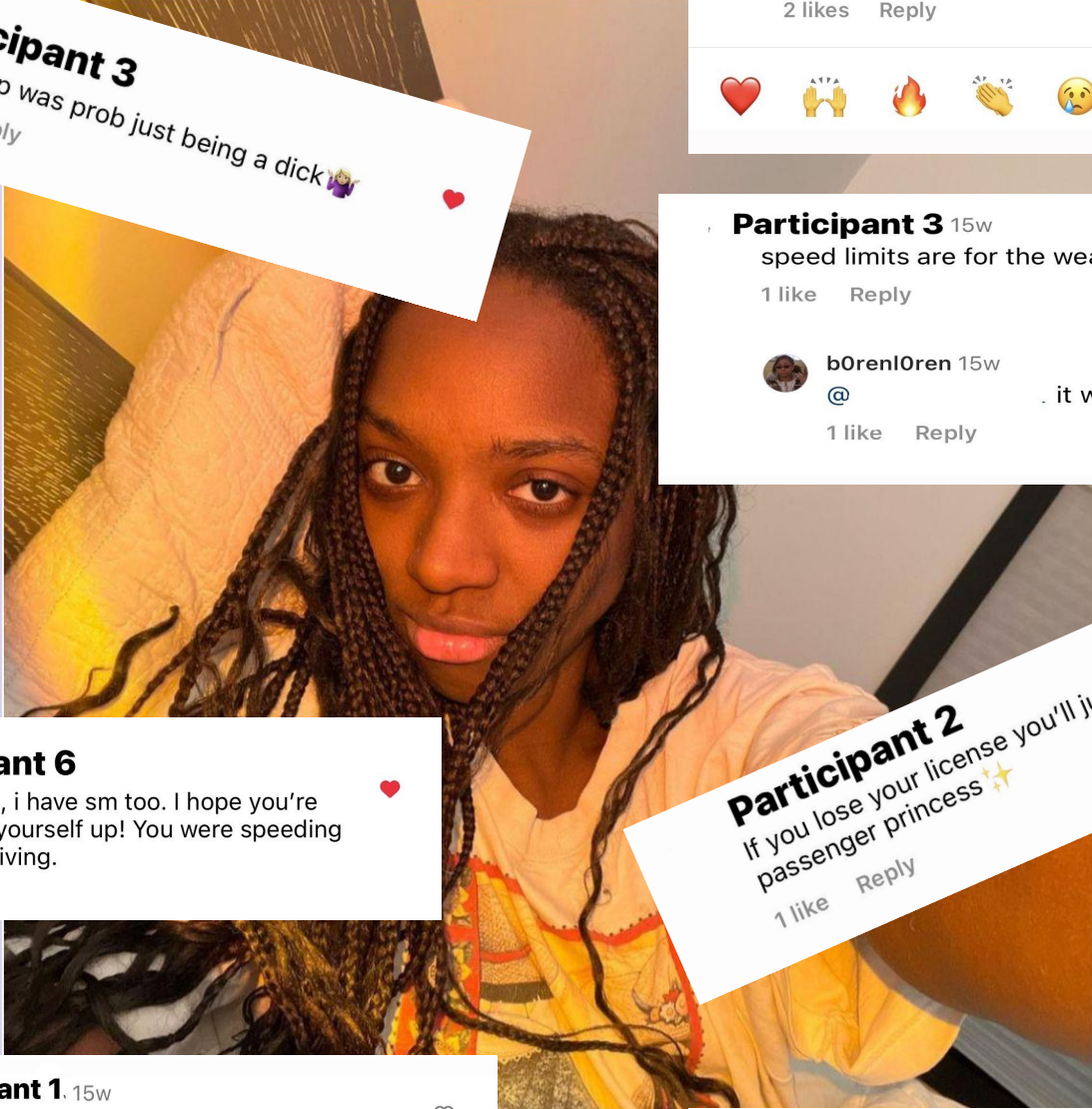
Participant 4 15w
no face no case 🫶
2 likes   Reply

❤️ 🙌 🔥 👏 😢 😍 😮 😂

Participant 3
Acab. Cop was prob just being a dick🧝‍♀️
1 like   Reply

Participant 3 15w
speed limits are for the weak
1 like   Reply

b0renl0ren 15w
@   . it was a 45 too
1 like   Reply

Participant 6
It's okay girll, i have sm too. I hope you're
not beating yourself up! You were speeding
not drunk driving.
1 like   Reply

Participant 2
If you lose your license you'll just be a
passenger princess✨
1 like   Reply

Participant 1. 15w
I have 3 hit and runs under my belt, it's like
collecting girl scout pins
1 like   Reply

Participant 2
Lmao u drive fine. Worst case you're
arrested. It's kinda a baddie/hot girl move
to be arrested 👀 esepcially cuz its not like
its a violent charge or something deep
1 like   Reply

Participant 2   w
@   , omg well when u
look at it like that😆

♡ ◯ ◁

Liked by   and **17 others**

.l0ren Got pulled over for speeding. I now have
enough points on my license to lose my license. fml.
Ordered new clothes tho💕 😩 🤪 😍 ✨

