Am I Disclosing Too Much? Student Perceptions of Teacher Credibility via Facebook Introduction

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Abstract

This study examined the effects of teacher self-disclosure via Facebook on perceived teacher credibility. Undergraduate students (N=92) were randomly assigned to view one of the eight versions of the Facebook webpage of a teacher (either male or female) that involved two types of self-disclosure: images of alcohol drinking, and a narrative with emotionally-loaded language. The credibility ratings

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of the teacher indicated that revealing information about alcohol consumption and emotional problems concerning a personal relationship negatively influence student perception of teacher credibility. However, several gender differences emerged, indicating that an inherent bias exists in perceptions of credibility and appropriate self-disclosure. Specifically, male teachers were perceived more credible than female teachers in general. Moreover, the emotionally-loaded self-disclosure did not influence the female teacher's credibility, but did reduce the male teacher's credibility. Credibility was also influenced by the physical attractiveness of the teacher and the belief whether it is acceptable for a teacher to have Facebook profile.

Teachers are cognizant of the expected behaviors they must adhere to in order to maintain professionalism in the classroom (Hosek & Thompson, 2009). However, the boundaries that dictate professional and unprofessional behavior blur when the teacher-student relationship is moved outside of the classroom. This is evident through Hosek and Thompson's (2009) claim that teachers feel more comfortable disclosing information about their private life when communication with students occurs outside the classroom. Thus, while teachers are highly aware of the risk involved in their disclosure within the school setting (Hosek & Thompson, 2009), this awareness may diminish when communication is moved beyond the institution. Perhaps the most obvious arena of this blurred professional boundary between teacher and student relationship occurs in the realm of online social networking websites, such as Facebook.

Evidence indicates that Facebook is increasingly

becoming an acceptable means of communication between teachers and students (Atay, 2009; Sturgeon & Walker, 2009). However, as teachers allow their students to friend them on Facebook, their Facebook social activities become accessible to their students. Therefore, as Estrada (2010) stated, "students can peer into their teachers' personal lives like never before" (p. 283) because of the advent of social networking sites. Although many different types of media have been utilized for pedagogical purpose such as blog, Wikipedia, online course website, social media can serve as great tools in facilitating teaching (Sturgeon & Walker, 2009). Among the four popular networks – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Pinterest, Facebook has established a large community of users and is very popular among both students and teachers (Atay, 2009). Due to the popularity of Facebook in this particular population, this study focuses on Facebook as the social media platform to examine the effect of teacher self-disclosure on the student perception of teacher credibility.

A teacher's goal in using Facebook is not to maintain professional interaction with students, but to maintain a social network with others (Estrada, 2010). Therefore a collision of a teacher's professional and social lives occurs. Teachers' profiles may exhibit inappropriate content when accounting for their professional role (Estrada, 2010). In fact, numerous stories have surfaced that highlight the exposure of inappropriate content on teachers' profiles, content that has often resulted in detrimental consequences. For example, school officials fired a teacher "after posting an insulting tip based on her experience teaching in Washington D. C. schools: 'Don't smoke crack while pregnant'" (Estrada, 2010, p. 286).

Thus, while teachers must maintain their professional behavior in the classroom, it is becoming increasingly necessary for them to maintain professional behavior on their own personal websites as well. However, because some teachers may fail to see the importance of censoring themselves on their personal webpage, instances of inappropriate disclosure may occur. And in cases where teachers are Facebook friends with their students, the students may be exposed to personal information that they would not have otherwise known. While several researchers (e.g., Cayanus & Martin, 2004; Dobransky & Frymier, 2004; Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2009; Sorenson, 1989) have documented the importance of self-disclosure in teacher-student relationships in the classroom, few researchers (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007; Mazer et al., 2009) have investigated the impact of teacher self-disclosure revealed outside of the classroom on the student-teacher relationship. Furthermore, researchers have not examined the outcomes of teacher revelations of inappropriate information outside the classroom. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine inappropriate teacher self-disclosure outside of the classroom setting, a communicative event that deviates from the social expectations of teachers. In order to situate our argument within the broader discussion of expected teacher behavior and self-disclosure, we review literature examining social expectations of teachers, expectations of teacher self-disclosure, and outcomes of teacher self-disclosure.

Social Expectations of Teacher Behavior

Because teachers are expected to act as role model citizens and educators, the issue of ethics and morality is

admissible (Foulger, Ewbank, Kay, Popp, & Carter, 2009; Kuther, 2003). In fact, many teachers across the United States have been disciplined or dismissed for unethical communicative acts that were viewed as "inappropriate" or "immoral." One example of such an act includes a soon-to-be teacher who was denied a teaching certificate after she posted a picture on a social networking site that characterized her as a "drunken pirate" (Foulger et al., 2009). This scenario demonstrates the extent to which society holds teachers accountable for perceived unethical behavior (Foulger et al., 2009; Kuther, 2003). Though scholars (Ei & Bowen, 2002; Estrada, 2010) are not in agreement on what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate conduct outside the classroom, many agree on the expectations of teacher behavior within the institutional setting (Downs, Javidi, & Nussbaum, 1988; Kuther, 2003).

