

Teacher Professionalization in the Age of Social Networking Sites

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Abstract

As teacher education students become professionals, they face a number of tensions related to identity, social participation, and work-life balance, which may be further complicated by social networking sites (SNS). This qualitative study sought to articulate tensions that arose between professionalization influences and teacher education student participants' SNS participation. Findings suggest that some expectations of professionalization in SNS cut deeply into participants' self-concept and that tensions arose surrounding unclear expectations of professionalization and fears related to political and religious expression. The study's implications are: Teachers need to (a) consider how participation in SNS may impact their identity, (b) understand how moral turpitude is defined in their communities and how their behavior aligns with these standards, and (c) carefully explore how they can maintain meaningful social connections in online spaces as they pass through new phases of life and seek to become professionals.

Teacher Professionalization in the Age of Social Networking Sites

Social Networking Sites (SNS) like Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and Pinterest are “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211). Widespread experiences with SNS suggest that these sites are actively transforming various aspects of common culture in both intentional and unexpected ways. For instance, as news agencies adopt social media to engage audiences and increase ad revenue, they are simultaneously reporting on instances where SNS use has led to harm. Cyberbullying and sexual predation via SNS are now common themes and have led to great concern, even though the relationship between SNS and harmful behaviors seems to be imperfectly understood (Erdur-Baker, 2010; Schrock & boyd, 2011) and empirical studies suggest that current educator use “does not ... suggest any cause for moral panic” (Hew, 2011, p. 668).

In the United States, concerns have also arisen as educators and teacher education students have been punished for “inappropriately” participating in these spaces. Punished behaviors include posting “racy” photos (Matyszczyk, 2013; Neuburger, 2008), depicting alcohol or drug use (Stross, 2007; WSBTV 2, 2009), writing offensive messages (Ha, 2011; The Huffington Post, 2011; WCVBTV 5 Boston, 2010), and “friending” students (Lindner, 2011). These cases suggest that the ability to create and maintain relationships online (Johnson *et al.*, 2009) also leads to potentially problematic social outcomes. In response, recent policy determinations and court rulings have forced educators to alter the ways they participate in SNS (Cunningham, 2011; Hinze, 2011; Preston, 2011; Schrock

& boyd, 2011), and concerns pertaining to educator participation require us to understand how SNS impact education, culture, identity, and professionalization.

Current literature, however, lacks empirically validated theoretical constructs necessary to understand identity and professionalization in SNS (Kimmons, 2014). By exploring the tensions of identity and professionalization within SNS for teacher education students, we hope to increase understanding and become better equipped to address issues of SNS implementation and regulation for education.

Review of Relevant Literature

This study is part of a larger research project that attempts to understand teacher identity¹ within SNS. The focus of this paper is to articulate (a) tensions related to teacher education students' use of SNS and (b) points of emphasis regarding professionalization. Though there is a wealth of literature on professional identity, this literature is not adequate to address the issue of teacher identity in SNS. As participants use SNS, they must think of themselves and their relationships with others in new and negotiated ways, like considering how their participation impacts their perceived credibility (Johnson, 2011), determining if having an account is even appropriate (Malesky & Peters, 2012), rethinking what "friends" mean (Beer, 2008), examining their participation as that of a "micro-celebrity" (Marwick & boyd, 2010), managing privacy issues online starting at a young age (Davis & James, 2013), and contemplating their engagement with and "sharing about [personal] issues unrelated to the profession" (Veletsianos, 2013, p. 646).

¹ The terms "teacher identity" and "educator identity" are used interchangeably in this paper

Some explanations have been offered to understand teacher identity, including general notions of teachers as holistic individuals rather than professional-private dichotomies or rational self-representations (Olsen, 2008), symbolic interactionism (Sexton, 2008), and Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical view of the self as a multi-faced actor who mobilizes activity to achieve a specific goal. Perhaps the most well-known body of literature on educator professional identity utilizes the Communities of Practice (CoP) model. CoPs represent "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger (1998). Within such organizational structures as CoPs, identity formation is a "dual process" that exists as we mutually invest ourselves in a community (*identification*) and is shaped by how others respond to our activities (*negotiation*) through a "social ecology" of identity formation (Wenger, 1998, p. 190) that is increasingly taking place in digital habitats like SNS (Wenger, White, & Smith, 2009, 2010). According to the CoP view, as individuals participate in a community, their actions and inactions weave into and impact the community around them, thereby establishing, negotiating, and reifying the identity of the individual in the context of the community. Such negotiation, however, becomes increasingly complex in a digital world, because "identity and affiliation today are increasingly sites of contestation between market forces aiming to recruit consumer loyalties through popular culture media and individuals and social networks seeking to re-appropriate popular culture content and forms for our own purposes" (Lemke & Van Helden, 2009, p. 152). Such contestation is further problematized in SNS, as personal and professional community participation are collapsed around the individual (Marwick & boyd, 2010) and negotiated identities are blurred.

