Chapter 7
The Resonant Roar of the Internet: How to Use Social Media and Keep Your Job

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ABSTRACT
This chapter will examine the intersection of law, policy, and appropriate teacher conduct in the online environment through a series of vignettes and offer suggestions for both the pre-service and in-service teacher to successfully navigate social media throughout their careers. The author has captured contemporary relationships through the lifeline of social media and has highlighted some of the ultimate consequences of the line between personal and professional lives that became blurred in the online environment. The issue of the First Amendment protection as well as the issue of the Educational Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) are addressed.

INTRODUCTION
I’m just going to just go ahead and say it... the blacks are the ones causing the problems and this ‘racial tension’... I guess that’s what happens when you flunk out of school and have no education. I’m sure their parents are just as guilty for not knowing what their kids were doing; or knew and didn’t care. I’m almost to the point of wanting them all segregated on one side of town so they can hurt each other and leave the innocent people alone. Maybe the 50s and 60s were really on to [sic] something. Now, let the bashing of my true and honest opinion begin...GO! #imnotracist #imsickofthemcausingtrouble #itwasagatedcommunity (Fetcher, 2015).

This is the June 9, 2015 Facebook post by Karen Fitzgibbons, fourth grade teacher at Bennett Elementary School in Wolfforth, Texas, in response to the resignation of McKinney, Texas, Police Corporal David Casebolt, who was shown on video pointing his service revolver at unarmed, African-American
teenagers at an unruly pool party. Fitzgibbons, a 16-year teaching veteran, was fired the next day by the Frenship Independent School District despite Fitzgibbon’s explanation that she was making a “personal” and not “educational” post.

As illustrated by Karen Fitzgibbon’s misunderstanding of her free speech rights when it comes to making a “personal” post on a social media website versus what may be a work related “educational” post for which a teacher may be held personally liable and terminated, this chapter will examine the intersection of law, policy, and appropriate teacher conduct in the on-line environment through a series of vignettes and offer suggestions for both the pre-service and in-service teacher to successfully navigate social media throughout their careers. Be forewarned, some of the solutions provided to the vignettes may be wholly dependent upon geography, social mores, and local custom.

**SOCIAL MEDIA DEFINED**

**Vignette: Idaho Athletic Coaches on Vacation**

Laraine Cook was engaged to be married to Tom Harrison. They were both employed by Pocatello High School in Idaho. Cook was the girls’ basketball coach and Harrison the boys’ football coach. In July 2013 when the couple took a family vacation in Oregon, they posed in their swimsuits on a lake for a photograph. In one photograph, Harrison had his hand on Cook’s bikini-clad breast. She posted the photo on her Facebook page, but took it down two days later when the high school’s Athletic Director, Robert Parker, told Harrison that the photo may cause problems for the couple (Bryce, 2014). On October 21, 2013, someone forwarded a copy of the Facebook post with Cook and Harrison’s photo to the school administration and, despite not having a social media policy, the school district immediately dismissed Cook, but only reprimanded Harrison. The district then submitted Cook’s case to Idaho’s Professional Standards Committee to revoke Cook’s teaching certificate on the grounds of “immorality.” Cook appealed (Bryce, 2014). Which side will win?

**What is Social Media?**

Social media is a lifeline for contemporary relationships, especially for young adults. To keep in touch with family and friends, texting, tweeting, and “Facebooking” has replaced the handwritten letters of yore. For pre-service and in-service teachers, the line between their personal and professional lives often blurs in the on-line environment. For school administrators and state legislatures interested in policing teachers’ on-line activity, the difficulty lies in determining what is constitutionally permissible in regulating off-duty conduct.

There have been numerous studies encouraging teachers to embrace technology in the classroom, from laptops to iPads, as a way to engage student learning. Teachers using Twitter, for example, as a rapid-response mechanism to developing relevant topics for class discussion report great success. On the other hand, school district policies to prevent inappropriate student-teacher relationships have enacted restrictive social media policies that specifically countermand the benefits of the technological age in pursuing educational goals. Many educators believe schools should acknowledge the reality of the ubiquitous nature of social media in everyday life for both teachers and students, and embrace the benefits social media can offer. New Canaan, Connecticut, high school librarian, Michelle Luhtala,