



“Should I say that?”: Venting, Repercussions, and Self-censorship on Social Media

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What is a social networking site?

- Create a user profile
- Make connections
- View and traverse those connections

Content properties on SNS

- Persistence
- Searchability
- Replicability
- Invisible audiences

Content properties on SNS

- Persistence
- Searchability
- Replicability
- Invisible audiences
- Ghosts from the past
- Unintended reach
- Rapid dissemination
- Your boss

What do I mean by “venting”?

- Catharsis theory
- Freud and the “hydraulic model of anger”
- Does it help?

Venting in the academic workplace

- As public academics
 - Steven Salaita / Saida Grundy
 - Bigotry?
 - reading intent

Venting in the academic workplace

- Which policies will prevail?
 - “Academic freedom” / 1st Amendment
 - “Civility in discourse”

Venting in the private sector

- Right to organize under National Labor Relations Act, §7
- Counterproductive behavior versus “concerted action”
- NLRB finds concerted actions --> firings reversed
- NLRB finds only “venting” --> firings upheld

	Protections afforded	Inherent tension(s)
First amendment	Unpopular or offensive speech	Minimal enforcement
NLRA §7	Right to organize	-- At odds with workplace policies -- Concerted action v. gripes
Academic freedom	Research, teach, and correspond without fear of firing	At odds with policies that stress civility
Consideration of context / intent by reader	Possible justification of solitary offensive remark	-- Easy to make snap judgment -- Much harder to evaluate speech in context

Measures to protect online speech and associated tensions they create

Interventions

- Katie Duke
 - Nurse, NY Presbyterian Hospital (and reality TV celebrity)
 - Captioned OR photo on Instagram with “Man v. 6 train”
- Response
 - “If you hung around nurse’s station and heard the way we talk about injuries, life and death you might get the wrong impression but it’s just a coping mechanism.”
 - Claimed photo originally posted by doctor, and he was not reprimanded

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- Richard White
 - IBM employee, union member
 - Complained that layoffs left gaping hole in workforce experience – said business was being “tanked” by management
- Response
 - Appealed termination to NLRB, and won!

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- Ted Bishop
 - Head of Professional Golfers Association of America (PGA)
 - Compared golfer Ian Poulter to a “little girl squealing at recess” for publicly criticizing more accomplished golfers
- Response
 - Apologized for his tweet to his daughters and all offended parties
 - Asked permission to address governing board and explain/apologize

Interventions

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FIRED

&

BANNED FOR

LIFE

Interventions

- Britt McHenry
 - ESPN reporter
 - Filmed berating the clerk at a towing company
 - Film went viral
- Response
 - Issued an apology via Twitter



Britt McHenry · @BrittMcHenry

📅 16th Apr 2015 from TwitLonger

1

👍 1

Tweet

Like

In an intense and stressful moment, I allowed my emotions to get the best of me and said some insulting and regrettable things. As frustrated as I was, I should always choose to be respectful and take the high road. I am so sorry for my actions and will learn from this mistake.

[↩ Reply](#) · [⚠ Report Post](#)

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Britt McHenry

- Collected 3,379 replies to apology tweet in (close to) real time

Word	n	Sentiment
apol-	316	Apology not genuine / apologize to person you hurt
fire	152	McHenry should be fired <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10 instances of negation or rhetorical Q
sorry	98	Only sorry because you got caught
caught	77	
human	66	Stress humanity of victim / human fallibility of McHenry
everyone	65	Everyone has bad days / (small) McHenry thinks she's better than everyone

Britt McHenry

Word	n	Sentiment
bitch	122	Directed at McHenry
class-	77	McHenry has no class
looks	50	McHenry got job due to looks / not right to criticize others based on looks

McHenry - Outcomes

- Suspended for one week (less than some other ESPN personalities)
- Did not “feed the trolls”
- Returned to Twitter

What did suspension actually do to resolve the situation?

Prevention

- Educate in classroom
 - Professional writing
 - Persistence, searchability
 - Rhetoric and comp studies
 - Replicability, invisible audiences
- Discuss in workplace
 - Division of individual and organizational representative
 - Acknowledge venting is real (forums / alternatives)

How we're behaving

- “Spiral of silence”
- Fear of shaming
 - “I suddenly feel with social media like I’m tiptoeing around an unpredictable, angry, unbalanced parent who might strike out at any moment. It’s horrible”

Does social media content represent “us” anymore?

Did it ever?

Alternatives to summary dismissal

- Due process
 - Hearing
 - Restorative justice
- Recursive practices
 - Modification of policies
 - Better training
- Recognition of place
 - Stop reading employees social media
 - Social media as the corner pub (Andrews, 2011)

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