This milieu has led to a contemporary culture in which individual identities become “highly adaptable constellations of identifications and affiliations, with threads of continuity braided into unique life-and-learning biographies” (Lemke & Van Helden, 2009, p. 153). This suggests that identity may comprise an interpretive self-representation of how our participation in a variety of diverse spheres (e.g., personal, professional) is symbolically unified through the connections of meaning that we assign to them. In our own research, we found that developing educators’ identities may be understood as collections of acceptable identity fragments (AIF), wherein they (a) shape their participation in SNS in ways that they believe are “acceptable” to their audiences (e.g., peers, family), (b) view their participation to be a direct expression of their “identity,” and (c) feel this expression to only represent a small “fragment” of their larger sense of self (Kimmons & Veletsianos, 2014).

The limitations of a CoP view for understanding an identity constellation is herein discernible: its scope is limited to understanding the individual within a specific community, intentionally performing a specific practice. What happens to identity when contexts collapse, private participation becomes public, or participation histories remain persistent and visible? SNS participation brings all of these issues to the forefront, because popular SNS utilize algorithms to plot the identity constellation for users and share this image with the world. If identity formation is indeed a meaning-making process, then we should consider the tensions that arise as aspects of emerging teacher identities are elicited, packaged, and shared in a networked and commercial world. In this study, we ask: *What are the tensions that arise between professionalization influences and teacher education students’ SNS participation?*

Methods

This paper is part of a study that used grounded theory to develop an explanatory theory of pre-service teacher participation in SNS (Kimmons & Veletsianos, 2014). As such, the methodology explained below reflects the larger research questions, but the findings presented only focus upon the tensions of teacher professionalization within SNS.

Participants

Participants represented a convenience sample of first-semester elementary teacher education students at a large university in the southern US. In this institution's college of education, elementary education students entered their professional development sequences the second semester of their junior years. This sequence lasts three semesters, and in this time, students complete teacher education courses and internships in local schools. The study follows participants through the first semester of this sequence, since it was anticipated that this would provide the most valuable illustration of emerging tensions with professionalization. In total, six cohorts of students were invited to participate, and eighteen students ($n = 18$) consented. All participants were female, due to a heavily imbalanced gender distribution in the program, and ages ranged from 20 to 28 (median = 21).

Data Sources

Data generation took place at three intervals over the course of a semester that included intensive interviews, focus groups, and follow-up interviews. The first interval occurred at the beginning of the semester and consisted of intensive interviews with each participant. The purpose of these interviews was to determine participants' initial uses of

SNS, how they determined what to share in these spaces, and how they viewed the connections between their SNS participation and identity. By conducting these interviews at the beginning of the semester, we hoped to gain an understanding of these issues before the professionalization processes of participants' coursework and internships had heavily influenced them. Initial interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

Two to three weeks after this initial interview, participants were required by the college to complete an online training module that addressed issues of teacher professionalism, moral turpitude, and SNS. This training consisted of eight pages of content, which provided guidance and information on pertinent topics including state laws and district policies, prohibited communication with students, electronic media and privacy, personal use of media, and potential risks of posting any information online. Participants also read examples of teachers being punished for their SNS use and completed a mastery-based comprehension quiz. The complete training is available publicly online (Kimmons, 2012). All students in the program completed this training module whether or not they participated in this study.

Within two weeks of completing the training, participants met in focus groups of three to six people, based on ease of scheduling. In these groups, participants talked about the training, emerging questions or concerns, and professional requirements. The purpose of the focus groups was to (a) gain insight into what tensions and questions were sparked from the training and (b) begin peer-based conversation around these points. Focus groups lasted around 60 minutes.

Follow-up interviews were conducted two to three months later for determining what participants had been thinking about through the course of the semester and to

gather self-reflections on how their SNS use had changed since the initial interview. These shorter interviews lasted only as long as needed for participants to fully describe what tensions they were facing and what had changed.

All methods in this study and the larger grounded theory study relied on self-reporting, because it was determined that doing so would be more suitable for answering the research question and would provide participants with a stronger voice in framing and conveying their beliefs and attitudes about identity and professionalization. This decision positioned the researchers as listeners of participant narratives rather than judges of online behaviors and allowed researchers to focus on the meaning, rationale, and intent of reported behaviors rather than the content of such behaviors.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the methods for grounded theory outlined by Charmaz (2006), roughly encapsulated in seven steps: gathering data, coding, memo-writing, theoretical sampling, reconstructing, writing, and reflecting. All steps were performed in an iterative, constantly comparative manner, and this study relies upon many concepts originally established by Glaser & Strauss (1967), like simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis, constructing analytic codes and categories from data, and sampling aimed toward theory construction.

We transcribed the data verbatim and then proceeded through a three-step process of coding: *in vivo* coding, thematic coding, and theoretical coding. *In vivo* codes consisted of dividing transcriptions into chunks of complete thought, concisely restated and using the same words as possible. Each thought chunk was then condensed to a single word or phrase (i.e. thematic code). These codes were then compared, organized,

and interpreted in light of one another (and other data sources like memos) to construct elements of the final theory (i.e. theoretical codes). Throughout this process, constant comparative analysis was employed to direct questioning, discussion, and memoing, and saturation was reached as analyses of new transcripts ceased to push theoretical questioning in unexpected directions.

Rigor

We took measures specific to the epistemology used in this study to increase validity and reliability. These included the following:

- Researcher reflexivity, which was achieved through bracketing, was a conscious attempt to limit our own bias and pre-understandings of the phenomenon. We achieved this through ongoing reflection and memoing (Hall & Callery, 2011).
- Thick descriptions. In writing the results of our investigation, we sought to provide extensive and clear descriptions of the themes identified to enable readers to examine the degree to which these results apply to their own context and “determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred” (Merriam, 1995, pp. 58). This is a significant step as it enables others to assess the validity of our results by examining their applicability in their own context.
- Peer debriefing. Throughout data analysis we debriefed with others in order to remain reflective of our own understandings of the phenomenon.
- Triangulation. Data were compared across and between individuals and groups of individuals (i.e. focus groups).

Researcher Positionality

At the time of study, the first author provided technology integration training to preservice teachers and the second author was a faculty member at the university where the study took place. Three years prior to the study, the first author completed a teacher preparation program and taught as a high school digital media teacher. We (both authors) maintain active presences in prominent SNS (including Twitter and LinkedIn) and are intentional in our use of different systems for different purposes. The second author utilizes Facebook, while the first author left this SNS at an early stage in the process of this study due to privacy concerns. We have worked with teacher preparation students prior to this study and we believe that safe and effective professional use of SNS requires thoughtfulness and intentionality.

Findings

We first present teacher education students' views on SNS use and professionalism, as taken from their initial interviews, and then consider any shifting views and tensions as reported after the training, via focus groups and follow-up interviews. We will then explore specific tensions that emerged from this shift.

Before the Training

Initially, many participants talked about being careful online out of professional consideration. The word "professionalism" was used as they talked very generally about content they shared and how they believed they presented themselves in a manner that was both "professional" and "fun" within SNS:

[My Facebook content is] pretty professional (Brinley).

I definitely try to keep [my Facebook content] more professional. ... There are [also] pictures of me at bars and having fun with friends, ... fun-professional, a good mix of work and play (Anita).

My page is pretty professional (Ingrid).

I try to present myself in a fun way, but ... now that I'm getting closer in my profession, I'm trying to keep ... professional (Jaquelyn).

[My Facebook profile is] pretty put-together and classy. ... The way you dress in pictures and what you're doing should definitely reflect how teachers should act (Nora).

I don't put anything [on Facebook] that could be bad professionally for me (Evangeline).

Despite these statements, participants had difficulty articulating what professionalism in SNS means and what constitutes appropriate behavior. When pressed to define inappropriate behaviors, most participants began talking about alcohol use:

I wouldn't post pictures of me throwing up [from alcohol use]. ... I would take down [party pictures] where you are ... on a table or something like that (Evangeline).

I've had my underage drinking going on, but in those photos I was always very careful about what I put. ... I always make sure that no one can see what's inside of the cup. (Fiona).

I think that even when you are of legal drinking age, I still don't think it's that appropriate to be putting pictures of yourself when you're drunk on Facebook (Zoe).

The only picture I have on [Facebook] of me drinking alcohol is one drink on my 21st birthday, and I was at a restaurant, so that's not a big deal, and the things that I post are not going to be anything that [a potential employer] would worry about (Callista).

Before I was 21 there was never any pictures of any alcohol in the background. I'm never holding a cup, even if it's water. ... I don't have as much censorship about alcohol [now], because I am 21. ... I've had students be like 'Do you drink beer?' and I'm like 'Well, I'm 21, so I'm allowed to drink beer' (Violet).

This emphasis on alcohol use may reflect participants' culture as college juniors in a university where social drinking is common and may also reflect considerations that began in high school. Many participants either drank while underage themselves or knew of others who did, and, as a result, their peer group had to think through issues of underage drinking on SNS in high school in order to avoid punishment. This worry and concern likely transferred to professional angst about alcohol at the time of the study, while other potentially problematic content had not been highlighted as matters of concern, because such behaviors were less problematic in high school. This is perhaps evidenced in the fact that all participants agreed that content depicting a person drunk or suffering from alcohol poisoning should not be placed online, but participants had different views on depictions of "responsible" alcohol use.

Many participants listed alcohol as the only inappropriate content that they might be concerned about, while others expanded this discussion to include a variety of content, such as "risqué photos," "photos at the beach," "flicking off the camera," "inappropriate

language”, “crude language,” “curse words,” “illicit drugs,” “raging parties,” “smoking out of a bong,” “crazy weekends,” “subtle humor,” and illegal activities. Despite the openness of some confessions and diverse beliefs, almost all participants felt they outperformed their peers in terms of how appropriately they presented themselves online, and no participants believed that their behavior was more risky than that of their peers. Universally, participants agreed that illegal activities (e.g. illicit drug use, underage drinking) were professionally inappropriate to post in SNS.