Keith-Spiegel, Tabachnick, and Allen (1993) concluded that utilizing invalid grading scales, insulting or flirting with students, ignoring instances of plagiarism or cheating, and attending class under the influence of a substance are all acts considered to be unethical and inappropriate in the classroom setting. Likewise, Kuther (2003) found that teachers should possess a working knowledge about their field, display concern for student welfare, and acquire a high level of professionalism. Nevertheless, the term "professionalism" is ambiguous, particularly with regard to behaviors outside the classroom, as it is open to individual interpretation. For instance, while some authors propose the idea that teacher-student relationships that move beyond the classroom are improper and unprofessional, others show interest in this type of relation, claiming that an outside relationship leads to an increase

in rapport and teacher credibility (e.g., Ei & Bowen, 2002). These inconsistencies in the literature contribute to the confusion that teachers endure when deciding what behaviors to engage in outside the classroom.

Hosek and Thompson (2009) noted that teachers understand the social norms that guide teacher behavior in the classroom; however, they have difficulty determining what constitutes appropriate behavior outside of the institutional setting. In other words, the rules and expectations for teacher conduct off-duty are not universal or clear-cut. For example, while some students may agree that a teacher drinking outside the classroom is a personal choice that does not interfere with one's professionalism, others may view the act as unprofessional and immoral, which can negatively affect teacher credibility (Kuther, 2003). Because society places great emphasis on the communicative acts that teachers engage in off-duty, self-disclosure becomes important, as disclosing information can lead students to generate conclusions about their teacher's level of professionalism and credibility, particularly when the teacher provides highly personal information (Mazer et al., 2009). While no scholars have specifically identified the level of teacher self-disclosure that is considered to be appropriate or inappropriate outside of the classroom, many scholars have examined the appropriateness levels of teacher self-disclosure within the classroom, levels that may transfer to disclosure in non-classroom settings.

Teacher Self-Disclosure

Sorenson (1989) defined teacher self-disclosure as "teacher statements in the classroom about self that may

or may not be related to subject content, but reveal information about the teacher that students are unlikely to learn from other sources" (p. 260). While the information a teacher chooses to disclose is a personal decision, this decision is guided by social expectations of appropriate self-disclosure in the classroom setting. Several researchers (Cayanus & Martin, 2008; Downs et al., 1988; Lannutti & Strauman, 2006; Myers & Brann, 2009; Sorenson, 1989) have highlighted the expectations students have about appropriate teacher self-disclosure. According to Sorenson (1989), students establish distinctions between the types of disclosure of good and poor teachers. Generally speaking, good teachers are expected to reveal information that is positive in nature (Lannutti & Strauman, 2006; Sorenson, 1989). Information with a positive nature often includes positive declarations, such as "I like dogs." Additionally, Sorenson (1989) highlighted that positive disclosure include expressing concern or care for students and concern for others.

In addition to positively framed statements, students have expectations about the content and amount of teacher self-disclosure. Students expect that their teachers will disclose personal information that is relevant to the course concept (Cayanus & Martin, 2008; Lannutti & Strauman, 2006; Myers & Brann, 2009). According to Lannutti and Strauman (2006), students believe that when teachers reveal information relevant to course concepts, the revelation is intentional and thus appropriate for the classroom setting. Because students believe self-disclosure that is relevant to the course is appropriate in the classroom, Lannutti and Strauman (2006) concluded that students value self-disclosure that is illustrative in nature.

Thus, classroom self-disclosure is different from revelations within personal relationships because the purpose is to illustrate class concepts and not reveal deep, emotional feelings. Also, students expect teachers not to over-share personal information, but to balance the amount of self-disclosure with course materials (Myers et al., 2009). This is also reflected in the conclusions drawn by Downs et al. (1988), who discovered that students prefer moderate amounts of self-disclosure during discussions of course concepts.

While students establish guidelines for appropriate self-disclosure, they also identify what constitutes unacceptable (i.e., deviant) teacher self-disclosure, an aspect of communication that reflects poor teachers. Cayanus and Martin (2008) and Sorenson (1989) have highlighted that students believe poor teachers disclose negative personal information or frame disclosure in a negative light. Students rate teachers as poor teachers when they reveal statements that reflect their personal competence, such as "I never made anything less than an A in my life" (Sorenson, 1989). Additionally, Kearney, Plax, Hays, and Ivey (1991) determined that students deem certain teacher verbal behaviors as misbehaviors. These verbal misbehaviors include: straying from the subject, using sarcasm or putting down others, using sexual innuendos, verbally abusing students, identifying negative personality traits, and revealing inappropriate information. Thus, students establish social expectations about the types of information teachers should and should not reveal in the classroom.

