

Overblown Facebook Personas Can Leave Friends Deflated

Kathleen Burge writes about the weird psychological aspects of facebook in the [Boston Globe](#).

If you are one of Catherine Pisacane's 792 Facebook friends, you got a glimpse into her life a couple of weeks ago. She posted a selfie, taken by her sister, of the two of them smiling and snuggling outside the Museum of Fine Arts.

Her Facebook posts didn't mention that her knee ached, or that she and her sister had encountered an aggressive driver on their way to the MFA – or any daily irritations that everyone experiences but few mention on social media.

Facebook and other social media allow users to present a curated self, showing friends or the public a happier or more accomplished version of a person. Most of the time, as with Pisacane's post, it is trivial. But in some cases, the gap between reality and the Facebook version can be striking, and troubling, psychologists say.

Studies have suggested that looking at idealized versions of our friends' lives leaves us feeling less attractive, less secure about our careers, and generally, more unhappy with our own lives. In a 2013 [study](#), a University of Michigan research team checked in with subjects five times a day and compared how they felt with how often they had been on Facebook.

"The finding was the more people used Facebook, the worse they felt, and the less satisfied they were with their lives," said [Ethan Kross](#), an associate professor of social psychology at the University of Michigan.

At the extreme end of the divide between curated reality and real life is [Erika Murray](#) , the Blackstone woman charged with fetal death concealment after the bodies of three children as well as four living children were discovered in a vermin-infested home. Murray had recently posted cheerful pictures on Facebook of her cooking and updates about her two older children.

“Its official,” Murray wrote in July. “I have a teenager! Happy Birthday [daughter’s name]. I love you so much.”

For most people, the split between online and offline selves isn’t so remarkable, the realities so much at odds. Humans have long tailored the image we show the world with the clothes we wear, the haircuts we choose, the cars we drive – even the smile we routinely put on for photos. But social media offer even greater control over the versions of ourselves that we make public.

“There’s certainly an opportunity that people have to carefully curate how people appear,” said Kross. “You can choose which photo to post. Not the one with the big pimple.”

But even small gaps between social media users’ real and virtual identities can cause people to feel bad about themselves, said Cambridge psychologist [Craig Malkin](#) .

They know that the images they are building up online aren’t genuine. Hiding less flattering aspects of their lives can damage their self-esteem, he said. The problem: they’re not truly the people who are being rewarded with “likes.”

“Whenever we feel like we can’t be fully who we are in order to be liked or be admired, it’s bound to affect our self-esteem,” said Malkin, who is writing a book about narcissism that includes a chapter on social media. “There’s a sense of, ‘I feel like a fraud.’?”

Ultimately, people become accustomed to not discussing problems or difficult parts of their lives. Our online selves may complain about minor annoyances but they rarely despair over dead-end jobs or marriages. They don't argue with their siblings or get bored caring for their children.

They're sharing more but revealing less, so they feel disconnected, Malkin said. "It's not a genuine connection if you're not sharing difficult emotions. Part of sharing connections to people means them really knowing who we are."...