*Potentially Toxic Support?; Replies from Ride or Die Participants in the above posts
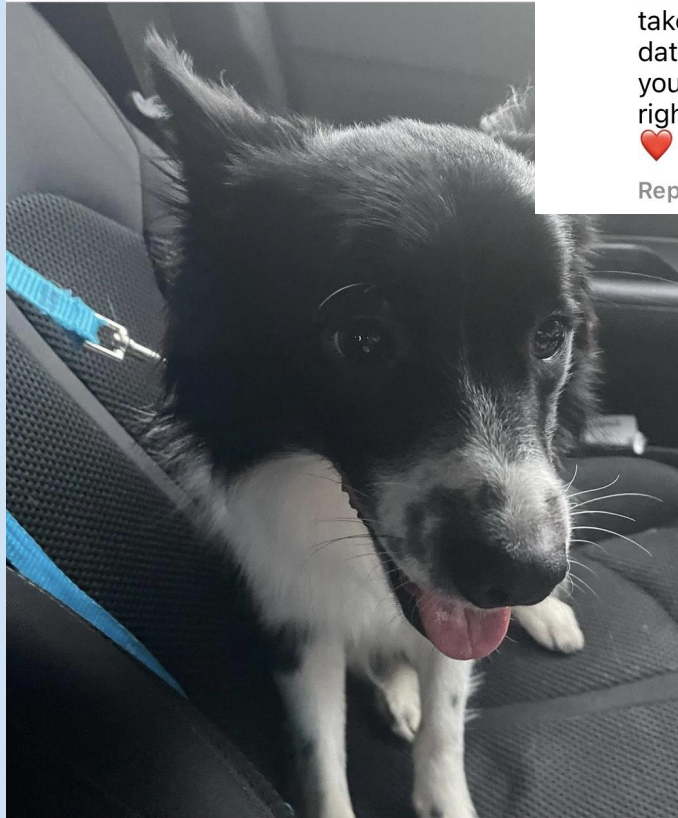comment section*

The comments Loren received from this category were attempting to be supportive but the effectiveness is questionable. The first comment was constructed puerley from validation and justification; validating Loren's behavior by finding it amusing and justifying it through criticizing her work schedule. Perhaps indirectly, this form of "support" (and I included quotation marks because I, myself am unsure if these kinds of blind embracement and encouragement actually qualify as support).

In a majority of friendships, especially between young adults, it would be considered inappropriate and a boundary violation to lecture or respond to a friend confiding in you or going through a hard time in an authoritative or infantilizing tone. As the "Helpful and Responsible Friend' category demonstrated, there is still an abundance of appropriate and often helpful ways to express disapproval or concern which can actually be supportive within itself. Support is so intricate, it is far more than just making someone feel better in the moment or spoon feeding them what you believe they want to hear.

 This kind of engagement was consistent but the most prominent while interacting with posts where Loren expressed or implied guilt for missing an academic deadline, getting fired or other behaviors she was unhappy with. While individual participants' engagement mainly fell into one category, most participants occasionally would engage in ways that could fall under other participant type categories. However, the "Ride or Dies" overlapped with the "That's so Me" and "The Responsible, Helpful Friend" categories the most. However, they were separated from the "That's so Me" group because although this group would also communicate relatability, "Ride or Die" participants' overall engagement was less focused on themselves and appeared to relate to specific categories of post as opposed to relating to most posts. The main

difference between this group and the "Reasonable, Helpful friend" group is slight but

significant, while the "Reasonable, Helpful Friends" participants offered support and were

friendly, they expressed concern and challenged Loren's less productive or destructive choices

by offering solutions, attempting to problem solve or letting her know it was not the best idea;

something the "Ride or Dies" did not do and almost practiced the inverse by encouraging,

supporting or suggesting arguably irresponsible or impulsive solutions, Loren regardless of the

posts content. I am inclined to believe this group's engagement was the most diverse because

they participated as if they were close to Loren, meaning they felt comfortable engaging in ways

those less familiar would, and simply because they were the largest and most active cohort of

participants.

HRF Participant

I feel like that too sometimes, but maybe take a step back of some distance from dating? It can be exhausting, regardless you're beautiful, funny af and will find the right guy. You just gotta be patient yk❤️ ❤️ ❤️

Reply

An example of the Helpful but Responsible Friend's (HRF) engagement pattern consisting of support, and not only offering advice but attempt to help problem solve. This participants and other HFR's advice vastly differs as it avoids attacking the perceived villain or placing blame on anyone and rather places emphasis on positive affirmations and moving forward.

'Oren

Liked by   and **12 others**

l0ren smh i have the worst luck with guys smh smh smh

View all 24 comments

ROD Participant 1

Fuck him, he prob is ugly asl and doesn't deserve you anyway. Don't let some loser fw your confidence babe💕

Reply

ROD Participant 2 15w

same omfg just start trolling instead of trying

Reply

l0ren 14w

@ROD Participant 2 lmao im weak

Reply

Both comments from different Ride or Die Participants (ROD) were supportive, but representative of their categories distinguishing engagement approaches and patterns. While the first participant's reminder to remain confident is encouraging, they initially resort to automatically criticizing the guy referenced by Loren. The second response despite expressing solidarity, ignores how Loren expressed she was feeling and the comments primary purpose was to suggest "trolling" and centered around vengeance.

The "Friendly but Cool" Follower

This group is composed of participants who would engage a decent amount-not excessively and not sparsely. This category was almost used as a baseline, as a group, their level of participation and engagement was average in reference to the studies overall participation. While their comments were friendly, they were not nearly as detailed or personal as participants in the "Ride or Dies" group or "That's so me" group. While they would show support, concern, or occasionally mildly relate at times, it was selective and clear that they were not trying to be as engaged in Loren's life as participants in some of the other groups. They repeatedly followed standard social media norms or etiquette when engaging by interacting the most with posts that were substantial milestones for Loren, or major life events primarily through commenting impersonal and vague but supportive or productive messages regardless of their genuine reactions, indicative of Canadian-American sociologist, Erving Goffman's performance theory. Goffman believed individuals and society operate through performing identities including gender and class as well as social and cultural expectations, "...,but also that such performances are embedded in the mundane materiality of social life (Etzkowitz, 1993, 419)." Assuming Goffman's performance theory is applicable to participants in this category conforming to societal norms, the insight provided suggest that despite potentially having drastically different opinions or responses than what they comment, they feel compelled to perform in a socially acceptable way by being acknowledging Loren, and treating her with respect. However, that is the extent of the intimacy or closeness of their relationship. During rough patches for Loren, participants in this category "liked" these posts at an average rate but commented less frequently than posts that were more positive. Similar to their comment engagement with more positive

posts, when participants in this group did comment on posts outlining Loren's struggles, they were impersonal and vague. There were very little to no comments from this category that offered a shared experience, a substantial amount of comments were blanket statements including "I'm so sorry!!", "It'll work out, don't worry" and "Damn, that sucks." and almost no questions or specific, personalized advice was given. Noticeably, participants in this category collectively presented themselves as not close friends but closer than acquaintances to Loren.

This category was almost used as my baseline, as a group, their level of participation and engagement was average in reference to the studies overall participation. This group is composed of participants who would engage a decent amount-not excessively and not sparsely. Their overall participation was categorized by the following forms of engagement, interacting through likes and comments an "average" amount relative to the other groups, particularly the group that engaged the most the "Ride or Dies" and the group that participated the least the "Scroll and Roll" category. Despite being one of the largest cohorts of participants, this group differed from the others by remaining balanced during engagement by remaining friendly, supportive and interested but not falling on either end of the spectrum by being overly involved and supportive or dismissive.

This category is additionally unique because while a substantial number of 'Friendly But Cool' participants offered advice or verbal support similar to other categories, it is offered in a less warm and proactive delivery. While participants in other groups may attempt to help problem solve or offer copious amounts of support, members of this category resorted to giving advice (without involving themselves or helping Loren problem solve) or by offering a few, usually impersonal words of encouragement. True to their name, they were friendly and *cool,* not warm but certainly not cold- but were not and never became overly familiar with Loren, however, their engagement indicated that they were closer than a simple acquaintance.

not warm but certainly not cold- but were not and never became overly familiar with Loren, however, their engagement indicated that they were closer than a simple acquaintance.

Engagement consistency was upheld and consistent despite expressing moderate interest in Loren's life, they proceeded under more traditional social media norms and practices in addition to simultaneously showing interest and support while retaining their boundaries and distance. After days of procrastination, Loren finally decided to attempt to abandon her avoidant behavior and address a passed due final, "Making a smoothie. Debating on asking my professor for another extension. I still haven't finished my anthro final", utilizing the comment section, one 'Friendly but Cool' follower commented, "Ask". After Loren responded to the comment, describing how she needed an explanation regarding why the final was late, the same participant replied "I would say something like Winter Depression". Another 'Friendly but Cool' follower commented, "I would ask or at least email explaining why you haven't done it yet". Certainly both responses are helpful and supportive, however, they are relatively brief and do not express overt interest or that they are eager to hear more details. While the first exchange initially was a close-ended reply, the participant follows up with a helpful suggestion without getting more personal and trying to ask or understand why Loren has not completed the final.

Participant 2 16w

Ask

2 likes   Reply

.l0ren 16w

@ **Participant 2** thats what i'm thinking. Okay emailing now trying to come up with an excuse tbh lie as to why i haven't completed it and need more time. Sigh

Reply

Participant 2 .6w

@ '0ren I would say something like Winter depression

1 like   Reply

Participant 1

I would ask or at least explain why you haven't done it yet

Reply

Liked by :   and **14 others**

.l0ren Making a smoothie. Debating on asking my professor for another extension. I still haven't finished my anthro final 💀 😩

View all 16 comments

Additionally, the participant began the exchange by simply suggesting Loren 'ask' for an extension, despite offering a helpful suggestion, the participant does not communicate direct encouragement or solidarity. Neither participants' responses are not accompanied by unwavering support or sympathy, negative or destructive encouragement, and humor.

Communication through Social Media has already complicated intricate and complex in person socialization immensely, particularly because of digital communications abandonment of tone, body language, and facial expressions. Luckily, certain cues such as "dry" or closed ended

responses, and being "left on read", a skill this category has mastered, have made deciphering online communication and social cues slightly easier. While taking the initiative to respond, and in a way that is helpful to Loren's post, reading between the lines, it is clear from participants engagement that while their goal is to extend support and kindness to Loren, (or at least appear that way), their language and situational cues such as engagement and response time that it is not their intent to become close friends with Loren or to become entangled in whatever predicament she was wrapped up in. For instance, on New Year's Day morning, Loren woke up with a hangover after a chaotic, boozed-filled New Years Eve, "Still hung over. Very nauseous. Have been sitting on the bathroom floor on and off since this morning. Throwing up all day. Almost 24 hours since that last drink. Never mixing Vodka and Hennessy again. I'm telling y'all…it's not worth it." While still offering support, the 'Friendly but Cool' participants, did not comment or show any inkling that they were interested, found Loren's post amusing or entertaining, yet still wanted to show that they were listening and sending warm, happy thoughts their way, one participant commented "Feel better {red heart emoji]." while a second replied "Happy New Year (three celebratory party emojis)!!!" While remaining positive and supportive, this category was able to maintain distance and did not appear supportive of Loren's drinking the night before. Although Loren did not receive negative reactions, these participants (and the 'Friendly but Cool' category as a whole) decision to not acknowledge or address the drinking, her being hungover and "sitting on the bathroom floor on and off all day" but rather focus on her feeling better and embracing the new year without publicly condemning her substance use nor encouraging or enabling it. The most outstanding and identifiable trait about this categories engagement approach is their ability to remain kind, and neutral yet supportive while maintaining a very clear distance and boundary with Loren.

