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Discreet Openness: Scholars' Selective and Intentional Self-Disclosures Online

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Abstract

Research into emergent forms of scholarship focuses on academics' use of technology for learning, teaching, and research. Very little attention has been paid in the literature to scholars' uses of social media to disclose challenging personal and professional issues. This article addresses the identified gap in the literature and presents a qualitative investigation into the types of disclosures that 16 scholars made online and their reasons for doing so. Results identify wide-ranging personal and professional disclosures. Participants disclosed not only about academia-related issues but also about challenges pertaining to family, mental health, physical health, identity, and relationships. Some scholars disclosed as a way to grapple with challenges they faced; others disclosed tactically, sharing information for political rather than personal reasons. Yet others disclosed as a way to welcome care in their lives. In all instances, though, disclosures were selective, intentional, and approached with foresight.

Keywords

social media, scholars' use of technology, higher education, networks, networked scholarship, academic mental health

Social media and other networked technologies feature prominently in discussions pertaining to emergent forms of scholarship (e.g., Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009). These technologies are often portrayed as providing opportunities to augment scholarly endeavors, such as enabling greater or more efficient access to scholarship and allowing scholars to reach diverse audiences. Burgeoning popular literature positions social media as instruments for academics to share knowledge and have greater impact. Faculty member surveys, however, show that many scholars use social media for both personal and professional matters (Quan-Haase, Martin & McCay-Peet, 2015; Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2013). Some research suggests that scholars' participation on social media is intertwined with the sharing of multiple facets of their life and self (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2013).

We have recently observed scholars disclosing challenging professional and personal issues on social media. While some research shows that instructor self-disclosure may improve student–instructor relationships (Johnson, 2011; McCroskey, 1992), the literature examining scholars' online self-disclosures and the reasons for making these disclosures remains limited. The gap between our anecdotal observations and the formal literature is made more complicated by the burgeoning media coverage of faculty members' use of social media, which tends to offer conflicting advice. Scholars are encouraged to share both personal and professional aspects of their self online (e.g., Scragg, 2014), but at the same time are advised to limit the disclosures that they make and to "watch what they say" (Donoghue, 2015; Pryal, 2015).

To better understand scholars' personal and professional disclosures on social media, it is necessary for researchers to investigate how social media are embedded in scholars' broader lives. In this article, we present a preliminary investigation into the experiences of 16 scholars who have made personal and professional disclosures on social media. First, we review literature examining the use of social media in scholars' lives. Next, we present this study's research questions and methods. We then discuss our findings and implications.

Scholars' Use of Social Media

The term social media refers to a collection of digital platforms on which users can create, share, and consume content—in text, photo, video, or hybrid formats—without the need for extensive technological skills. Many social media platforms center on profiles or stable identities around which

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an individual can build a network of contacts. On some platforms, these contacts are reciprocal, as in Facebook's "friends" model, whereas platforms such as Twitter and Instagram allow users to follow others without requiring reciprocal engagement. Other platforms allow for anonymous and/or location-based posting, building audiences based not on identifiable networks but on broadcasting to all within geographic proximity. Thus, different platforms encourage different kinds of sharing and disclosure.

Prior research suggests that scholars use social media for both personal and professional reasons (e.g., Bowman, 2015; Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007; Moran, Seaman, & Tinti-Kane, 2011). The analytic framework we use to make sense of such uses of social media is called *Networked Participatory Scholarship*. This framework posits that scholars make use of "online social networks to share, reflect upon, critique, improve, validate, and otherwise develop their scholarship" (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2012, p. 768). For instance, a sociologist might blog about his ongoing research on a Wordpress blog, a data scientist might share her code on a code-sharing site such as Github, an educational technology researcher might provide advice to educational technology startups through Twitter, and a historian might ask students to create social media narratives for historical figures. Social media usage isn't limited to professional matters, however. Scholars also use social media to connect with family, friends, and acquaintances. They can also connect with colleagues over matters that fall outside the purview of their profession.

While research on emergent forms of scholarship often focuses on the increased impact that social media usage may afford an academic's work (Mewburn & Thompson, 2013; Terras, 2012), social media participation may also have other, more relational effects. Stewart (2015a, 2015b), for instance, found that (a) scholars build ties based on the sharing of personal as well as academic interests, and (b) the sharing of others' work serves to increase scholars' visibility to the peers whose content they disseminate while also signaling their own areas of interest and expertise to their networks. Since scholarship is a reputational profession, networked scholarship tends to depend upon eponymous platforms through which academics can develop profiles, visibility, and ties to peers. Weller (2011) asserts that increasingly "in a digital, networked, open world people become less defined by the institution to which they belong and more by the network and online identity they establish" (p. 4).