Differences in opinion concerning SNS content (e.g., bikini photos, vulgarities, alcohol use) seemed to be closely connected with whether participants felt that teachers were held to a different standard than other professionals. In these interviews, many participants did not feel that there were any differences in cultural expectations between teachers and other professionals, considering professionalism to be merely a matter of maturity that people grew into as they left college and moved into the “grown-up” world. Fiona explained: “I think [expectations of professionalism] are the same [for everyone] ... you always want to present yourself as a professional, and I think that ... it factors into who you are as a person.” Jacquelyn agreed: “I don’t think [professionalism for teachers is different from others], I just think maybe in general, whenever you’re applying for jobs, I’m pretty sure people want to see someone who is more professional than [someone] ... who’s always been crazy.” And Violet concluded: “I think that we all are expected to have a professional side of our lives.”

Others felt that teachers were held to a higher standard. Kelli explains:

I feel like teachers have to be saints. They can't have anything wrong. ... [If you] get a DUI or DWI, you could lose your ability to teach, when

other professions don't even have to worry about that, and ... on Facebook it's kind of similar.

A number of participants explained that these differences in professional expectations stemmed from teachers' relationships with children. Ingrid illustrates:

"[As teachers] we have to think about what would be appropriate to children, because what would be appropriate to someone our age or older is not necessarily something that they're going to want to see. And also their parents are ... trusting us with the most precious thing in their life."

The recognition that different professional expectations stem from teachers' relationships to students further led some participants to justify such scrutiny, explaining that teachers should be held to a higher standard than their peers:

Because we are placed in responsibility of kids ... we should hold ourselves to the highest standards (Evangeline).

Would I want my son's teacher to have pictures of her drinking on Facebook? No. ... I think that with other professions there is less of that pressure, because you are not working with their kids (Penelope).

We ... are role models, like somebody who is ... an accountant, who are they a role model to other than maybe their kids? ... We have so many people looking up to us that we should give a positive appearance (Nora).

Even in these cases, though, definitive rules of appropriateness were difficult to establish but often included phrases like "nothing bad," "no partying," "no alcohol," "no drunk pictures," "no cussing," and so forth. In general, the issue seemed like a fuzzy area, and they had no source that they could reference for clear, universalizable standards of

appropriateness. Some participants had adopted self-imposed standards (like not posting content “that I wouldn’t want my grandmother to see” [Ingrid]), but these standards were adopted intuitively or as personal convictions.

Further, most participants did not feel that their sense of professionalism impeded their online participation or led them to act in a manner online that they lamented. Rather, most saw their willing self-censorship as an important behavior that either reflected their desires for privacy, increasing maturity, aims to be seen as “a good girl” (Brinley), or concerns for others to get to know them in real-life situations. Thus, they did not feel like they were “losing anything” by self-censoring but were adjusting their behaviors “to fit within the realm of what all these different people see is acceptable” (Helena), even if they could not clearly articulate exactly what “acceptable” meant.

After the Training

The training module was designed to teach participants about moral turpitude, teaching contracts, state laws, and school district authority and guidelines regarding electronic media. By providing a list of examples of teachers being punished for potentially innocuous behaviors, the training forced participants to consider how their online behaviors might be problematically interpreted and surprised them in a few key ways. First, many did not expect their behaviors to be scrutinized:

[The training module] shocks you ... to be like ‘Oh, I need to watch what I’m doing’ (Gretchen).

I hadn’t really thought about [the scrutiny] and how every little thing that you do can come back to bite you in the butt (Zoe).

I have a very laissez-faire attitude toward things, and [while taking the training] I was like: 'Why do [parents] care? Your kids don't know in prekindergarten, they're not reading [Facebook profiles], so why does it upset you so much?' (Anita).

Even those who already believed they would be scrutinized were surprised at its severity:

I was surprised at the reasons that people could actually be fired (Anita).

The only thing that shocked me was people getting fired for not something illegal. ... People just didn't like it, and so that's kind of crazy, because ... we are teachers, but we are also people too (Callista).

I was really surprised ... about how serious it is. Before I had this mindset that 'yeah, I don't want people to think this about me,' but I thought people could still choose to post stuff, even if they didn't care what people thought, and it's their freedom to do that, but if you choose this profession you have your freedoms almost taken away (Brinley).

Though the training did not serve as the participants' introduction to professionalism, it enhanced their understanding and led them to become more self-aware of the minutiae that they posted online, even if they did not drastically change their behaviors:

I'm even more aware of the importance of it ... even more careful about the kinds of things that I'm putting on the internet about myself and my students (Ingrid).

I think I'm even more conscious of things I'm posting than I was before (Violet).

I'm definitely thinking about things a lot before I put them up (Nora).

Previously I hadn't thought of 'you are putting this out there and anyone can see it.' ... so now it's just like I'm very cautious about putting things up (Zoe).

I've been a lot more careful about what I post, because you never know who knows someone else (Fiona).

I guess I feel like I do have more of an understanding of what's expected, like that your personal life does reflect on you professionally, and I never really thought about that before (Gretchen).

In addition to the training, participants were also involved in their program, which involved coursework and discussions with their instructors on issues related to professionalism, which also increased self-awareness. However, some participants felt that their development outpaced that of their peers, who did not participate in interviews or focus groups:

Towards the middle of the semester, Spring Break, I saw all my peers [who were not participating in the study] with pictures of alcohol or something else (Brinley).

I don't think [my cohort members who were not part of the study] were affected [by the training] very much at all (Nora).

Some of my friends in my cohort, who friended me, I see them post stuff, and I'm just like 'I don't think that picture of you in a swimsuit should be on there,' but I think that this experience made me a lot more aware of it, and I like it. It's good (Gretchen).

Though only the training was intended to be a teaching moment, other aspects of the study (e.g., focus groups, interviews) influenced participants to become self-aware about their online participation in valuable ways. Ingrid, Nora, and Gretchen specifically described the focus groups as being “influential,” “helpful,” and “valuable” in discussing these issues with peers. In addition to gaining self-awareness, though, it seems that reasoning through professionalism issues with their peers may have empowered some participants to become more vocal in their peer groups about such issues. Brinley explained:

When I do see fellow cohort friends do something [questionable online now,] I would probably mention to them like ‘Hey, I know you can get in a bind if this is ever brought back up,’ ... [Before participating in the study,] I probably would’ve felt like it wasn’t my place ... I probably would have just looked at it and thought ‘that’s probably not a good idea,’ but now I would probably say something.

Thus, though participants may not have drastically altered what they post online as a result of the training, they seem to have developed greater self-awareness and comfort engaging with others on these issues, and we will now point out some specific points of tension that arose in conjunction with this increased self-awareness.

Fear and Confidence

Participants discussed a variety of factors that led them to feel either afraid or confident about their online participation. Factors contributing to confidence included having a strict “moral pointer” (Violet), being private in who they shared things with, and posting on sites that they felt were obscure. Regarding this third point, participants

paradoxically felt more confident posting private information openly to sites like Tumblr, Pinterest, and Twitter, which they felt to be less frequented by peers and employers, than to a private Facebook account, and participants gradually posted less to popular sites as they witnessed them becoming more popular. Thus, there seemed to be an inverse relationship between participation and a site's popularity, privacy settings aside.

Other factors influencing fear included the number of pictures participants had posted, the existence of potentially inappropriate content, and changing site privacy policies. This last factor arises largely in response to Facebook, which had a negative reputation amongst participants for changing user privacy policies with little warning in a “confusing” manner (Winter and Anita). This confusion led some participants to live in uncertainty and fear with regard to privacy.

Participants also expressed “big brother” type fears, in which they worried about what information was gathered about them and how readily it was shared with third parties. Nora warned her peers that “the government has software where they can get past privacy. ... They have programs where they can get past all your privacy settings, and we work for the government, so they can get past all the privacy settings.” Yasmin continued:

Any time you put your interests or songs or anything [on Facebook], all the advertisements specifically target you. They are targeting you, and that's why people pay so much to advertise on Facebook. ... Sometimes people forget ... They've come to see Facebook like, 'Oh, it's really friendly, and Facebook is free.' [Facebook wants] to help you get in

contact with your friends, but ultimately, they are making money off of you and sometimes your misfortune.

Some participants felt that their information was being coaxed out of them and might be used against them when profitable. Such sentiments were not restricted to Facebook, as Anita expressed: “I’m really creeped out by Google, and that’s why I don’t have Google+.” These fears and uncertainties framed participants’ behaviors and reflect considerations for privacy policies and commercial information practices.

Politics, Religion, and Offense

As the study progressed, participants focused heavily on “offensiveness,” explaining that teachers need to be careful not to “offend” anyone. This focus stemmed from both professional and personal empathy. As Helena explained: “I’m very empathetic, so I would never want to say something that could be offensive or taken wrong or make it seem as though I have a narrow opinion about something that I actually don’t.” As role models and semi-public figures, participants believed that teachers need to tread carefully in certain areas, because they will be expected to work with diverse people, representing various value systems. Violet explained:

If you have really strong opinions that are offensive to a majority of people or would offend your students or their families, then you shouldn’t display those. [It’s] not that you can’t have [those opinions or beliefs], but you shouldn’t display them on something like Facebook.

Some potentially inappropriate content (e.g. nude photos, racial slurs) seemed to be matters of common sense for participants, but only some participants went so far as to say that violating teachers *should* be punished. For instance, Violet and Evangeline talked

about the importance of not expressing racist beliefs online, because they felt that if a teacher is racist or otherwise bigoted, then their “personal beliefs could potentially, or maybe already [have] harmed, [their] students” (Evangeline) and that teachers should be held accountable and punished for any such expressions.

