Self-Disclosure and Liking on Social Networking Sites

Emma L. McGorray '18 and Patrick J. Ewell, Ph.D.
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Introduction and Background

- The relationship between self-disclosure and liking has been well studied in the context of face-to-face (FtF) interactions. Because online environments are relatively new, less is known about the relationship between self-disclosure and liking in the context of computer-mediated communication (CMC)

- Collins and Miller (1994) found that **more intimate self-disclosures in first-time FtF encounters lead to more liking**, but Chaikin and Derlega (1974) found that **intimate FtF self-disclosures are received positively only when they are normative to the environment** and are considered inappropriate and unusual even when they are normative

- **The Internet is a unique environment in which intimate disclosures may be received more positively, perhaps in part due to anonymity** (McKenna et al., 2002; Bargh et al., 2002), but **self-disclosing in online environments does not always lead to greater liking of the discloser** (Antheunis et al., 2007; Whitty, 2007)

- Bazarova (2015) found that **disclosure appropriateness mediated the relationship between the disclosure's context and social attraction to the discloser**

- Context appears to play a role in the relationship between self-disclosure and liking, but many studies appear to focus on a single social networking site (SNS)**, making cross-site study especially warranted**

- The measure of self-disclosure levels is not consistent across the literature (Collins & Miller, 1974) so content-based evaluations of self-disclosure level (e.g., Beike et al., 2016) and intimacy-based evaluations (e.g., Collins & Miller, 1994) were combined to result in **three levels of self-disclosure: general, specific, and intimate**

- **General self-disclosure** is the sharing **of self-relevant facts** and **specific self-disclosure** is the sharing of more detailed information that often takes the form of **autobiographical stories** about specific events. **Intimate self-disclosure** is the sharing of **sensitive information**, often something you would only share with family or friends

Hypotheses

- H1: Self-disclosure at a level deemed appropriate for the environment will be liked the most

- H2: Intimate self-disclosure in an environment where such behavior is deemed inappropriate will be less liked than in an environment where intimate self-disclosure is appropriate

