Wobble Moments: Ethical Ambiguity in Social Networks

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Social networks offer researchers unique access to communities and topics of interest, but they also present complex ethical dilemmas that can unsettle traditional research paradigms. While there have been guidelines specifically developed to ethically assist researcher considerations on these platforms, the plethora of ambiguous complexities in online encounters is difficult to attend to. These uncertainties, which expand beyond the parameters of existing guidelines, can evoke the researcher 'wobble moments.' A suspending of certainty, prompted by events not easily thought of in advance that cause hesitancy and unease. Employing 'wobble moments' as a framework, this paper shares a series of ethical tensions the author encountered when researching in social networks. By thinking, reflecting and responding to these wobbles, the equilibrium of 'appropriate' ethical conduct is unsettled. When dialogued, these moments signal significant occurrences that are filled with uncertainty and simultaneous possibilities. The paper contends these moments can refine and rethink what constitutes 'good' ethical practices, evoking (re)newed pathways and nuanced considerations when ethically researching in social networks. Embracing the wobbly complexities in place of hierarchical and colonial steeped values, researchers can develop more collaborative and responsive ethical practices, better serving the communities they engage with.

Keywords: social networks; ethics; dialogism; researching; friend request; identity sharing.

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Introduction

Ethical considerations are of critical importance for all research but are especially significant in social networks and unfettered online platforms, which can pose challenges that extend beyond regulatory recommendations. Social networks offer researchers unique access

to communities and topics of interest, but they also present complex ethical dilemmas that can unsettle traditional research paradigms. As pervasive platforms that bridge online and offline worlds, social networks serve as fertile ground for exploring marginalised communities (Kucirkova & Quinlan, 2017). However, their unfettered nature creates inherent ethical tensions (Kaye et al., 2021), particularly concerning public versus private data, identity sharing between participants and researchers, and issues of digital anonymity (Townsend, 2017). Existing ethical guidelines often fall short in addressing these complexities, prompting researchers to critically examine recommendations that may not fully encompass the nuanced challenges encountered when researching in social networks.

In this paper, I employ a 'wobble moments' framework to explore how unforeseen and unsteady events affect researchers' sense of appropriate conduct in these spaces. Drawing from my experiences and engaging with literature on similar ethical tensions, I highlight these wobble moments as significant occurrences that evoke feelings of unease and uncertainty. Originally developed to mentor student teachers facing ambiguous situations in classrooms (Fecho et al., 2015, 2021), this framework facilitates investigations into unsteady feelings arising from complex scenarios that challenge established protocols. By identifying a 'wobble moment' as an instance of doubt or uncertainty about how to proceed, I argue that dialoguing about these encounters can (re)conceptualise ethical recommendations, leading to renewed notions of 'appropriate' conduct in social networking research.

Tensions within Ethical Guidelines

Social network use is continually advancing, granting access to people's everyday lives, making them ideal research sites for a variety of communities and topics of interest (Camacho et al., 2020). An enduring comment from social networking literature, beginning in the early 2000s, is an emphasis on the growth of these sites in 'recent years,' indicating their continual expansion (see Carrington et al., 2005; Rains & Brunner, 2015; Verduyn et al., 2020). This ongoing growth highlights how social networks continue to grow and evolve. Consequently, they enable researchers to access the lived experiences of growing communities, with vantages into increasingly transdisciplinary and interpersonal encounters that researchers might not otherwise have access to (Fu et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the ubiquitous fixation and mundane integration of these online platforms have contributed to the 'postdigital' turn, offering further researcher entry points. Because social networks are no longer novel, existing in and throughout everyday life, they

have come to define how peoples interact through the habitual and unremarkable integration of digital and physical encounters. The term 'postdigital' highlights these pervasive, condensed online/offline realities, whereby the digital realm permeates every aspect of daily life (Sinclair & Hayes, 2019; Westbrook, 2024). This 'post' evolved integration of the digital into life, with human-technology relations defining all aspects, such as social interactions (Knox, 2019). For researchers, the integral and interwoven use of social networks, which are interconnected throughout the everyday, offers a unique entry into a variety of social contexts, contestations and communities, including those potentially marginalised or otherwise difficult to access (Kucirkova & Quinlan, 2017). Although these sites enable researchers' such an entry, given the ubiquity of human technology in the public forum, social networks pose considerable ethical challenges, which, in their nuanced complexity, are often not well attended to in institutional ethical frameworks (Townsend, 2017). Due to their uptake as research locales, ethical guidelines specify recommended conduct in social networks; however, the complexities of online access and interactions can result in limiting, bounded directives.