The 'Scroll and Roll Follower'

The "Scroll and Roll" engagement category summarized participants who, I imagine, simply scrolled and kept rolling without engaging through likes or comments. With only two participants and such an extreme difference in engagement relative to the other categories, this was certainly an outlier; qualitatively, it was an interesting finding because The participants in this category exemplified the following traits; very little to no likes or comments on Loren's posts, viewing temporary twenty four hour stories, indicating viewing the account, at least to a certain extent and when they did engaged, liked the most "relatable" posts often in the miscellaneous posts category. This cohort of participants was significantly the smallest with only two participants. Both of these participants engaged very little to not engaging with the account at all, despite being active (based on story views). Despite this, due to this category being incredibly small, theories and observed participant patterns are substantially less meaningful because a participant pool of two is simply too small to draw meso and macro level conclusions from. Regardless of the post content,photo, or category these participants chose not to engage, indicating that they prefer to disengage if exposed to posts that retain personal or unneeded information or perhaps, thought the content was not realistic or could not be engaged with authentically.

Follow Up Questionnaire Data

After the study concluded, to confirm that the category each participant was in, I used their submitted follow up questionnaire responses to see if they were consistent with the participants' follower category and their engagement. Their responses additionally supplemented and added insight and context to their engagement patterns, intent and social media history; additionally, reaffirming the performance theory, co-presence theory, social exchange theory and looking glass self theory. When asked if they frequently saw similar posts from friends, or acquaintances, their responses showed two dominating patterns; that they frequently encountered oversharing as well as viewing those accounts as entertainment.

While one of the questions participants answered asked if they frequently encountered posts similar to Lorens or that they considered to be oversharing, one participant shared that she believes being exposed to similar content encouraged herself to overshare,

Yes, unfortunately, I see a lot of people post similar things on their accounts. I myself have a finsta and have had it since middle school. I would overshare a lot when I was younger and would think it was normal since everyone else was doing it around me as well.
'Friendly but Cool' Participant, she/her, 19

This particular response additionally indicates that one of the indirect effects of the increase of oversharing on social media, particularly amongst adolescents, can lead to normalization. As a result of these participants' peers and social media circles engaging in overindulging information through social media, they themselves began to engage as it was the "norm". Interestingly, this led me to theorize that despite digital oversharing typically not being considered the social "norm", if one is frequently exposed or interacting with posts that overshare, it may be their social norm. Research suggests that a substantial amount of society, particularly adolescents strive to fulfill social norms. If one's social circles social norms consist of oversharing, I believe it may encourage or lead to them engaging in it. Considering that, it is

plausible that frequent engagement or exposure to posts that overshare lead to normalization and desensitization to the various implications and consequences of oversharing online.

Another participant also expressed regularly encountering similar posts on social media, specifically on finstas and spam accounts, "Yes, I see posts like these all the time. I like keeping up with my friends and their lives. All finstas are kind of like the confessionals in reality tv shows. And it really is like a tv show — what's gonna happen next?"- 21, she/her, Ride or Die. As another active social media user, the belief that "all finstas are kind of like the confessionals in reality tv shows…" not only reinforces how normalized and desensitized many are to digital oversharing but it also alludes to some users detaching themselves and or the poster from the fact that this is the posters (often whom they are friends with or know in real life) life, or situation posted by viewing it more as entertainment or a reality tv show. This specifically leads me to believe that a significant amount of oversharing often includes some aspect of shock value, and or drama, resulting in their followers perceiving it closer to reality tv. For younger social media users, I theorize that for some when they view what they consider to be shocking, outrageous, "drama" or unrealistic, it is easy to become detached to the relationship with the poster and the circumstances of what they are consuming (a peers social media, not reality tv) resulting in their engagement, and particularly how they engage being affected. The participant's specific mention of waiting to find out "what's gonna happen next?" implies that for her and other users, they are likely to actively view and engage with users who overshare out of sheer curiosity.

The concept of becoming detached from those who overshare online, is further explained and reinforced by Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman's *co-presence* theory, "being accessible, available and subject to one another (Goffaman,1996,22)". In order to achieve this, Goffman believed full bodily presence, through physical spaces along with visual, and aural cues (Etzkowitz, 1993, 420), which are substantially limited through social media interactions, are required to embody co-presence. The overwhelming data concluding that a substantial amount of participants view oversharing from people they know as entertainment or "almost like a tv

show" likely would not surprise Goffman. Due to the limited co-presence social media features afford, Goffman plausibly would attribute this finding to participants (and social media users in general), being unable to be fully accessible, available and most importantly subjective within our social interactions. Despite their intent, the oversharer may feel encouraged to continue current social media habits because it can yield an attentive and engaging social media following. When behavior is condoned, either directly or indirectly through encouragement and approval, the user oversharing, who already may be more impressionable or vulnerable, is likely to continue the behavior because they believe it is how others view them, making the looking glass self theory applicable. Applying the looking glass self theory, offers explanation to how the oversharers' followers perceive them as well as my first question, what compels social media users to overshare? If the looking glass self theory is applicable, it can be theorized that some who encounter users who consistently overshare online believe that is how the oversharer should behave, likely because of their repeated posting pattern. Ultimately resulting in them expecting and acting as if this behavior is normal for the oversharer. Thinking from the perspective of the poster, if they perceive this to be how they are supposed to behave or present themselves, they may continue-additionally adding insight to *what compels social media users to overshare?*

However, the seemingly exciting and entertaining "drama" oversharing sometimes brings is certainly a double edged sword. For other participants, certain oversharing leads to anxiety and at times, even their relationship being negatively affected by another's oversharing. Distancing oneself from friends or acquaintances that overshare was an overwhelmingly common theme throughout the questionnaire responses, specifically to the fifth question, "How do viewing posts from friends or peers resembling the ones posted on the account study impact

your relationship, perception, or interactions with those people?". A 'Friendly, But Cool

Participant we will refer to as 'Ellie' responded with the following,

Unfortunately yes, starting in middle school. In middle and high school it caused so much drama and it just became a thing, if you wanted to start beef or let someone know you had an issue it was done on either snapchat or someone's finsta or spam account. My school was super small and it led to so much conflict, I actually remember having a conversation with my friends towards the end of highschool about how we felt like we had to walk on eggshells and constantly watch what we said especially to certain people because half of the time people would post about someone negatively for doing the smallest things. It's so embarrassing to post your whole life online. I definitely started avoiding and distancing myself from people who overshared. I couldn't be friends with someone who overshares, Mainly because I didn't want my business to end up on their page and the guaranteed drama but also because a lot of oversharers just too unstable and exhausting to keep up with in real life. I don't mind seeing it from afar, I actually think it can be pretty entertaining but it certainly taints my image of the person…as messed up as that may sound. Again it's just so embarrassing.

- She/They, 22, 'Friendly But Cool' Participant

Embedded within Ellie's experience, it becomes evident that it serves as a working, active model of the social exchange theory. Defined by American theorist and sociologist, Peter Blau as "here conceived is limited to actions that are contingent on rewarding reaction from others (Blau, 6,1964)." Exchange and Power in Social Life)". Blau's theory insinuates that successful, happy, social relationships and interactions are frequently derived from a mutually beneficial, respectful and rewarding dynamic and understanding between all involved parties. Depending on the relationship and dynamics, the rewards and costs vary from emotional, financial, status or service(Emerson, 1976, 360)". The mental framework pertained during the process of

establishing whether a relationship is mutually beneficial and essentially worth being in, according to Blau is by considering and analyzing the various costs or risks along with the benefits of the relationship. If explicit beneficiary gain is solely one sided, despite it being appealing and a desirable relationship for one party, the relationship likely would not thrive, due to the other individual not finding it rewarding. Applying this to Ellie's response contextualizes why they "couldn't be friends with someone who overshares", because she finds digital oversharing "exhausting", instigating drama and does not see them as emotionally, and generally stable, maintaining a relationship with someone who overshares would not be a mutually beneficial relationship for Ellie. This is further reinforced by Ellie explaining that they can find oversharing "pretty entertaining" but only "from a far"- from people they do not have a relationship with.

 Interestingly, along with the social exchange theory, components of Ellie's response is representative of the symbolic interactionist theory. The symbolic interactionism theory argues that individuals perceptions, interactions and experiences formed through micro-level socialization, are used to develop meaning, purpose, and interpretation of one's social interactions and social environments (Dennis, 2011, 350). Through interactions with users and posts oversharing on social media, according to the symbolic interactionist theory, Ellie was able to sense-make and interpret what virtual oversharing meant to them from previous social interactions, providing her with the adequate information to act accordingly and proceed with her decision to not have close relationships with those they believe over share. In regards to symbolic interactionism, American sociologist and researcher, Herbert Blumer directly states, "Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them (Blumer, Herbert. 1969, 416,)." Under Blumer's logic, Ellie simply does not gravitate towards

oversharing because of her interpreted meaning: drama, instability and exhaustion. Despite

"meaning" and what objects, subjective experience and our environment are communicating to

us being the motivating factor behind navigating the world, it is merely a result of accumulated

social interactions and experiences, "Meaning is thus a *product* of social interaction, but requires

active interpretation to be acted on (Dennis, 2011 350)." Therefore, it is not a tangible or

objective concept, opinion or item but subjective interpretation composed of personal

micro-level social interactions that establish meaning and if 'one acts towards' something.

Another response, not only reinforced this through a different experience, but reiterated

oversharing leading to distance in relationships outside of friendships and acquaintances. Despite

a majority of consequences of virtual oversharing affect one's interpersonal relationships,

emotional wellbeing and perception of self, academic and employment status are also at risk of

being jeopardized. One of the responses to question five was unfortunately reminiscent of the

sometimes devastating impacts of oversharing,

> **"Well first, oversharing online is embarrassing as fuck, esepcially after high school. But I have a slightly different experience actually. Although some of my friends and acquaintances have overshared, they don't usually influence my relationships (especially because none of my close friends overshared), however, this summer, I had to report someone to my boss because of their continuous oversharing online. I was uncomfortable constantly seeing posts about them stealing from the store and knew the boss knew we were friendly. It certainly impacted our relationship and how I felt towards them because I was annoyed I was put in this position and they definitely knew I was the one who told them, resulting in them getting fired (which also made me feel really shitty but my boss was becoming suspicious of everyone…)."**
> **-He/Him, 24, "Friendly but Cool Participant"**

Within a company or school firing or expelling someone for certain online activity it is

communicating that they do not want to associate or represent the oversharer and their online

content; again, ultimately distancing themselves from someone who overshares. This

participant's, who we'll nickname Brooks, particular situation also is indicative of the complex

and at times awkward situation oversharing can sometimes put their followers in. There are

countless unwanted results of oversharing within interpersonal relationships, however, in more

structured and systematic environments, oversharing has the ability to influence far more. The

added presence of an authority figure such as a boss, in conjunction with a relationship built

within a work environment complicates and raises the steaks of oversharing because a third

party, is involved and it is more than the individual's relationship being impacted by the

oversharers content but their work life. *Traditional authority,* one of German sociologist Max

Weber's three identified forms of authority emphasizes the undeniable presence of varying levels

of authority, "The typical structures of traditional authority are patrimonial rule, involving a ruler

and a personal administrative staff, and feudalism, involving a hierarchy of lords and vassals

bound by personal oaths of fealty…(Spencer, 1970,131)." Traditional societal structures and

authority norms have built and continuously influenced institutional dynamics, such as, work

environments. As Spencer mentions, "defining positions" are a critical role in traditional

authority structures. Considering the negative consequences of oversharing on social media,

understandably, when an authority figure whether it is a boss, educational instructor or law

enforcement member, becomes involved social media users feel less comfortable viewing posts

or having information from posts that overshare. Despite this not being Brook's personal

experience, while it adds insight to how oversharing can impact work environments, it

additionally emphasizes the economic and in some cases, more severe consequences than an

acquaintance distancing themselves.