Political beliefs were treated slightly differently, but had a similar outcome. Though participants felt that a plurality of political opinion was good and that teachers, as citizens, have rights to political opinion, they nonetheless felt that teachers should behave apolitically. Reflecting “appropriate” classroom behavior, participants felt that they “shouldn’t put [political beliefs] in places [like Facebook,] where ... students can see them” (Nora). For the participants, political beliefs are treated much like any behavior that they might be judged for, like wearing a bikini at the beach. In Ingrid’s words: “I don’t think [that they are] really that different, because you have the right to do whatever you want.” Violet agreed:

“If you are a lawyer, you probably wouldn’t have a picture of you in a bikini as your profile picture, because you’re trying to have a professional thing, and not like that wearing a bikini isn’t professional, but that’s just a recreational thing that isn’t in the professional world.”

In this view, “becoming professional” seems to be equivalent to “becoming apolitical” in public. Rather, participants believed that teachers should find “other [less public] outlets” to express political beliefs (Evangeline). In Daphne’s words: “You don’t have to solely rely on a social media site to show everybody who you are. There are lots of other ways to do that.”

Religion, however, was a different issue. Barring the case of extreme religious views that espoused bigotry and hatred, participants felt that it was appropriate to express religious beliefs online even if others might take offense or disagree with them. Several participants talked about how important their religious beliefs were to them and were at least moderately concerned that someone might be offended at or misjudge them for those beliefs. Unlike political views, participants generally felt that though the potential for offense might be a concern for religious beliefs, they would continue to express themselves religiously online. Penelope explained:

It would be difficult for my self-concept [to stop expressing my religion online,] because I'm so connected to my religion that if I didn't share it on Facebook or if I didn't put it out there as a part of me, it wouldn't be saying very much about myself. Not that my religion defines me, but ... it encompasses my life. ... [Why] would you ... disconnect yourself from something that you believe in so strongly?

This suggests that participants' religion-identity relationships were different or stronger than their politics-identity relationships. Though participants expressed the necessity to keep religion out of their classrooms, they felt that they should be able to express themselves religiously in public spaces. Callista, for instance, could not understand what might be inappropriate about "writing an encouraging Bible verse" in a status update, Violet liked to share "either quotes about Christianity or how I view my faith or Bible verses," and Penelope clarified that she was not trying to use Facebook for proselytization, but for expression: "It's not like I'm like 'Oh, you should believe what I believe.' It's like 'Oh, I'm so blessed. Heavenly Father loves me.'" Penelope concluded:

I think I probably could just not say anything [about my religion on Facebook], but at the same time, my self-concept comes from [knowing] I'm a child of God. ... Heavenly Father is real, and he's a part of my life, and so, [not saying anything] would ... inhibit [me] from expressing how I'm feeling.

These findings suggest that connections between teacher education students' identities and different types of behavior have different meaning, and that the censorship of some behaviors may impact self-concept in acute and problematic ways. This also suggests that some forms of expression may be more important to one's identity than others, but participants' preference of religion over politics may not be generalizable and likely reflects sociocultural values of the geographic region.

Fairness and Professionalism

Throughout conversations with participants at all stages of the study, they seemed to have a clear understanding that they were in a continuing process of professionalization. This process of change was "not unexpected" (Zoe), but many expressed surprise at the severity of requirements and how innocuous SNS behaviors might be publically scrutinized. Upon reflection, many participants came to compare teachers to politicians and felt that this level of scrutiny was unfair and unpleasant:

It is ... shocking that teachers, of all people, can't really put what they want and express themselves through these sites ... I feel like kind of its unfair why teachers have to worry so much versus everyone else with a professional job.... It's almost kind of sucky that I can't [share what I want] (Brinley).

I think it's unfair. I mean as of now we might think we're okay with it, you know, we're not losing that much, but ... you're only allowed this much wiggle room. ... I think overall, in the whole population, ... we are treated unfair (Evangline).

I do think that there is a difference in what people perceive teachers to be [in comparison to other professionals], and I do feel like it's unrealistic in some regards (Penelope).

Even though participants generally felt this scrutiny to be unfair, they also viewed it as a necessary sacrifice:

It kind of sucks that because you're going to be a teacher you have certain expectations that you might have to carry yourself a little differently. But it's kind of something that you choose ... and I just don't really see the point of complaining (Kelli).

We knew what we were getting into, and we knew that we were going to be a role model, so we knew we were going to have very high standards (Nora).

It's just something you kind of have to live with ... so the slight sadness that I might feel by not showing all my Spring Break pictures to everyone in the world compared ... to how much I love teaching, how much I love being with the kids, it's not a big deal (Yasmine).