- H3: Intimate disclosure will be more liked in the Tumblr condition where individuals do not use pictures of themselves than in the Tumblr condition where individuals do
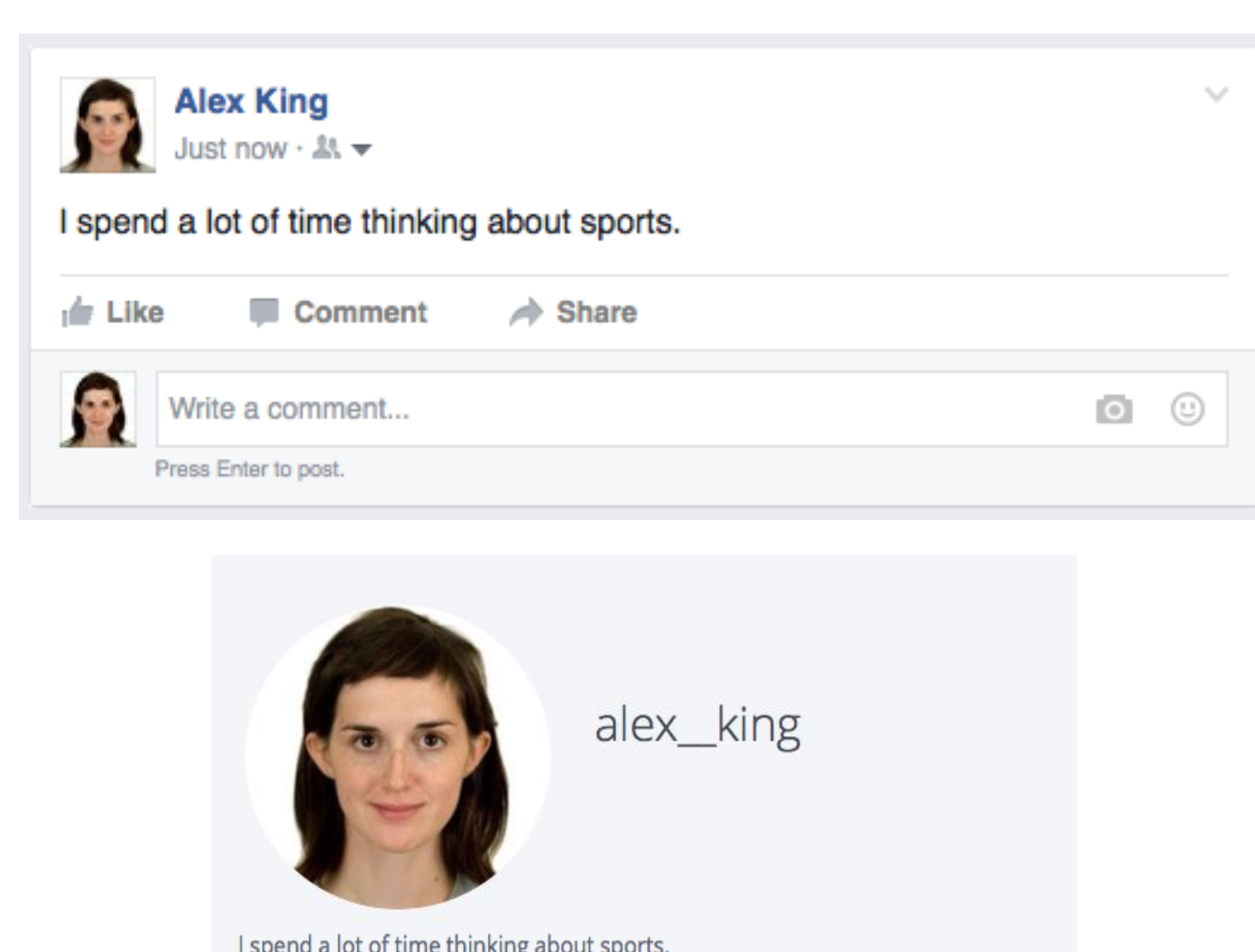