VI. Conclusions

A currently circulating 'Digital Diary' or "whisper" post; 74% of Participant questionnaire responses used some variation of the word "embarrassing" to describe oversharing on social media making it the strongest collective finding.

Main Findings

Through the data Loren's hypothetical 'finsta' garnered, it was overwhelmingly clear that oversharing on social media often has a plethora of negative effects on not only the poster but their following and the general climate of social media, in addition to the subsequent consequences it can lead to. The accumulative data outlined two main conclusions, however, the most overwhelming finding was the inordinate number of participants who described oversharing as "embarrassing". Interestingly, despite participants' questionnaire responses implying or directly describing oversharing predominantly as negative, their engagement with the study posts replicating oversharing arguably encourages and even comepels others to overshare. The questionnaire revealed that while some participants found oversharing consisting of "drama", "tea", or anything of shock value to be "entertaining" or as one of my participants said "something worth keeping up with, because it literally is like a 2012 facebook fight", despite it being a negative response, the oversharer continues their behavior because they believe it is how others expect them to behave; indicative of the looking glass self theory. It continuously leads to attention, even if it is at their own expense. A majority of participants from various categories, found oversharing to be anxiety inducing, stressful and resulted in their relationships with the oversharer often being fractured. Between the main two findings, despite both being negative reactions to oversharing online, stark differences remain; while one is rooted in stress and discomfort the other derives from amusement and entertainment at the expense of the oversharers overall well being, relationships and digital footprint.

Television series, cinematography, literature, theater, and musical performance amongst other forms of media, all seek to entertain their audience despite frequently having additional

purpose or intent rooted within their work. Through social networkings evolution and progression through the 2010's and into the early 2020's, users have been turning to platforms such as Instagram, Tik Tok and Facebook for entertainment. Instagram reels, short seconds long video clips, Tik Tok videos, and Facebook games, quizzes and polls have further expressed to users that these platforms are more than just sharing memories through photos and videos or as another form of communication but as an entertainment source. Dismally, users viewing social media content as entertainment or even amusement, is not exclusive to scripted or intentionally entertaining content such as clothing or makeup haul videos posted to the same social media platforms. Responses to how oversharing on social media is viewed, numerous participants belonging to different engagement categories questionnaire responses heavily implicated viewing peers, acquaintances and even friends digital oversharing as entertaining. At first glance, humor and overt support and kindness are symbolic of a positive interaction, however, for many participants, this was to cloak and disguise their rather negative reaction to oversharing, often mocking the oversharer or finding their predicaments humorous. Their at times, seemingly supportive and encouraging comments were arguably disingenuous, because of the lingering ulterior, self-serving, underlying motives.

By encouraging the behavior, even when the user knows another response would be more appropriate, they are enticing, encouraging and relaying the message to the oversharer that they should continue and that it is truly well received. However, it is important to note that this does not mean that these participants had mal intent, but likely is indicative of Goffman's performance theory. Subconsciously, partially as a product of the looking glass self theory, humans are taught and trained by society to execute a particular performance based on identity, interaction, environment and situation. For instance, the performance of gender is expected and

entrenched in most children's minds before they even attend school. Similarly, we are taught, particularly at a young age to embody an abundance of mundane, everyday performances such as being "nice" or "not putting others down". As time goes on, these performances taught and encouraged by teachers, parents, peers, communities, and media, commonly remain with us but become more intricate and sophisticated. A potential explanation for seemingly obviously poor advice may be attempting to fulfill a particular performance, in this case one that is "nice", "chill", "badass", or "non confrontational".

Again, modeling the Looking Glass Self theory, the oversharer may also internalize these signals and believe that this is what is expected of them, in addition to what is likable, interesting, and comedic about them. Additionally, social media's lack of visual, aural, and physical cues tamper with users' ability to be fully subjective towards each other. Goffman's co-presence theory and emphasis on performance is one potential explanation for the pattern regarding social media users distancing themselves from those who overshare. The lack of interpretation due to social media restrictions make it easier to view their posts and essential lives as fictitious, making it dangerously easy to not see the oversharer or their posts as a person with emotions and real life but simply a source for entertainment. After scratching past the surface, finding amusement or entertainment from others virtual oversharing, in some cases about particularly sensitive or intimate topics is inherently a negative response, regardless of its potential to compel or encourage users to overshare.