In addition to what students consider appropriate and inappropriate teacher self-disclosure, what teachers

themselves believe to be appropriate or inappropriate reveals social expectations of teacher disclosure as well. According to Fusani (1994), "most faculty have a standard of what is appropriate to share with students about personal beliefs and experiences" (p. 249). McBride and Wahl (2005) highlighted several topics that teachers considered appropriate, including families, personal feelings or opinions, daily outside activities, and personal histories. Zhang, Shi, Tonelson, and Robinson (2009), confirming McBride and Wahl's (2005) conclusion, stated that teachers believe disclosure related to family and personal opinions are appropriate disclosure for the classroom. Furthermore, Zhang et al. (2009) determined that teachers deem personal experiences and personal stories as appropriate classroom self disclosure as well as personal interests and hobbies.

Just as researchers have identified the disclosure teachers feel are appropriate to reveal to students, scholars (Hosek & Thompson, 2009; McBride & Wahl, 2005; Zhang et al., 2009) have also identified several topics teachers feel necessary to conceal in the classroom. These topics highlight the information that teachers believe are inappropriate to reveal to students in the institutional setting. This information includes personal information (e.g., sexual orientation), information about negative personal relationships, sexual topics, or negative aspects of personal character or image (McBride & Wahl, 2005). Zhang et al. (2009) determined that teachers feel it is inappropriate to disclose information related to political ideology, religious beliefs, intimate relationships, or illegal issues. McBride and Wahl (2005) also concluded that teachers conceal information that is irrelevant to the course and information that expresses negative feelings. Finally,

Hosek and Thompson (2009) determined that teachers often conceal information related to intimate family and social experiences, such as family problems and alcohol consumption.

Outcomes of Teacher Self-Disclosure

Researchers have expressed great interest in examining the outcomes of teacher self-disclosure in the classroom because of the impact such disclosure can have on students' perception of teachers and on students' learning environments (Cayanus & Martin, 2008; Dobransky & Frymier, 2004; Hosek & Thompson, 2009; Mazer et al., 2009; Sorenson, 1989). Several researchers have documented various outcomes of teacher self-disclosure, noting both positive outcomes of appropriate self-disclosure (Cayanus & Martin, 2008; Dobransky & Frymier, 2004; Mazer et al., 2009) and negative outcomes of inappropriate (or deviant) self-disclosure (Downs et al., 1988; Foulger et al., 2009; Hosek & Thompson, 2009; Sorenson, 1989). Thus, when used correctly, self-disclosure can aid teachers in their attempts to create an environment conducive to learning (Frymier & Weser, 2001).

Scholars have pinpointed various positive outcomes that are tied to teacher self-disclosure in the classroom. For instance, when a teacher self-discloses desirable or appropriate information, students tend to evaluate their teacher and the class in a positive manner (Cayanus & Martin, 2008). The use of appropriate self-disclosure in the classroom also contributes to higher levels of motivation among students and assists in the development of a classroom environment that is more relaxed, which helps students feel less anxious about participating in group discus-

sions (Mazer et al., 2007). Similarly, Myers and Brann (2009) discovered a positive correlation between appropriate teacher self-disclosure and teacher credibility. While appropriate self-disclosure in the classroom is tied to several positive outcomes as illustrated above, less is known about the influence of self-disclosure outside of the classroom setting.

Mazer et al. (2007) determined that teachers who self-disclosed information high in immediacy on their social networking profiles received positive reports from students. Similar to the positive outcomes associated with self-disclosure in the classroom, teacher self-disclosure on social networking websites is related to high levels of affective learning, motivation, and credibility. Nonetheless, a contradiction exists, as students expect both a professional website and one where teachers can "be themselves." Consequently, teachers must find a healthy balance between representing themselves as teachers and as human beings with a personal life outside the institution (Atay, 2009). In order to maintain a positive image and enhance credibility, Myers and Brann (2009) recommended that teachers monitor their self-disclosure in terms of amount and appropriateness. Hence, teachers must strategically reveal information on their profile page that is ethical and competent if they wish to avoid negative reactions from students (Mazer et al., 2007). Though few researchers have looked at the negative outcomes associated with teacher self-disclosure in an online environment, many scholars have studied the phenomenon in a classroom atmosphere.