Top: Example of an online post in the Facebook general condition.
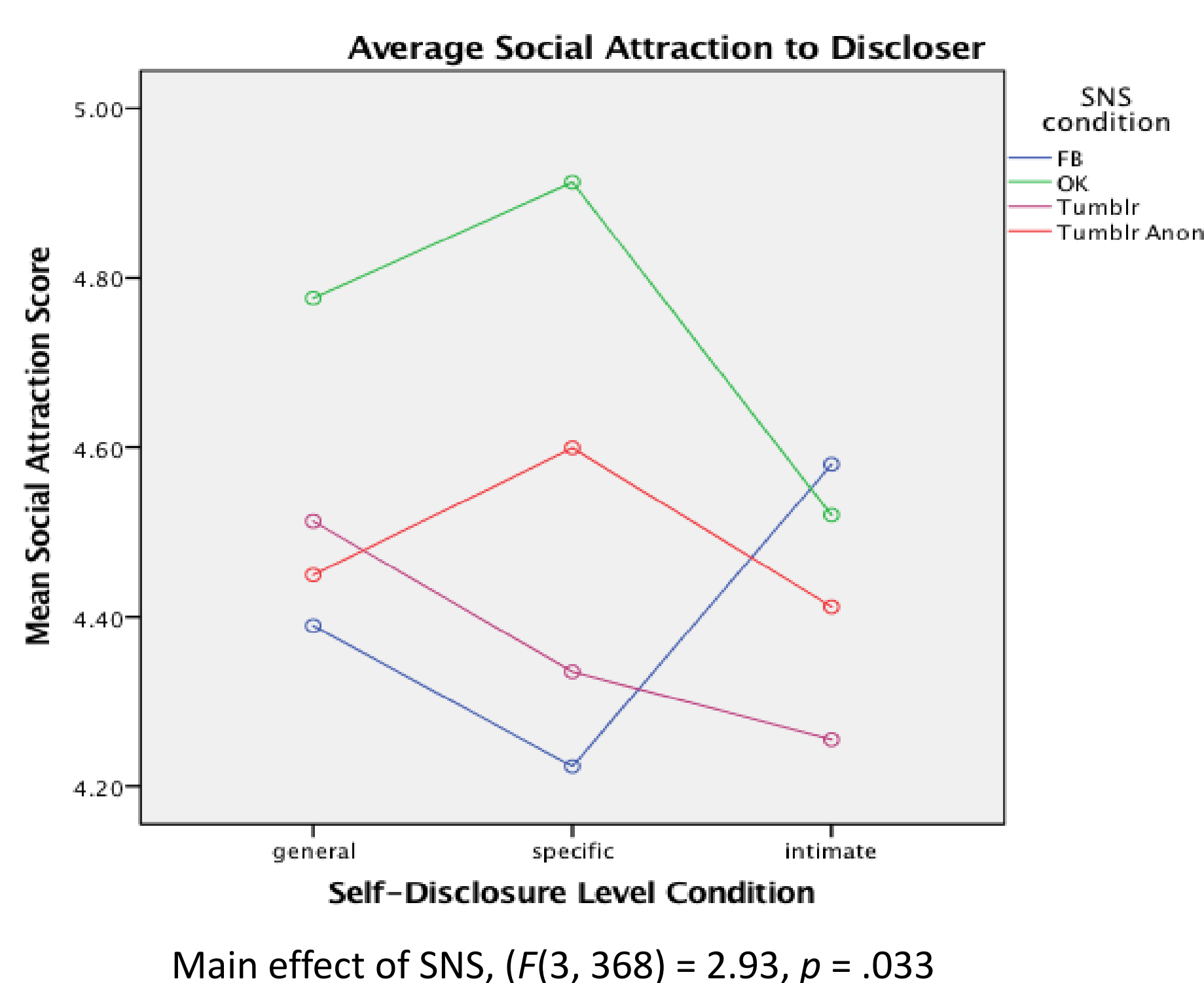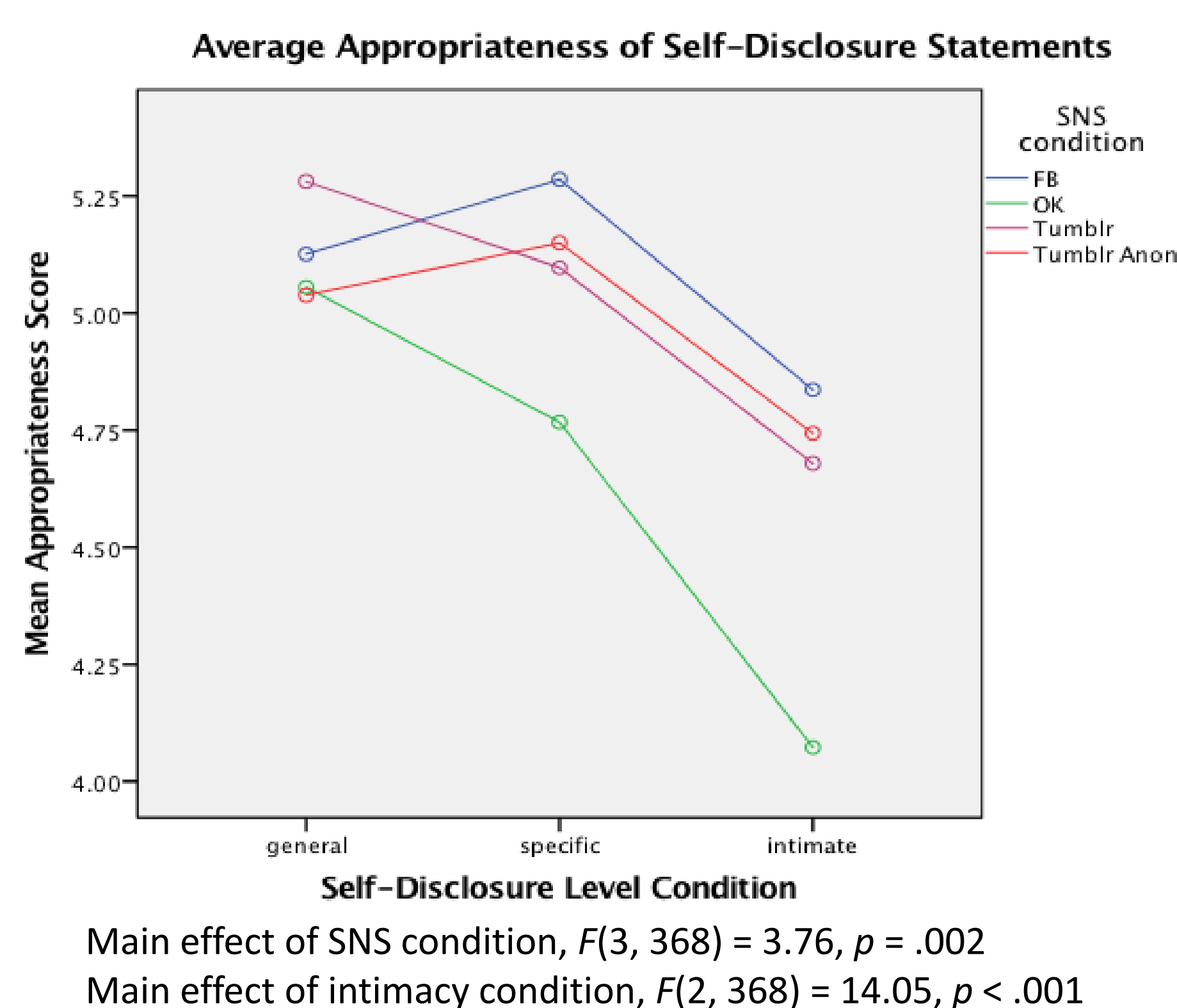*Bottom:* Example of an online post in the OkCupid general condition.

Measures and Reliability

- Liking was measured using 4 items from the social attraction subscale of the McCroskey and McCain (1974) Interpersonal Attraction Scale with altered items modeled after the adapted items used by Bazarova (2015), α = .893

- Appropriateness was measured using the 4 items measuring general appropriateness from Canary and Spitzberg's (1987) appropriateness scale, α = .869

Method

- 410 participants were recruited online through Amazon's Mechanical Turk

- Content-controlled sets of general, specific, and intimate statements were generated and then tested in a series of pilot studies in which participants were asked to classify the disclosure level and positivity of the statements

- Three sets of statements were selected based on the results of these pilot studies and were adapted into social media posts

- In the primary study, participants were randomly assigned to view screenshots of either general, specific, or intimate posts in the context of either Facebook, Tumblr, OkCupid, or Tumblr (anonymous)

- Participants viewed three statements, each on a different topic, and responded to scales measuring social attraction to the discloser and the appropriateness of the disclosure

- At the end of the study, participants rated the positivity level of the disclosures regardless of all other factors

Results

Main effect of SNS condition, $F(3, 368) = 3.76$, $p = .002$
Main effect of intimacy condition, $F(2, 368) = 14.05$, $p < .001$

Main effect of SNS, ($F(3, 368) = 2.93$, $p = .033$

Results (cont.)

- A factorial MANCOVA controlling for positivity ($p < .001$) revealed a main effect of SNS condition on social attraction ($F(3, 368) = 2.93$, $p = .033$) and on appropriateness ($F(3, 368) = 3.76$, $p = .002$). The MANCOVA also revealed a main effect of intimacy condition on appropriateness, $F(2, 368) = 14.05$, $p < .001$. No interaction effect was found

- Participants in the general and specific conditions found the online posts to be significantly more appropriate than participants in the intimate condition

- Participants in the OkCupid condition liked the discloser significantly more than participants in the Tumblr and Facebook conditions

- Participants in the OkCupid found the posts to be significantly less appropriate than participants in the Facebook, Tumblr, and Tumblr anonymous conditions

Discussion

- Our results did not support our hypotheses—OkCupid, the context in which posts were considered least appropriate, was the context in which the posts were best liked

- Visual anonymity of the discloser did not affect social attraction to the discloser

- More intimate posts were not better liked, but there was no interaction between SNS and intimacy, and thus no support for the idea that more intimate posts are liked better in certain settings