Undoubtedly, posts of Loren's were humorously clever, although Loren was often describing less than optimal predicaments, she often depended on humor and making her followers laugh to cope or share what came to mind. Contrastly, when the comedic components of Loren's posts are stripped, and they are simply left with the sole content, it potentially leads to the second overarching negative reaction expressed by participants. Close to 45% of participants indicated or explicitly included in their questionnaire replies that although oversharing from peers, classmates and friends can be entertaining and reminiscent of "reality TV confessionals" and public "C-List celebrity social media feuds". However, within the same token, a substantial amount of participants including slightly more than half of the participants who described oversharing on social media as a form of entertainment, attributed encountering the questionable social media habit in their everyday lives with stress, anxiety, strained and poor relationships with the oversharer and multitude of undesirable consequences. A large number of participants, especially those in the 'Friendly but Cool' follower engagement category, automatically associated online oversharing negatively. While their responses aligned with the overall finding, that a significant amount of those who encounter online oversharing perceive it negatively despite potentially compelling users to overshare, participants who identified more with the second explanation have a negative response to oversharing because of the conflict and consequences it may yield. For many, viewing posts that overshare particularly about interpersonal or social dilemmas can land them in at the least, an awkward or uncomfortable position. Participants described through their questionnaire answers that seeing posts oversharing about others makes them feel "stuck in the middle of whatever drama is happening" leading to stress, social and interpersonal troubles. Additionally, it left these participants with the

lingering fear of being the next person the oversharer negatively posts about, frequently causing their followers to "distance" themselves from the oversharer to evade the drama, conflict and potentially harrowing consequences oversharing online inevitably invites. Similar to participants who found Loren and real world social media posts resembling hers to be comedic, their response to oversharing on social media was not the intended or desired one but still potentially compels the user to continue oversharing. Despite not mocking, or engaging disingenuously, the lack of reaction and response towards the oversharing may give the false pretense to the oversharer that they need to share even more and potentially feel the need to elevate the level of shock value to get the affirmation they are seeking.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Study

Strengths

While not impeccable, the data and results my study yielded imply that there were numerous strong aspects to the study including participants' confidentiality throughout the study, conducting the study on an easily accessible platform, Instagram and my recruitment pool. Unfortunately, due to IRB regulations, potential participants (during the recruitment stage) and final participants all were informed that the study persona and posts were solely created for the study. Despite participants being aware that their responses and engagement was for research purposes, they were still instructed to interact with the accounts content as if it was an authentic profile they encountered on their own social media's feed- and many according to their participant follow-up questionnaire responses. Participants were guaranteed 100% anonymity meaning that their participation, identity and connection to my study was kept private and not disclosed to anyone. I believe that the guaranteed confidentiality encourages

participants to engage and respond authentically, even if it is not the most "socially acceptable" response. Participants were offered and explained the purpose for participating under a burner account, meaning they could like and comment on posts without other participants knowing their true identity. I included the option of a burner account to allow participants to feel more comfortable freely participating but additionally to render more authentic and genuine engagement. Additionally, the account remained private, meaning it was only accessible to me as the research conductor and participants during the study. Without the fear of surveillance or judgment from participants they may know outside of the study or creating a less than ideal digital footprint, participants' study engagement was ultimately more authentic due to the confidentiality measures put in place.

The accessibility of Instagram was another strength of the study because participants were able to participate simply by going on their personal cell phone and at their own schedule. Considering the duration of the study, four weeks between December and January, it was pivotal to me to conduct the study through an easily accessible platform. While recruiting participants, I specifically mentioned in my flyers that I was looking for active social media users resulting in all of my participants already having Instagram downloaded on their phones. By conducting research on Instagram, my recruitment group was more likely to regularly engage because of the convenience and accessibility. Participants were required to follow the account in order to view the posts as if it was a private account, meaning the study posts regularly appeared in participants' overall Instagram feed. I found this to be one of the strongest elements of the study because participants did not need to intentionally seek the account out to engage but could engage when it showed up on their feed. The study accounts posts appearing in participants'

overall feed served as a reminder and made regular participation easier. Additionally, appearing in participants' Instagram feed the way any authentic Instagram accounts posts would not only remind participants to engage with the account but it also, lead to more natural engagement and for participants to interact without necessarily being in "research participant mode" but rather respond as if it was any other account.

A substantial amount of collected data was from the study, however, I believe including a supplementary questionnaire was necessary to effectively and accurately analyze the data and findings from participants' study engagement. The follow-up questionnaire was not only designed to ask participants about their experience with the study and oversharing but to contextualize and add insight to participants' responses and engagement patterns. Specifically, asking participants how viewing similar posts to the accounts in real life affects their perception or relationship with the poster offered explanation and clarified their engagement. Supplementing their engagement with their response to how their relationship or opinion of someone is affected through oversharing, helped contextualize responses that were ambiguous or vague. Being able to analyze a participant's engagement with confirmed explanations strengthened the accuracy and validity of the study's data.

Weaknesses

The largest weaknesses of the study was not being able to use deceit while crafting my study and throughout the recruitment process. A large study objective was to analyze data that reflected participants honest, authentic and genuine responses and engagement, however, this is harder to obtain when the participant knows it is for research purposes. Being aware that their responses are being monitored, recorded and analyzed- while their confidentiality is enacted, is objectively an inauthentic and non-existent part of engaging with others on social media. In

addition to being aware of surveillance from me, the researcher, viewing and tracking their engagement, participants are also aware and may fear potential judgment from me. Being aware of participating in a study, also risked jeopardizing data. To combat this, while remaining transparent in my study objectives and study process, I made it clear that I was not looking for any specific conclusions or data to avoid participants attempting to engage in ways they thought were socially acceptable, how they perceived I wanted them to or what previous research has shown. Another weakness of not being able to present the study account as an authentic Instagram, was participants knowing that the person posting, was not actually experiencing what the post outlined. This has the potential to result in participants feeling hesitant or reluctant to share similar or shared experiences or generally respond how they authentically feel or would out of fear of judgment or their response and sometimes vulnerability within their responses being used solely for research as opposed to a genuine human interaction or correspondence.

Additionally, despite participants demographic information including gender, race, where they were raised and currently reside, varying, because of my recruitment processes methodology, my participant pool's diversity was somewhat limited. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, and my study recruitment flier (33) that was advertised on my personal social media accounts and around Bard's campus. Consequently, a significant amount of participants attended the same school, were subjected to the same cultural norms throughout their lives and aligning life philosophies, and values. If I were to conduct my study again identically, but recruited participants from a more national, larger pool, the findings would be less consistent and collective amongst participants, Of course the results of this study are not accurately representative of what social media users in general perceive online oversharing because of the small number of participants, but also because the results are gathered from a

participant pool with limited demographic diversity in regards to region and education.

