School of Computing
Spring 2018 Seminar Series

SOCIAL MEDIA AS SOCIAL TRANSITION MACHINERY

presented by

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Abstract:
When people face major life transitions, they must make complicated decisions about how to disclose information about that change to the people around them. This talk will focus on how people present and disclose changing identities on social media during life transitions. I use gender transition as a case study to understand both the relationships between identity disclosure, emotional wellbeing, and social support in online contexts, and how people experience liminality on social media. I present the results of a study examining transgender people’s transition experiences and emotional wellbeing over time using data from transition blogs on Tumblr, a social media blogging site. I analyzed text data from these blogs using methods including computational linguistics, sentiment analysis, and statistical inference, followed by qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with transgender bloggers. I contribute an empirical examination of how emotional wellbeing changes over time through the gender transition process. To conceptualize these results, I apply van Gennep’s liminality framework to a social media context, and contribute a new understanding of liminality by arguing that reconstructing online identity during life transitions is a rite of passage. During life transitions, people present multiple identities and do transition work simultaneously on different social media sites that together act as social transition machinery. I conclude with design implications for human-centered social technologies and future directions for life transitions research using an intersectional approach.

Bio:
Dr. Oliver Haimson recently earned his Ph.D. from the Informatics Department at University of California, Irvine’s Bren School of Information and Computer Sciences. He conducts human-centered social computing research focused on online identity, gender, life transitions, and social media to influence technology design that is both usable and inclusive. Oliver is a recipient of a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship and a Rob Kling Memorial Fellowship, and has worked as a research intern at Microsoft Research, eBay Research Labs, and Data Science for Social Good Atlanta. He received his M.S. in Information and Computer Science at University of California, Irvine, and his B.S. in Economics at Carnegie Mellon University.

Wed., March 28, 2018 @ 12:20 pm          McAdams Hall, Room 119

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