Public vs Private Data Divides

A significant ethical consideration and contestation in institutional ethical guidelines is the extent to which data can be considered private or public. The Government of Canada's (2022) ethical guidelines note that the line between public versus private in these spaces is not clear-cut. Privacy settings on social networks, like Facebook, are typically set to 'Public' by default. Users are not always aware of the public or private nature of their posts, nor might they know how to view, edit, or find their privacy settings. As a result, researchers using data from these platforms must consider the ethical implications of this possible lack of awareness (Kroll & Stieglitz, 2021). Therefore, potentially ambiguous perceptions of real versus perceived privacy can complicate ethical approaches. These complexities call for ongoing considerations of how to engage in these sites, which, in their entangled realities, can stretch beyond guideline recommendations.

Furthermore, social networking data that is explicitly in the public domain does not necessarily exempt researchers from ethical consideration. Platforms, such as Reddit, which anonymises all users, are often excluded from ethical applications. However, Gliniecka (2023) stresses that this availability of data does not invalidate the role of ethical requirements. Rather, they contend, it heightens the need for such consideration by challenging the lip service of institutional guidelines for a relational responsibility. For

instance, although publicly available, there may be a ‘disinhibition effect’ for content, whereby a user may act in a way they would find embarrassing or would not engage in if they were in a physical, public space (Gelinas et al., 2017). Hence, it is overly simplistic to argue that because the data is publicly available on social networks, it does not require ethical consideration.

There can also be confusion on the part of social networking users regarding what ethical procedures are required for the collection and analysis of their posts. Twitter users tweeting in a domain they understood to be open were found to be largely unaware that researchers were able to gather and analyse their posts without their consent (Gilbert et al., 2021). Further complicating ethical approaches, research has also highlighted differences in how people feel their sense of safety and privacy is ethically safeguarded online. These include the social norms of the platform, specific communities being researched, the content of the posts and who is analysing the data (Dym & Fiesler, 2020; Gilbert et al., 2021). These ambiguities resist a one-size-fits-all approach to ethical conduct when researching online, problematising stringent requirements and standardised guidelines.

Users’ expectations for the privacy of their social networking content are another key ethical concern. Researchers are encouraged to question the extent to which users have ‘reasonable expectations of privacy’, determined somewhat by the platform and its terms and conditions (Townsend & Wallace, 2016, p. 5). Yet, as already indicated, users may not have contemplated the full spectrum of impacts their posts may have in other spaces, such as conferences and publications, nor the privacy terms and agreements of the platform they have signed up for (Toronto Metropolitan University, 2017). Conversely, there are those who argue that public domain content does not require informed consent, as users are presumably aware of their broad audience, even if their data usage extends beyond their initial expectations (Beninger, 2017). Notably, Gliniecka (2023) contends that there may be strict ethical requirements that prompt researchers to contend that public domain data in social networks does not require ethical consent. This is because of the possibilities of stringent ethical dictates that can significantly alter or cease a study. There may, therefore, be a paradoxical relationship between overzealous ethical requirements and a lowering of ethical approaches to social networking research due to loophole solutions that might encourage lax avenues.

Identity Sharing

Another ethical debate is the extent to which researchers ought to be identifiable to participants. In social networks, participants and researchers have access to arguably more information about one another than they might in traditional research contexts. Contingent on one's privacy settings, this data could encompass friends, families, roles, opinions, interests and likes, as well as geo-locations. While researchers can have access to such participant information, participants can also have access to the researchers' private spaces (Rowsell & Pahl, 2015). According to Kozinets (2016), this sharing can reveal the researcher's position and interest in the study through their personal images and texts. Such co-sharing can connote a researcher's ethics of care due to being part of the communities being researched. In contrast, Toronto University's (2017) ethical guidelines claim that the use of a researcher's personal account that offers this identity sharing is problematic given the details it reveals. They contend that information, such as ideology and political affiliations, can shift the involvement of participants. This sharing may be particularly concerning when researching in communities that might pose considerable risk to researchers, such as the alt-right (Massanari, 2018). The inherent tensions traversed suggest that the ambiguities of social networking research are not easily attended by ethical guidelines, including those specifically formulated for such tasks.