   After months of research and data analysis of online oversharing, the compelling components of oversharing and the overall concept remains an enigma to me. Even after 'being' Loren for a month. Oversharing on social media likely is received poorly, like for many participant in the study, because the content often consists of topics that places the poster in a vulnerable position to be criticized, mocked or talked about. I consistently observed throughout my research, literature review, and combing through my findings from both the Instagram study and follow-up questionnaires that commonly people will respond neutrally or positively to posts that share the same amount of information but about topics that are socially acceptable to share on social media and never directly label it as "oversharing". A post goes from "long" or "detailed", to "oversharing" when those perceiving it deem it to be inappropriate or socially deviant to share what or how much the post does. While some of the main findings and people generally, who are even remotely familiar with the concept of oversharing on social media often view it negatively and attribute it to immaturity, poor-judgement, and excessive social media use, I still don't believe oversharing is inherently negative. It is the disproportionately negative effects and consequences, that make it inherently negative. While I do not understand the appeal, I can appreciate and do not think it is negative or using social media as a catalyst to raise awareness to social issues should be stigmatized. However, in the same breath, I acknowledge that a substantial amount of oversharing can have negative effects, but do not believe this is enough to categorize and reduce all over sharing on social media as automatically negative. The approach, delivery and intent of the post's content typically make that determination. Despite this, a majority of oversharing on social media is poorly received because society establishes

digital oversharing simply by sharing detailed posts pertaining to matters generally considered socially unacceptable to post. Shifting how we view those who choose to publish personal information on social media is crucial because it is when our, the audience's, response, reaction and perceptions become negative that their oversharing suddenly turns negative. If users were left to simply be, and the stigma of oversharing was broken, certain forms of oversharing could eventually turn into another form of journaling, and be socially acceptable. Regardless, without judging oversharing on social media, components and factors such as safety, my personality, and privacy, led me to stick to my journals. Lastly, my intent is not to persuade your personal thoughts on oversharing, but rather persuade you to proceed with an open mind the next time you encounter a post you'd find on Loren's Instagram.

New post

Share

Write a caption...

For Now,

The End

Bibliography
Part I

A. Buzzetto-More, Nicole, Robert Johnson, and Muna Elobaid. "Communicating and Sharing in the Semantic Web: An Examination of Social Media Risks, Consequences, and Attitudinal Awareness." *InSITE Conference*, 2015. https://doi.org/10.28945/2150.

Blau, Peter M. *Exchange and Power in Social Life (1964)*. ROUTLEDGE, 2017.

Boag, Simon, and Susan Skelly . "Why Do People Overshare on Social Media?" The Lighthouse. Macquarie University, March 16, 2023. https://lighthouse.mq.edu.au/article/march-2021/Why-do-people-overshare-on-social-media.

Boyd, Danah. *It's Complicated the Social Lives of Networked Teens*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015.

Dennis, Alex. "Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnomethodology." *Symbolic Interaction* 34, no. 3 (2011): 349–56. https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2011.34.3.349.

Emerson, R M. "Social Exchange Theory." *Annual Review of Sociology* 2, no. 1 (1976): 335–62. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.so.02.080176.002003.

Etzkowitz, Henry, and Steve J. Heims. "What Happened to Cybernetics?" *Contemporary Sociology* 22, no. 4 (1993): 493. https://doi.org/10.2307/2074372.

Gecas , Viktor, and Michael L. Schwalbe. "Beyond the Looking-Glass Self: Social Structure and Efficacy-Based Self-Esteem," 1983. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3033844.

Goffman, Erving. *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*. New York: Free Press, 1966.

Madden , Mary, Amanda Lenhart , Sandra Cortesi , Urs Gasser , Maeve Duggan , Aaron Smith , and Meredeth Beaton . "Teens, Social Media, and Privacy." Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech. Pew Research Center, August 17, 2020. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2013/05/21/teens-social-media-and-privacy/.

Rossing, Jonathan P. "A Sense of Humor for Civic Life: Toward a Strong Defense of Humor." *Studies in American Humor* 2, no. 1 (2016): 1–21. https://doi.org/10.5325/studamerhumor.2.1.0001.

Shabahang, Reza, Hyejin Shim, Mara S. Aruguete, and Ágnes Zsila. "Oversharing on Social Media: Anxiety, Attention-Seeking, and Social Media Addiction Predict the Breadth and Depth of Sharing." *Psychological Reports*, 2022, 003329412211228. https://doi.org/10.1177/00332941221122861.

Bibliography
Part 2

Spencer, Martin E. "Weber on Legitimate Norms and Authority." *The British Journal of Sociology* 21, no. 2 (1970): 123. https://doi.org/10.2307/588403.

Subrahmanyam, Kaveri. "Online Communication and Adolescent Relationships ," 2008. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20053122.

 Sullivan, Mario A., and Joachim Marjon. "BULLYING: ON- AND OFF-LINE." *GPSolo* 34, no. 2 (2017): 32–35. h   ttp://www.jstor.org/stable/26425844.

Valkenburg, Patti M., and Jessica T Piotrowski. "Plugged in: How Media Attract and Affect Youth ," 2017. https://doi.org/10.12987/yale/9780300218879.001.0001.

Wawra, Daniela. "Digital Communication and Privacy: Is Social Web Use Gendered?" *AAA: Arbeiten Aus Anglistik Und Amerikanistik* 40, no. 1/2 (2015): 219–45. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24722047