- Intimate posts were not significantly more liked than other posts, but they were not significantly less liked--this challenges previous research and necessitates further research

- This study was limited by the small range of appropriateness scores, small effect sizes, and participant familiarity with the site they viewed posts on—people were much more familiar with Facebook than the other sites

- Replicating this study with different disclosures that vary more in terms of positivity and appropriateness will allow for greater understanding of our results

- Specific focus on dating sites like OkCupid is especially necessary—the disparity between lower appropriate scores and higher liking complicates the current understanding of the relationship between self-disclosure and liking

- These findings have everyday applications—according to our findings, individuals should pay more attention to where they're posting than what they're posting when they want the people who read their posts to like them

- Data from the pilot studies has yet to be fully explored and may yield interesting results about the nature of disclosure appropriateness
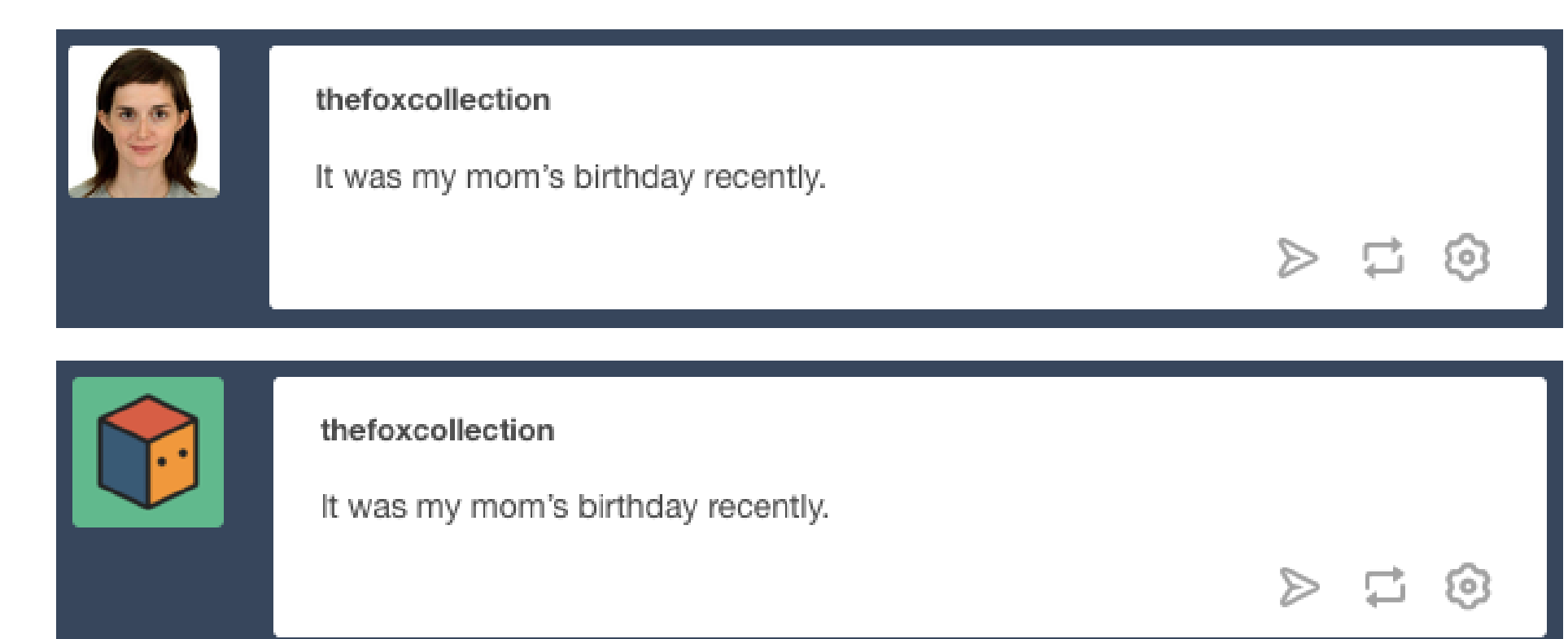
Top: Example of an online post in the Tumblr general condition.
Bottom: Example of an online post in the Tumblr anonymous general condition.