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Responding To Student Disclosures: A Narrative Inquiry Of Online College Instructors' Experiences Handling Disclosures Of Personal Trauma In Their Asynchronous Online Classrooms

Rachel Seeber-Conine

RESPONDING TO STUDENT DISCLOSURES: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF ONLINE

COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS' EXPERIENCES HANDLING DISCLOSURES OF PERSONAL

TRAUMA IN THEIR ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE CLASSROOMS

By

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Abstract

Research in higher education indicates students may disclose personal trauma and/or sensitive information in their college classrooms when learning about sensitive academic content; and as a result, these situations may trigger disclosure of previous and/or current personal traumatic experiences (Greener et. al., 1984; Lindecker et. al., 2021; Papadatou-Pastou et al., 2019). However, research relating to online disclosures by students, especially in asynchronous courses, is limited (Hew, 2005; Lindecker et al., 2021; Lister, et al., 2021) despite continual increase in enrollment of online studies in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). This research study narrows the gap in literature related to disclosures in online environments and instructors' ability to recognize and respond during these difficult moments. Given the rapidly accelerating number of students taking online courses, it is critical for higher education stakeholders to reflect on the disclosures of trauma and sensitive information in online courses to better support instructors and students in remote environments. This narrative inquiry study explored the lived and told stories of asynchronous online instructors and underscores the need for additional training in higher education to better support instructors when academic content and other circumstances results in student self-disclosures of personal trauma and/or sensitive information in asynchronous courses. Using Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1994, 1999) self-efficacy theory to guide this study and drawing on the four antecedents of performance

experiences, vicarious (learning) experiences, verbal persuasion (encouragement) and physiological (emotional) states, this study answered two research questions: (1) How do instructors handle disclosure of personal trauma when teaching sensitive academic content that may trigger previous and/or current personal traumatic experiences within their asynchronous online undergraduate students? And (2) How prepared do instructors feel to recognize signs of personal trauma in their students when teaching asynchronous online classes? Findings from this study indicate instructor's self-efficacy levels are generally high relative to antecedents of verbal persuasion, and physiological states. In addition, while instructor's self-efficacy level are high with respect to performance experiences (recognition of disclosures) conversely there appears to be vulnerabilities in instructor's self-efficacy levels surrounding performance experiences (specific to levels of preparedness with respect to instructor training/skillset when responding to disclosures) and vicarious experiences. As well, this research indicated the need for increased support and training for higher education instructors to better recognize and respond to these difficult disclosures by students in their asynchronous online courses. All participants reported providing disclaimer statements to students and the benefits of employing these disclaimer statements to asynchronous students, either regarding mental health and community resources available and/or providing messages relative to sensitive content being taught in the modules in their courses.

Keywords: asynchronous, content forecasting, disclaimers, disclosure, emergency remote education (ERE), empathy, faculty, instructor, online learning, pandemic, remote learning, self-efficacy, synchronous, trauma, trigger, trigger warnings

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This…the "acknowledgments" section. This may be the most challenging and emotional aspect to write of this entire document despite having looked forward to writing this piece of my dissertation for just about 1,345 days now (but who's counting). I finally get to have my "voice" and write in a way that feels natural to me. And I'm sure like any other doctoral candidate and soon-to-be graduate, I am ecstatic about the chance to write just this section without using APA formatting (it's the only section done that way out of the 200 or so pages of light reading to follow). However, I took some time to research (ironic, I know) what makes a strong and effective acknowledgement page (note- I am aware it should simply be a page- another difficult task for anyone finishing a dissertation and so in my true spirit of saying and typing too much- I have capped it at no more than five pages - but I am giving fair warning that I stretched this unwritten rule a bit- because after all of this and I mean ALL of this - it only seems fitting). I even read online how some friends and family members mentioned in this section might possibly want to frame this page or in my cases, pages, of my dissertation (so no pressure there, of course) and how some students take a chance to make their reader laugh and smile before tackling reading a "brief" dissertation (here's to wishful thinking). So, here is to saying thank you, from the bottom of my heart and for all the signs from my Dad (KPS) along the way, because truly, he was right (he would love that I put that he was "right" in an official, published document) "life is a cinch, inch by inch". Even when it is difficult to hear and to take advice like my Dad so often gave me, this journey proved to reaffirm what Dad said every time life seemed to be a lot to handle. Looking at this final step in my formal education for now, just over three years in *steps* or rather inches, *inch by inch*, made it an attainable goal, much like anything else in life. At times I fell, and I fell hard, but it is because of those mentioned in these now several pages of acknowledgements, that I stood

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back up and have crossed the finish line. And let us not forget faith…always believing that everything happens for a reason, thanking and believing in God ….so with that….thank you….writing this dissertation and recognizing the incredible journey that it has been would not have been possible without my lead advisor, Dr. Gizelle Luevano. I am certain that not everyone hits the dissertation lotto (if that should ever be a thing) with their lead advisor the way I did with Dr. Luevano. How she responds back to every single message within what feels like seconds (sometimes it literally was) is beyond impressive, but I will be eternally grateful for her support, her guidance and what I now consider to be, her friendship. The support from the entire UNE team is something that I know will benefit students for years to come and has certainly shaped the course of my education and quite frankly, my life. Dr. Debra Welkley never stopped believing in me and that I could accomplish this goal- she truly was able to see a diamond in the rough (in my topic, in my paper - and I hope in me) but she did not stop encouraging me, not for a single moment. I will be forever grateful for my education and for the leadership team at UNE. The leadership demonstrated by Dr. Pelletier and Dr. Jameson set the bar high, providing educational standards second to none and of course the encouragement to stay on track, to stay focused and the consistent reminder that an education is something that no one can ever take away from you. Once again, my Dad was right (that is twice now I have stated it in such an important document - he must be beaming in heaven). Education is the best investment we can make in ourselves. So, for anyone on the fence or wondering if they should take this on….yes. Do not think too long and hard about it- because it is easy to talk yourself right out of it - take the leap - say yes. Dr. Marylin Newell was my first advisor and while she was not able to be part of my dissertation committee for the entire time, she made an impact on me, far beyond what she will ever realize, because of her, I am a better instructor. My affiliate for this entire degree really gets

and Kenny) will pick up this *short* research paper and hopefully be proud of their Godmother and will always prioritize their own education. I have to believe that my Mom will read this and cry - knowing that she let me cry over and over on her shoulder (well on the phone on her shoulder) as I experienced the ups and downs of research and writing - thank you Mom. I have two supportive bonus sons, Kevie (yes, I typed 'Kevie' just for him) and Eric, that God gave me (well technically my husband shared with me) that came complete with amazing plus ones that I consider my bonus daughters and close friends- who never once lost sight of the meaning of family and were cheerleaders like no other- standing right next to my awesome sister-in-law, Misty who cheered me on like sisters do. Although I have to mention that I have three bonus grandkids (and hopefully more someday) that may be cheering the loudest lately (Amelia, Conor, and Everleigh). I hope that they always chase their dreams, even and especially the dreams that others might insist are not reality - those are the best ones of them all. Yet, chasing dreams is something that my own son, Dylan, now almost 26, taught me how to do best. He is already stronger than I ever thought I could be, and I am blessed to have this time on earth so that he could watch me start and now finish this life-long achievement. You are never too old to start a new chapter. One of the very best moments in the last, almost four years now, was hearing him ask me about how to start his own journey of earning his doctorate. I hope in some small way, this will inspire him and if by chance he decides not to, I hope he will always continue to value the experience of learning and dreaming big because he is capable of changing this world - I know he changed mine. It is truly our children that see us, all of us - the good, the bad and the ugly, and how lucky am I that he loves me anyway, in spite of my flaws (and I have many) but having you Dylan, as a son - that was and is my greatest accomplishment and best title ever, the title of "Mom". Lastly, (yes there is more - not much-hang in there) to my husband, Kevin. He is a retired police Captain and is a man of a few words (clearly,

I am not) - so I will make this concluding thought brief (KWC kind of brief). God knew I needed you. I needed you nearly two decades ago as much as I need you today. I am certain if it were not for your unconditional support and love that I would not be writing this paper, earning this degree, and achieving this final step in my education. You have the patience of a Saint. It is only fitting that I officially take your last name - we are stronger together and I am so proud to finally be called Dr. Rachel E. Seeber Conine, Ed.D. This would not have happened without you, Kevin and this is truly *our* accomplishment - I love you with all my heart.

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All of my close friends and family
In memory and appreciation of my Dad (KPS) who always reminded me that an…
Education is your best investment in yourself…and he was right.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic (WHO, 2020) and on March 13, 2020, the United States (US) government declared a national emergency by Proclamation 9994 which declared COVID-19 a pandemic causing significant public health risk (FR Doc. 2020-05794, 2020). Governments worldwide took extensive measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 (Duma et al., 2022). Higher education institutions (HEIs) transitioned on-campus classes taught in-person to predominantly online classes (Smalley, 2021; Tran et al., 2021). This transformed the primary mode of delivery and methods of teaching for higher education (HE) (Bashir et al., 2021). The rapid response and swift shift to online learning created an effective and safe teaching environment for many college staff, faculty, and students (Smalley, 2021; Tran et al., 2021). Countless campus stakeholders around the country shared hopes of eventually returning to an in-person classroom once COVID-19 cases decreased and in-person environments were safe once again (Felson et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2021).

However, in October of 2020, there were over approximately 178,000 known COVID-19 cases on US college campuses (New York Times, 2020). The number of COVID-19 positive cases confirmed what many feared, that a return to traditional in-person classes would not be in the near future for college students (New York Times, 2020). Therefore, emergency remote education (ERE) became an essential model of teaching at traditional HEIs during the pandemic (Shin et al., 2021). Many faculty transitioned from teaching in person, to a blended model, in which some classes were online and on campus throughout the semester, while other classes

became fully distanced online (i.e., remote/virtual) learning environments, highlighting a wide variety in teaching options (Shin et al., 2021; Smalley, 2021).

There are two main types of online courses known as *asynchronous* and *synchronous* (Hrastinski, 2008), which were widely applied in the higher education ERE response to the pandemic. Some classes remained conventional online courses, which are taught asynchronously, a well-known and successful approach to "facilitating knowledge construction and collaborative learning" (Xie et al., 2014, p. 320). An *asynchronous* method of teaching affords students flexibility to complete coursework outside of regularly scheduled class times and includes asynchronous activities such as "captured videos, interactive videos, online videos, podcasts, presentations, screencasts and notes can all be used for viewing lectures at home" (Hrastinski, 2008; Yilmaz et al., 2017, p. 1548). Whereas *synchronous* methods of teaching online courses identify a pre-set time to meet online with real-time remote communication in real time and, in some circumstances, phone conferencing when videoconferencing is unavailable (Hrastinski, 2008; Martinez, 2012). Synchronous online courses may include activities taught during class online in which "students can participate in problem solving activities, student presentations, case-based presentations, discussions, role-plays and debates remotely" (Yilmaz et al., 2017, p. 1548).

When COVID-19 was declared a national emergency and a global pandemic, 19.4 million students were enrolled in college, 11.9 million students attended full-time, and 7.5 million part-time, including 3.1 million graduate students taking classes (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2020). According to NCES (2020), of the 19.4 million students enrolled in college, 87% were enrolled in some or all online courses in the Spring of 2020 after the nation declared COVID-19 a pandemic in March 2020. During the pandemic, many college

students experienced unprecedented challenges resulting in substantial mental health concerns, which put both their health and academic success in jeopardy (Lederer et al., 2021; NCES, 2020). For example, in the US, many college students left campuses halfway through their 2019–2020 academic year, which disrupted coursework and often resulted in a lack of independence and social support, raising the concern for additional mental health worries (Kim et al., 2022). Lederer et al., (2021) argued "these unprecedented challenges facing students during COVID-19 'worsen students' already substantial mental health concerns and inequalities therein at a time in which students are having trouble securing care" (p. 16). In fact, even before COVID-19, there was a growing concern regarding mental health in college classrooms, both online and on-campus classrooms (Lederer et al., 2021; Son et al., 2020).

Since 2000, the mental health crisis in HE has illuminated the importance of prioritizing student's mental health (Kadison et al., 2004). Sensitive academic content is taught in classrooms across the US and these difficult discussions may result in students' self-disclosure of previous and/or current personal traumatic experiences (Agllias, 2012; Ball, 2000; Carello et al., 2015; Reyes et al., 2012). Students who have an awareness of counseling services, access to these services, referrals, and engagement with mental health professionals are more likely to thrive academically and successfully earn their degree (Kadison et al., 2004). Kadison et al. (2004) recommended creating a strong community of mental health on campus by "providing student education to promote prevention" (p. 167), "emphasizing community outreach," (p. 174), giving follow-up care (p. 175), and "ensuring off-campus resources and coordination of care," (p. 176) underscoring the pivotal role college instructors play in supporting students' mental health (Crady, 2005). Reflecting on the experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and anticipating a post-pandemic teaching environment in HE, many more students became reliant on online

courses, accentuating the need for effective practices for addressing mental health online (Kose et al., 2022).

Identifying and responding to mental health concerns in an online asynchronous environment is not without challenges (Gordon et al., 2021). When academic content has the potential to trigger students, instructors' preparedness to recognize and provide referrals for crisis intervention and assistance becomes a critical asset to both the college and the student (Hošková-Mayerová, 2016; Shrivastava et al., 2013). Recognition of these disclosures are even more difficult in an asynchronous environment (Stewart et al., 2005; Thomas et al., 2017). An instructor's ability to recognize student trauma may be disadvantaged in an online asynchronous course (Thomas et al., 2017). This highlights the importance of faculty training and preparedness to handle personal disclosures of trauma and/or sensitive information that may be triggered by academic content (Olser, 2021; Parkway et al., 2010).

Instructors of asynchronous classes are not face-to-face with students as they are on campus or by video in a synchronous online class, thus, recognizing traditional cues of distress, uncomfortableness, trauma, and anxiety are more difficult (Carjuzaa et al., 2021, Hrastinski, 2008; Martinez, 2012). An instructor cannot see the facial reactions or body language of a student learning about sensitive topics such as sexual assault or domestic violence, nor can they hear the voices of their students when they ask a question in a discussion post in an asynchronous online class (Cares et al., 2014; Olser, 2021). As such, trigger warnings may become commonplace in many syllabi.

There are multiple definitions of *trigger* and *trigger warnings* (APA, 2013, 2015; Merriam-Webster; 2022, Raypole; 2019; Stringer 2016, 2018). The American Psychological Association (APA) (2015) described a *trigger* as a stimulus that results in a reaction. An example

of this in the context of a memory may be an emotional response associated with a previous experience(s) (APA, 2013, 2015, 2018). Raypole (2010) defined trigger as "anything that might cause a person to recall a traumatic experience they've had" (para. 1) and provided an example of "graphic images of violence that may be a trigger for some people" (para. 2). In the Merriam-Webster dictionary, (2022) a trigger is defined as "(1) something that acts like a mechanical trigger in initiating a process or reaction (2) to initiate, actuate, or set off by a trigger (3) to cause an intense and usually negative emotional reaction in someone" (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Subsequently, *trigger warnings*, which may also be known as *content forecasting* (Stringer 2016, 2018), are statements that alert readers, viewers, or listeners to upcoming material that is potentially distressing or, more specifically, potentially *triggering* (Stringer 2018) and may cause a reader or viewer to experience symptoms of distress (Kim et al., 2020; Sandon, 2018).

The concept of trigger warnings was first introduced in the media, signaling viewers and readers that upcoming material may serve as trauma reminders and may be difficult to watch or to hear (Bruce et al., 2020; Wythe, 2014). Starting in 2014, the national news reported demands for university teachers to adopt the use of trigger warnings when teaching sensitive topics. In psychology, the concept of trigger warnings "stems from the clinical symptomology associated with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (Boysen et al, 2018, para 1). The APA (1994) asserted one of the most frequent psychological problems following trauma is the "spontaneous and emotion-laden intrusion of traumatic memories" (Kleim et al., 2016, para 2) known as PTSD (Heer, 2015). The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) (2019) defined this as a disorder that develops in "some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event" (para 2) and primary features of PTSD include re-experiencing symptoms, like intrusive thoughts and flashbacks (para 8). The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) (2015) defined

trigger warnings as "warnings to alert students in advance that material assigned in a course might be upsetting or offensive" (p. 3). Boysen (2014) defined trigger warnings as language used by teachers to offer "prior notification of an educational topic so students may prepare for or avoid distress that is automatically evoked by that topic due to clinical mental health problems" (para 5). Even though emotions, words, objects, or situations can trigger specific responses, (NIMH, 2022), the topic of trigger warnings is extremely contentious in HE (Sanson, 2018).

Vigorous debate has arisen about the impact of trigger warnings used or not used in courses offered at HEIs (Cares, 2018). Discussions about trigger warnings in online classrooms have been ongoing, and given the increased online teaching and student enrollments, this discussion warrants further research with respect to information and mental health services provided to students (Pelosi et al., 2020; Son et al., 2020). Thus, Son et al. (2021) suggested future research focus on exploring relationships between coping techniques and stressors as well as studying the effects of COVID-19 on mental health. In addition, Dayagbil et al. (2021) urged HEIs to help prepare students to identify and learn ways to cope with the new learning environments and invest in creating infrastructures that support students' success with an emphasis on the modality of the curriculum and strategic planning evaluations in response to crisis (Dayagbil et al., 2021; Norze et al., 2021).

According to a 2016 survey conducted by National Public Radio, 50% of professors (n=829) indicated they have used a trigger warning as content forecasting in advance of introducing potentially difficult or sensitive material and most did so because they chose to do so, not because of an academic policy or because a student had requested it (Kamenetz, 2016). While there have been arguments for and against the concept of trigger warnings in HE (ALA, 2020; Boysen et al., 2018; 2021; James, 2017; Jones, 2020; Lockhart, 2016; Robbins, 2016), it

appears when teaching sensitive topics, the use of trigger warnings may provide an environment that is respectful of the traumatic experiences students endured prior to discussing such topics in the classroom (Ballbo et al., 2017; Boysen et al., 2018; Spencer et al., 2018). However, far more research is warranted to explore the proactive approach taken by some instructors to address such situations (Bedera, 2021; Bruce et al., 2020; Robbins, 2016).

Despite climbing instances of mental health concerns in college and the possible triggering academic content taught in physical and online classrooms (Conrad et al., 2020), faculty teaching in HEIs have little to no formal training in crisis intervention and referral techniques such as therapy, counseling, or psychology (Lindecker & Cramer, 2021). Unlike social workers, counselors, and clergy who often receive extensive training regarding healthy boundaries and critical self-care techniques (Spencer, 2018), many college instructors struggle to access and obtain such critical training (DeMarchis et al., 2021; Waltz, 2016). In fact, many faculty members often have limited knowledge and experience identifying community agencies and organizations to refer students to, often creating a challenging task for adjuncts, part-time, and even full-time instructors teaching online (Lindecker et al., 2021). Training that focuses on stress management and coping resources is often not a primary focus for instructors, and training opportunities may be limited or non-existent for professionals in this arena (Waltz, 2016).

Active Minds (2020) concluded one in five college students reported their mental health significantly worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings also indicated more than half (55%) of the students interviewed (n=2086) said they did not know where to go if they or someone they knew needed mental health services. These findings indicate the need for instructors to be better prepared to help students address mental health concerns in a post-pandemic world (Active Minds, 2020). The Director-General of the WHO, Dr. Tedros Adhanom

Ghebreyesus, emphasized "Good mental health is absolutely fundamental to overall health and well-being," (WHO, 2020, para 5). Additionally, Ghebreyesus stated "COVID-19 has interrupted essential mental health services around the world just when they're needed most. World leaders must move fast and decisively to invest more in life-saving mental health programmes −during the pandemic and beyond" (WHO, 2020, para 5). In 2022, as the world beings to rebound from the pandemic, so must HEIs. It is imperative all students, including online students, are provided with resources to easily access mental health resources and that online instructors are properly trained to recognize and respond to online student disclosures of personal trauma in the asynchronous classroom.

As a greater understanding of online teaching develops, it is important to recognize and respond to the growing number of students who may disclose experiences of personal trauma and/or sensitive information in the online classroom (Booth, 2012; Carello et al.; 2014; 2015; Rocca, 2010; Swan et al., 2005). Expectations of instructors in HE includes providing the most informed, compassionate, and professional response to students to promote success both in the classroom and in life (Gelles, et al., 2020; White, 2022). Booth (2012) noted:

> Even the most careful review of our course assignments and activities may not tell us why students disclose what they disclose, but we can predict somewhere down the line, when we create authentic and integrated learning opportunities, students may self-disclose private information in some form as they are learning their way around our classes and institutions (p. 8).

As such, in this study, the researcher explored the experiences of online instructors and shared the stories and perspectives of how student disclosures were handled in online asynchronous

course(s) and the extent to which these participants felt prepared to recognize signs of personal trauma in such circumstances.

Definition of Terms

The following definition of terms are relevant to the narrative inquiry and are used throughout this dissertation. These terms are relevant to the understanding of the overall problem explored.

Asynchronous: a method of teaching that affords students flexibility to complete coursework outside of regularly scheduled class times and (Dhawan, 2020; Hrastinski, 2008) and includes asynchronous activities such as "captured videos, interactive videos, online videos, podcasts, presentations, screencasts and notes can all be used for viewing lectures at home" (Yilmaz, et al., 2017, p. 1548).

Content Forecasting: not a rival term or substitute for 'trigger warning,' a useful, a more benign and approachable term for trigger warning providing notice of potentially upsetting or disturbing content (Stringer, 2016).

Emergency Remote Education (ERE): The emergency response from educational institutions during crises (e.g., pandemics or conflict) to shift teaching and assessments online is known as emergency remote education and may involve adapting content which would have traditionally been taught face-to-face as blended learning or as fully distanced learning (Shin et al., 2021).

Empathy: refers to the "capacity to understand someone else's experiences and feelings and being able to take the perspective of the other person" (Shin et al., 2022, p. 433)

Faculty: (also referred to as Instructor) is a teaching or academic staff member of a higher education institution, an instructor as in one who instructs, a teacher. Full-time, part-time,

adjunct, and other types of instructors employed in academic units at colleges and universities (Gelman, et al., 2022).

Online Learning: is defined as "learning experiences in synchronous or asynchronous environments using different devices (e.g., mobile phones, laptops, etc.) with internet access" (Dhawan, 2020, p. 7).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): is, in a crucial sense, a theory of memory, a medical diagnosis and for certain people, the memory of a trauma always exists, lying just below the surface of consciousness, ready to be triggered, which will naturally lead to a heightened vigilance (Heer, 2015).

Synchronous: a method of teaching online courses which identifies a pre-set time to meet online with real-time remote communication, and, in some circumstances, phone conferencing when videoconferencing is unavailable (Dhawan, 2020, Hrastinski, 2008; Martinez, 2012). A synchronous online course may include activities taught during class online and "students can participate in problem solving activities, student presentations, case-based presentations, discussions, role-plays and debates" (Yilmaz, et al., 2017, p. 1548) remotely.

Remote Learning: is defined as "learning which happens when the learner and teacher are not in the same place, and possibly not active at the same time" (Greener, 2021) and can "encompass both synchronous (live) and asynchronous (at different times) learning activity" (para. 4).

Trauma: The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (2013) (DSM–5) defines trauma as "exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence." (DSM–5, (2013); APA, 2013).

Trigger: The APA (2015) defines trigger as "a stimulus that elicits a reaction. For example, an event could be a trigger for a memory of an experience and an accompanying state of emotional arousal" (page #).

Trigger Warnings (TWs): statements alerting readers, viewers, or listeners to upcoming material that is potentially distressing or, more specifically, potentially 'triggering.' This term is part of the language of post-traumatic stress and describes one of the ways in which someone with a trauma background can be retraumatized (Stringer, 2016, p. 62).

Statement of the Problem

Research indicates it is likely students may disclose personal trauma and/or sensitive information in their college classrooms when learning about sensitive academic content; and as a result, these situations may trigger disclosure of previous and/or current personal traumatic experiences (Greener et. al., 1984; Lindecker et. al., 2021; Papadatou-Pastou et al., 2019). However, there is limited literature and research regarding disclosures in the online teaching environment, specifically in asynchronous courses, despite continual increase in enrollment of online studies in the US (NCES, 2020).

Figure 1 reflects data from NCES that indicates an increase in online enrollment from 2012-2019 in postsecondary education (US Department of Education, 2020).

Figure 1

Percent of Students Enrolled in Distance Education Courses

Percent of students enrolled in distance education courses

Line | Bar | Table

Notes: This table presents data collected from Title IV institutions in the United States.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall Enrollment component final data (2012 - 2019) and provisional data (2020).
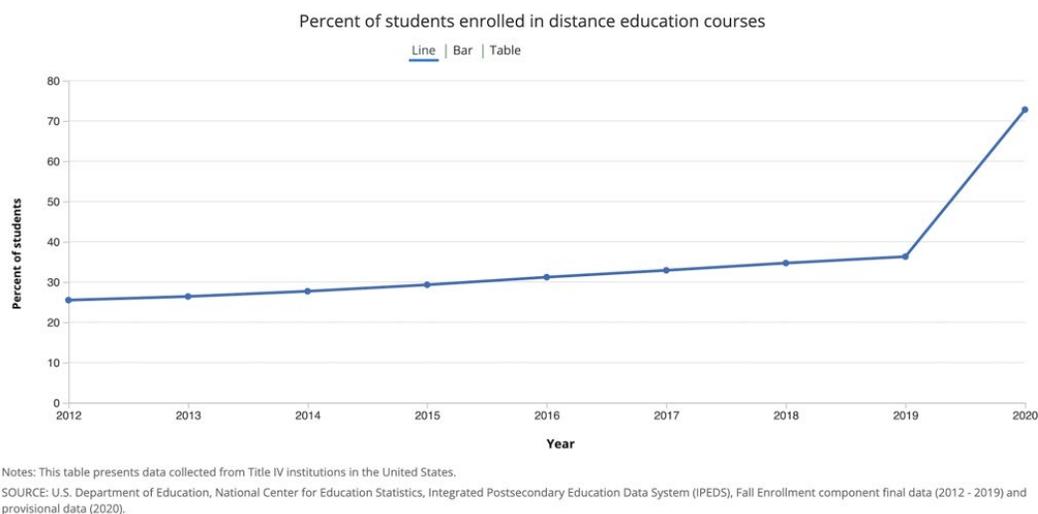
Note: Figure 1 is a line graph that reflects data collected from Title IV institutions in the US that displays the relationship between student enrollment and distance education courses from 2012-2019. Student enrollment in distance education courses increased during 2012-2019. From the Department of Education, NCES (2020). Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Percent of students enrolled in distance education courses. Trend generator. Retrieved April 1, 2022, from https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/TrendGenerator/app/answer/2/42

Research indicates the percent of students enrolled in distance education courses in 5,908 postsecondary institutions in the fall of 2020 was 72.8% (NCES, 2020). The U.S. Department of Education (2020) confirmed over 70% of students in college participate in online courses. Thus, it is now more important than ever to explore the experiences of faculty teaching undergraduate asynchronous online courses in which academic content may trigger student disclosure of previous and/or current personal trauma (Hasking, et al., 2021). Lindecker et al., (2021) concluded a "better understanding of how student self-disclosures is perceived and handled by

faculty members provides an opportunity to inform institution-level student support practices, faculty support practices, and faculty training initiatives" (p. 3). Likewise, Hew (2005) and Lister, et al. (2021) indicated the experiences and perceptions of college instructors teaching asynchronous online undergraduate courses and their responses to student self-disclosures warrant a better understanding. Thus, this narrative inquiry adds to the limited existing research in the field of HE (Hew, 2005; Lindecker et al., 2021; Lister, et al., 2021) regarding shared experiences and perceptions of instructors when recognizing and responding to students' disclosure of personal trauma and/or sensitive information and the extent to which instructors feel prepared to recognize signs of personal trauma in their online asynchronous teaching environment.

Purpose of the Study

In this study, I explored the experiences and perceptions of asynchronous online course instructors in public and/or private HEIs in the US regarding the extent to which academic content triggers disclosure of students' personal trauma. This study provided an opportunity to learn firsthand from the experiences of online instructors about how they handled student disclosures in their online asynchronous course(s) and the extent to which they were prepared to recognize signs of personal trauma in their students.

Research Question

Using Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1994, 1999) self-efficacy theory and drawing on its four antecedents; performance experiences, vicarious (learning) experiences, verbal persuasion (encouragement) and physiological (emotional*)* states, I sought to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How do instructors handle disclosure of personal trauma when teaching sensitive academic content that may trigger previous and/or current personal traumatic experiences within their asynchronous online undergraduate students?

RQ2: How prepared do instructors feel to recognize signs of personal trauma in their students when teaching asynchronous online classes?

Conceptual Framework

The "purpose of a conceptual framework is to learn from the experience and the expertise of others as you cultivate your own knowledge and perspective" (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017, p. 17). Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 2). Self-efficacy is a subset of Bandura's social learning theory that maintains an individual's sense of self-efficacy can provide the foundation for motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishment. Further, the stronger their self-efficacy, the more likely individuals are to believe in their ability to succeed in a particular situation (Lopez-Garrido, 2020).

Self-efficacy is a theory that is often applied to personal and social change and has been used in myriad areas of psychology and in multiple experiments, interventions, and research (Bandura, 1986; Vaughan-Johnston et al., 2020). Bandura (1977) identified four antecedents to self-efficacy (1) performance accomplishments (2) vicarious experience (learning) (3) verbal persuasion (encouragement) and (4) physiological (emotional) states. Figure 2 displays the four main sources of influences t individuals gather information from to develop their self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977). Each of these four self-efficacy beliefs provides a foundation for how individuals "function as contributors to their own motivation, behavior, and development within a network of reciprocally interacting influences" (Bandura, 1999, p. 169). Self-efficacy has been

described as the belief that an individual can achieve and execute behaviors necessary for a

desired outcome by preforming the required steps to reach their goal (Bandura, 1977, 1986).

Figure 2

Four Antecedents of Self-Efficacy

Note: The conceptual model in Figure 2 describes the four main sources of influences that

determine efficacy judgements (Redmond, 2016) Individuals gather information from

these judgements to develop their self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1995, 1997). From:

Redmond, B.F. (2016). Self-Efficacy and Social Cognitive Theories. Penn State

University. Retrieved from

https://wikispaces.psu.edu/display/PSYCH484/7.+SelfEfficacy+and+Social+Cognitive+

Theories

As an example of how these antecedents of self-efficacy may be applicable, my own

advocacy in the field of victim services for over two decades and in the classroom as an adjunct

instructor provides a backdrop for how social learning theory, specifically self-efficacy, is an

appropriate conceptual framework for the current study. I have provided victim advocacy at a local, state, and federal level of government directing a not-for-profit sexual assault program, working as a Victim Advocate and then Specialist with the District Attorney Offices Victim Assistance program in Upstate New York and then as a Victim Witness Program Manager for the US Attorney's Office in the Northern District of New York. I have worked with thousands of crime victims and have trained hundreds of victim service providers, community groups, law enforcement officers, federal agents, and support staff on state and federal law, victims' rights and services and crisis intervention. I started teaching as an adjunct shortly after presenting a training to students in a Law School class at Cornell University as a guest speaker discussing legal rights and services, which fall under the Crime Victims' Rights Act of 2004.

Theoretical Framework

The antecedents of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory support the methodology of narrative inquiry by acting as a lens to analyze this research and summarize the lived experiences and told stories of participants. Specifically focusing on performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states, identified themes have led to summary findings relevant to the growing field of teaching asynchronously. Special attention has been paid to assisting online students with their mental health, which has clearly been identified as an ongoing area of concern in colleges across the nation (Kim et al., 2022; Lederer et al., 2021).

Utilizing self-efficacy theory, I examined the experiences and perceptions of instructors teaching undergraduate students asynchronously online in which academic content may trigger student disclosure of students' personal trauma (Hew, 2005; Lister, et al., 2021). There have been several studies focused on online teaching versus traditional on-campus teaching highlighting the pros and cons and lessons learned from teaching in both environments (Lê Strain

et al., 2022; Mahdizadeh et al., 2008; Shea et al., 2005). However, there appears to be limited research focused on self-disclosure rates of students in asynchronous online college classes to their instructors (Barak et al., 2007; Lindecker at al., 2021) and the subsequent response by instructors regarding their feeling of preparedness to recognize and respond (Greiner et al., 2022; Lantis, 2022). The current research differs from the minimal existing literature in the field because of the collection of shared experiences from instructors who experienced students' disclosures of personal trauma and/or sensitive information. Another distinguishing aspect of this research is the collection of experiences and perspectives of the extent to which instructors felt prepared to recognize trauma in their asynchronous online classroom. Due to the minimal research focused on student disclosures in asynchronous environments and instructors' perceptions of preparedness to recognize and respond, there is an opportunity for this study to add to the body of knowledge in the field (Lindecker et al., 2021).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

Qualitative research assumptions are assumptions made by the researcher in reference to the methods used to conduct this study (Creswell, 2019). For the purposes of this study, I assumed participants were able and willing to share their experiences and perspectives with me. The second assumption was instructors who taught or are teaching asynchronous classes wanted to participate in this study. The third assumption was participants had students they taught in an asynchronous online environment, who disclosed personal traumatic experience. The fourth assumption was participants may believe students who shared personal traumatic information in class did so because of sensitive academic content taught in the course materials.

Creswell (2019) acknowledged limitations are not uncommon in qualitative research, and in this study, there are several limitations. First, it was unknown if participants would report

perceptions about student reactions were because of the sensitive academic content or because of personal traumatic experiences. The second limitation was due to regional considerations. The scope of this study was not limited to a particular region, however there may have been participants who showed interest in participating in the study from Upstate New York. Recognizing I am an adjunct faculty with the State University of New York Plattsburgh and Delhi campuses, these instructors may not have been as forthright in the interview. This limitation was mitigated by not selecting participants for the study from these specific campuses. Participants were selected from public and private colleges throughout the US who met the criteria outlined in Chapter 3 and described in Chapter 4 in more detail. The third limitation was the researcher being an elected official in Warren County, New York, who may be seen as having positional power and authority, although I have no supervision or evaluation position with faculty. As a member of the County Board of Supervisors I oversee the local community college budget and recognize this as a limitation but excluded current SUNY Adirondack instructors from the potential instructors to be interviewed, thus addressing this potential limitation. The fourth limitation was some participants may have believed that any of their students experienced negative feelings while discussing sensitive issues. Perhaps, some faculty believe online courses do not provide an opportunity for faculty to witness disclosures or cues that may alert them to problems in the classroom. The fifth limitation, given the increased amount of fraud online, is some faculty may have been apprehensive in meeting with me to conduct the interview. To mediate this problem, I attached the participant information sheet to my recruitment post (Appendix B).

This study illuminated the shared perspectives and experiences of seven instructors who taught at least one asynchronous class in the past 5 years in the US. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016)

emphasized the "purposeful selection of research participants thus represents a key decision in qualitative research" (p. 148). I recruited participants using online recruitment methods, specifically social networking sites, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn to customize and target criteria for participants to a widespread audience in a time-efficient and cost-effective manner (Thornton, et al., 2016). Using social media as a recruitment tool allowed me to identify multiple participants within one site, affording a wide range of potential shared experiences and perspectives of instructors having taught online at any university or college in the US.

Rationale and Significance

Students may disclose personal trauma and/or sensitive information in their college classrooms when learning about topics that are difficult to discuss or trigger prior experiences of personal trauma (Greener et. al., 1984; Lindecker et. al., 2021; Papadatou-Pastou et al., 2019). Yet, limited literature is available regarding the preparedness of faculty responding to students in online asynchronous classrooms when academic content may have triggered disclosures of personal traumatic experiences (Lindecker et al., 2021). More specifically, this research may help to identify experiences of instructors, highlighting a need for additional training in recognizing and responding to online student trauma.

Often, students taking online courses do not live in the immediate geographical region of the school's physical campus. For example, I am a student in an Education and Leadership doctoral program at The University of New England (UNE) with a main campus in Maine and I am a resident of New York. If an instructor had concerns regarding my well-being and wanted to refer me for supportive mental health services, I would assume they would be familiar with the main campus counseling department/office and perhaps some local resources near campus.

However, as a New York resident, these resources would not be of significant help to me. If anything, it may provide another layer of referrals for me to contact and may discourage my outreach for help. If a disclosure requires immediate attention in a classroom, this type of delay can add to the traumatic experience and have adverse impacts on a student. If a student is referred for counseling and crisis intervention, traditionally, instructors follow the policies and procedures of the counseling office for the school. If a student is not able to drive to campus or may not even be in the same state, it makes the likelihood of assistance highly unlikely. Another factor to consider is low-cost or free counseling guidelines, including state victim compensation programs, may vary by state. If this research helps just one HEI modify its crisis intervention policies in the online classroom, it will be incredibly significant. Thus, it was important to use a critical lens such as self-efficacy, to fully explores the performance of online faculty preparedness to recognize and respond to mental health concerns.

Summary

Research studies indicate students may disclose personal traumatic experiences in their college classrooms, especially when learning about sensitive academic content that may trigger disclosure of previous and/or current personal traumatic experiences (Greener et. al., 1984, Lindecker et. al., 2021; Papadatou-Pastou et al., 2019). Formal training and previous professional experience in crisis intervention and referrals techniques is extremely limited in most faculty teaching college (Lindecker et. al., 2021). There is limited research regarding disclosures in the online teaching environment, specifically in asynchronous courses. This is despite the increase in these classes being offered since 2020 when many HEIs went virtual as a response to a global pandemic, (Lindecker, at al, 2021; Tran et al., 2021). Recommendations from researchers supported the exploration of faculty experiences teaching undergraduate asynchronous online

courses in which academic content may trigger student disclosure of previous and/or current personal trauma (Hew, K, 2005; Lindecker et al., 2021; Lister, et al., 2021). Lindecker et al., (2021) suggested that by better understanding how student self-disclosures are handled by faculty, an opportunity may exist to influence policies and procedures in HE and to provide additional training. As such, this narrative inquiry study may add to a body of limited research in HE about the experiences and perceptions of faculty when recognizing and responding to students' disclosure of personal traumatic experiences and the extent to which they feel prepared to recognize signs of personal trauma in their online asynchronous teaching environment.

Self-efficacy reflects individuals' beliefs about their abilities to perform at expected or higher than expected levels during events that impact their lives (Bandura, 1977, p. 2). I used this framework for the current study with an added emphasis on the four antecedents of this theory, which are discussed in further detail in Chapter 2. In this narrative inquiry, I interviewed seven faculty who have taught asynchronous classes in HE in the US. Chapter 3 contains a detailed approach for the narrative inquiry study, approved by UNE's Institutional Review Board (IRB). It includes an outline of the specific methodology, data collection, interviews, privacy protections, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 includes a description of the experiences and perspectives of participants relative to their response to and level of preparedness to recognize disclosure of personal trauma in their online asynchronous classrooms. An idea critical to the field of HE was suggested by Lindecker et al., (2021), who argued a more in-depth understanding of student disclosures and instructors' ability to respond to them is warranted. Thus, in Chapter 5, I convey knowledge and perspective gained and corresponding implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since 2000, the mental health crisis in HE has underscored the importance of prioritizing student's mental health (Kadison et al., 2004). Lederer et al., (2021) asserted mental health concerns were already apparent prior to the pandemic, and now the circumstances surrounding the pandemic have emphasized the importance of recognizing the significance of mental health in our college students. According to the NCES (2020), of the 19.4 million students enrolled in college, 87% of students were enrolled in some or all online courses in the spring of 2020. Sensitive academic content is typically taught in college courses all over the US and these discussions may result in students' sharing information about personal trauma and/or sensitive information to their instructors (Agllias, 2012; Ball, 2000; Carello et al., 2015; Reyes et al., 2012).

Not only is there limited research regarding student self-disclosure in college (Szcygiel, 2019), but also, there is limited research that explores the subsequent responses by instructors and their preparedness to recognize and respond to such disclosures (Greiner et al., 2022; Lantis, 2022). It is important for online instructors to recognize and respond to the growing number of students who may share experiences of personal trauma in college online classrooms (Booth, 2012; Carello et al., 2014, 2015; Rocca, 2010; Swan et al., 2005). Student self-disclosures have the "potential to enhance (or disrupt) the overall learning environment" (Frisby et al, 2013 p. 243) and further understanding of how faculty understand and respond in these moments will help in affording HE to provide more support for students and training to faculty (Lindecker et al., 2021). Therefore, this narrative inquiry study shared the stories and lived experiences of seven college instructors and how they handled student disclosures of personal trauma and/or

sensitive information in their asynchronous online course(s). Additionally, this study captured the experiences of the extent to which instructors feel prepared to recognize signs of personal trauma in such circumstances.

Keywords have a profound impact on search results and can aid the reader in understanding the study and research. The following keywords are relevant to this study: *asynchronous, content forecasting, disclaimers, disclosure, emergency remote education (ERE), empathy, faculty, instructor, online learning, pandemic, remote learning, self-efficacy, synchronous, trauma, trigger, trigger warnings*.

Self-Efficacy as Both Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

Social learning theory positions self-efficacy as an individual's beliefs about their potential to deliver high levels of performance on events that impact their lives (Bandura, 1977). Bandura's self-efficacy theory emphasizes cognitive and information-processing capacities that mediate social behavior (Grusec, 1994, para 1). Recognizing the influence instructors have on their students' lives (Frisby et al, 2013) and how instructors recognize and react to students' personal trauma in response to sensitive content in their courses, is relevant and timely given the increased number of online students (Lederer et al., 2021; NCES, 2020) and the concerning mental health crisis in HE (Kim et al., 2022). This framework provides the conceptual and theoretical lens through which this problem was studied and that guided the research as it was conducted. Moreover, using Bandura's self-efficacy theory as a guide for the conceptual framework in this study, linked all "of the elements of this research process: researcher interests and goals, identity and positionality, context, and setting (macro and micro), formal and informal theory, and methods" (Ravitch et al., 2017, p. 5). This is particularly relevant as experiences of instructors are reflected in this research, as "people are self-organizing, proactive, self-

regulating, and self-reflecting." (Smith et al., 2005, p. 9). College instructors have the potential to significantly impact a student's life and their experiences in recognizing and responding to disclosures in the online classroom is especially relevant to their self-efficacy perceptions.

A theoretical lens in narrative research is a guiding belief that provides a structure for advocating for groups and/or individuals in the written report (Creswell et al., 2019, p. 516). Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, further developed as self-efficacy, was first introduced in an article in the journal Psychological Review entitled "*Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change*" (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy levels have been found to sufficiently influence teachers' beliefs and influences their motivation and performance (Demir, 2020; Morris, et al., 2016). Specifically, self-efficacy and the four antecedents surrounding this theory, performance experiences, vicarious (learning) experiences, verbal persuasion (encouragement) and physiological (emotional*)* states, provided a critical lens to this study. These four antecedents were reinforced in *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* by Bandura (1986). Delving into the four antecedents of self-efficacy and applying these beliefs to the lived experiences of participants as they handled situations of students' self-disclosure of personal traumatic experiences in their asynchronous courses provided themes and patterns that may be useful for policy development in the online classroom across HEIs. Bandura (1986) concluded these four antecedents do not directly affect one's self-efficacy, rather, their influence is regulated by how individuals, interpret their experiences.

Self- Efficacy as a Conceptual Framework

Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as a theory intended to combine coping and goal achievement by focusing on outcome and efficacy as the essential elements. Self-efficacy serves, in part, as an individual's foundation in their lives and may provide information that improves

workplace performance and why people perform the way they do (Hodges, 2008). Using self-efficacy as a critical lens to study instructor's self-efficacy (Wang, 2021; Williams, 2022), online instructors' preparedness to recognize and respond to mental health concerns was explored. Students may not recognize their need for crisis intervention and counseling and often face barriers in accessing such helpful services (Lattie et al., 2019). Exploring self-efficacy in asynchronous online instructors can provide a lens to share their experiences of their recognitions and reactions to students' distress. While instructors may be one of the most important asset of HEIs, having instructors who are trained and responsive to students' mental health needs affords organizations, students, and instructors the opportunity to thrive and grow (Astin et al., 2000). The four antecedents surrounding this theory, performance experiences, vicarious (learning) experiences, verbal persuasion (encouragement) and physiological (emotional*)* states (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1994) are further explored in the section below.

Performance Experiences

Performance experiences (outcomes) are mastery experiences in which individuals perform successfully (Bandura, 1994; Peterson et al., 2005). An example of a performance accomplishment is an instructor completing a training and developing knowledge, skills, and abilities in recognizing and responding to students' mental health concerns in an online environment. An instructor may recall engaging in training on responding to disclosures in the online classroom with their peers, in which modeling behavior of identification and response to trauma may be observed. These types of professional trainings often address the preparation levels explored in the current study, which focuses on the feeling of preparedness to recognize student distress in online classroom. Calkins et al. (2021) concluded formal trainings can have a positive influence and increase self-efficacy toward teaching. Thus, it is reasonable to assume if

instructors engage in training on sensitive and difficult topics, they may have more positive interactions handling instances of student disclosure (Calkins et al., 2021). This may also highlight a high level of self-efficacy in performance outcomes (Calkins et al., 2021).

Vicarious Experience

Vicarious experience (learning) is another facet of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1994) and an example of this belief may be applied to on-the-job training/shadowing experiences in the college classroom. Vicarious experiences are circumstances in which people observe others performing well, compare themselves to others, and form beliefs about their own aptitudes (Kang et al., 2021). Thus, online instructors with a strong skillset in handling disclosures of personal trauma in the classroom, who are successful at identifying and responding to a students' mental health concerns, may strengthen efficacy beliefs for others observing (Peterson et al., 2008). For some faculty, this may describe the training or shadowing of other instructors, as they may have field experience, they bring with them to teach sensitive academic content. For example, a victim service provider may now be teaching a victimology class and has been trained in victim assistance and crisis response. Other examples of instructors understanding their own competencies include teaching paedology and incorporating empathetic teaching practices.

Teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy may describe themselves as being open to new ideas (Abun et al., 2022; Bümen, 2009; Calkins, 2021; Kang et al., 2021). Some instructors may consider trigger warnings/content forecasting a new idea, and high levels of self-efficacy in this category may afford a willingness to experiment with new methods to better meet the needs of their students (i.e., training) and be more committed to teaching (i.e., reaching out to students in online assignments where traumatic experiences are disclosed by the student) (Hoy, 2014).

Likewise, observing other instructors teaching with empathy may provide quality vicarious experiences that offer "an opportunity to refer students to the departments within our institutions that are trained to deal with trauma" (Gutierrez et al., 2019, p. 15). Instructors who display the insight to recognize the need for training and express a desire to learn, indicates an instructor with higher levels of self-efficacy (Abun et al., 2022; Bümen, 2009; Calkins, 2021; Hoy, 2014; Kang et al., 2021).

Verbal Persuasion

Verbal persuasion (encouragement) is sometimes referred to as social persuasion. This may be feedback from others, that is determined to be reliable and authentic and is often viewed as similar to their own capabilities (Glackin, 2019; Xiao et al., 2019). Participants in the current study may exhibit confidence in verbal persuasion by thinking more deeply about their experiences and stories shared with me because of this research being conducted. For example, participants may recall instances in which they were more persistent than they typically are in repeated attempts to reach a student about whom they were concerned. They may also consider their experiences relative to their resilience to reflect on their policy regarding content forecasting and willingness to modify or adapt (Selvik et al., 2022).

Selvik et al. (2022) found an instructor may be one of the only people to whom students feel safe in disclosing their victimization, specifically in cases such as domestic violence, suggesting it is one of the few opportunities to tell someone about what is happening to them when they are away from the offender during class. These types of situations may provide an opportunity for additional training, affording a chance for instructors to share experiences with each other and learn new skillsets at the same time. Many times, having a peer or supervisor

praising their efforts, especially from someone they value, may motivate instructors to reflect more on how they respond to disclosure in future situations (Kram, 2021).

Physiological

The fourth aspect of self-efficacy is a critical facet of the current study's foundation. Physiological (emotional) states are emotional reactions to situations and may include physical reactions (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1994). Physical cues can indicate vicarious trauma or trigger a recollection of personal traumatic experiences in the instructor (Bannister, 2019). Yet, fear and anxiety can play a role in the lack of recognition and response to difficult situations of student disclosure in the classroom and can decrease performance efficacy (Peterson et al., 2008).

Self-Efficacy as a Theoretical Framework

Self-efficacy is a theory used frequently when responding to personal and social change (Bandura, 1986; Vaughan-Johnston et al., 2020). Bandura's (1977) four aspects of self-efficacy provide an applicable theoretical framework for the current study. A theoretical lens in research such as a narrative inquiry methodology is an ideology that affords a writer a structure to use when advocating for individuals or groups (Creswell et al., 2019). Self-efficacy as described by Bandura (1986) constitutes "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances. It is concerned not with the skills one has but with judgments of what one can do with whatever skills one possesses" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Employing self-efficacy as a lens to better understand the experiences and level of preparedness of online instructors who have experienced students' self-disclosure of trauma provides an opportunity for reflection of what is particularly impactful in these moments of disclosure, what works and what does not, by drawing on experiences and previous training (Kram, 2021).

Self-efficacy may provide information about an individual's skillset that can improve workplace performance (Hoges, 2008). Bandura (1997) first referred to this as performance accomplishments but later called it enactive learning theory, essentially stating that when self-efficacy increases, fear and avoidance decreases, all impacting performance levels (Kram, 2021). Employing this critical lens of self-efficacy, the performance of participants' preparedness to recognize and respond to mental health concerns was explored. Specifically, participants' performance experiences applied to the triggering disclosure of personal trauma from sensitive academic content, amongst other perspectives and experiences.

There are challenges to online teaching, and it is important for instructors teaching online to be prepared so they can help students meet goals and objectives (Du et al., 2018). While "online assignment or homework provides new opportunities (e.g., instant feedback), it also presents significant motivational challenges (e.g., regarding goals, ability beliefs, the level of difficulty, and the value or usefulness of online assignments" (Xu, 2022, p. 2). Xu (2022) examined the goals and objectives of teachers instructing courses online and confirmed that a frequent goal of online instructors is to have students exceed at their abilities to self-regulate online assignments. Another goal is for an instructor to use a person-centered approach to online assignment motivation (Xu, 2022, p.10). Bandura (1977) previously identified definition of self-efficacy demonstrates the applicability of this theoretical framework of self-efficacy in the current study in which verbal persuasion (encouragement) is a facet. This belief is sometimes referred to as social persuasion and is defined as "feedback from others that is judged to be authentic and a reasonable match to one's personal assessment of capabilities" (Peterson et al., 2008, p. 9). Stories of participants' authentic perspectives of their own assessment aiding students in distress were explored in the current research study.

The fourth facet of self-efficacy, physiological (emotional) state (Bandura, 1977) is a physical and emotional reaction(s) to situations (Bandura, 1995, 1997). An example of a physical reaction of an anticipated stressful situation when a student discloses personal trauma is a racing heartbeat, palpations, and nervous laughter (Winfrey, et al., 2021). However, once an instructor recognizes physical reactions when addressing student-self-disclosures, they are addressing their awareness of their physiological state of self-efficacy and this may be helpful in responding to students in distress (Burić, et al., 2020). Another example to highlight the importance physiological state of self-efficacy is to become aware of physical cues that indicate vicarious trauma or trigger a recollection of personal traumatic experiences in the instructor (Bannister, 2019). Performance efficacy may decrease when an instructor's emotion (i.e., fear or anxiety) plays a central role in handling these situations of student self-disclosure (Peterson et al., 2008).

Self-efficacy is best applied to specific situations and tasks (Bandura, 1986). Here it was and used as a lens to interpret the results of the current study and identify emerging themes. Higher levels of self-efficacy in teachers can influence their behaviors about their own teaching, decision-making, developing practices in their classroom, and recognizing students' emotional welfare when discussing sensitive topics (Menon, 2020).

Weaknesses of Self-Efficacy

Individuals perceive self-efficacy as their personal beliefs (Bandura, 1997) and this may be either a general or a specific belief (Greco et al., 2022), depending on which of the four antecedents of self-efficacy are being reflected upon. For example, a general belief may be an instructor's ability to face a stressful situation in class. The more specific belief may be contextual, based on the situation that is perceived to be stressful (i.e., recognition of student trauma in the classroom, response to student disclosure). Research suggests a negative

relationship between performance and self-efficacy (Didem, 2018; Moores et al., 2009; Ye et al., 2019). Generally, individuals tend to view their performance more favorably than it actually is (Didem, 2018; Lee et al., 2022). How instructors view their self-efficacy in terms of performance, particularly during difficult situations (McGeown et al., 2014) is often an accurate indicator of success in the task at hand (i.e., recognizing and responding to student disclosures in the classroom). Yet weaknesses in self-efficacy and performance perceptions can also occur (Didem, 2018; Lee et al., 2022). For example, without effective training on recognizing and responding to self-disclosures, an instructor may believe they are helping a student, however the student may disagree (Cares et al., 2014).

Strengths of Self-Efficacy

Credentials of instructors is one of the most influential factors in shaping the quality of the education system (Didem, 2018). Recognizing this importance, the strengths of considering the experiences of instructors using the lens of self-efficacy are many. Teacher effectiveness, collaboration, job satisfaction, stress levels, student performance are just a few behaviors that can be predicted by exploring levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1995, 1999; Peterson et al., 2018; