Shifting the Focus: Students Targeting Educators Through Online Social Media

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study is to address the question of "In what ways can Canadian educators address student social media abuse aimed at instructors?" To this end, this study works to identify concerns that Canadian teachers have surrounding the possibility of being negatively targeted by students through online social media, and provides practical strategies in how to deal with this issue as educators within the classroom. This qualitative study was based on semi-structured interviews with two Canadian teachers who drew upon their own experiences, opinions, and concerns about this issue. The conclusion of this study was that teachers have multiple proactive strategies, including discussion and debate within the classroom, as well as reactive measures, such as enlisting administrative support, to utilize while addressing the potential issue of educators being negatively targeted by students through online social media.
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# Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 5

- Background of the Study .......................................................... 5
- Purpose of the Study ................................................................. 7
- Research Questions ................................................................. 7
- Background of the Researcher .................................................... 8
- Philosophy of Research ............................................................. 11

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW 13

- A Question of Peer Groups ....................................................... 14
- Educator's Presence on OSM ..................................................... 15
- Online Social Media in the Classroom ........................................ 18
- An Issue of 'Bullying' ............................................................... 21
- Conclusions / Implications ....................................................... 22

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY 24

- Participants ............................................................................. 24
- Procedure .................................................................................. 25
- Instruments of Data Collection and Data Analysis ....................... 27
- Ethical Review Procedures ....................................................... 28
- Limitations .................................................................................. 30

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS 31

- Theme I: Background and Social Media Understanding ................ 31
- Theme II: Personal versus (Un)official Policy .............................. 33
- Theme III: Online Social Media Use in the Classroom .................. 38
- Theme IV: Specific Incidents and Concerns about Negative Targeting 40
- Theme V: Proactive Measures ................................................... 43
- Theme VI: Reactive Measures ................................................... 46

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION 52

- Implications for Practice .......................................................... 52
- Relation to the Literature Review ............................................. 56
- Limitations .................................................................................. 58
- Next Steps .................................................................................. 59
- Conclusion ................................................................................... 59

References 62

Appendices 68

- Appendix A: Interview Questions .............................................. 68
- Appendix B: Consent Form ........................................................ 70
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In 2014, online social media (OSM), has become a common method for individuals to connect in more ways than were possible using more traditional modes of communication such as phone calls or mail. OSM allows for users to share instantly ideas, videos, pictures and other media instantly with an audience of their choosing, which goes against the much more restrictive nature of mail or phone. There are many ways that social media flourishes online, through different platforms, forums and websites, and these outlets are fluid and dependent on those who use them.

The world of OSM takes many shapes, but it can be defined as interactive websites designed to build online communities for individuals who have something in common... and a simple desire to communicate across physical boundaries with other interested people. [...] Most social networking sites include the ability to conduct live chats, send e-mails, upload videos, maintain a blog or discussion group, and share files. Users can also post links to pictures, music, and video, all of which have the potential to create a virtual identity (Carter, 2008).

There are many different kinds of websites and electronic means of social connections that make up the world of OSM and the popularity of these forums are growing exponentially. Facebook, an OSM forum that networks personal profiles that include pictures and interests and chat capabilities, was founded in 2004 (Eldon, 2008), and today boasts over one billion active users (Fowler, 2012). Similar to Facebook, Instagram also includes a level of sharing between users, as well as between various other OSM platforms. Instagram had reached over a million users by 2011 (Instagram Team, 2011). Twitter, a social media site that features microblogging, was founded in 2006 and now has over five hundred million registered users (Lunden, 2012). YouTube is a service that
allows users to upload videos of their choosing, and also allows the general public to search, stream and comment on any video material that is housed on their servers. There has also been a huge jump in the popularity of websites that allows users to review and rate products and services and allows searches of these views by anyone who wishes to know. Ratemyteachers.com, an example of this kind of reviewing website that allows users to freely rate elementary and secondary teachers based on categories such as popularity, difficulty and even physical looks, was founded in 2001, but it is unclear just how many individuals frequent the site due to the anonymity that it grants. What is evident is that each of these platforms, and I have just listed the most prominent at this point in time, are incredibly popular and boast a great deal of activity.

Due to the rise of OSM, it is now possible to see much of what could be termed as personal and formerly private information in a single glance about any given person. There are pictures, often dating back years, statuses, interests, hobbies, relationship histories, political views, life events and much more all within a single profile. These websites offer a way to communicate with people around the world, and to express opinions within seconds to a virtually unlimited audience. Information provided on OSMs is freely given, and easily searched by not only those who are registered on the host websites but also by anyone in the general public. This information can be intimate in nature, and perhaps was not always intended for such a potentially large audience. Problematically, the fact that there is little privacy could mean that groups who have traditionally kept their personal lives separate from one another, such as teachers and students, could see a dissolution of these boundaries.
There is also the fact that in some forms of OSM, anonymity is guaranteed to varying degrees that could ensure that users are not as responsible with their online postings as they might be otherwise. The popularity of these social media outlets has resulted in unique challenges within education. The carefully designated private and public spheres are becoming more and more porous with educators and students existing and conversing in this largely unregulated online world. There are obvious positive advantages to this connection with students and teachers becoming global technological citizens, but there are also serious issues. In an OSM world, something that was meant for connection can instead mean a disconnection, or even conflict, between educators and learners.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine how students can potentially use OSM as a tool to negatively target teachers. In 2012, nine students were suspended from a high school in Brampton for tweeting about their teachers (Green & Donkin, 2012), and this prompted questions about how teachers should deal with these kinds of situations. It has also shed light on the fact that there is very little in the way of Ministry guidance on student’s behaviour online targeting teachers and how administrators should react.

**Research Questions**

My study seeks to provide further illumination on the question “In what ways can educators address student social media abuse aimed at instructors?” The wording on this question is intentional, as I do not wish to limit the study to a specific subject or grade. Within this broad question lies more specific questions about what kind of school or classroom environment may result in OSM targeting. Is this an issue that educators are
even worrying about, or is it still largely seen as isolated cases? How are teachers connecting with students through OSM, and should there be any interaction between educators and students online? Are there policies in place at the school level, and beyond, that help guide teachers through this potential issue? Have educators included any teachings on OSM in their classroom above and beyond what the curriculum asks for? Can social media targeting be looked at as an evolution of gossip and/or note-passing, or should it be treated much more seriously due to the permanence of digital information? Do videos or pictures add to the seriousness of the situation?

**Background of the Researcher**

I came to this topic due to the fact that I am currently training to be a teacher, and the idea of being negatively targeted by a student is a concern that I find myself struggling with. It is through my background as a Teacher Candidate (TC) particularly through going into multiple schools and working closely with other teachers, that I have been confronted with some issues within student and educator relationships. I realized that there have always been tensions in how students speak out about teachers in public forums, and how this conflicts with ideas of free speech versus libelous or slanderous allegations, but it is through my experiences as a TC that I have been able to witness the added complications that OSM brings to these relationships. An example of this is that in one of my earliest placements, I was confronted with a teacher who had personally experienced negative targeting by one of their students, and they related to me how this had impacted their own teaching and attitude towards their students.

As a researcher, I cannot pretend that I do not come to my topic without my biases and experiences influencing the decisions that I make, particularly in the realm of
education and concerning my research questions. There are two main points that might influence my own views on my research. The first is my own personal experiences with, and views on, OSM. The second is my own educational background and how that has influenced how I view student and teacher relationships.

As I am now in my late 20s, I had left secondary school before much of the more currently popular social media tools were introduced to the online world. To be clear about any potential biases I have before entering into this research study, it should be noted that I am a proponent for the use of OSM. I do have a frequently updated and maintained Facebook account, along with Pinterest, YouTube, Twitter accounts that I monitor and utilize on a regular basis. My activity on these forms of OSM has not subsided with the beginnings of my career within education, and I do have formal connections with many classmates and former teachers through these outlets. I also operate my own website that is maintained for career purposes. It should be clear then that I am no stranger to OSM, despite not having been exposed to it in my earlier educational endeavors such as elementary or secondary school. My background as a student also influences how I view student and teacher relationships, which could potentially have an impact on this research study.

I have always found education to be both exceedingly difficult and incredibly easy, the source of absolute frustration and a source of pride. I struggled through primary and intermediate school, seemingly grasping concepts far behind that of my classmates and having little understanding of what I was being taught, particularly in languages and sciences. High school was better, but I still struggled in those same classes and in fact did fail a couple of courses. Throughout my time at school, there were a few teachers that I
felt I connected with, but largely I felt as though I did not have a good relationship with educators who always seemed to be far too busy. I was accepted at the University of Toronto (UofT) in 2003 to do an undergraduate degree, and in three years, and multiple suspensions and probations, I was able to gain exactly one credit due to academic struggles. It was not until I was finally tested and diagnosed with a severe non-verbal Learning Disability in 2007 that I finally realized why school and education had always been so difficult.

I left UofT at that point, quite embittered with a system that had seen me struggle for so long and done little to help me, and went to the much smaller Trent University to start my undergraduate degree again. It was at Trent that I finally realized the impact that impassioned educators could have on a student. I graduated from Trent on the President’s List in 2012, and was accepted to do my Master of Teaching at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at UofT (OISE/UT) starting in fall 2012.

With this knowledge of my background, something must be clear: I am a student advocate whenever possible along with the fact that I am also a TC. This sometimes creates conflicts within my own views. Though my relationships are generally closer to other teachers, my sympathies often lay much closer to student needs and perspectives. That is my bias. I am conscious of this, but it impacts what I will be researching, and why, and quite possibly the results that I find. I would rather be fully aware of my own bias and work around that, then to be startled by the introduction of one halfway through my research although that still might be the case.
Philosophy of Research

Research is one of those terms that can be thought of in such simplistic terms, but it takes on a life of its own. At the heart of all research is a question, a concern, or even just a vague idea. There is something that you, the researcher, are wondering and an answer is not forthcoming in the form of “yes” or “no”. Thus, research is derived from passion. You have to be interested in your topic to even consider putting the time and energy into researching it.

The idea of research is not cut and dry either. There is always a level of subjectivity that makes research very personal. You actively choose to read this or that, you choose to include or exclude, you choose to explain or not. Some of these can mean that you do not have a true academic paper, but there is always choice even within the strictest of guidelines. The important thing is to be aware of the choices you are inherently making whenever possible.

As research is a human pursuit, it is also subject to human failings. Bias, experience, point of view, whatever you wish to term that which the researcher themselves brings to the table will change the outcome of a research project. This does not have to be a bad thing. In many cases, this is what makes that research stand out in some way, or allows others to gain a new perspective on the topic. I reiterate, that we simply need to be aware and acknowledge this and try to not let our own bias rule in the research or process and conclusion.

The conclusion or ‘answer’, in many cases, drives the question, but again this is not a fixed outcome. Often, there is no concrete answer, but merely a better understanding and more questions. Again, this is not a negative, but rather a chance to
continue examining the human condition which itself has few finite conclusions. To start research feeling like the only solid ending is an answer is to set oneself up for failure.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2011 the American academic journal *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* included a short article by Crystal Davis entitled "Parents Bullying Teachers Online". The title of this article suggests a negative targeting of teachers by parents, but a deeper reading gave some information about some of the research that is being done on this topic. Peripherally to the primary thesis of this article, the author does mention the fact that in a study on school teachers in England, thirty five percent of participants had experienced being "cyberbullied" and that within this percent "students carried out 72 percent of the abuse" (Davis, 2011). The article goes on to state that much of this "abuse" was through Facebook groups and through Ratemyteachers.com (Davis, 2011). Why then, if such a high percentage of this OSM targeting was happening against teachers by students, was this article simply addressing the seemingly lesser issue of parents propagating abuse against teachers?

This was an ongoing issue that I found while doing research for this literature review. What research I was able to find that directly correlated to my study was a by-product of other work that was focused on other issues. My findings in general were that there is little academic research that is being conducted concerning negative targeting against teachers by students, particularly from a Canadian perspective. The lack of writing on this specific topic can possibly be attributed to the fact that this is a relatively new area of study within education. This lack of research made this literature review more challenging as I found myself relying more on peripheral research and issues, along with much broader writings to ground this research study.
Within the more general research concerning social media abuse and the relationship to students and teachers, two separate lines of query are unveiled. The first is that social media is being used within peer groups to target one another. These peer groups are based largely on age and occupation, so much of the research is concerned with students targeting one another through OSM or with teachers or educators targeting one another through OSM, with little connection between these peer groups.

The second line of query is concerned with the online relationship between learners and teachers through social media with a view to how teachers should behave and the possible consequences of inappropriately close contact with students. This more general line of research enquiry also raises the question concerning teachers and other front-line educator's presence on OSM and the ethical implications of being an active participant in this online world, including those who have joined OSM for educational purposes.

**A Question of Peer Groups**

**Student-to-Student**

The focus of current research, in general, is based on negative social media uses being directed within a specific peer group. An example of this is student-to-student, or educator-to-educator, which are examples that Parsons (2005) uses. In the study by Sánchez, Levin & Del Riego (2012) the focus is on adults within the workplace with little emphasis on an intermingling of peer groups. Researchers focus on these more traditional targeting patterns that easily predate the online element, which indicates that it is not an exact byproduct of OSM (Parsons, 2005; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009).
It is interesting to note the culture of negative OSM use as a context in which these students and educators exist, but again there are no direct references to the issue of learners targeting teachers. An example of this can be found in Juvonen & Gross’s (2008) study of one thousand and four hundred participants that were aged twelve to seventeen with no mention of students negatively using social media against teachers. Instead, the study focused on cyberbullying within this peer group with teachers being placed largely in the periphery.

**Parent-to-Teacher**

The closest study that addressed the issue of students targeting teachers was through Davis' article on British teachers being targeted by parents, with the researcher finding that approximately thirty-five percent of the educators identified as having been negatively targeted through OSM (2011). Of this thirty-five percent, a quarter of the abuse was attributed to parents (Davis, 2011). Though parents and teachers would appear to be in different peer groups, they could generally be seen as being much more similar in age and occupation than the teacher and student groups, or parent and student groups. This puts these two peer groups at a similar level on a social hierarchy, which appears to be much more common in the research for this kind of negative targeting and abuse.

**Presence of Educators on OSM**

**Should Teachers Engage in OSM?**

A prevailing theme that emerged while looking at the research surrounding the question of “In what ways can educators address student social media abuse aimed at instructors?” was the question of whether front-line teachers and other educators should be engaging in OSM at all. Some school districts and other educational bodies,
particularly within the United States and Canada, have taken the step of advising teachers against the use of OSM or completely disallowing teachers to have any sort of social presence online, but there are some concerns about freedom of speech and teacher's rights (di Marzo, 2012). Di Marzo also makes the argument that:

> In an electronic universe, where young people rely on electronic media to acquire information, become educated about certain topics, and contribute their ideas, banning teachers from tapping into such a powerful tool will only handicap the education and innovation of our youth (2012).

The idea behind this kind of statement might imply that it is a very poor idea for educators to not engage in OSM and that it handicaps them as teachers as well as negatively impacts their ability to stay current in education for their student's advantage.

In a similar fashion, much of the literature assumes that teachers are already involved to some degree in their personal lives on OSM (Carter, et al., 2008; Davis, 2011; di Marzo, 2012; Froese-Germain, 2008; Papandrea, 2012). Carter argued that there is a generational element at work with teachers on OSM today, with those born within the 1980s, the same age group that makes up a majority of OSM users, entering the education workforce (Carter, et al., 2008). This again gives credence to the assumption of the participation of teachers in the world of OSM. Instead of debating the issue of whether teachers should be engaged on OSM the literature therefore seeks instead to caution educators about how they utilize these forums and what information they are putting online for public consumption.

The Ontario College of Teachers takes a cautionary stance with regards to teachers utilizing OSM by stating, "The use of the Internet and social media, despite best intentions, may cause members to forget their professional responsibilities and the unique position of trust and authority given to them by society" (2011). Similarly, in his book
aimed at teacher candidates, and those looking to enter the education work force, Scarfo and Zuker (2011) worries that OSM “can become, at their worst, vehicles for teachers to broadcast their poor judgment or unprofessionalism” (p. 26).

‘Friending’ and Professional Relationships

In OSM, there are many different ways for individuals to connect with one another to share ideas, pictures, videos, thoughts and many other kinds of media and information. Generally, the connection needs to be approved by both parties, but it depends on the forum and level of security that each individual has assigned to their information. Generally, these connections are called being 'friends' with another user of that OSM format, with the term 'friending' becoming popular from Facebook.

Many of the articles that address merely ‘friending’ between students and their teachers do so in a cautionary fashion. The focus appears to be that teachers should resist adding that more personal level of communication with their students, particularly current students, due to the idea that this could lead to either an actual or perceived inappropriate relationship. This is the focus of the Ontario College of Teachers 2011 professional advisory on this issue where it is stated, "Members should never share information with students in any environment that they would not willingly and appropriately share in a school or school-related setting or in the community." While vaguely worded, the cautionary sentiment of this statement is clear and it could be seen as an argument for students and teachers to not connect through OSM.

It is also explored through multiple other sources such as Kuehn’s article “Getting Into Trouble on Facebook” (2012), and various newspaper articles including those by Kristin Rushowy (2011) and Douglas Quan (2010). These are popular media sources, but
they represent the fact that this is an ongoing area of concern for the general public with regards to teachers and OSM. Again, these views are adhering to a more traditional view of a power hierarchy wherein a student is placed in the role of victim by a teacher. No mention is made of the reversal of this kind of relationship within OSM that is the focus of my research questions.

**Online Social Media in the Classroom**

**Teaching with Online Social Media**

Despite how relatively new OSM is, there is a number of academic articles and studies that look at how exactly this kind of media can be brought into the classroom. Researchers argue that students are "Digital Natives" (Rheingold, 2008) who have grown up with different forms of OSM. Rheingold urges educators to remember that students learned how to learn new kinds of software before they started high school. They carry mobile phones, media players, game devices, laptop computer and know how to use them. They know the internet not as a transformative new technology, but as a fixture in their environment (Rheingold, 2008).

This message is echoed by many of the researchers who favour OSM use within the classroom as a rationale for the effectiveness of the media in teaching and learning.

Many researchers agree that, within limits and through teacher-guided activities, OSM can enhance learning opportunities for students in different subject areas. In Manrique and Manrique's 2011 study on including OSM in the teaching of social sciences, the researchers argue that "the possible classroom uses of the various tools of social networking such as Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, and Wikipedia [can] enhance student learning. These can complement the traditional methods of teaching" (Manrique & Manrique, 2011). They argue that modern students have such little experience with not
using technology and OSM that it makes little sense to include this within the classroom as a teaching tool (Manrique & Manrique, 2011).

Similarly, English teachers have embraced OSM as "Writing teachers now commonly use the Web in their teaching and have students engage with blogs, wikis, Twitter™, Facebook™, and other forms of multimedia that combine static and moving words and images" (Kaufer et al., 2011). Again, this research also acknowledges the fact that OSM has become such a large part of student's lives outside of school that it makes little sense to not utilize this within the classroom (Kaufer et al., 2011).

**Effective Use of Online Social Media**

Despite this kind of positive outlook on OSM use within the classroom, there are also concerns that the media might not be utilized in an effective way that enhances student learning. In the same article that extolled the virtues of OSM in the English classroom, the researchers worried that "classrooms that make use of social media can too often do so at the expense of the traditional focus of writing classrooms, especially the persistent focus on the textual process and product, electronic or physical" (Kaufer et al., 2011).

To that end, there is also research on how to effectively implement OSM in the classroom in a bid to move beyond the idea of utilizing technology solely for technologies sake as opposed to a practical tool to augment learning. Loizzo and Ertmer address this in their 2014 research study where they not only echo the fact that many educators are already utilizing OSM to some degree in their personal lives, but go on to give the advice for teachers to expand this use to better make the most of the technology within the classroom. They argue that teachers need to "Spend some time exploring these
tools before [they] use them in the classroom. This will help [them] keep up with the pace and each which [their] students use these tools" (Loizzo & Ertmer, 2014).

Another concern about OSM use within the classroom is the issue of accessibility. The possibility of disparity of technological tools to access OSM represents "a severe "digital divide" - a gap between those who have access to computers and the Internet - and those who don't.... classrooms lack the resources and connections to hook into these basic learning technologies" (Riley, 2008). To this end, Loizzo and Ertmer advise a BYOT (or Bring Your Own Technology) policy whenever possible, which asks students to bring their own devices in order to fully participate (Loizzo & Ertmer, 2014). This policy is echoed by some school boards, such as within the Peel District School Board which embraces a Bring Your Own Device strategy in an effort to ensure "equity of access" (Peel District School Board, 2013). This kind of strategy shows the level of support that school boards are showing for the use of technology and OSM within the classroom, despite the concerns about access and possible ineffectiveness.

Digital Citizenship

As part of the idea of OSM within the classroom, there is also research for teaching students about internet etiquette and the idea of "Digital Citizenship" (Moriellon, 2013). The definitions for this term are somewhat varied, but tend to revolve around the idea that "Digital Citizenship indicators dictate that students should be able to (a) advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology as well as (d) exhibit leadership for digital citizenship" (Berman-Dry, 2013). Generally, it is understood that a good Digital Citizen is one who uses online resources including OSM in an ethical manner that does not attack or demean others.
In Loizzo and Ertmer's research study, one of their tips for effectively integrating OSM into classrooms includes "[teaching] students to be good cybercitizens" (Liozzo & Ertmer, 2014). A participant within their study stated "that with the popularity of social media growing, it's good for students to learn how transparent the internet really is: "Other people are reading what they're saying. It's not just between them and the computer" (Liozzo & Ertmer, 2014). The importance of teaching responsible digital citizenry is repeated throughout literature surrounding the idea of OSM use within the classroom and for educational purposes (Moreillon, 2013; Kaufer et al., 2011; Berman-Dry, 2013).

**An Issue of Bullying**

I have been careful about my use of the term ‘bullying’ with respects to my research goals. The term ‘bullying’ has reached a point in our culture that it appears to be overused to explain any sort of aggressive behaviour or any unpleasant encounter, and this is not always the case. The word also has a definition that is not strictly in line with my research goals. In Les Parsons’ book, *Bullied Teacher, Bullied Student* (2005), he defines bullying as “a repeated act against an individual or a series of individuals who fear the bully’s power. An imbalance of power exists.” The idea of bullying as having to be a repetitious activity is echoed in numerous other sources and this does not accurately reflect the goals of my research. I am looking for examples of students targeting teachers through OSM and it does not necessarily have to be on multiple occasions. A problem arises with much of the current research being focused on the idea of bullying with OSM and not necessarily isolated incidents.
There is also some confusion over the term ‘cyberbullying’, which superficially appears to be more in line with the OSM usage that my research is geared towards. One definition of this term indicates that it is again a repetitive, malicious, harassment of any individual through an electronic or digital medium (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2009). Much of the research that is provided on cyberbullying again deals with this behaviour occurring over a period of time, which is not what I am looking at within my research topic and questions.

**Conclusions/Implications**

In conclusion to this literature review, while there is significant research on the broader topics of social media use and education, and particularly within the ideas of cyberbullying and using OSM in a harassing fashion, there appears to be little information on students targeting teachers. Many of the sources that I have found agree that there is the possibility and reality of social media being used in a negative way against individuals, but it is generally within the same peer group, or following a more traditional power structure from the top down. There is little to no discussion about what happens when those who are supposed to be lower on the hierarchy (ex. the students) target those who are typically considered to be higher on a power chain (ex. the teachers).

Also, much of the research is based in the United States, with a few examples being from the United Kingdom. There is very little in the way of Canadian content, apart from the Ontario College of Teachers documents (2011) which simply addresses the issues about ‘friending’ that were previously discussed. On the surface, this lack of information might prompt questions as to whether there is an issue with students targeting teachers online, but anecdotal evidence, as well as less-scholarly sources such
as newspapers, shows another side to this story. It would appear that much of my research will have to be original in order to gain a better picture of this situation, with already established research forming a context.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In order to properly understand and answer the question “In what ways can educators address student social media abuse aimed at instructors,” I utilized current academic articles and literature as well as interviews with educators. This was a qualitative study that was conducted through the experiences and opinions of teachers. The teachers interviewed have extensive experience within education along with concerns about the possibility and impact of educators being negatively targeted by students through OSM.

The interviews were semi-structured through open-ended questions that I had prepared ahead of time. I was able to interview two participants, and they were conducted in different ways due to the relative location of each interviewee. With Andrew, a pseudonym given to protect his identity through his informed consent (please see Appendix B), we were able to conduct a face-to-face interview at a mutually agreed upon locale. With Hannah, another pseudonym, due to the fact that she is a resident of Calgary, Alberta, I was only able to interview her via phone call at a time that was convenient for the both of us. The interviews were each transcribed within a week and the data within was analyzed and coded for recurring themes and ideas. The data was also compared and contrasted against the information found in the literature review to find commonalities.

Participants

Finding participants for this research study was extremely difficult. This difficulty necessitated a broadening of the research question to include educators outside of those teaching intermediate and secondary school, which was a part of the original query.
Originally, my research study was also interested solely in those educators who had personally experienced negative targeting and with that in mind I had found potential participants with this experience. These educators declined to be a part of this study for personal reasons.

Eventually, I was able to gain participants through cold emailing principals at various secondary schools in the general Toronto area along with other third-party contacts. Another avenue that allowed me to find participants was through the connections of my Research Supervisor along with other Professors at the University of Toronto. All of the initial points of contact with potential participants were done online, through email. Unfortunately, the educators and administrators that I attempted to contact in this fashion either did not respond, or they declined to be a part of this research study.

In the end, my study was based on the data collected from two participants. Andrew is an elementary school teacher at a small private school in Toronto, Ontario, while Hannah is an elementary school teacher at a public elementary school in Calgary, Alberta. Again, in an effort to protect their identities in accordance with the informed consent that they signed, the names Andrew and Hannah are pseudonyms and this is how they will be referred to throughout this research study.

Procedure

Aside from the literature review, the data for this study was collected through interviews on an individual basis with each participant. The interview questions were pre-selected (please see Appendix A) and sought information from each educator about their personal experiences with being targeted by students through OSM, along with their views and opinions on the issue. These questions included the teacher’s general
experience with OSM, if they had encountered any issues concerning the research question within their school, what were their views on conditions that allow this behaviour to flourish, and what kind of recommendations they would make to the Ministry of Education. Each participant was asked approximately twenty-one questions.

Each interview was conducted individually either in person or over the telephone. A Samsung digital recorder was used to record each interview with the Voice Memo software included on an I-Phone 4 utilized as backup to ensure a low risk of technological failure.

Within twenty-four hours of each interview the voice recording was listened to at least once. Transcription was begun within forty-eight hours of each interview and finished within a week of each interview. The transcriptions were completed by me, the interviewer. Andrew’s interview was transcribed verbatim with the help of the Google Application software “Transcription”. This software is free and widely available through www.Google.com but it was used in conjunction with slowing down and speeding up the digital voice recording and manually typing each word and sound. Hannah’s interview was transcribed verbatim through use of the online program “Transcribe Lite” which is freely available in trial format through www.transcribe.wreally.com. This program allowed the audio recording to be uploaded and then played back at a much slower rate. It then allowed dictation from me reading along with the audio and it transcribed based on that spoken transcription. Both transcriptions were checked extensively to ensure that they were as true to the audio recording as possible.

After transcription each interview was thoroughly examined, analyzed, and coded to ensure that common themes, issues, and ideas are all taken into consideration for later
data analysis. This coding was consistently compared with the original research question and sub-questions that were stated in Chapter 2. The data analysis and findings will be examined in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

**Instruments of Data Collection and Data Analysis**

Data collection was conducted through a literature review, which is part of Chapter 2, along with the semi-structured face-to-face interview that I conducted with Andrew, or the phone interview that I conducted with Hannah. The data analysis began with simply listening to the digital copies of the voice recordings to re-familiarize myself with what was said and how. Through this initial listening, I was able to make notes about specific points of interest and the times that they occurred during the recording. I then coded the data collected through transcription. To properly code the data that I had collected, I utilized Wolcott's method, as laid out by Creswell (2013).

To do this, I read through the data multiple times before I was able to utilize Word highlighting to start to "winnow" (Creswell, 2013) down the information into more easily identifiable themes. This was done through differentiating the colour highlighting between the various themes, and then using a table to organize the data that had fallen into each of these preliminary themes. My coding themes were originally much more broad, but I was able to identify multiple sub-themes which eventually became the six major themes that comprise my Chapter 4. This again reflects the methodology that Creswell talks about in his writing (2013). From there, I was able to break down these themes further into the sub-topics that make up each major theme through again using different colours within Word highlighting, and then applying the differently coloured data to a table.
After doing this initial coding and note-taking, I then consolidated the recurring themes down to more focused points of interest that could then be analyzed further. The data was then organized into these themes for a much more in-depth analysis of the importance of the information contained within. I did end up changing my sub-topics during the writing process as it became apparent that some data was too similar to truly separate.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

In the initial emails sent to prospective participants, a short paragraph outlined their level of participation and it was mentioned there that they would be able to revoke their consent at any point of the study and that their identity would be kept in the strictest of confidences. After participants stated that they were willing to be a part of the study, I emailed an informed letter of consent (please see Appendix B) to simply read over prior to the actual interview. This letter included not only my contact information, in the case of any questions or concerns, but also that of my Research Supervisor as well as the Ethics Review Committee at the University of Toronto.

The informed letter of consent detailed out the purpose of this research, each participant’s level of participation, the fact that they were able to withdraw consent at any point, that the study is entirely confidential, and the relevant contact information. There are guidelines at the end on where to sign, date and print their names, as well as to indicate their consent.

From there, before the interview, I presented each participant with a printed copy of the informed letter of consent for his or her signature. This was done to again ensure
that there was no confusion about the contents of the letter. Each participant’s right to revoke consent, along with the level of confidentiality, was also reiterated.

Confidentiality was ensured through a neutral pseudonym that will be used in any and all references to the participant, with a notable exception being the signed informed letter of consent. All notes, transcriptions, coding, and analysis made of the interview referred to the participant by this pseudonym, along with any mention of the participant in the final copy of the study. Any identifying information (ex. school, district, position, etc.) that might be specific to that participant was withheld or modified in order to give a general idea of any relevant information without the risk of exposure.

The signed informed letter of consent was photocopied to ensure that each participant had a copy of the document for their records, along with a copy for my own records. After the document was signed, no changes were made to it or the study with regards to their involvement or expectations.

Participants were also made aware of the fact that they were to be voice recorded, which in turn resulted in transcription, but with the strictest assurances that this data was solely be used for this study. The voice recordings were also destroyed along with any mention of their identity beyond a neutral pseudonym upon the completion of the research study.

Each participant was made aware of the fact that they are welcome to read and obtain a copy of the finished research study if they so wish.
Limitations

A notable limitation to this study is the fact that I was unable to interview students who might be able to offer their perspective to my research question, “In what ways can educators address student social media abuse aimed at instructors?” This was due to the fact that my Research and Ethics clearance did not include those who were not of legal age or those who are still considered a student within a school board.

Another limitation was the fact that many teachers who had personally experienced negative targeting by students declined to be a part of this study. I cannot speak to specifics with this issue, but rather that that is a necessary limitation of many studies in that participants are not required to speak to researchers.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

The findings of my research concerning “In what ways can educators address student social media abuse aimed at instructors?” will be organized into themes that were revealed through the process of the participant interviews and subsequent coding of information. These themes align with the literature review in Chapter 2 while offering some new insights into this issue and how it is perceived by educators. The themes that I have organized the data into often overlap and compliment one another due to the nature of this research question.

Theme I: Background and Social Media Understanding

In an effort to better understand the research participants' potential biases and beliefs with regards to OSM, I asked a series of questions about their history and use of the medium. This was also done to ascertain just how much prior knowledge each interviewee was in possession of regarding this topic. This was then tied into whether they interacted with students through OSM and what their personal policies and views were with regards to this kind of contact.

The two teachers that I interviewed, Andrew and Hannah, utilized OSM in very different ways in their personal life and throughout their interviews showed a disparity of knowledge about that world. There were also some differences in the way that they categorized OSM but also some surprising similarities.

Andrew started his interview with me by stating explicitly that he does not utilize OSM in his personal life and called himself an "anomaly" (Andrew, October 7, 2013) for this policy. He has made a conscious decision to avoid anything but Skype, an online-
based telephone or personal video streaming system, or email, which he sees as different from other forms of OSM, specifically Facebook. It was not entirely clear why Andrew had placed Skype or email, which tend to serve the same kinds of functions as OSM in terms of internet-based social interaction, in a separate category from OSM. This could be simply his perception of email and Skype as being a much more 'traditional' means of online communication, generally between two people with a form that is similar to ordinary mail or telephone calls, as opposed to something more creatively based in technology such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube, to name the most popular platforms. He does use Facebook peripherally, however, through family members and he does acknowledge the role that social media plays in "networking, communicating, that sort of thing." (Andrew, October 7, 2013) Throughout our interview, Andrew did broaden his categorization of OSM to also include YouTube, but he did not share his rationale for this inclusion with me.

In contrast, Hannah is involved to a much greater degree in this online world. Like Andrew, she mentioned email almost immediately and her first instinct appeared similar to Andrew's in that she categorized that service as outside of OSM. Similarly, she organized her understanding of OSM narrowly and it took several questions to ascertain that she also utilized blogging systems and Pinterest. Pinterest is a growing form of OSM where each registered user has a digital 'wall' upon which they can 'pin' or link to anything that they happen across online in the forms of pictures, textual information, videos, and also items from other users. It tends to not contain as much personal information as something like Facebook, but again it does enable users to share a lot of their own personality and beliefs, depending on what they 'pin'. Despite these similarities
of categorization to Andrew, Hannah also mentioned that she is an active member of the Facebook and Pinterest communities, which means that she not only has online profiles but that she actively maintains and updates her information on these websites.

Throughout our interview, Hannah referenced Facebook and general social media language in a way that Andrew did not. For example, Andrew asked for explanations of types of OSM, which might indicate that he was not completely aware of the variety of sites and mediums that this could encompass. Hannah also did not request examples of OSM terms that Andrew did ask for specific assistance with, such as what Instagram was. Despite these differences in understanding and usage both Hannah and Andrew had firmly stated personal views concerning interaction with students online.

**Theme II: Personal versus (Un)official Policy**

**Online Interaction with Students**

A word that both teachers used throughout their interviews was "appropriate". When asked directly if she interacted with students through OSM, Hannah's answer was an immediate "no" (Hannah, October 20, 2013) and she went on to state that she would not add present or former students on Facebook and that she thinks that "it's really important that teachers being who they are... you have to stay keep that relationship really separate" (Hannah, October 20, 2013). Similarly, Andrew's response to that line of questioning was, "I just don't find it appropriate" (Andrew, October 7, 2013).

Surprisingly, despite this similarity of response, Hannah and Andrew had different stated policies for interacting with students online. Andrew was open to students emailing him with school-related questions. He explained that he wasn't "comfortable soliciting, you know, dialogue with a student... [he] would rather do that face-to-face in
class" (Andrew, October 7, 2013). In contrast, Hannah was much more hesitant about interacting with students outside of school through online means, which is interesting considering her much stronger personal involvement with OSM which is contrasted with Andrew's lack of online presence in that world. While not directly addressing the potential medium of email, Hannah focused on Facebook as being a point where students might contact her and stated that "I always say that it's really inappropriate like try to add me because I'm not their friend I'm their teacher" (Hannah, October 20, 2013). This also raises questions about how Hannah and Andrew might view their relationships with their students in general.

Hannah places a large distinction between teacher and friend, which is evident by her above statement, which implies that there is complete separation between the two terms. Andrew did not make as explicit statements about this, but he is similarly careful with his own personal policy concerning online contact with students by stating above that he was not "comfortable" (Andrew, October 7, 2013) which indicates some agreement with Hannah's more explicitly stated opinion. Something that was not discussed with either participant was whether they would approve of a student-teacher relationship outside of the classroom that did not involve OSM, such as friendship or a mentorship situation. The question could therefore be whether any interaction with students outside of the classroom is accepted, or if it is simply the online element that makes the idea problematic.

Conflict with Colleague's Policies

A major point of contention for Hannah with regards to OSM and her personal policies concerning student use and interaction was the fact that her colleagues did not
often share her views. She disapproves heavily of teachers and both former and current students interacting through OSM and it upsets her that some of the teachers at her school do not share this belief. Hannah explains that she "[feels] like it's inappropriate but that's something that [she doesn't] have control over so yeah, that pisses [her] off" (Hannah, October 20, 2013). It is clear that Hannah feels strongly about the fact that her colleagues have a differing policy on OSM use with regards to students than she does, and that Hannah feels she has little input into how they operate in the online world.

It also becomes problematic for Hannah that she is 'friends' on Facebook with these teachers and then the same teachers 'friend' former students which allows them to see Hannah's online presence. She worries about this as she stated that "I've had a couple of friend requests and I make sure that my privacy settings are really really high..." (Hannah, October 20, 2013) but due to the fact that her colleagues have different policies, the security settings are lessened. Facebook privacy settings are notoriously difficult to navigate, and change often, so that it can be difficult for users to ascertain what information is available for public searches and consumption. It should also be noted that while Facebook is the most infamous for this lack of coordinated security, other OSM platforms also have similar changes and policies, and this again can make interactions with students through these websites highly problematic and difficult to control the sharing of personal information.

Andrew did not have the same conflicts with colleagues over this issue as Hannah which is possibly due to his lack of online presence in the same respect, particularly with regards to Facebook. He did mention a colleague who did have more of an online
presence, which would indicate a different set of personal policies versus his complete lack of presence in that community.

(U)nofficial Policies

Despite the fact that Andrew teaches at a private school in Ontario and Hannah teaches at a public school in Alberta, the two shared disconcertingly similar experiences with regard to official policy on the issue of OSM interaction with students. Much of their knowledge was vague, with policy being either non-existent or not clearly outlined in a way that could be understood by either teacher. Both Hannah and Andrew were unsure if their particular school, teacher's associations, or governmental bodies had any set policies on teachers and OSM. While it should be noted that this is simply the view of two teachers, it could be part of a larger issue that could indicate that either these policies are lacking, or that the information is simply not being given to or accessed by teachers.

Andrew mentioned this briefly by stating that "I’m not sure what the school parameters are like in terms of policy. I’m not sure if we at this time have an overt policy about using that in the classroom, right" (Andrew, October 7, 2013). He did specify that the school had policies in place for internet safety but nothing that specifically addressed student and teacher relations through OSM use. There was also no discussion of official policy when Andrew discussed administration's possible reaction to negative targeting through OSM, which again would reinforce the fact that either the policy is not present or not communicated.

Similarly, Hannah was not able to talk to official policy on this issue but she did discuss unofficial attitudes and reactions by various groups in response to teachers having an online presence and interacting with students. Hannah talked specifically again about
Facebook and how her school had enacted firewalls against the site within the school to discourage onsite usage. She also mentioned that the administration at her school "need to realize that yeah teachers are on Facebook, telling people they can't be on it is unrealistic..." (Hannah, October 20, 2013). Hannah did not explicitly state that this OSM use happened in teacher's personal time, but she was clear that their presence online was for their personal life as opposed to utilizing it for educational purposes with their students. The way she talked about this point did not make it clear if this was official policy or rather that the administration would prefer that teachers not engage at all in OSM.

Again, there is uncertainty about official policy even existing, and Hannah not being aware in either case. There are a few questions that this prompts, such as if policy is not communicated or enforced, is it actually policy? Secondly, whose responsibility is it to ensure that teachers know about possible policy. Should teachers be seeking out this information, or should it be offered by their administration, or some other authority figure? If there is no policy, does the idea of "frowning upon" a practice, such as teachers not having a presence on OSM, have any credence? There are many concerns here that neither Hannah or Andrew truly addressed other than the fact that they simply did not know if there was policy.

In the same general topic of policy, official or unofficial, Hannah also mentioned that the Alberta Teacher's Association (ATA) "frown[s] upon Facebook and any of those other social medias big time so there have been teachers that have been fired for putting up the inappropriate statements..." (Hannah, October 20, 2013). Again, the language here is unclear, but the expression 'frowns upon' indicates that this is not official policy. There
are some issues here in that the ATA is serious about OSM and teachers, but that this is based on the highly subjective idea of "frowns upon" rather than something more official. Why, if this is a fireable offence, is there not something more explicit in place, or communicated, to guide teachers?

Neither Hannah nor Andrew spoke to specific policy or examples about how administration or school boards would react to OSM targeting by students against teachers and instead spoke in terms of what they would wish for in terms of action.

A conclusion that can be drawn about Hannah and Andrew is that official policy is lacking in the realm of OSM use, particularly with regards to negative targeting by students against teachers. While this implication is gained from only two teachers, it is transferable in that it can create some concerns that more teachers might also find this kind of information lacking or not communicated effectively.

**Theme III: Online Social Media Use in the Classroom**

In the interviews I asked questions about OSM in the classroom in an effort to see if there was a connection between students using these sites and services outside of the classroom and if they associated the use with their teachers. Both Hannah and Andrew utilized OSM within their classrooms to different degrees and assuming different levels of knowledge with their students.

Hannah uses school board-generated blogging systems within her classes so that her students can talk online about reading and writing assignments. She also uses Desire to Learn, which is again a strictly education-based OSM system. She makes a very strict distinction between what she sees as recreational OSM, such as Facebook, and 'approved' school board systems. Hannah did not talk about OSM within her classroom to a great
extent and focused instead on the negative aspects of students using these sites and programs outside of the classroom, which I will discuss further shortly.

In contrast, Andrew is much more diverse and open to using OSM within his classroom. He uses E-Commons, which is an education-based program that is not strictly approved by his school or the Ministry of Education. This program is not only used within his classroom but Andrew also uses it to communicate with students' parents who have access to what their children are doing in class. YouTube is another OSM site that Andrew uses to share video clips with his students. Andrew actually bases an assignment concerning his students creating their own videos for a classwide film festival around YouTube and students have access to an I-Pad to shoot and upload their footage. He did not explain this activity in huge detail, but he did say

my students will be using I-Pad technology in the near future, to create, we’re calling it MIFF, My Independent Film Footage... As opposed to TIFF. And it’s just sort of empowering kids to think about sort of who they are on different levels. Literally, metaphorically, and using arts, but also the habits of mind that we use here at [school name removed] to help them goal-set (Andrew, October 7, 2013).

While Andrew had some concerns about the privacy levels of YouTube, through these activities he is a proponent for OSM use within the classroom as a teaching and learning tool.

It was quite surprising to see the different attitudes that Hannah and Andrew displayed towards OSM being used within their classrooms. This is particularly true when it is taken into consideration the fact that Hannah is much more active in those communities outside of school, while Andrew aims to have no presence in online communities. Andrew did not talk at length about this contrast, of using OSM in the
classroom while not utilizing it in his personal life, so it is hard to discern the rationale behind this decision.

**Theme IV: Specific Incidents and Concerns about Negative Targeting**

Hannah and Andrew both expressed many concerns about the negative aspects of OSM and this took many forms including the prospect of being potential targets for their students.

**Peer-to-Peer Interactions**

An example of this was their concern about how their students were responding negatively or maliciously to one another through OSM, in addition to the possibility of being targeted as teachers by students. Hannah, in particular, talked about multiple instances where "we've had an issue in the past where kids putting out pictures on Facebook that were very inappropriate but they were taking pictures of themselves and of their friends and doing that" (Hannah, October 20, 2013). Andrew was not as specific but he also expressed concerns that students within his class were getting into disagreements with one another, and he worried that those oppositions might find their way to OSM. This mimics what was discussed in Chapter 2 with regards to the question of the word bullying, and the fact that there are major concerns about negative targeting happening within peer groups. There are also possible consequences in that minor disagreements could become much larger and perhaps even have permanent consequences due to the difficulty of removing digital material from the internet.

**Anonymity**

A concern that Andrew talked about was the anonymity that could come with the negative targeting of teachers through OSM. Hannah did not mention this possibility.
Andrew's primary concern was that "they can hide behind the technology" (Andrew, October 7, 2013) and he also stated that "anonymity made it difficult to sort of track and trace it. Which, you know, if you are the victim of something as such, would make it, you know, uncomfortable, unfortunate and difficult to find out who and why" (Andrew, October 7, 2013).

What is interesting to note is that Hannah and Andrew both replied in the negative to the question of if they had ever been negatively targeted by students through OSM, but it must be stated that they might simply not be aware of this due to their own policies concerning searching their own names online. The issue of not knowing will be discussed shortly through my sub-topic on Search Engines. Both research participants did share concerns about the possibility of this kind of attack happening. Both of the interviewees spoke, unprompted, about the existence of www.Ratemyteachers.com.

www.Ratemyteachers.com

The existence of the website www.Ratemyteachers.com was a huge concern to both Andrew and Hannah and they both discussed this OSM tool that provides a forum for students to give uncensored reviews of their teachers. Hannah asked me if I had heard of this website and then mentioned "I don't know anyone personally that's been rated or anything like that" (Hannah, October 20, 2013). Andrew had much more to say about the website:

there was another colleague that this person and I had worked with, and I believe it was on something called ratemyteacher or something, and they had seen a negative, you know, not horribly malicious or slanderous, but a negative review about that person, that person’s teaching style (Andrew, October 7, 2013).
Andrew also made mention of the fact that this teacher had simply Googled their own name and this review was one of the first entries that the search engine found. Hannah expressed a similar concern about search results.

**Search Engines**

Hannah's primary concerns about this kind of negative targeting centred around the idea that "that would be basically... basically that would be bullying towards teachers so definitely perhaps depending on to what extent it is... I mean it is defamation of character" (Hannah, October 20, 2013). Google and other search engines were a part of her concerns about what could be found if you searched an educator's name and whether something like www.Ratemyteachers.com would come up.

It is at this point that I must look at the issues of defamation of character and bullying. As I stated in Chapter 2, bullying is a term that I have purposely avoided due to the fact that it is often defined as a repetitious behaviour and does not include isolated incidents. Therefore, is the behaviour of students who participate in negatively reviewing teachers on www.Ratemyteachers.com bullying? Does it depend solely on what was said? With that in mind, if the review, or whatever the student has said about the teacher, is simply negative but not necessarily untrue, is that defamation of character? Through OSM, our society allows and utilizes reviews of many services and products that are often non-complimentary, so is the reviewing of teachers different? To that end, what was written or said might make much more of a difference, rather than students simply engaging in OSM use concerning their teachers.

When questioned if either interviewee had ever sought information about themselves on social media sites, both Hannah and Andrew replied quite adamantly they
had never personally run a search. This of course brings into question as to whether either teacher had been negatively targeted without their knowledge.

Andrew appears to be aware of this possibility. When asked if he had ever been negatively targeted, he stated, "not that I’m aware of. Because I choose not to engage. So, it could be floating out there, I have no idea. And I don’t care" (Andrew, October 7, 2013). Hannah was similarly emphatic when asked if she had ever searched her own name on www.Ratemyteachers.com, her reply was simply, "Never" (Hannah, October 20, 2013).

While both interviewees spoke about the positive impacts of OSM, they were both overwhelmingly critical and worried about the potential issues, such as being negatively targeted by students. As previously discussed, Hannah stated that it upsets her that students are 'friends' on Facebook with her colleagues, which enables them to see more information about her. At the end of his interview Andrew simply stated, "It's just, it's scary" (Andrew, October 7, 2013).

Theme V: Proactive Measures

Proactive responses to the possibility of OSM targeting was a large part of what both Hannah and Andrew discussed throughout their interviews. While each teacher took a slightly different approach, all of the measures taken were done in an effort to prevent negative targeting from happening. This was generally done with the goal of stopping negative targeting within the age group of their students. This would also have the impact of helping to prevent negative targeting against teachers.
Teachable Moments

Through using Facebook, Hannah talked at length about students who sought her 'friendship' online through that site and how this could lead to teachable moments within her classroom. She is open with students about her online presence but makes a clear distinction that that is her personal life. When students ask her about being 'friends' on Facebook, she responds by stating, "I'm not their friend, I'm their teacher. We can be friendly, but I am certainly not your friend. I'm not going to go to the movies with you on the weekend, so why would you add me to Facebook" (Hannah, October 20, 2013).

Andrew also employs the idea of teachable moments with his students with regards to OSM use, but he does this through the E-Commons program that he uses within his classroom. As his students encounter various situations, Andrew tries to bring these into classroom-based teachable moments. The primary example he used was in terms of offering one another constructive feedback on their work through E-Commons, but this idea could be utilized further. The teaching moments that he discussed were largely centred around the idea of "frank discussion" (Andrew, October 7, 2013) within the classroom through dialogue with his students.

Discussion and Dialogue

Related to the idea of teachable moments, both Hannah and Andrew heavily utilized open discussion and dialogue within their classrooms. Andrew had already had multiple conversations with his students about this issue, despite having only been with his current class for just over a month at that point. In fact when asked for recommendations on how educators should deal with the potential issue of negative OSM use, Andrew's answer was simply "frank discussion" (Andrew, October 7, 2013). He was
a proponent of making these discussions and dialogues authentic to his students in an
effort to ensure that he was not lecturing but rather having students participate. Andrew
also mentioned that these discussions should be ongoing and be made to ‘weave’ through
other topics and situations to ensure understanding.

Similar to Andrew, Hannah also spoke of open discussion with students as a
proactive measure against OSM abuse. She talked about these discussions happening
with her class but also with specific students depending on the situation. In contrast to
Andrew, Hannah also mentioned not only educating students through debate and
workshops but also their parents. As a teacher in a diverse area, Hannah worried that
many of her student’s parents are not as fluent in English as their children and might not
always be aware of what is happening on OSM. To this end, Hannah did not offer any
specific examples or suggestions for how to achieve this partnership with parents.

Class-based Workshops and Assignments

Both interviewees used informal in-class measures to proactively raise questions
about students and OSM use, but in different ways.

Hannah described a series of workshops that her school put together for students
with a focus on cyber bullying as it was felt that

Facebook for the kids and that kind of like Twitter it’s been used
recently more so kids have been having issues with bullying, they've
been using it to insult one another and basically fight over on Facebook
and on their walls and stuff like that (Hannah, October 20, 2013).

These workshops were developed with the Calgary police and included ideas about
responsible "digital citizenship" (Hannah, October 20, 2013). Formal education in OSM
was a large part of the proactive measures that Hannah discussed.
In contrast, Andrew puts together assignments for his students including a journal-based writing assignment where students explored whether OSM was a "blessing or a curse" (Andrew, October 7, 2013). He was able to show me some student work on this topic and the writing was in-depth concerning the issue. Some students did bring up the issue of whether social media could be used in a bullying capacity.

**Theme VI: Reactive Measures**

**Parental Involvement**

Through each interview the participants were in agreement that parents should be involved in the case of an issue where a student was negatively targeting their teacher through OSM. As an obstacle to this, both participants expressed doubts as to whether parents were always fully aware of their children's activities through OSM and online in general.

Hannah discussed the possibility of parents being brought in to work with students through workshops and other educational endeavours concerning students and "digital citizenship" (Hannah, October 20, 2013) after any such incident had occurred. As has already been noted through Theme V: Proactive Measures, Discussion and Dialogue, Hannah was concerned about the possibility of her students' parents being immigrants and encountering language and cultural barriers with regards to their children's activities on OSM. Due to this worry, Hannah discussed needing "to educate the parents" (Hannah, October 20, 2013) particularly after an incident had happened to better enhance their understanding, although ideally she wished for this education to be more proactive.

While he did not have a similar concern about the possibility of disconnect due to cultural or language barriers, Andrew did express a worry that student's activities on
OSM "might be something parents might be aware of, or not" (Andrew, October 7, 2013). He also seemed doubtful about a parent's ability to effectively manage their children's activities online, stating that "not assuming that they can manage it or that they can't, but just seeing what really is the situation by just putting it out there" (Andrew, October 7, 2013). Both participants worried about this lack of knowledge effecting possible parental reactions to negative targeting incidents that might be attributed to their offspring.

Hannah echoed this concern about parental ignorance as she felt that "parents have been really irresponsible especially with the Internet. I see my kids all the time being babysat by not only the internet, but by video games" (Hannah, October 20, 2013). This was followed by Hannah holding parents responsible for their children's online activities when she stated that "if the parent's paying for the internet and the child is a minor under their roof then the parents should be more accountable" (Hannah, October 20, 2013). Andrew spoke little about parental accountability in contrast to Hannah. He focused more on what kind of response he would wish from parents in the wake of an incident concerning their children.

Andrew's main sentiment concerned the fact that he "would like [parents] to take it seriously. If there was evidence that their... child... had done such a thing" (Andrew, October 7, 2013). He also empathized much more than Hannah appeared to, by stating how his own experiences impacted his views on parental involvement by stating "I come from this as a parent. I have a son and a daughter" (Andrew, October 7, 2013). Due to this experience he acknowledged that parent responses could range and could possibly even be "destructive in their approach" (Andrew, October 7, 2013). Andrew stressed the
importance of evidence of the child's involvement for parents. Overall, he stated that "You know, you hope that you have a bit of middle ground with a parent whereby, you know, they’re gonna be firm and supportive with both their child, and the process and you, and take seriously what’s happened if it’s overt and quite apparent" (Andrew, October 7, 2013).

**Intervention of Administration**

The role of the administration, Principals, Vice- Principals, and those who are in a position of authority within a school, was discussed by each participant with regards to this issue. Particularly, it was discussed in the context of a teacher already having been targeted by a student through OSM. Andrew spoke at length on what kind of response he would hope for from his school's administration.

Most importantly, Andrew hoped that administrator's would react "in a supportive and ethical way" (Andrew, October 7, 2013). He not only wanted to be supported as a teacher, should such an incident occur, but also to ensure that the student was supported, no matter the question of guilt. Andrew stated that he wanted "to have that administration support you and try to unearth the truth and always- both parties, the, what’s the word I’m looking for, the party that’s been effected along with the administration, but being-not to be over-reactive, not too high not too low" (Andrew, October 7, 2013).

Andrew did mention his concern that an allegation of negative targeting perpetrated by a student might not be taken seriously enough by administrators. He stated that "Sometimes in the business of a place, or in the politics of a place, you might be told, ‘oh don’t worry about that’, or ‘we gotta keep this quiet’" (Andrew, October 7, 2013), and he hoped that "ethical due process" (Andrew, October 7, 2013) would be followed. In
contrast, Hannah did not talk about the potentiality of administrative involvement to the same degree.

Hannah was confident that administrators should and would take these kinds of incidents seriously and she felt that "they would take a strong stance against that" (Hannah, October 20, 2013). She also felt that their role would be to ensure parental involvement and, if necessary, police involvement. Hannah did not discuss specifically how she would hope the administration would deal with this kind of issue other than these thoughts.

The Police and Legal Ramifications

Despite the fact that I, as the researcher, did not specifically ask about police or any other law enforcement or possible legal issues with regards to this issue, both Hannah and Andrew did mention this form of extreme reaction unprompted. Their discussions on this reactive measure did, surprisingly, take very different forms.

Andrew spoke in generalities with regards to the legal issues surrounding the topic of students negatively targeting educators through OSM, largely due to his own stated uncertainty about the actual legalities of this form of online targeting. Andrew was careful in his choice of words during this part of our interview, and prefaced much of what he said with the word "hypothetically" (Andrew, October 7, 2013). He also never explicitly mentioned law enforcement or police, but rather focused on possible legalities.

Andrew went on to state, "If one commits a- and I don’t know at this time if under law it’s not a crime, but it was a crime against this person’s character and a form of slander" (Andrew, October 7, 2013). The possibility of criminal activity appeared to trouble Andrew, and he went on to talk about how, "if someone commits a crime, you
know, in a certain place at a certain time, that effects someone, then they’re not guilty? I don’t agree with that” (Andrew, October 7, 2013). Andrew's careful discussion about this "hypothetical" (Andrew, October 7, 2013) issue was in marked contrast with Hannah's more frank statements about the legalities and direct references to police involvement.

While answering a question concerning how Hannah would ideally like the administration at her school to respond to a student negatively targeting a teacher through OSM, Hannah was specific in what their possible response should be. She stated that administrator's role was that "they're the front-line in terms of getting police [involved]" (Hannah, October 20, 2013). Hannah went on to talk about possible police involvement in running a "workshop educating the kids about digital citizenship like how to properly behave on the social media sites" (Hannah, October 20, 2013) as a reaction to an incident within the school. Hannah was clear that her response to this with connection to police involvement and possible legal actions were biased due to her personal experiences.

Hannah explained that "[the teachers at my school] had an issue in the past where kids putting out pictures on Facebook that were very inappropriate but they were taking pictures of themselves and of their friends and doing that" (Hannah, October 20, 2013) and this incident prompted police involvement. She was clear that this was an administrative responsibility by stating, "a call the principal made. He went and said this was a bigger issue, police came in" (Hannah, October 20, 2013).

**Conclusion**

An analysis of the data has revealed that the participants in this study share a concern about this issue which can be seen as transferable to others within the profession and they understand the potential for this negative targeting to become hugely
problematic to the point of legal proceedings. The teachers who participated in my study also share many of the same views on how to address the issue, as well as how they interact with students through OSM and its place within their own lives and professions.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide some possible responses for the question of "In what ways can educators address student social media abuse aimed at instructors?" Through this research study, it has become apparent that there are no concrete answers to this issue, but rather differing methods based on individual experiences and opinions which will be further explored below. Generally, the possible strategies that can be utilized fall under two categories: proactive measures or reactive administrative measures.

Implications for Practice

Proactive Measures

Both Hannah and Andrew were strong proponents of introducing the concepts of "digital citizenship" (Hannah, October 20, 2013) into the classroom. Hannah defined this term as being a part of online social interaction etiquette, but also the realization that "what they post is now forever gone, it's for everyone to see. They will never be able to retract that whether it be a photograph or a statement" (Hannah, October 20, 2013). Andrew agreed with this idea of online responsibility, along with the necessity for proactive education to "understand the potential pros and cons of using [OSM]" (Andrew, October 7, 2013).

Authenticity

Andrew described an ideal situation for this measure where teachers should try to introduce these ideas by "just trying to weave it into, make it authentic in terms of [student's] experiences, and some of the things they're feeling and experiencing" (Andrew, October 7, 2013). Hannah agreed with the idea of sincerity when introducing
this into her classroom with the assumption being that students might not be as invested in learning about something that feels arbitrary on the part of the authority figure within the room.

Beyond this idea of authenticity, Hannah and Andrew's approaches to proactive measures when dealing with this issue were in contrast with one another. Hannah assumed more of a traditional teacher role, whereas Andrew advocated much more of a teacher-as-facilitator role in proactively combating students negatively targeting their teachers through OSM. The question remains of what forms can this take when put into practice.

*Frank Discussion and Debate within the Classroom*

As a part of his teacher-as-facilitator role, Andrew advocates setting up an environment within his own classroom, as well as other teacher's domains, that actively encouraged "frank discussion" (Andrew, October 7, 2013) and debate. This meant that students were given loose guidelines in how to structure their own discussions and debates, with Andrew guiding their actions and learning. He described students taking a stance on various issues, such as "whether social media was... was it a blessing or a curse" (Andrew, October 7, 2013), and then defending their personal views on OSM use. He recommended that educators introduce the topic of OSM, and the potential for negative targeting and abuse, in the classroom and that teachers should not limit how, when, or what kinds of discussions happen on the subject. Andrew suggested that

It might be as a whole group, it might be small group, and it might be independently as a result of something maybe a child has said. And it might be something that is affecting them with peers within the class, or beyond the class, and it might be something parents might be aware of, or not (Andrew, October 7, 2013).
Andrew believed strongly that this kind of open discussion was one of the best proactive measures that teachers can take within their classroom.

Workshops and Teaching Moments

In contrast with Andrew, Hannah discussed at length using teacher-led initiatives with a primary example being workshops. She had some experience with this idea, as she explained that, "we actually did a whole bullying workshop actually this year because I think Facebook for the kids and that kind of like Twitter its been used recently more so..." (Hannah, October 20, 2013). She emphasized that this was a part of teaching "health, you know, social interaction" (Hannah, October 20, 2013) to her students. Not only did Hannah advocate these teacher-led activities, but she also discussed a series of workshops that the Calgary Police offer to students within the schools.

Hannah was also a proponent of various teacher-led teaching moments within the classroom as a proactive measure, including "a class circle or a meeting or well it depends on who's involved" (Hannah, October 20, 2013). These teaching moments, Hannah stressed, should be as authentic as possible to ensure that students are involved and participating, but again they are teacher-guided in a way that is missing from Andrew's approach.

Potential Risks and the Big Picture

Andrew and Hannah agreed that there are some potential issues with these proactive measures, while also acknowledging that some educators might be hesitant about opening a dialogue about this issue due to concerns about student maturity or ability to discuss the idea of OSM use. Andrew dismissed this concern by stating, "So, you know, not assuming that they can manage it or that they can’t, but just seeing what
really is the situation by just putting it out there. This question and social media I find is really something quite personal, and they’ll all have an opinion about it” (Andrew, October 7, 2013). He also advised teachers directly by stating that

therein lies the art of teaching, right? The like, reading your audience and seeing where they take you and you never know where they’re going to take you. And sometimes it might be dark and dangerous (Andrew, October 7, 2013).

Hannah spoke more to the fact that her students may be young, but they are embracing OSM at even younger ages still. Due to this fact, she sees a responsibility on the part of teachers to educate their students on responsible OSM use, as Hannah has concerns that parents may not understand enough of the online world to speak to what their children are doing. She agreed with Andrew by stating that "I think the big thing is to educate your students about it, I think that not talking about it is a mistake” (Hannah, October 20, 2013).

Reactive Administrative Support

While both participants agreed that proactive measures were much more preferred as a response to the question of “In what ways can educators address student social media abuse aimed at instructors?”, they acknowledged the potentially necessary presence of reactive measures.

Much of the reactive measures that both Hannah and Andrew discussed had to do with the administration at their individual schools. In this case, the word administration implies traditional educational authority figures such as the Principal and Vice-Principal. Andrew and Hannah both talked about involving their administration in situations that teachers might not be equipped to deal with.
Andrew advised that administration should be viewed as potential partners in responding to this issue. He stated, "you might not be equipped to deal with it. Maybe you put the conversation on hold, but you find the support of a colleague, or administrator, and then re-open the dialogue" (Andrew, October 7, 2013). He also talked about how these figures might know "proper channels to take" (Andrew, October 7, 2013) that front-line educators might not be aware of. In general, Andrew was a proponent of keeping the lines of communication open with the administration to ensure that the proper steps are taken, including possible notification to parents and other stakeholders.

Hannah agreed with Andrew concerning the role of the administration at her school, and their responsibilities to take action on behalf of the teacher who had been targeted through OSM. She stated that, "As an administrator, I'm trying to think again, they're the ones that need to keep the parents involved and then they're the front-line in terms of getting police or whatever" (Hannah, October 20, 2013). To this end, she also agreed with Andrew on the importance of speaking to the school's administration and ensuring that they are aware of the situation in a timely fashion.

Relation to the Literature Review

The literature review found in Chapter 2 for this study correlates almost exactly with the themes that arose out of transcribing and coding the interviews from both participants in many ways. There were many indicators throughout the interviews that both participants were already aware of the issues that became apparent in the literature review and this showed some deep connections between the two.
Both Hannah and Andrew used the term "bullying" to describe the behaviour that I had taken great pains to simply term 'negative targeting'. This was done consciously on my part as I did not wish to influence their way of thinking or talking about the issue, but both participants seemed to naturally use the term as an almost synonym for what I was describing. They did not make the distinction between a series of behaviour as opposed to a solitary incident, as I had done in the literature review. This was an interesting omission that could be used as a transferable assumption that other educators generally do not separate out bullying from other negative behaviours.

Another direct connection between the literature review and the data analysis was the emphasis on peer groups. Andrew and Hannah both talked about negative behaviours exhibited online within their student's peer groups, with students targeting one another used as an example and as a basis for many of their concerns over OSM use.

The issue of 'friending' also became a topic of discussion with both participants, though to differing degrees, and this was another major theme within the literature review. While Andrew briefly spoke to this theme, it was Hannah who truly discussed it. This might have been due to their different views on their own personal involvement in OSM, but Hannah spoke passionately against teachers having contact with students through these forums with particular emphasis on Facebook, which mimicked the literature gained on that theme.

Both participants also talked about utilizing some form of OSM within their classrooms, which was another topic that was discussed within the research included on Chapter 2. OSM was viewed particularly by Andrew as a way to truly enhance the learning of his students, particularly due to the fact that they were already so used to
working within this online world which again mimicked the idea that teachers should utilize student's prior knowledge in this area. Hannah used the term "digital citizenship" (Hannah, October 20, 2013) and the need to teach students about how to respect one another through OSM which again reflects the literature that was reviewed in Chapter 2.

**Limitations**

Through the course of this research study, there were significant limitations to gaining knowledge and understanding of the issue on "In what ways can educators address student social media abuse aimed at instructors?" The first was the amount of time given to the research which was impacted by the fact that this Masters program is two years in length. Due to this fact, the literature review as well as the qualitative research gained from participants was limited in scope so as to be manageable within that short time frame.

Another significant limitation was the issue of participants. Due to the subject of this study, I found that many teachers were hesitant to talk to their personal experiences, particularly those who had directly experienced this issue. What this meant was that the two participants I did interview had not been negatively targeted personally by students through OSM, which is a serious limitation. Instead, the participants were able to talk about their own peripheral experiences, second-hand narratives, and their own thoughts and fears.

Again, due to issues in gaining participants, I was only able to interview two teachers. The participants were also both elementary school teachers, which meant that secondary school teachers were excluded completely. With this study's focus on OSM, and the fact that older students are much more likely to participate in those forums, this
was a troubling omission. The fact that I did not speak to students was another limitation to this study.

Next Steps

Due to the fact that this issue is perpetrated by students, this is a crucial part of any research into this topic. How can educators really address a behaviour without knowing fully the motivations behind it? Are students targeting instructors due to an inherent power struggle, or are there other more complex issues at play here? An obvious next step would be to interview students on this topic, particularly those who have already perpetrated some action against their teachers.

Another excellent 'next step' would be to interview a much wider range of teachers in order to better ascertain a more complete view of the fears and thoughts on this issue. I would particularly aim to interview teachers who have experienced this negative targeting in an effort to better see how they would recommend that their peers address the potentiality as well as the outcomes of their particular circumstances.

Conclusion

This study was based in large part due to a single conversation that I had with a more experienced educator early on in my Master of Teaching degree. The individual, who taught at the primary and intermediate levels, recounted an experience with one of their students targeting them through OSM the year before. This had been an emotionally devastating situation for the instructor, as they felt that a good relationship existed between themselves and their student. Eventually, the principal and administration had had to become involved, along with the student's parents and possible legal action had been mentioned. This is where my research began.
Part of my program of study was to complete multiple placements, which entailed joining different school environments and teaching for periods of approximately four weeks. Without fail, at each of these placements, when asked about my research, the other faculty expressed concerns about being targeted in such a manner. They inquired about how they could address this potential issue as many seemed sure that at some point in their career they, or perhaps a colleague, would be negatively targeted by a student and they expressed concerns about how to respond. Teacher candidates are similarly alarmed at the idea of being targeted by students, and this specific issue has made its way into the curriculum in some programs for those wishing to join the teaching profession.

Through coursework in my program, a case study was presented to my colleagues and that dealt with exactly what my study was examining. A student had posted a very unfavourable and personal review of their teacher on www.Ratemyteachers.com, and we as teacher candidates were asked to examine and give opinions on how the matter should be resolved at the school level and beyond. From the presentation of this case study, it could be assumed that the education professor and the teacher’s education program were well aware of the possibility of this kind of scenario impacting any one of my colleagues and I, which shows that this is not an isolated issue that few are interested in discussing further. Instead, this case study was presented in one of the largest teaching institutions in Canada.

The reaction of my colleagues was also notable in that they were in no way surprised by the content of the narrative, but rather upset at the idea that they could be personally affected by this kind of student behaviour later on in their careers. They discussed the possibility of legislation at the board level addressing negative OSM use
targeting teachers, but they also debated what each stakeholder in the situation could do to either make the issue better or worse.

As I worked through this study, I realized a few key points that impacted what I was doing. The first is what I discussed in Chapter 2 concerning the fact that there is little academic research about this kind of targeting, and even less that shows this issue through a Canadian perspective. The second is that it is an incredibly emotionally charged issue for educators. The teacher who inspired me by initially sharing their experiences made it clear that emotion was very much a part of their ordeal, but it has also become part of a larger worry about the potentiality of this occurring within the profession. The educator that I talked to who inspired my student actually experienced this negative targeting, but I have realized in more generalized conversation with other individuals within the profession that this is a widespread fear. Due to this level of uncertainty surrounding this issue, there is much more that could be done to research and improve upon the possible answers that I have provided here.
References


   Venturebeat.


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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Section 1: General Personal Background Information

1. What is your name and occupation?

2. What is your academic background?
   a. Which Universities have you attended?
   b. What did you major/minor/specialize in?

3. How long have you been a teacher?
   a. What grades and subject matter do you teach?
   b. Have you ever taught outside of this grade and subject?

Section 2: Background and Literacy with Online Social Media

4. In your personal life, do you utilize online social media?
   a. If yes, what form does this take?
   b. If no, why do you abstain from online social media use?

5. Do you utilize online social media use within your classroom?
   a. How so?

6. Do you interact with students through social media outside of the classroom?
   a. What forms does this take?
   b. Do you have any policies for social media use with students?

7. Are discussions about social media use utilized in your classroom or with students?
   a. What forms does this take?

Section 3: Experiences with Negative Social Media Targetting

8. Have you ever experienced a negative targeting by a student, or former student, through social media?

9. Please describe your relationship with this student prior to this event.
   a. In general, what kind of student were they?

10. What form did this take?

11. How were you able to find out about this negative targeting?
    a. If it was through a 3rd party, what was the relationship?

12. What actions did you take after discovery?
a. If school administration was involved, what actions did they take/advice given?
b. Were parents/other interested parties involved?

13. How did this targeting impact your classroom interaction with both that specific student and their classmates?
   a. Were other students aware of what had happened? How?

14. What were the repercussions for the student after this negative targeting?

15. What were the repercussions for you?

16. Did this event change anything within your classroom or how you taught?

17. Do you feel that the situation was dealt with properly?
   a. Please expand on if you were satisfied or not.

Section 4: Recommendations

18. Ideally, how do you feel your experience should have been resolved?

19. On reflection, is there anything that you would have done differently prior to this incident?

20. What are your recommendations for how to deal with negative social media use targeting teachers?
   a. What advice would you give to other teachers, school administrators, school boards, Ministry of Education?

21. Do you have any additional comments?
Appendix B: Consent Letter

Date: Monday, October 7, 2013

Dear _____________________________,

My name is Shannon Smyth and I am a Master of Teaching student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). This is a letter inviting you to participate in my research project that is concerned with online social media being utilized by students to educators. I am looking at specifically what academic institutions can do to address this issue.

Your involvement in this study would include participating in a 45-60 minute, audio-taped interview that will occur at a time convenient for you. This interview will include questions regarding your experiences with your own social media use, your relationships with students, any experiences you might have with being targeted through social media by students, and any other thoughts you might have on this subject.

The audio recordings will be transcribed and the data within it analyzed. Your specific responses will be kept confidential and your identity will remain anonymous, as pseudonyms will be used in any written report or presentation that may arise from this study. During the course of this research, only my supervisor and I will have access to this data as it will be stored in a secured locker at OISE/UT and all data will be destroyed no later than five years after the successful completion of this study.

Please be assured that your participation in this project is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question during the interview, to stop the interview at any time or withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. This research study involves minimal risks and will work to benefit future educators and administrators in how this issue will be handled. A summary of my research results as well as the full report (if you would like a copy) can be sent to you via e-mail.

Please feel free to contact either myself or my faculty supervisor should you have any questions or require further information. You also always have the option of contacting the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273, if you have any questions about your rights as a participant.

If you agree to be interviewed for this research, please sign the attached form in preparation for the interview. The form can be submitted at the interview, or scanned and
emailed to shannon.smyth@mail.utoronto.ca. Please retain a copy of this letter for your records.

    Thank you very much for your help.

    Sincerely,

    Shannon Smyth
    Principal Investigator
    (416)476-3488

    Patrick Finnessy, Ph.D.
    Research Supervisor
    (416)978-0078

Consent to Participate

[   ] I wish to participate in this OISE/UT project as outlined above.

Participant’s Printed Name: ______________________________________________________

Participant’s Signature: ______________________________________________________

Date: ___________________________