However, prior research shows that online identities may not be singular, and this finding should compel researchers to investigate the complex ways that social media are integrated in scholars' lives. boyd and Heer (2006) suggest that the ongoing performance of identities and relationships through profiles shift the idea of profiles from static representation "to a communicative body in conversation with the other represented bodies" (p. 1). Thus, a social media profile may be multi-faceted to reflect multiple aspects of identity. This concept of faceted identity builds on the work of Goffman (1956), who framed social experiences as interactive performances, in which actors alter their self-presentation based on assumptions about norms, acceptability, and the reactions of others. While Kimmons and Veletsianos (2014) note that social media platforms tend to privilege and foster a more unitary presentation of self, sometimes framed as "authentic," they also find that social media identity is a constellation of "identity fragments." In this research, they found that individuals reveal fragments of themselves online, and while each fragment may be authentic, it is also incomplete, transitional, and developed intentionally.

The relationship between self-disclosure and identity within scholarly networks, however, has not yet been examined in depth. In psychological literature, self-disclosure involves the intentional sharing of personal information. Altman and Taylor (1973) describe the process of self-disclosure as one of social penetration, in which disclosures serve as the means by which humans in social situations attain intimacy and mutual understanding. In Altman and Taylor's model, disclosure operates as a series of rings, as in an onion, so that encounters with others first establish breadth, or superficial information that costs little to disclose, then depth. Depth in self-disclosure incurs greater risk, as knowledge of this dimension of the self tends to be relatively private and held in confidence. More recently, Brown, Werner, and Altman (1998) have posited self-disclosure as dialectical rather than linear, with disclosures ebbing and flowing as part of relational, trust-building communication. Relational or interpersonal trust is often presented in the literature as an effect of disclosure. Wheeless and Grotz (1977), for instance, found that higher levels of trust between individuals were associated with consciously intended disclosures and with greater amounts of disclosure. These relational, trust-building communications have been shown to take place online as well as offline (e.g., Walther, 1996).

Importantly, self-disclosure has been shown to have effects in instructional contexts. McBride and Wahl (2005) outlined teacher self-disclosure as a strategy for creating a more immediate classroom environment, although they cautioned that inappropriate or excessive self-disclosure can have negative effects. Cayanus and Martin (2008) found that teacher disclosures correlate with student motivation and understanding. Mazer et al. (2007) found that instructor disclosures on Facebook correlated positively with higher levels of anticipated motivation and affective learning among students. Johnson's (2011) study on perceived instructor credibility found that students who viewed professors' social tweets in addition to their scholarly ones were more likely to rate those professors as credible. DeGroot, Young, and VanSlette (2015), on the other hand, found that students who viewed more professional Twitter feeds perceived their instructors as being more credible, but also suggested that students' preconceptions about the use of Twitter as a classroom tool may dictate their perceptions of instructors' use.

Self-disclosure's capacity to build relationships, online or offline, does not necessarily supersede people's conceptions of role and boundaries.

Outside the realm of teaching contexts, however, scholarly self-disclosure on social networking platforms has been minimally explored. Researchers, however, have noted the importance of relational communications: Gruzd, Wellman, and Takhteyev (2011) found that social media communications help scholars strengthen existing relationships and build new ones in their areas of research; Kjellberg (2010) indicated that one of the key functions of scholarly blogs is to create relationships; and Veletsianos (2012) suggested that the sharing of personal information may help scholars explore shared interests. Furthermore, Mewburn (2011) suggested that doctoral students' disclosures of troubles during their PhD studies—"troubles talk"—may serve essential functions in the formation of one's identity and community (cf. Bennett & Folley, 2014). However, the role of disclosures within relational, networked communications among the scholarly community in general has not received significant attention. This may be in part because disclosure as a form of communications does not align with scholarly norms or because emergent forms of scholarship are examined in the context of enhancing professional processes/outcomes.

Disclosure is particularly used within popular and higher education media and in blogs, where first-person narratives are common. Writing for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Pryal (2014) examined the risks for non-tenured academics disclosing mental illness, while in the same piece making her own disclosure of psychiatric disability. McElroy (2013) disclosed her severe anxiety disorder as a way of making a case for the security offered by tenure. However, not all disclosures are personal in nature, even where their content involves the sharing of confidential information. Some are professional. For instance, Debenham (2015), an adjunct writing professor, disclosed in an article that he supports his family by means of a supplemental job at a grocery store. Kendzior (2014) wrote about leaving academia after her doctorate due to the pervasive crisis of contingency and norm of underpaid or free labor within higher education. In a profession as precarious as contemporary academia, disclosure as a means of raising issues of contingency seems to be a powerful and increasingly common rhetorical tool.

In summary, the literature lacks investigations of what disclosures academics make online and why they make those disclosures. In this study, we address this identified gap in the literature and examine a broad range of disclosures within scholarly networks. We consider these disclosures and the roles they play in establishing networked relationships while also examining what does not get disclosed or is less likely to be disclosed. The research questions we posed to better understand scholars' disclosures are the following:

- What disclosures do scholars make on social media?
- Why do scholars make these disclosures?

Answers to these questions contribute to a broader understanding of how scholars use social media and their reasons for using them in the ways they do.

Methods

The goal of this study is to investigate the disclosures that scholars make on social media and their reasons for making such disclosures. Qualitative research approaches are ideal for this study as they enable us to identify and describe the activities and experiences that scholars have and the meanings that they attach to them. Thus, the investigation reported herein is a basic qualitative study (Merriam, 2002).

Participants

The first step of the data collection process involved identifying potential participants and inviting them to participate in this study. Potential participants were scholars in various higher education careers and positions, from doctoral students to professors and alternative academic career professionals, who had made personal or professional disclosures online.

We directed potential participants to an invitation to participate in this research via three means: First, we emailed five individuals who we knew had made personal and professional disclosures on their blogs and provided them with a link to the invitation. Next, we each posted the invitation to participate in this study on our personal blogs and disseminated the posting via Twitter and Facebook. Others further disseminated this information via standard social media processes (e.g., re-sharing our blog posts via Twitter). Finally, we used a snowball sampling method to recruit additional participants by asking interviewees to suggest other scholars who they knew shared similar experiences online. Suggested participants were emailed a link to the research study invitation.

In all, 42 individuals completed a consent form and questionnaire to participate in the study. Of those, 16 were invited to participate in the research study and all of them did. We included these 16 individuals in an iterative manner. We started by interviewing five individuals and continued adding individuals until we felt that we had reached a point where we were confident that we could answer our research questions using the data we collected. This process is standard in qualitative research (Baker & Edwards, 2012). In selecting these 16 individuals, we sought diversity by choosing a range of self-disclosures (e.g., personal and professional, physical and mental health) as well as a range of employment states (e.g., tenured vs tenure-track vs adjunct).

Participants are listed in Table 1. Participants' age ranged from 30 to 57 years (mean [*M*] = 41.6, standard deviation [*SD*] = 8.1, median = 40.5). Of the 16 participants, 12 identified as females, 3 as males, and 1 as transgender. At the time of writing, participants were in fields related to education or educational technology (10), the humanities (3), the social

Table 1. Participants.

Name[a]	Academic status	Age range	Reported gender
Alec	Associate professor	40–49	Male
Anne	Lecturer (non-tenure-track)	30–39	Female
Ash	Doctoral candidate and sessional instructor	40–49	Female
Becky	Doctoral candidate	40–49	Female
David	Associate professor	40–49	Male
Grainne	Professor	50–59	Female
Jack	Assistant professor	30–39	Transgender
Jessie	Professor	50–59	Female
Kate	Associate professor	50–59	Female
Katia	Doctoral candidate	30–39	Female
Lee	Alternative academic career	30–39	Female
Liana	Alternative academic career	30–39	Female
LP	Doctoral student	30–39	Female
Maha	Associate professor	30–39	Female
Richard	Professor	40–49	Male
Sally	Alternative academic career	50–59	Female

[a]Some participants elected to use their real names, while others elected to use pseudonyms.

sciences but not education (2), and nursing (1). Participants lived in five countries: the United States (8), Canada (3), the United Kingdom (3), Australia (1), and Egypt (1). Participants disclosed a number of personal and professional challenges online, ranging from cancer and depression to challenges with contingent employment. They also made identity disclosures acknowledging aspects of self that were distinct from dominant norms in their environments.

Data Sources

Two data sources informed this study: interview transcripts and participant blog posts.

Using a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix), we interviewed 15 participants via voice over IP and one participant face-to-face. Using this protocol, we asked participants to describe their personal disclosures, and their reasons for, their experiences with, and the reactions of others to their disclosures. One aspect of this phenomenon that was of particular interest to us was the degree to which participants perceived that they experienced "care" by others after having made a disclosure. Thus, some questions in the protocol directed participants' attention to this particular aspect of the experience. The semi-structured nature of the protocol allowed us to probe for additional comments while ensuring consistency across participants. Fourteen interviews lasted between 35 and 60 minutes. Two interviews lasted around 80 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The second data source used in this study was participants' self-disclosure postings, usually made on their blogs, although in two instances these were made solely on other social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter). These posts were archived offline for analysis. They were used to gain additional insight into participant disclosures and to triangulate the disclosures and reasons provided for making the disclosures.

Data Analysis

We analyzed the data iteratively using Dedoose, a data analysis software application. First, we (two researchers) read the data independently to gain a broad perspective of the self-disclosures and experiences reported in the data. Next, we each wrote open codes in response to the two questions guiding the research: "What disclosures are reported here?" and "What reasons do participants report for making these disclosures?" We used open coding because we were interested in allowing an understanding of the phenomena under investigation to arise from the raw data. This process was guided by the constant comparative approach to data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which allowed us to examine all data in an iterative and flexible manner. In particular, we each read the data (e.g., a sentence, a blog post, a paragraph) and coded it with a code characterizing what we read. Examples of open codes generated included the following: physical health, concerns pertaining to academia, sharing, and tactic. As we read more data (e.g., another paragraph), we either assigned one of the pre-existing codes to the data just read or created and assigned a new code that described the data. When a new code was created, all past data were re-read to examine whether the new code could be assigned to them. The process of constantly comparing codes and data led to a list of codes that described all the data.

Concomitant to this process, we held meetings to discuss emerging codes and share findings that each of us saw in the data. When the first round of coding was complete, we discussed the codes and generated a list of themes describing the codes. We each re-examined the data using these themes in mind and reconvened to discuss our findings. We repeated this process until no more themes could be identified. At that time, we both felt that the data had been saturated and agreed that further analysis would generate little new insights, so we paused analysis.

We took a number of pre-emptive steps to reduce the incidence of bias in this study. First, we each analyzed the data independently as a check against individual biases. Second, in presenting our results, we use "thick descriptions" so that readers are able to "determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred" (Merriam, 1995, p. 58). Third, we sought to provide a richer and more robust understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by triangulating two data sources (Patton, 1999). Finally, we conducted member checks with participants to ensure that analysis of the data accurately reflected their perspectives. We emailed each participant a summary of our major findings and asked them to

comment on whether the findings accurately reflected their experiences and on whether there is anything that might be missing from the results. Nine participants responded. They either affirmed or provided further information to improve our framing of their particular disclosures. We incorporated all edits suggested by participants.

Limitations

This study faces a number of limitations. First, while we have described types of disclosures made by scholars on social media and explained some reasons for doing so, we do not purport to report all the disclosures that academics may make on social media or their reasons for doing so. Second, while we provide analyses of academics' disclosures, we have not examined how academics' disclosures may differ in relation to particular institutions, digital platforms, locations, or demographics. Third, the majority of our participants reported eponymous self-disclosures. Results might differ for those individuals who disclose challenges anonymously. Nonetheless, this study provides fertile ground for future work to examine academics' social media use in other contexts, such as anonymous scholar's experiences.

Results

The study found that scholars' personal and professional disclosures on social media are wide-ranging, but cluster around common human experiences. Motivations for making these disclosures were also found to be diverse. Some scholars disclosed as a way to grapple with challenges they faced. Others disclosed for political or tactical, rather than personal, reasons. Their decision was guided by a desire to make non-dominant or underrepresented aspects of identity visible. Still others disclosed as a way to welcome care in their lives. Many reported a combination of motivations. In all instances, though, even in the cases where scholars viewed digital participation and sharing as part of their daily life, disclosures were selective and intentional:

RQ1. What disclosures do scholars make on social media?

Participants' social media disclosures covered many topics and tended to be planned and intentional. Disclosures were both personal and professional—and sometimes both, as they narrated the very personal effects of professional roles, pressures, and cultures. Participants in the study disclosed not only about work- and academia-related issues but also about challenges pertaining to family, mental health, physical health, identity, and relationships. Some participants wrote about things that had happened to them in public; in those cases, the disclosure was not the event itself but the exploration of it from an intimate or affective point of view. Others used social media platforms to share things that they had not necessarily shared elsewhere in their lives at all.

Sites of Disclosure. A public–private spectrum characterized the platforms in which participants made disclosures. While obviously nothing shared on the persistent, replicable, scalable, and searchable (boyd, 2011) platforms of social networks or blogs is truly private, the ways in which scholars used these platforms were varied and allowed for some level of targeting and controlling audiences, so long as their posts were not amplified and catapulted into visibility by other users. Some of the more private channels for social media disclosure were personal blogs, although if participants had cultivated large readerships these veered more to the public side. Facebook also enabled levels of private disclosure among chosen recipients, as did Twitter's locked account feature, although only one participant in the study had a locked or pseudonymous Twitter account. Blog posts were often cross-posted by their authors or others on Twitter and Facebook. On the more public end of the spectrum, some participants disclosed in high-circulation public venues like *Inside Higher Ed* or on personal social media channels of such scale—one participant has over 85,000 Twitter followers—that all communications from these platforms defaulted to high visibility.

Topics of Disclosure: Illness and Wellness. One of the primary categories of disclosure was illness. Participants shared physical and mental health issues, both acute and chronic. Three participants had disclosed depression through their blogs, and at least one had narrated some of her recovery as well. One acknowledged chronic fatigue and one rheumatoid arthritis. Two participants had blogged through breast cancer and treatment, although via very different lenses: one intensely medical, sharing details and photos of reconstruction; the other intentionally non-medical, drawing on illness as a prompt for critical reflection on academic work practices, time, and mortality. For a number of participants, the intersection of mental and physical health was a site of additional narrative exploration.

The illness of others, primarily loved ones, was another key site of disclosure within the study. Two participants shared that their mothers had forms of dementia. One wrote her way through her partner's experience with cancer; another disclosed her son's autism. At least three had shared the death of a parent; one narrated his ongoing grieving process for his father with posts that marked anniversaries and his own navigation of his father's absence. Disclosures related to others often centered on the ways in which events happening to other people had effects on participants' lives and identities. One participant, David, began a longstanding and highly visible arc into disability activism and journalism with a LiveJournal blog post announcing the birth of his firstborn and his son's Down Syndrome diagnosis. Another,

Katia, disclosed her mother's Alzheimer's, but noted that she did so with care and caution:

> I ran it by the people who would be affected by that, before I put it up . . . that's not just me anymore and I don't wanna put somebody else, I can't put somebody else's self on the line in terms of vulnerability . . . I can only speak for myself.

Sometimes a disclosure about a current situation led to further examination of the effects of that particular challenge in larger life contexts: the effects of depression on family life, the experience of working through illness.

Topics of Disclosure: Identity. A number of disclosures also centered on identity. Some asserted aspects of personhood that tend to be visible in face-to-face contexts but are not automatically so online: trans identity, queer identity, religious identity, and racial identity were all disclosures that featured in the study. Others shared aspects of identity that are often kept hidden in face-to-face social circles; one participant wrote about how her anti-racism work stems from her grandfather's Ku Klux Klan history, and another disclosed her fears about raising a female child in a misogynist culture. Participants also examined issues of gender oppression, being made to feel over-emotional in academic life, wearing the hijab, being Black in a White graduate program and White-dominant community, and other expressions of identity that fell outside the perceived default norms of their intended audiences.

Topics of Disclosure: Professional, Personal, and Intersecting Challenges. While some participants' disclosures centered on personal life events—from revealing news of separation and divorce to narrating the experience, as Grainne did, of being scammed through an online dating service—others' focused on professional issues or related to academia in particular. Some wrote about their adjunct status and the frustrations and belittlement that can accompany precarious work in the academy. Others shared conflict with colleagues and the sense of non-belonging commonly called imposter syndrome. Still other participants disclosed various challenges related to the PhD process, including dissatisfactions with their advisors and programs, racism within their program, the challenges of doing a PhD with a newborn, and thoughts of quitting entirely.

Finally, some disclosures bridged personal–professional boundaries. The untenability of academic work culture is the central lens through which Kate, an Australian scholar, narrated her experience with breast cancer. She disclosed her diagnosis in a post that opened by citing a report on the extra hours demanded of Australian academics, particularly female academics, within the contemporary workplace culture of higher education. She referred to an annual labor awareness campaign called *Go Home on Time Day* and then disclosed her illness within that context of overwork and lack of time:

> I've been thinking about this because on *Go Home on Time Day* this year, I was sitting in a surgeon's office. It turns out that I have breast cancer, and I found out that very day. And here's the thing: I first thought about getting something checked out exactly 12 months ago. I found time at the end of 2012 to take a day off work, got a referral from my GP, and then the vague unease passed. So I didn't chase it up. (Bowles, 2013, para 5)

Thus, even a very personal health disclosure became a site of reflection on systemic professional pressures that can be very difficult for academics both to navigate and to speak about. During Kate's interview, she noted, "I think disclosing the cancer was incidental to really finally figuring out why I think the way that higher education uses worker time is exploitative and harmful."

RQ2: Why do scholars make these disclosures?

Scholars' motivations for disclosures were varied, as were the many boundaries around privacy and disclosure that the study revealed. While participants were all actively engaged in sharing aspects of self in public online spaces, the majority were emphatic about the fact that their disclosures were selective and intentional and did not indicate an all-inclusive or indiscreet openness about all aspects of their lives. Rather, participants' narratives suggested that disclosures within networked scholarship are approached with care, intentionality, forethought, and, in many cases, trepidation. Additionally, all participants reported that they use different platforms for different communication purposes and have, at least slightly, a diverse sense of audience across the social media they employ (cf. Veletsianos, 2016).

Boundaries of Non-Disclosure. In the interviews, discussions of participants' reasons for disclosure often veered toward sites of non-disclosure and the individual boundaries that they maintain around what they reveal, share, and explore online. Although participants engaged in a wide range of personal and professional disclosures, the majority were clear that not everything is disclosed, and most indicated that they perceive norms or boundaries of "acceptable" sharing. Ash framed her understanding of the boundaries of speakability as a graduate student as follows:

> There's the professional struggles that are acceptable as in, "Oh, I've had articles rejected," or, "I'm going through a bit of a rough patch with my writing." But that real . . . the PhD stuff, the PhD vale of s*** that people go through, that real depression. You don't really talk about that, at least not publicly . . . you're supposed to have a sort of certain up and down. But the real lows, you don't acknowledge. And also the real highs, 'cause then you're just flaunting it.

More senior faculty also noted boundaries around calling out institutional politics online, particularly related to funding and labor. Racism in the academy was identified as

difficult to address, as were the practical challenges of being female in institutional settings. Disclosure was sometimes seen as a way of pushing back at those perceived boundaries and norms of speakability. Jessie pointed that class is seldom really discussed in academia, online or offline:

> The place I do see it come up is the class discussions about adjunct faculty, but still it often lacks specificity . . . I want somebody in the *Chronicle of* f***ing *Higher Education* to write about what it's like to be a faculty member, try to do like a speaking gig, and not have a credit card.

In relation to the various health-based disclosures that were part of our study, scholars' reasons for sharing those were similar to reasons for sharing other challenges: Coping, not hiding, welcoming care, and raising visibility were all motivations whether disclosures were illness-based or not. However, health issues did come with particular boundaries of non-disclosure: Realities of illness that family members might be hurt by or not want to hear were mentioned by a number of participants. Rebecca, who blogged through her experience with breast cancer, noted,

> Part of the issue is that I'm doing it an injustice if I am not authentic, which means that I needed to deal with honesty when I'm having issues with depression or anxiety, or mental health issues, as well as physical health issues, or a bad day . . . And if I was sugar-coating things, I wasn't going to be authentic. It becomes a big challenge for a lot of women that are writing through that experience, because they feel the need to protect people within their family and communities and kids and all of this, and so they are very guarded.

Rebecca documented her illness, recovery, and reconstruction processes through photos as well as words, but did not share all of these openly on her blog:

> I put links into the pictures of my toenails. I didn't put in the picture of mytoenails, 'cause I didn't want to gross people out who didn't want to see it, but . . . for people that are going through it, it's actually really important to document, because . . . they talk about having nail changes, but they don't actually show . . . But because my blog is tied to me, do I want pictures of my breasts on my blog? And so, whereas I would share that face-to-face . . .

The affordances of particular social media platforms were acknowledged as shaping some of the boundaries around disclosure. Sexuality and kink were labeled sites of non-disclosure or non-speakability in networked spaces by a number of participants; however, one mid-career graduate student who uses a pseudonym for her Twitter participation circumvented this broadly perceived norm by making liberal use of Twitter's "lock" and "delete" features. She noted,

> At night, sometimes, I will lock my account, and I will put up pictures of myself and will have these sexual conversations, and I'll have just very open kinds of pictures. And then in the morning, before I unlock my account, I will go and delete things, images that I don't want people who are not in there to see. So I think generally, I have one kind of image on Twitter, but I turn it up a bit in Twitter After Dark.

Another participant suggested that what he shares on Twitter is limited by the 140-character nature of the medium and that he is more likely to disclose on Facebook, where space is less an issue and responses are threaded.

Reasons for Disclosure: Tactical Visibility. For some participants, though by no means all, the motivation to disclose online was political or tactical as well as personal. Particularly where issues of mental health or the visibility of non-dominant identities were concerned, participants tended to frame disclosure and openness as important strategic forms of awareness-raising and social media platforms as powerful places for engaging in this work. Richard framed his online participation in general as a form of political or tactical visibility:

> They'll be talking about business as usual, and I'll be trying to discuss labour rights or student debt or whatever it is, so those people might think 'Oh god, here he goes again' You know? Maybe it's about being a bit of a conscience, but maybe it's about being troublesome, I don't know. I'm not being willfully troublesome. It's trying to call the world the way I see it almost, but whilst being respectful of other people's position.

Grainne, who shared her negative experience with an online date who then tried to pressure her for money, noted that she exposed the hustle on her blog despite worrying about the disclosure's effect on her professional image precisely because of its relevance to her professional world:

> It touched on my professional aspect. It made me think and reflect on online identity and the dangers of online identity. I mean clearly, it wasn't one bloke, it was a whole ring of them and if they're working 20 sad women and they get one to cough up 3,000 pounds, it's a good days work.

Her disclosure served to raise the broader issue and, she hoped, to caution others.

In some cases, participants' online disclosures allowed them to raise the issue of identities that have historically or geographically been rendered invisible, at least within the academy. Jack, a queer and trans scholar completing a postdoctoral fellowship and moving to a tenured position, noted how he closed an open Facebook letter to her[2] postdoc institution: "And I just wrote another Facebook note and when I signed it, I said 'your first openly Trans faculty member . . . Ever.'" Another participant, LP, found being one of the very few scholars of color in their faculty and generated a Twitter hashtag tactically disclosing, collating, and making visible some of the experiences of Black graduate students.

Reasons for Disclosure: Easier Online Than Offline. The affordances of social media and networked platforms served to make online disclosures easier than in-person disclosures, for some participants. Online platforms enable people to communicate with audiences who may be more empathetic to particular disclosures or narratives than their location-based peers or colleagues may be. While online participation and disclosure always carry some risk of unanticipated audiences seeing a particular post, a phenomenon known as context collapse (boyd, 2011; Wesch, 2009), online environments may allow individuals to try on new facets of identity or identity performance. As Katia explained,

> Especially on Twitter and on my blog, nobody who really knows me is following those spaces that closely, except for colleagues. But none of my friends from other non-academic life or my family. There aren't very many of those people on there and so that allows me to try different things because it's not . . . there's nobody there who's gonna be like, "That's not what you're really like." So in that sense, it's very open to different possibilities.

Katia also indicated that the facets of identity opened up online for her carried over to embodied aspects of her life:

> I think that it's actually in a sense my online participation and the self that I'm putting out online is, it's almost ahead of my face-to-face self in terms of my confidence. It's definitely like that's where I make the changes first . . . as an introvert, it takes less energy. I communicate through words and I'm a words person . . . So, maybe that's what makes it easier on there online.

Reasons for Disclosure: Openness as a Means of Aligning Public and Private Senses of Self. Participants also relayed that disclosures served to align their own senses of self with their online performativity. One participant, Sally, acknowledged a chronic health challenge she felt she had made visible through her participation in a related Twitter chat. She framed the health challenge as

> orange peels stuck to the bottom of my shoe . . . I didn't deliberately come out with some orange peel and wave it to the crowd, but it was going around stuck to the bottom of my shoe anyway. So all I did was to pick it off and go, "Ha, orange peel. How silly!"

Participants indicated that disclosure serves as a means to build and maintain online identities that felt somewhat like authentic or rounded versions of self. Lee's disclosures about her affective experiences as a female adjunct in the academy freed her, in a sense, from the constraints of purely professional online engagement: "I feel like it's a fairly authentic performance of who I am and this is . . . I guess this is why it was impossible for me to keep up this sort of professional/personal divide." This idea of disclosure as a signal of authenticity to self resonated throughout the study, as did the narrative that sharing oneself online becomes a practice or habit. Regarding sharing the death of his father via social media channels, Alec said,

> It didn't feel foreign at all. It felt like part of the process . . . my 100,000th tweet was the birth of my son. My 4th, Leo. When you get into that mode of announcing those big life moments, it didn't make any sense not to announce this [the death of his father].

Reasons for Disclosure: Care and Support. Participants' disclosures were also related to care and support. The scholars who volunteered for the study were primarily what White and LeCornu (2011) call "residents" of online spaces, who "see the Web as a place, perhaps like a park or a building in which there are clusters of friends and colleagues whom they can approach and with whom they can share information about their life and work" (Section Residents, para 1). Thus, the majority had a readership to whom their disclosures were directed, and most—though not all—reported receiving care in relation to their networked disclosures. Katia found the warm and accepting response to her first disclosure a catalyst in encouraging her to share further:

> For the first time I felt like maybe it was possible to share things online and to open myself out there online, to put myself out there and not have it be something scary but something that would be positive.

Reasons for Disclosure: Processing and Coping. A number of participants framed disclosure as a means of grappling or coping with challenges, an avenue by which they were able to come to terms with aspects of identity that were new, difficult, or in some way divergent from those of peers, colleagues, or the perceived norm for participants' particular social locations. For these participants, disclosure within networks served as a way to both own and process identity. As Liana noted after sharing her imminent divorce, "I feel once I disclosed, I was able to be more open or go back to myself . . . I felt more comfortable on Twitter."

Discussion

The disclosures that scholars described to us, as well as the reasons for making these disclosures, are wide-ranging. Disclosures are personal and professional, and sometimes bridge personal–professional boundaries. The two themes identified in terms of reasons for disclosures—tactical reasons and personal boundaries—have significant implications for networked scholarship. First, these findings reinforce the notion that scholars' personal lives are often an integral part of online participation and as such mediate emergent forms of scholarship. Thus, the study or institutionalization of emergent forms of scholarship needs to recognize that this area of practice and research involves more than just professional activities. Second, as far as we know, this research is the first to identify academics' tactical use of social media to

achieve particular objectives. Future research into this area may further explore the strategies used for tactical action as well as the outcomes desired by academics employing social media in tactical ways.

Many popular academic publications urge scholars to exercise caution in their use of social media and provide step-by-step instructions in order to help academics keep "private life out of the public spotlight" (Oden, 2015). Such writing often presumes that academics are naïve users of social media (e.g., Donoghue, 2015). Yet in our research, we find that some scholars' social media practices are nuanced, measured, and thoughtful, even in cases in which disclosures are made around thorny issues. It may be that the academics we interviewed have a developed understanding of the intricacies of social media. But it is also possible that academics overall have a nuanced understanding of social media, and part of the reason that they find themselves in trouble sometimes is due to exposure to unanticipated audiences or academic cultures unsympathetic to scholars' desires to use Twitter to speak out. While it is necessary for academics, and any user of the web alike, to understand the persistent, replicable, scalable, and searchable nature of the web (boyd, 2011), it is likewise important to recognize that scholars' use of online social networks serves a variety of purposes, and in some cases, scholars may consciously choose to make *selective* disclosures. In those instances, our research suggests that scholars may make personal and professional disclosures on social media with caution and prudence.

Indiscriminate disclosures are rare and, indeed, absent in this research. The forethought and selective information shared on social media lends support to the theory developed by Kimmons and Veletsianos (2014) that suggests that digital identity is authentic, yet incomplete and fragmented. While that research focused on pre-service teachers, this research appears to suggest a similar outcome for scholars. Further research to identify the completeness of scholars' presentation of the self online, as well as the issues that are and are not speakable online, is necessary. For instance, we show that tactical reasons and personal boundaries mediate self-disclosures. What other reasons might mediate scholars' decisions to participate on social media in the ways that they do? What are the factors, for instance, that might encourage scholars to disclose about personal issues but not professional issues?

Concerns have recently arisen with regard to scholars' use of social media, and news media have frequently reported the negative outcomes associated with scholars speaking online in ways that were perceived to be uncivil (e.g., Grusin, 2015; Guarino, 2014; Herzog, 2015; Jaschik, 2015). In our study however, we show that scholars have made challenging disclosures of the type that are frequently advised to be kept private, and these have led to positive outcomes. While this is not a guaranteed outcome of self-disclosures, and indeed it is difficult from this research to ascertain what the potential impact of particular disclosures may be, the result arising from this work is that disclosures do not universally translate into negative outcomes. Future researchers may examine the generalizability of this result (e.g., by conducting large-scale surveys) to identify how many scholars make different types of self-disclosures online and what the actual and perceived outcomes of those disclosures were. Of interest is also the question of whether these disclosures vary by professional role (e.g., students vs faculty) or academic rank (e.g., adjunct instructor vs full professor).

Finally, these results have implications for those responsible for educating faculty and doctoral students about social media use. We advise these individuals (e.g., faculty development officers, librarians, doctoral student educators) to resist utopian or dystopian social media narratives and to consider instilling in scholars the complicated picture of social media use. Such a picture includes disclosures that have led to negative outcomes as well as disclosures that have led to positive outcomes. In this article, we provide some examples to facilitate and support such endeavors. In educating current and future faculty about social media use, care must be taken to illustrate the diverse ways that online participation intersects with scholars' sense of identity.

Conclusion

While emergent forms of scholarship are often promoted as ways to improve scholarly outcomes, this research reveals the intimately personal nature of social media use by scholars. Furthermore, this study shows that scholars sometimes use social media in tactical ways that bear no relationship to increasing the reach, impact, and rigor of their research or scholarship. These findings serve as a reminder of the complex environment that contemporary scholars find themselves in when they are online. At the same time, these findings reveal some sophisticated uses of social media by scholars, indicating that researchers need further investigations into why scholars engage with social media in the ways that they do and further inquiry into understanding the diversity of practices that scholars enact online.

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Appendix

Questions used in the interviews included the following:

- Describe to me how you participate on social media.
- Try to remember back to the first time that you, as an academic, used social media to share about a personal or professional struggle that you were facing. What do you remember about that situation?
- I read your blog/Twitter/Facebook post announcing [personal struggle]. Could you share with me the reasons for that disclosure?
- Can you walk me through the process of deciding to post about this?
- What boundaries do you see around what is speakable or disclosable online? How do these boundaries differ—if they do—from face-to-face boundaries? Are there topics that remain unspeakable even in online spaces?
- Is there anything else that you want to tell me about your experiences on social media?