Some participants acutely felt the pressures of professionalism impacting their online participation and identities, and they felt that this was unfair. However, they were also willing to make this sacrifice, essentially giving up a part of their identities, for the

greater purpose of being able to teach and work with children, thereby putting their future students above their own desires for self-expression and social participation.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to determine tensions between professionalization influences and teacher education students' SNS participation. Professionalization requirements that are placed upon teachers may present dilemmas regarding teacher SNS use, and the power that individual teachers have to resolve them may be minimal. The findings that we present above may sound familiar to readers who have been engaging with social media and have experience in this domain, but to our knowledge no empirical studies to date have confirmed the suspicions that we have had regarding professionalization and SNS participation. Furthermore, while our results are framed in the context of the teaching profession, they may extend to other professions (e.g., higher education faculty members, doctors, lawyers), and this study provides a foundation for others to examine these concepts elsewhere. We will now explore a number of dilemmas in order to facilitate meaningful dialogue with regards to SNS and teacher professionalization.

First, it seems from this study that *teachers must consider how participating in SNS or altering their participation in them (e.g., content, connections) may impact their identity and self-concept*. While a number of studies have indicated that individuals express their identity through SNS (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009), and suggested that individuals should be intentional in their use of SNS (e.g., Beer, 2008; Malesky & Peters, 2012), our study highlights the deep impact that *participation might have on an individual's identity*. Most participants began using SNS without considering all the ways

in which their social relationships and identities would be impacted by their SNS participation. Rather, most participants joined SNS in response to social pressures and excitement from peers. Forethought should be taken, however, both regarding whether to use an SNS and how to participate within it. Similarly, when teachers feel pressure from society, administrators, or institutions to alter their SNS participation under the guise of “professionalism,” they should recognize that such actions may have implications on identity, and the full implications of such an alteration should be explored before acquiescing in this manner.

Many teacher education students in this study were quite complacent to freedoms of expression being taken away, because they cared more about potential employment and the children they serve than about self-expression. However, if there are connections between identity, social participation, and literacy practices (Cazden, et al., 1996; Gee, 2009; Gilpin, 2010; Ivanič, 1998; Kimmons, 2014), then teachers at all stages should ask the question: “Are we okay with society taking a heavy-handed approach to mandating how we can and cannot participate in the social world or who we can and cannot *be*?” Complacency to SNS participation adjustment may be tantamount to complacency to identity adjustment.

With the advent of the internet and social media, many have expressed hope in such technologies’ potential to democratize social institutions, ensuring equal participation and voices to all (Bonk, 2009; Dahlgren, 2000; Gallon, 2010). Yet, if institutions mandate norms of SNS participation, then these technologies may be losing part of their transformative and democratizing value. Though freedom on the internet might have previously been viewed as anarchical and anonymous, it seems that SNS

encourage participants to practice the bravado of sharing and expression that came from anonymity only to face punishment as it is discovered, mis/interpreted, and linked back to identity. Have SNS become traps for teachers, with democratic expression serving as the bait? Have SNS provided more freedom, or have institutions co-opted these technologies as a means of enforcing tightened governance?

For these reasons, institutions that direct employees to join SNS and connect with others to foster professional relationships (e.g., CoP) should be thoughtful and ask reflective questions related to identity, the nature of existing relationships, and how the medium might influence either. Teachers should recognize that invitations to use SNS are very different from invitations to use other forms of technology, because their use could lead to problematic consequences on social and professional levels.

Some readers might still argue that such problematic consequences could be avoided if teachers merely acted in accordance with social norms of professionalism. Though this may seem simple, the enigmatic issue of moral turpitude gives us reason to pause. If we lived in a homogeneous society with a commonly accepted value system, then there would be little question of what is “appropriate,” because everyone would interpret *moral turpitude* in a similar manner. However, North America, in which this study is situated, is a diverse society with various cultural expectations and norms. What is appropriate to one social, economic, racial, ethnic, religious, or political group may be anathema to another, and though moral turpitude clauses should perhaps remain somewhat undefined and elusive so that school boards can have the flexibility to act in accordance with the moral pulse of their communities, this leads teachers to face a precarious dilemma: *If teachers do not clearly understand how moral turpitude is defined*

in a given community, then how can they be sure that their behavior (online or offline) is beyond reproach?

They cannot. With such an ephemeral standard, the only safe choice may be to reduce online participation to practical non-existence and may lead to a type of “don’t ask, don’t tell” expectation of teachers. We may claim that teachers have a right to hold unpopular political or religious beliefs or to have aspects of their identities that others might not recognize, respect, or value (e.g. race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political affiliation, religious belief), but it is problematic for teachers to express them within a culture of moral turpitude. Thus, it may be *legally acceptable* for a teacher to self-identify as Muslim, Christian, Republican, Democrat, Communist, gay, lesbian, etc., but it may not be deemed appropriate to express such aspects of identity online for fear of an unwritten standard. The worrisome upshot of this is that if we believe that identity is composed of participation in social contexts, then an expectation of “don’t tell” is tantamount to “don’t be.”

No participants in this study believed that they were acting immorally in SNS, and though most had moral reasoning supporting their online actions, others might not hold similar views of morality. Hence, though a teacher may believe that her life is strictly moral, she may fear to share it with others and may sense, with many of this study’s participants, that ‘I have nothing to hide, but I’m hiding anyway’ or that she must carefully protect her personal life like “politicians” (cf. Marwick & boyd, 2010).