While some scholars (Atay, 2009; Mazer et al., 2007) link self-disclosure to teacher liking, others have disagreed, claiming that self-disclosure is only necessary and

beneficial when it relates to course material (Lannutti & Strauman, 2006). To be more specific, Myers and Brann (2009) claimed that teachers should explain and clarify, not reveal highly personal information. Revealing inappropriate facts about one's self, as well as displaying negative personality traits can lead to unfavorable student reactions, which may negatively impact teacher credibility (Kearney et al., 1991). For example, Weiler (2006) highlighted the importance of withholding political affiliation information, as revealing this highly personal belief can lead to perceived incompetence and a questioning of teacher intentions. Likewise, students have been found to deem teacher alcohol consumption as an inappropriate behavior to disclose in the classroom setting (Nunziata, 2007). According to Hosek and Thompson (2009) when such social experience is exposed, the teacher's credibility could potentially be damaged. This potential credibility damage also holds true when teachers expose intimate family problems.

Researchers have yet to delve into how excessive or inappropriate teacher self-disclosure plays out outside the classroom, such as through an online social networking site (Mazer et al., 2007). Hosek and Thompson (2009) determined that teachers are more willing to disclose personal information to students outside the classroom. Teachers' communications with students outside of the classroom often blur the professional boundaries surrounding teachers, as their social and professional lives collide. This collision of boundaries could thus lead to a teacher revealing excessive personal information (e.g., social drinking behavior, personal relationship information).

When teachers use social networking sites and dis-

close personal information about themselves to their students, they may jeopardize their credibility, particularly if they violate student expectations. In previous studies, scholars have concluded that both excessive and inappropriate teacher self-disclosure in the classroom could lead to lower levels of credibility (Hosek & Thompson, 2009; Kuther, 2003; Lannutti & Strauman, 2006; Weiler, 2006). These findings lead to interesting questions about how extreme types of disclosure affect credibility, especially when the revelation occurs through a popular online community such as Facebook. Hosek and Thomspon (2009) maintained that teachers must not discuss "intimate family and social experiences and certain aspects of their identity" (p. 335) with their students inside or outside the classroom in order maintain credibility. However, because of the blurred professional-social lines that exist on Facebook, this inappropriate information may be revealed. Therefore, we seek to discover how these revelations disclosed outside the classroom on a social networking site impact a teacher's credibility. We divide the types of excessive self-disclosure into two categories — revelations of a morally dubious behavior, especially drinking, and revelations of a narrative with emotionally-loaded language. The following research questions are raised:

> RQ1: How does the exposure to pictures of alcohol drinking on a teacher's Facebook profile affect student perception of teacher credibility?
> RQ2: How does the exposure to emotionally-loaded information on a teacher's Facebook profile affect student perception of teacher credibility?

Method

A 2 (gender of teacher: male vs. female) x 4 (teacher self-disclosure: revealing alcohol drinking; revealing emotionally-loaded information; revealing both alcohol drinking and emotionally-loaded information; and revealing neither alcohol drinking nor emotionally-loaded information) factorial design was conducted to examine the effects of teacher self-disclosure via Facebook on student perception of teacher credibility.

Participants

In this experiment, convenience sampling was used for obtaining the participants. Participants ($N = 108$) were recruited from a communication course at a large Southwestern university; in exchange for participating, students received extra credit in the communication course. Fourteen participants did not pass the manipulation check and information was missing for two participants, resulting in the exclusion of 16 participants ($N = 92$). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 36 ($M = 21.9$, $SD = 3.3$) and 44% were male. The racial/ethnic distribution of the participants was as follows: 60% Caucasian, 16% African American, 9%, Latin American, 2% Asian American, 9% Multiracial, and 4% other ethnicity.

Procedure

After signing informed consent forms, participants were informed that they would be viewing a printout of a teacher's Facebook profile. The participants were randomly assigned to receive one of the eight versions of profile mock-ups depicting a teacher. As the participants viewed the mock-ups, they were instructed to develop an

overall impression of the teacher they viewed. After assessing the mock-up profiles, participants completed a questionnaire about teacher credibility, interpersonal attraction, and attitudes toward online social networking, and were then asked to provide demographic information and answer supplemental questions assessing their familiarity with Facebook and their belief about whether it is acceptable for a teacher to have a Facebook page. The last question in the questionnaire assessed whether student perceives the teacher self-disclosure revealed on the profile was excessive (see Appendix B).

Stimuli

Eight Facebook mock-ups were included as stimuli for this study. Each mock-up reflected variation in teacher self-disclosure for a male and female teacher named Chris Smith (a gender neutral name used for both the male and female teacher profiles). The teacher presented through the Facebook mock-up profiles was depicted as recently hired to teach communication courses at the university. Variations in the teacher self-disclosure included manipulation of photos and wall posting intended to depict the teacher engaging in alcohol drinking and revealing emotionally-loaded content.

The experimental manipulations centered on types of inappropriate teacher self-disclosure (i.e., drinking alcohol and revealing emotionally-loaded information). Specifically, we included pictures of a teacher drinking alcohol and displaying emotionally-loaded language on "The Wall." For the drinking alcohol condition, three photos of the teacher (male or female) depicting alcohol drinking show the teacher as drunk and holding an alcohol bottle in

his or her hand. In addition, message displays "I was so wasted!! I totally needed that forgettable night!!" For the emotionally-loaded information revelation condition, messages on the wall display the instructor (male or female) as angry and upset and complaining about the recent discovery that his/her significant other of 28 years has been cheating (see Appendix A).

The eight profile variations in this study are: (1) a female teacher profile that displays a picture of her drinking alcohol, (2) a female teacher profile that reveals emotionally-loaded information, (3) a female teacher profile that displays both a picture of her drinking and emotionally-loaded information, (4) a female teacher profile that neither displays alcohol drinking or emotionally-loaded information, (5) a male teacher profile that displays a picture of him drinking alcohol, (6) a male teacher profile that reveals emotionally-loaded information, (7) a male teacher profile that displays both a picture of him drinking and emotionally-loaded information, and (8) a male teacher profile that neither displays alcohol drinking or emotionally-loaded information.

Measures

Teacher credibility. Teacher credibility was measured utilizing McCroskey, Holdridge and Toomb's (1974) two-dimensional teacher credibility scale, which included measures of competence and character. This measure is composed of 12 items on a bipolar 7-point scale. The 12-items included on the scale reflect the following traits: *intelligent/unintelligent, untrained/trained, expert/inexpert, uninformed/informed, competent/incompetent, stupid/bright, sinful/virtuous, dishonest/honest, unselfish/selfish,*

sympathetic/unsympathetic, high character/low character, untrustworthy/trustworthy. Chronbach's alpha for this scale was relatively reliable at .79. After dropping one item, *competent/incompetent,* the reliability increased to .86, indicating good reliability. An index score using the 11 retained items was created for teacher credibility (M = 4.27, SD = 1.05).

Social attraction. Teacher social attraction was measured using 5 items of McCroskey and McCain's (1974) interpersonal attraction 7-point Likert scale. The scale ranged from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. The 5 items included: *I think he/she could be a friend of mine; It would be difficult to meet and talk with him/her; He/she just wouldn't fit into my circle of friends; we could never establish a personal friendship with each other;* and *I would like to have a friendly chat with him/her.* Chronbach's alpha for this scale was .76, indicating a relatively reliable scale. An index score was created for social attraction (M = 4.04, SD = 1.31).

Physical attraction. Physical attraction was assessed using 5 items of McCroskey and McCain's (1974) interpersonal attraction 7-point Likert scale. The items included: *I think he/she is quite handsome/pretty; He/she is very sexy looking; I find him/her very attractive physically; I don't like the way he/she looks;* and *He/she is somewhat ugly.* The reliability of this scale was α = .91, indicating that the scale is reliable. An index score was created for physical attraction (M = 4.05, SD = 1.51).

Attitudes toward social networking. Student attitudes toward social networking were assessed through an adaptation of the Generalized Attitude Measure (McCroskey, 1966; McCroskey & Richmond, 1989). This

measure was composed of 3 items on a bipolar 7-point scale. The items reflected the following traits about "the use of online social networking sites": *good/bad, harmful/beneficial,* and *wise/foolish.* Chronbach's alpha for this scale was $a = .75$. An index score was created for attitudes toward social networking ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 1.11$).

Other measures. Adapted from Mazer et al. (2007), we assessed student perception of the appropriateness for teachers to use Facebook. Students were asked: "How appropriate do you perceive the use of Facebook for a teacher?" (Mazer et al., 2007). Answers were reported on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) very inappropriate to (7) very appropriate, ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.92$). Participants also responded to a question that assessed if they had a Facebook profile, how often they checked their profile, and how familiar they were with Facebook.

Results
Manipulation Check

To determine the effectiveness of the self-disclosure manipulation, participants responded to a question that assessed the following: "The instructor on the Facebook website reveals too much information about his/her personal life." Students responded on either yes or no. The manipulation check examined whether participants successfully perceived the teacher's excessive self-disclosure in the stimuli. For the participants who viewed the profiles that revealed neither alcohol drinking nor emotionally-loaded language, those who answered "NO" passed the manipulation check. For the participants who viewed the profiles of the other groups that displayed either alcohol drinking, or emotionally-loaded language, or

both, those who answered "YES" passed the manipulation check. Eighty-seven percent of the participants passed the manipulation check ($N = 92$). The data of the participants who did not passed the manipulation check was excluded from the data analysis.

Data Analysis

We first tested if there was a significant difference of the teacher credibility rating among the eight variations of the teachers' Facebook profile (male normal, male drinking, male emotional, male drinking and emotional, female normal, female drinking, female emotional, and female drinking and emotional). A one-way ANOVA analysis was conducted using the different variations of the profiles that the participants received as the independent variable and their perception of the teacher's credibility as the dependent variable. A significant difference was noted among the eight different variations, $F(7, 84) = 6.84$, $p < .001$. The Tukey HSD post hoc analysis indicated that the credibility rating of the male teacher who neither displayed an alcohol drinking picture nor emotionally-loaded language ($M = 5.45$, $SD = .81$) was significantly different from the credibility rating of the male teacher profile that displayed a picture of him engaging in alcohol consumption ($M = 3.81$, $SD = .75$), of the male teacher profile that displayed emotionally-loaded language ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.08$), and of the male teacher profile that displayed both an alcohol consumption picture and emotionally-loaded language ($M = 3.86$, $SD = .91$). For participants who received the female teacher's profiles, there was a significant difference between the credibility rating of the female teacher's profile that neither displayed an alcohol drinking

picture nor emotionally-loaded language (M = 5.22, SD = .82) and the female teacher's profile that displayed a picture of her drinking alcohol (M=3.65, SD=.33) and the female teacher's profile that both displayed both an alcohol drinking picture and emotionally-loaded language (M = 3.76, SD = 1.19). However, the Tukey HSD post hoc test did not find a significant difference between the credibility rating of the female teacher's profile that neither displayed alcohol drinking picture nor emotionally-loaded language (M = 5.22, SD=.82) and the stimuli where the female displayed emotionally-loaded language (M = 4.15, SD=.97).

The univariate General Linear Model (GLM) was then conducted to determine which factors affect the credibility perception of the teacher. The omnibus test included all factors as independent variables including teacher gender, participant gender, religion, and relationship status, whether the participant has a Facebook page, teacher self-disclosure, participant perception of online networking use, participant perception of the teacher's physical attraction and social attraction, how much participants believed it was appropriate for teachers to have a Facebook, participants' familiarity with Facebook, and the possible interactions among those factors. After dropping the non-significant factors, we found that besides the teacher self-disclosure on Facebook profile as detected before ($F(3, 90)$ = 11.38, p<.001), the teacher's gender ($F(1,90)$ = 10.80, p < .01), the perception of the teacher's physical attraction ($F(1,90)$ = 12.87, p < .01), and the opinion of how much it is appropriate for teachers to have Facebook ($F(1, 90)$ = 9.57, p < .05) also significantly affected the credibility rating of the teacher. Specifically, the male teachers were

rated more credible than the female teachers overall, and the more physically attractive the participant perceived the teacher, the higher the credibility rating given to the teacher. Furthermore, the more the participants think it is appropriate for teachers to have Facebook, the higher credibility rating given to the teacher.

Discussion

The focus of this study was to examine how excessive teacher self-disclosure on Facebook influences students' perception of their credibility. Results showed that male teachers who revealed images of alcohol consumption, who posted narratives including emotionally-loaded language, or who did both, received lower credibility ratings than the male teachers who displayed neither of these behaviors. For female teachers, the profile exhibiting alcohol consumption and the profile exhibiting both alcohol consumption and emotionally-loaded language negatively influenced credibility; however, the profile with the narrative including emotionally-loaded language did not influence the credibility of the female teacher. When comparing male teacher credibility ratings to the female teacher credibility ratings, after controlling all other factors, the male received higher credibility scores in all but one variation of the stimuli. And finally, in addition to the self-disclosure level influencing the teacher's credibility, the physical attractiveness of the teacher and the belief that it is acceptable for teachers to use Facebook also affected credibility rating.

Although scholars (e.g., Mazer et al., 2009) have determined that revealing highly personal information negatively impacts teacher credibility overall, our results

indicate that the gender of the teacher may influence student perception. The findings of this study suggest that students consider emotional disclosure more acceptable for female teachers than for male teachers. This conclusion is not surprising considering the stereotype prevalent in the western world that labels females as emotional creatures and males as rational beings (Kring & Gordon, 1998). In other words, it is more socially acceptable and expected for females to express emotion and personal information, while males are held to a more masculine standard. Males are instead expected to hide their emotions, so they will not be characterized as weak and incredible (Pearson, West, & Turner, 1995).

Furthermore, the results suggested an inherent gender bias in perception of credibility that favor males, as when holding other factors constant, every variation prompted participants to rate the male teacher slightly higher than female teacher (except for the emotional loading variation). This finding is inconsistent with previous findings on teacher credibility ratings (Glascock & Ruggiero, 2006; Patton, 1999), which have concluded no significant difference in credibility ratings based on gender. However, perhaps this can be best explained through Widgery's (1974) assertion that individuals tend to label males as more credible initially; therefore, this perception may change as an interpersonal relationship emerges. Because participants merely viewed Facebook pages and did not develop personal relationships with the teachers on the profiles, students were only able to utilize the visual information initially available.

Despite the gender differences on the credibility rating, we discovered that certain self-disclosure, such as

drinking, negatively affected student perception of teacher credibility for both males and females. These results are consistent with prior research, which suggests that alcohol consumption is perceived as morally dubious, particularly when individuals expose this behavior via social networking sites (Foulger, et al., 2009). Teachers are not expected to engage in such behavior, or if they do, they are not expected to reveal this behavior to their students (Nunziata, 2007); thus, exposure of the teachers drinking alcohol violated the expectations of the students. Nonetheless, alcohol consumption appeared to have more of a negative effect on credibility for females than males, perhaps, because drinking is deemed a masculine behavior (Holmila & Raitasalo, 2005).

The results also revealed that once credibility is damaged, the addition of other potential damaging factors does not further decrease a person's credibility level. For example, the two male profiles revealing a singular self-disclosure (i.e., the profile exposing a male teacher engaging in alcohol consumption and the profile of the male teacher revealing an emotionally-loaded narrative) did not differ significantly from the profile of the teacher that revealed both disclosure. This finding was also true for the female teacher's profile only excluding the emotionally-loaded self-disclosure profile. This indicates that subsequent violations will not necessarily increase damage to one's credibility; it only takes one expectancy violation, concerning self-disclosure, to damage a teacher's credibility.

In addition to the implications about gender, credibility, and self-disclosure, results indicated that physical attractiveness is a significant factor that influences stu-

dent perception of teacher credibility. This is consistent with conclusions by Patzer (1983), who asserted that physically attractive people are perceived as demonstrating more expertise and trustworthiness than those who are not as attractive; therefore, people perceive physically attractive individuals as more credible. This tendency to associate positive traits with physical attractiveness is detected in our study, as students rated teachers they perceived to be more attractive as more credible.

Finally, the more participants believed a teacher possessing a Facebook page was appropriate, the higher credibility rating they granted the teacher, regardless of the behavior exposed on the site. This suggests, for this particular case, that the more open the students were about teachers using Facebook, the less they thought the teacher self-disclosure was problematic. This could possibly be caused by the expectation people have about self-disclosure on Facebook, that the disclosure will be more personal in nature. Therefore, because they believe it is appropriate for teachers to have a Facebook profile, they are not bothered by the personal disclosure. Furthermore, for the participants who believe it is appropriate for teacher to use Facebook, this finding indicates that they may be able to separate the teacher's professional life from his/her personal life. However, for those who believe that teachers should not have Facebook, disclosure such as the ones used in this study (i.e., drinking behavior and emotionally-loaded language) are violations of the norms and expectations assigned to teachers. Teachers are expected not to reveal information about intimate family and social experiences, such as family problems and alcohol consumption (Hosek & Thompson, 2009); therefore, revealing

this information via Facebook conflicts with their professional role.

Limitation and Future Research

Future researchers should examine how different types of gender-specific emotions (i.e. anger, sadness) displayed on a teacher's Facebook page impact his or her credibility. Also, this study utilized the profile of a new teacher, whom students do not know personally. Future research should delve into how students perceive excessive self-disclosure when they view profiles of teachers with whom students have already established a relationship. Because the study was conducted using a convenience sample of students from only one college, results may not be generalized to other groups such as adolescents and parents of the college student. Additionally, this study did not explore the impact of student usage of Facebook in general on their impressions of teacher self-disclosure. Future research should compare the possible differential impressions of teacher's self-disclosure between students who are new to or use Facebook on a limited basis versus those who use Facebook regularly and may be more accustomed to personally revealing information. Last, the study did not examine the student participant's background, which could influence the research outcomes – such as race/ethnicity and age of the teacher, age and race/ethnicity of the student. Future research should control for these variables to better clarify the outcomes.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to determine how excessive self-disclosure on a teacher's Facebook profile im-

pacted student perception of teacher credibility. Revealing information about alcohol consumption and emotional problems concerning a personal relationship was shown to negatively influence student perception of credibility. However, several gender differences emerged, indicating that an inherent bias exists in perception of credibility and in perception of appropriate self-disclosure (i.e., it is acceptable for females to reveal emotionally-loaded information). These results suggest that the detrimental effects of self-disclosure could be gender specific, as impact of alcohol drinking and emotionally-loaded content for male and female teachers varied. Thus, while Hosek and Thompson (2009) suggested that teachers are more willing to reveal personal information to students outside of the classroom setting, our results indicate that teachers should keep in mind the type of information they reveal on their social networking sites, for this information can be potentially damaging to student perception of teacher credibility.

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Appendix A

Emotionally-Loaded Excerpt

Female version:
My ex and I were married for almost 28 years. I found out he was cheating on me and I stupidly let him come back with the understanding that if he did it again, we were done. Well, not even TWO years later I caught him with the same nasty filfth. I found out that he has cheated throughout the WHOLE marriage and not one of these women even compare to me!!! Not that I'm the perfect catch, but I rank waaay above these women. I don't understand women today that chase or sleep with married men. It's not like they are EVER going to leave their wives. It makes me SICK to know that my husband didn't even have to go look-ing!! They were jumping at his feet, and belieeeve me he's NO-WHERE close to perfect. In fact, I would say he's about 2% per-fect!!! :'(

Male version:
My ex and I were married for almost 28 years. I found out she was cheating on me and I stupidly let her come back with the understanding that if she did it again, we were done. Well, not even TWO years later I caught her with the same nasty filfth. I found out that she has cheated throughout the WHOLE mar-riage and not one of these men even compare to me!!! Not that I'm the perfect catch, but I rank waaay above these men. I don't understand men today that chase or sleep with married women. It's not like they are EVER going to leave their husbands. It makes me SICK to know that my wife didn't even have to go looking!! They were jumping at her feet, and belieeeve me she's NOWHERE close to perfect. In fact, I would say she's about 2% perfect!!! :'(

Appendix B

Questionnaire

Instructions: The following are a series of attitude scales. You are asked to evaluate the professor whose Facebook profile you just viewed in terms of the adjectives on each side. For example, if you think the professor is very tall you might mark the follow-ing scale as below:

Tall X   ___   ___   ___   ___   ___   ___ Short

Of course, if you consider the professor to be shorter, you would mark your "X" nearer the "short" adjective. The middle space on each scale should be considered "neutral". Mark this space if you feel neither adjective on the scale applies to the professor or if you feel both apply equally.

Intelligent   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   Unintelligent
Untrained   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   Trained
Expert   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   Inexpert
Uninformed   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   Informed
Competent   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   Incompetent
Stupid   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   Bright
Sinful   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   Virtuous
Dishonest   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   Honest
Unselfish   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   Selfish
Sympathetic   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   Unsympathetic
High character   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   Low character
Untrustworthy   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   Trustworthy

Instructions: On the scales below, please mark your "X" near the adjective that applies to your feelings about "the use of online social networking sites" (i.e. Facebook, MySpace). The middle space on each scale indicates you are undecided or do not under-stand the adjective pairs themselves. There are no right or wrong answers. *Only mark one space per line.*

Good   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   Bad
Harmful   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   Beneficial
Wise   ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___   Foolish

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements as they apply to the professor whose Facebook profile you just saw. Circle the number for each state-ment to indicate your feelings based on the following scale.

   1 = strongly agree
   2 = moderately agree
   3= slightly agree
   4 = neutral
   5 = slightly disagree
   6 = moderately disagree
   7 = strongly disagree

I think he /she is quite handsome/ pretty.
Strongly agree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly disagree

He/she is very sexy looking.
Strongly agree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly disagree

I find him/ her very attractive physically.
Strongly agree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly disagree

I don't like the way he/ she looks.
Strongly agree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly disagree

He/ she is somewhat ugly.
Strongly agree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly disagree

I think he/ she could be a friend of mine.
Strongly agree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly disagree

It would be difficult to meet and talk with him/ her.
Strongly agree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly disagree

He/ she just wouldn't fit into my circle of friends.
Strongly agree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly disagree

We could never establish a personal friendship with each other.
Strongly agree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly disagree

I would like to have a friendly chat with him/her.
Strongly agree   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Strongly disagree

For the following question, please rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement by circling a number between 1 and 7.

How appropriate do you perceive a professor's use of Facebook?
very inappropriate   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   very appropriate

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS (Please circle your answer):
Do you have a Facebook page? (If no, skip to question #3)
        Yes   No

Approximately how often do you check your Facebook page?
Less than once a week   Once a week
Once a day   More than once a day
How familiar are you with Facebook, in general?

Very Familiar   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   Not at all Familiar

<u>Demographic Information:</u>
What is your gender?   Male   Female

What is your age?   _____ years

How would you describe your ethnicity? (Please check the appropriate answer)
   _____European American (Caucasian)

   _____African-American
   _____Latin American
   _____Asian American
   _____Multiracial
   _____International (Born outside of the U.S.) - Please list
country of origin: _____ ----__
   _____Other

What is your classification?   Freshman   Sophomore   Junior
   Senior

What, if any, religious affiliation do you have?
   _____

What is your relationship status?
Single   Dating (In a relationship)   Married   "It's Complicated"

Do you think the professor on the Facebook profile reveals too
much information about his/her personal life? (Please circle)
         Yes   No