Digital Anonymity

Another ethical recommendation across guidelines highlights concerns for the anonymity of online data and participants. Ethical guidelines from the British Psychological Society and La Trobe University advise against publishing verbatim quotes that could identify participants through search engines (Ethics, Integrity & Biosafety, Research Office, 2023; Kaye et al., 2021). Such confidentiality can be especially crucial when drawing from sensitive content and communities at risk of persecution. Notably, while extra ethical consideration is required when researching marginalised communities, this level of consideration is often not extended to social networking ethical guidelines (Klassen & Fiesler, 2022). This shortcoming can lead to diminished trust between these groups and researchers (Zong & Matias, 2022). This is because of the potential for perpetuation of harmful stereotypes or biases, given that social networks are ripe with implicit biases and echo chambers (Wang et al., 2020). Consequently, steeped in confirmation bias, stereotypical content exposure and the spread of misinformation, social networks appear to be spaces requiring further ethical considerations when engaging with marginalised communities, not less.

However, the lack of additional consideration for marginalised communities is not the only concern for researchers in this space. It is also important that marginalised peoples are not overlooked, with social networks offering a vantage into communities that may otherwise be silenced. On the other hand, if researchers focus on non-marginalised, amplified voices, such as those in the rising alt-right, is this ethical considering the harm these dialogues can do? Massanari (2018) contends that there is potential for this harm because the investigation of such content may embolden users in their dogmatic views and how they enact these. This tension, often not addressed in ethical guidelines, hints at the expansive social networking considerations required of researchers that are not well addressed in current frameworks..

Ethical Recruitment

Another ethical concern is how researchers elicit recruitment in social networks. Because it is almost impossible to determine the true age of participants and the extent to which people engage with consent forms, there is the potential for risks and coercion (Ethics, Integrity & Biosafety, Research Office, 2023). For instance, participants may click through consent forms without fully understanding the implications, or studies might inadvertently pressure social connections to participate, potentially straining relationships.

Researchers' use of personal accounts to recruit in social networks also has the potential to pose challenges. Fileborn (2016) discovered that a considerable issue was losing control over a recruitment post due to the 'Share' feature. This snowballing made it difficult to track where and to whom the information was disseminated. The loss of control resulted in misinformation reaching participants. Fileborn (2016) found it unclear who was ethically responsible and accountable for addressing questions once the post began to spread beyond their feed's 'view'. The challenges posed by this snowballing effect problematise ethical frameworks that often do not extend to consider how others - who are not participants but rather fellow social networking users who commonly share content in these sites, affect ethical tensions. It is these ambiguities inherent in social networks that do not appear to be well attended by 'box-ticking' ethical guidelines, requiring further scrutiny of these document recommendations (Whelan, 2018).

To further complicate 'best practice', ethical guidelines have opposing recommendations for recruitment. Toronto Metropolitan University's (2017) guidelines highlight that certain social networking platforms, such as Facebook posts and Event pages, cannot adequately protect the confidentiality and privacy of those who elect to participate in a study. For this reason, they encourage researchers to post recruiting content in the main feed

but recommend private, direct messaging for responses. Conversely, user researchers (those focused on understanding users' behaviours) from the United Kingdom's Department for Education (n.d.) are not allowed to recruit in social networks publicly or privately. This regulation seeks to remove the potential discomfort, perceived favouritism and lack of impartiality that may be evoked by doing so. In addition, the regulation aims to alleviate the likelihood of recruiting those with larger influence and presence in these sites, minimising a diversity of perspectives and possibly prompting biased insights (Department for Education, n.d.). These conflicting approaches further affirm the complexities of researching in social networks, arguably highlighting the indeterminateness of ethical guidelines.

Consequently, although the aforementioned ethical recommendations and concerns are not exhaustive, they are indicative of the inherent ambiguities and tensions of researching in social networks. The complexities and contradictions traversed highlight how these sites are not so easily encompassed by guidelines. Signalling this insight, one such ethical document acknowledged that such research 'can raise particular, sometimes non-obvious, challenges in adhering to existing ethics principles' (Kaye et al., 2021, p. 4). In response to the challenges and uncertainties these ethical ambiguities pose, in this paper, I employ a 'wobble moments' framework to consider what unsteady complexities, when researching in social networks, have to offer.

'Wobble Moments': A Method(ological) Framing

'Wobble moments' form a methodological framing situated in dialogic philosophy to consider unsteady feelings and situations (Fecho et al., 2015), such as those raised by social networking's ethical ambiguities. By attending to these moments, researchers may arrive at potential possibilities of thoughtful responses that broaden beyond these moments, adding to their ethical toolkit and values. Initially developed to assist mentored and novice teachers to contemplate and respond to teaching challenges that expanded beyond what could be preconceived, this framework prompts a dialogue with the self and others to shift from reactive responses to efforts to understand with deeper complexity (Fecho et al., 2015, 2021). A wobble moment can suspend certainty, compelling the self to unpack what might be perceived as 'knowable' best practices or ethical guidelines of the researcher's conduct. A wobble framing prompts one 'to think, to reflect, to measure response, to call upon past practice, to choose from a range of options, to gain deeper understanding of the stances of others' (Fecho et al., 2015, p. 4). Therefore, this framing can bring renewed meanings and

thoughtful possibilities to situations that pose tensions, which cannot be easily thought of in advance, as indicated in the aforementioned social networking literature.

Wobble moments are far from easy, yet it is these challenges that can lead to thoughtful approaches and possibilities, facilitating a contemplative dialogue (Fecho et al., 2015). Such moments can elicit dread, paralysis and foreboding, given that they challenge the resources and prescribed tools at one's disposal, such as the limitations of ethical guidelines for social networking research. However, it is in these liminal spaces of uncertainty that new thinking can be developed with a cautious ambiguity, well suited to social networks' complexities. With dialogue forever positioned toward an unknowable future, wobble moments recognise uncertainty as welcome possibilities instead of dread-filled maybes (Fecho et al., 2015, 2021). Given how this ill ease causes one to reconsider research, it can facilitate value-filled inquiry with the self and others to unsettle researchers' equilibrium of 'appropriate' conduct.

To employ this method, first, a wobble moment is recognised when it leaves the researcher feeling uncomfortable, uncertain and unsure of how to respond, given that the event expands beyond the parameters of existing guidelines and advice. Second, having located such a wobble, these events are initially described, with the next step to consider such moments in dialogue with others. For this paper, literature forms this role by considering what other authors might offer when discussing similar tensions. This process is not a debate where a single answer is sought but a dialogue in which opposing lenses complicate and complexify the wobble, in keeping with the unfolding and complex nature of social networking researching realities. To form this dialogue, aspects that 'stood out' for the researcher's subjectivity are accentuated alongside the issues the moment raises for them. Fecho and colleagues recommend the following question during this process: 'What feelings did the story evoke in you, or what emotions seemed to be lurking beneath the surface of the story' (Fecho et al., 2015, p. 31). When paired with other voices, such as literature, in conversation with the emotions the wobble raises, the dialogue seeks out possibilities enabled by taking the time to reflect and think on ethical ambiguities. Brought into conversation with the wider professional community, a thoughtful and possibilistic response is developed (Fecho et al., 2015.

To begin this process, I outline several wobble moments that I experienced when researching in Facebook groups. The first Phase One group had approximately 16,000 members at the time of data collection, with a 'closed' setting, meaning posts were not viewable to non-members. The second Phase Two group was created with the explicit

purpose of further investigating the dialogues of the first group. In these spaces, the following questions orientated the research: *How do teachers strategically respond to their political concerns and values? What strategies did they employ in an endeavour to be heard?*

Ethical consent was gained from RMIT University, alongside the informed consent of the groups' admin and the posters' whose content was included in the research, via Messenger's private space. An announcement was also posted in the main feed of Phase One that I would not be including or analysing any content without the informed consent of users. Yet, even with these guidelines adhered to, ethical ambiguities and tensions arose that were beyond my initial expectations. These wobble moments centred on perceptions of privacy, identity sharing and friend requests. I now reflect on my personal experiences as a researcher through a wobble framing, bringing my subjectivity into dialogue with relevant literature to consider the possibilities these momentary uncertainties may offer.

Dialoguing with the Wobble

A wobble moment I encountered signalled unsteady privacy perceptions in overtly large but closed social networking groups. Upon seeking the informed consent of members' posts in the large Phase One group, I was surprised to receive four out of thirty 'No, I do not consent' for my post to be included in the research replies. One respondent went as far as capitalising on this answer, while another sent me an unprompted private message after seeing my announcement to emphasise they wanted their data to stay private. My initial reaction to these responses was one of surprise, especially at the vehemence of the two specified replies. I contemplated at the time that political content was likely a sensitive topic for some teachers, prompting them to keep this dialogue in the group, in addition to the possible distrust in how their data might be presented, eliciting a 'No' response. However, I had a lurking feeling that these reactions affirmed the user's sense that their posts were private, prompting a candour of dialogue. The thousands of members in the Phase One group constituted a large-scale network. As such, it stretched the boundaries of a private space in such an expansive community.

These moments evoked ethical concerns about the potentially differing perceptions of what constituted reasonable expectations of privacy. This feeling brought to the surface a disquiet for the trust users might place in such a platform to provide a 'safe space' for sensitive discussions. Dialogues they might not choose to share in other locales. As a researcher, these interactions made me further consider differing perceptions of a social

network's privacy and safety. A lurking feeling of the dangers present for researchers and other network users persisted in these tensions, prompting me to think of the potential consequences of these ambiguities of privacy conceptions. These dangers might include the unintended exposure of users' sensitive information, given their perceptions of privacy; the comprising of users' identity when included and published in academic spaces, given the accessibility of online data; in addition to possible professional or legal consequences users might face if the discussions they believed to be private became public in multiple spaces, with conceivable impacts to their employment and relationships. These lurking dangers emphasise the considerable potential for harm when researching in social networks, highlighting the value of wobble moments that encourage researchers to pause and engage in reflexivity.

Inconsistencies between perceptions and the reality of privacy appeared apparent in further research in closed groups. Exploring the paradoxical privacy-openness of closed Facebook groups, Chalklen and Anderson (2017) researched with mothers of young children in a group. They explored these users' perceptions of privacy, specifically when sharing sensitive content, such as photos of their children and views on breastfeeding and vaccinations. They found that the mothers valued the groups as a safe space to build community during what could otherwise be an isolating time. Conversely, the mothers were also concerned about privacy, with special consideration for the digital footprint they were creating for their children. Children's photos particularly prompted some to contemplate their closed group as a 'public domain' (p. 6), stressing 'Nothing is personal anymore' (p. 7). These tensions highlight that users may be well aware of the ambiguities of supposedly private social networking spaces. Yet, the participants from Chalklen and Anderson's (2017) research emphasised that the positive experiences of these sites outweigh their negative potentials. Perhaps then, my lurking suspicion of user naivety of privacy was a misplaced concern centred in my own subjectivity. Such worries overlooked the complexities of others' strategic considerations, such as how, what and why they chose to post in this space, possibly shifting the trade-offs between the incentives and downfalls of social networks. As such, participants can be rethought of as agentic and cable social networking users, shifting to a strength-based framing and challenging notions of them as solely ill-informed and naïve.

Conversely, closed group posts can be easily screen-captured and shared online, sometimes with considerable detrimental consequences (Poloni, 2019). The volume of information stored in social networks can be appealing to adversaries, such as scammers, as well as advertisers; those who do not take security concerns seriously on these platforms are

vulnerable to a variety of threats, including risks to confidentiality and social embarrassment (Jain et al., 2021). There is evidence of the identities of Facebook group members being harvested by corporations, affecting, for example, members of an undisclosed group associated with high-risk breast cancer who suspect their insurance premiums were raised because of this membership (Fazzini & Farr, 2018). This event led to questions 'whether users of a 'closed' group have a reasonable expectation of privacy' (Fazzini & Farr, 2018, p. 16). A literature review of social networking research by Kapoor et al. (2018) highlighted inconsistencies in users' perceptions of privacy. The ability to edit their settings and perceived trust in a network instilled a sense of safety and privacy that constitutes digital risk, prompting a greater willingness to share content.

Having dialogued with this literature through the lens of my wobble moment, I affirm that the inherent tensions surrounding privacy settings in social networks persist. These ambiguities, which exceed perfunctory guidelines, necessitate a nuanced approach to ethical research conduct. The enduring nature of online content, forever available online, juxtaposed with the fluidity of perceived audiences and user-derived benefits, calls for ongoing, thoughtful considerations of both perceived and actual privacy in social networking spaces. This tension demands that researchers remain deeply engaged with their community knowledge, recognising that ethical decision-making cannot be outsourced to guidelines devoid of contextual understanding. Moreover, it evokes a movement beyond simplistic notions of participants as naive users, acknowledging their agency and varied perceptions of online safety. Doing so embraces a more contemplative, 'wobbly' approach to research design and data presentation. One that remains attentive to the inherent ambiguities of social networking encounters and the evolving nature of online interactions. Such an approach necessitates continuous reflection and dialogue, grounded in the researcher's immersion in their field and responsiveness to the complex, often unpredictable dynamics of social networking spaces.

Wobble Moments: Identity Sharing

When researching in Facebook, I chose to do so from my personal account, as opposed to creating a shell account. This identity sharing led to several wobble moments that prompted surprise and uncertainty. Upon asking users in Phase One and Two groups if they consented to be a part of the research, I received multiple 'Friend' requests from these individuals. These requests evoked a great sense of uncertainty in how I should respond. Was it ethical to accept them? If not, on what grounds might doing so pose an unethical risk? Was there the

potential for coercion? As a user who has a profile set to open and largely uses this space for professional purposes, what type of coercion might it elicit by accepting these users as friends? Drawing from my teaching background, where it is common for parents to seek out and add teachers on social networks, I followed the common centre guidelines to not engage with these community members in additional online spaces, ignoring the requests. Yet, doing so evoked a lurking sense of uncertainty and discomfort for me. It felt like I had rebuked those who were readily sharing their content with me; without their contributions, my research would not have been possible. So, was it ethical to ignore them in response?

Participant-researcher friend requests are seldom covered in guidelines for social networks, posing uncertainty for how to ethically respond. One such document from Edinburgh Napier University (2022) that discusses friend requests recommends that researchers consider whether their topic has the potential to be divisive or controversial. They followed this query by stating that researchers should not accept friend requests, keeping separation between their personal and professional realms. However, there are those whose research entailed participants accepting researcher friend requests, enabling greater access to participants' content that would otherwise remain private (see, for instance, Hennell et al., 2020). This approach has evoked a critical question for me: To what extent is the reciprocal sharing of social networking content between researchers and participants ethically sound?

The ethical implications of researcher-participant friends on social networking platforms raise complex questions about trust, authenticity and the boundaries of research relationships. According to research conducted by Chitac et al. (2020), accepting and sending friend requests was perceived to increase the visibility of 'researcher-researched commonalities', enabling participants to develop trust in the study. In addition to identifying areas of interest to investigate during data collection. Further affirming this stance, while some may find it unethical, Sou (2021) accepted all friend requests from participants they engaged with during ethnographic fieldwork because they considered ignoring or rejecting these invitations to be unethical. They explained that this lack of ethics was because it 'may signal that our friendship was only bound to the research, almost a pretence' (p. 477). Sou continued to say that post-research, their interactions with these people were minimal, including happy birthday wishes. The minimal interaction between participants and researchers underscores the often superficial nature of social networking 'friends', encouraging an ethical revision of these tenuous digital connections throughout and beyond the research phases. Moreno et al. (2013) explain that 'following' and 'friending' have a different connotation on social networks, implying a loose connection that comfortably

extends to acquaintances and associates. They explained that there are those who feel friend requests could result in relational misrepresentations of data. While also noting that the quantity of these 'friends' can be linked to social capital, emphasising this activity as different from traditional conceptions of friendships. As such, they conclude that accepting participants' 'friend requests' is not likely to prompt prolonged or close relationships between people (Moreno et al., 2013). Nevertheless, accepting these friend requests can pose ongoing ethical wobbles for researchers.

However, there can also be complex dilemmas with social network 'friending' due to the enduring nature of these connections. Sou (2021), who did so, explained that due to their research and stay in a Christian community, they concealed and fabricated their identity as a coupled lesbian, pretending to be married to a man. Sou felt that without this construction, their PhD research would be undermined, with this being highlighted in comments, such as 'Homosexuality is a mental disorder' and 'Homosexuals are a mistake by God; a defect in the population … You can catch homosexuality by being in close contact' (p. 476, emphasis added). Sou explains that despite these 'unpleasant homophobic views', they developed a connection with these people during their fieldwork, prompting them to accept their friend requests (p. 76). After having this contact with their private life, Sou kept their heterosexual façade by hiding photos and content of their partner, LGBTQ+ events attended, alongside liberal political views. This ongoing act caused discomfort for the researcher, who felt they were affirming colonial paradigms rooted in their curated image. Hence, friend status can pose paradoxical ethical challenges that evoke discomfort and lurking feelings of what it means to be ethical, for whom and whether such acts are static across all contexts.

Having engaged with this literature and reconsidered my participants' friend requests, I have a lurking sense that it was unethical to ignore these invitations. Although the extra access to the life of the researcher can pose its own ethical challenges, the informal nature of these platforms does not commit people to close bonds. Rather, they offer a point of connection that challenges flawed hierarchical, non-relational conceptions of the researcher as the 'knower' and participants as 'known' dichotomies, emphasising the extraction of knowledge (Udah, 2024; Sou, 2021). Steeped in colonial paradigms, this traditional conception can reinforce a power imbalance of Eurocentric worldviews, privileging the domination of Western knowledge production. The simple act of a friend request may offer a wobble to this problematic framing, fostering opportunities for equitable relationships and local collaborations. The potential to adopt flexible research approaches could be enabled in ways that respect local contexts. In addition, it could facilitate 'disobedient and defiant

research' that defies methodical box ticking and is reminiscent of institutional, ethical forms (Udah, 2024). In place of such practices is the possibility of a continual process of becoming between dialoguers involved in the research (as opposed to researcher and participant).

Given this wobbling dialogue with the literature, if faced with future participant friend requests, I would choose to accept these invitations as an ethical act. This is because accepting these invitations offers a point of connection that acknowledges the informal nature of these platforms without committing to close bonds. Simultaneously, it might affirm the relational commitment to the communities of research and the intentions of the researcher. In addition, to possibly negating the silencing that is perpetuated by colonial research paradigms, which institutional ethics applications are arguably steeped in (Uda, 2024). Unthinking such approaches can, therefore, offer decolonial wobble moments through a challenge to colonial assumptions that may foster unequal power dynamics.

Profile Access: Ethical Reciprocity?

During research, it became clear that participants were engaging with my personal profile. Upon responding 'Yes' to giving informed consent, one participant added that they planned on reading one of the newly published journal articles that I had recently posted on my home page. This response evoked surprise, as perhaps naively, it had not occurred to me that participants might be interested in my profile. Conversely, I also had a lurking sense that a certain level of reciprocity was due. Yet, prior to the research commencing, I had sanitised my content, including removing political group affiliations and not using profile photo badges that often carry political messaging. My reason for this activity was to attempt to balance reciprocity while also being concerned not to sway participants based on my political views. Like Sou (2021), I sought harmony with those involved in my study, given preconceptions of biases that my profile content might prompt. Yet, like Sou, I also worried that this removal and curating might affirm a colonial paradigm of the aloof researcher, evoking a wobble moment. Additionally, I faced a similar concern about whether to change this information on my profile after the research had concluded, posing an ongoing challenge that was not easily resolved.

Further researchers have also expressed what appeared to be several identitysharing wobble moments in social networks. Hammelburg (2021) discussed how users' geo-location, relationship status, captions and hashtags, sexualities, hometowns and fandoms were all known to them due to their lurking researcher approach. Yet, when meeting these people, they were unaware of the same details of theirs, nor that they had been present on their

profiles. This prompted them to state, 'I felt the social discomfort of this unevenness, of not being as visible to them as they were to me' (Hammelburg, 2021, p. 9). This wobble prompted the researcher to contend that visibility matters, inferring that there is a level of ethical reciprocity due. Conversely, Toronto University's ethical guidelines (2017) highlight that the researcher's relations, including friend networks and family, who might wish to stay anonymous depending on the topic of research, are unveiled unwittingly when engaging in identity sharing. However, is it ethical that researchers seek for participants to share what may be personal and intimate values, beliefs and ideas, with the researcher taking this information from an aloof position?

A researcher's methodology poses a significant dialogue to engage with such wobbles. Through this framing, wobbles can be contextualised and responded to, as well as further challenged. My research methodology was guided by Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic philosophy, which shifts hierarchical notions of participants and researchers to co-dialoguers (see Sullivan, 2012; Westbrook, 2023). With all dialoguers co-constructing every encounter, the authorial role of research is reconceptualised. Ethical considerations of identity and privacy sharing are, therefore, also challenged. Bakhtinian dialogism contends that the self has a 'non-alibi in Being' (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 49), emphasising the lack of excuses to be responsible for one's conduct, which is always an ethical entreaty. Based on this methodological framing of responsive encounters, I concluded that ethical research practices required reciprocity. Since my study aimed to explore teachers' lived experiences through their political voices, I felt morally obligated to allow these teachers equal access to my own voice as the researcher, which was readily available on my profile. Simultaneously, recognising that dialogue always has an effect prompted the removal of political content prior to initiating the research. Therefore, although some degree of being reciprocal and answerable was employed, I attempted to balance this with a limiting influence on participants' political voices. This methodologically situated approach to ethical conduct affirms the significance of reflecting on and embodying the frames of the research throughout the pre-current-post-research phases that can surpass guidelines and frameworks.

Dialoguing with the ethics of profile use and access across wobbles and literature poses nuanced and enduring complexities, unsettling traditional research paradigms that dichotomise researchers and participants. Having engaged with this literature, I feel affirmed in the use of my personal social networking account to conduct the research, as it embodies my methodology. Following such a framing offers researchers an entreaty for ethical conduct beyond guidelines. Those engaging in methodologies that are thin on such responses may be

prompted to extend their methodological approaches and consider what ethical responses they feel are appropriate and answerable. As with Hammelburg's (2021) hesitations, the ethics of the self, including lurking feelings of unease, ought to be considered when designing the study and responding to participants.

The dialogue between the self and other, researcher and participants, should ideally consider the moments of wobble that indicate unease evoked by ethical guidelines or notions of 'correct' conduct. Just as social networks are built and maintained through the dialogues of their users, research conducted in these spaces should ideally be developed through dialogue and collaboration with the users themselves. Consequently, this approach opens possibilities to embody the intent of these sites. Although these platforms enable lurking, conducting research through covert observation, or positioning oneself as an unseen observer in digital social spaces, it is through dialogue that wobbles of uncertainty can be opened up into possibilities. This approach means researchers need to be willing to change their research design, analysis and presentation of data to reflect their ethical values in conversation with potential participants. Through this complexity, (marginalised) communities can be ethically attended to, and the rich complexities of insights can unfold, potentially better serving these communities. For instance, marginalised communities engaged in reflexive wobbles of collaboration might create and maintain the safety of their social networking spaces. By prompting researchers to question and reassess their ethical stance, discussions, such as who has data sovereignty, might be evoked, potentially retaining control over marginalised communities' data and narratives. Due to this uncertainty, more ethical and insightful research outcomes might be enabled, including those that might disobey and defy colonial paradigms present in 'traditional' research approaches. Ethical wobble moments, therefore, underscore the importance of being in dialogue through non-hierarchical conversations that condense notions of known and knower, of studied and study, to offer new possibilities developed between peoples.

Conclusion

The 'wobble moments' framework employed in this paper explored how unforeseen events, when researching in social networks, can unsteady researchers' sense of 'appropriate' ethical conduct. These persistent, inherent tensions can exceed guidelines and recommendations from institutional boards, challenging established protocols. This is because wobble moments surpass institutional box-ticking, highlighting how decision-making cannot be outsourced to

context-devoid guidelines. Conversely, a 'wobbly' framework can attend to the ambiguities of social networking encounters through dialogue with surrounding literature and local communities. This approach can facilitate nuanced reflexivity, promoting collaborative research responses that attend to the uncertainties of social networking research.

By embracing the wobbly complexities and lurking feelings of discomfort, researchers can develop more responsive, ethical practices that better serve the communities they engage with in social networks, particularly those that have been marginalised. Perceptions of users' naivety about privacy settings can also be challenged and tensioned as agentic and capable, while considering the concerns of posted content's enduring nature. Furthermore, thinking in and with the wobble, non-hierarchical dialogues can foster disobedient opportunities and challenges to colonial paradigms embedded in traditional research approaches and ethics applications.

A wobbly approach cannot only enhance the ethical integrity of social networking research but also align with the collaborative, dialogic nature of these platforms. Attending to the wobbles of uncertainty can, therefore, open up new possibilities for ethical, non-hierarchical research relationships. Developed through ongoing dialogues among those involved in the research, such wobbles have the potential to significantly enhance the ways researchers serve and empower the communities they engage with.

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