This uncertainty of community behavioral expectations seems to lead teacher education students to equating appropriateness with “that which is not likely to offend anyone.” Throughout our interviews, participants expressed fears about offending others

and limited participation in order to prevent unintended offenses. This seems to be a sad commentary on our society if teachers are led to define morality primarily in terms of others' responses to their behaviors. Afraid that they might offend through political beliefs, for instance, participants intentionally became apolitical. Such willing self-censorship and self-awareness might sometimes be laudable, but is public employability a legitimate reason to self-censor one's freedom of speech? It seems that teachers may be acquiescing crucial First Amendment rights out of fear and that public schools might in this case be violators of teachers' First Amendment rights. While being themselves censored, can teachers prepare children to become enlightened, productive, and free citizens?

We were surprised at the docility that we sensed from most participants with regard to such abridgements. Overall, it seemed that they were quite willing to do whatever necessary to comply with administrators and school communities, even if this meant altering the expression of their convictions in key ways. Though teacher education programs should help prospective teachers develop a willingness to serve and sacrifice for children and to become team players in their school communities, we should consider the cost to teachers as citizens. If democratic governments are intended to empower people to speak their minds and to express discontent toward governmental institutions without fear of institutional punishment, then are we allowing teachers to do this? Within democratic societies, good citizens should be seen as those who participate in the democratic process, including debating political issues, upholding beliefs, and voting according to their consciences, no matter how divisive or offensive their beliefs may be

to others. Are we allowing teachers to be engaged, conscious, and proactive citizens? Are we training teachers to be skillful in the classroom but silent in social discourse?

Participants did not seem to recognize any deep significance to their decisions to cease or abridge their participation in SNS and took a practical approach to the issue: choosing career advancement with a suspension of their rights. This suggests that we may be preparing teachers to prepare students to become democratic citizens when they themselves either do not recognize an abridgement of their freedoms or are willing to give up those freedoms without concern. When asked about this issue in follow-up interviews, responses tended to be nonchalant, reflecting that they did not think it to be “a big deal” or that ‘it’s just Facebook.’ There does not seem to be, however, any constitutionally meaningful difference between speech/expression in SNS and speech/expression via other media (e.g. telephone calls, face-to-face communication, town hall meetings), and, in fact, there are examples of state legislation on teacher electronic media use that treat all communication methods the same (State of Texas, 2010). So, if teachers give up these freedoms in SNS, then how is this different from other contexts? And if they are willing to give up those freedoms in all social contexts, then what has happened to their identities?

None of this high-level discussion may mean much for teachers who must find and maintain jobs in a society that might not fully value their rights of expression as citizens. Yet, it seems important for teachers at all stages of professional life to at least consider what their rights of expression should be in a free society and to consider what they are giving up by docilely acquiescing to societal demands of appropriateness. Findings in this study suggest that some of these issues may be coming to a head as

teachers find themselves thrust into situations where they are expected to alter their social participation and identity in SNS in major and undesirable ways (e.g., giving up political or religious expression).

Another dilemma facing teachers in SNS is that *teachers present themselves in a way that is reflective of their complex and ever-developing identities and may find it difficult to maintain meaningful social connections in online spaces as they pass through new life phases and are judged in an historical manner*. Popular SNS have embedded beliefs about identity that are naïve and do not fully reflect the negotiated social participation that frame educators' evolving identities (e.g., single account, timestamps of life events), which means that teachers must worry about employers gaining access to content that they posted during earlier life phases that may no longer represent current identities.

Even Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg (2007-2008) recognizes the value of limiting who can see private information from his past (as indicated by privacy settings on his Facebook account). Yet, most incidences of teacher punishments for SNS behaviors surround private communications, and many participants' fears revolved around systems sharing private information without their consent. Everyone might have similar fears, but if, for instance, a picture surfaced of Zuckerberg drinking at a party in 2007 would this be a matter of concern? It is doubtful that a successful billionaire would have much to fear from this, and only hypothetically illegal activities would be damaging for Zuckerberg if brought to light.

Reconsidering our interviews, participants initially viewed their own online lives from a similar perspective: only illegal content was categorically seen as inappropriate

(e.g., underage drinking, drug use). The reality of the situation, though, is that teachers cannot afford to lead the same lives that many other professionals can, and teacher education students only begin to realize this as they go through the process of professionalization. This realization, though, comes only after they have spent years posting content, investing in social interactions, and developing social habits.

Conclusion

These tensions seem to make educators' and teacher education students' participation in SNS problematic affairs. It follows that we should be mindful of the complexities of SNS use amongst educators. At the bare minimum, interested parties should recognize that the role of teachers in society today and their typical or solicited participation in SNS may not be easily compatible with one another. As a field and society we should be willing to openly discuss these issues with understanding, patience, and recognition of the complexities surrounding SNS participation and social well-being.

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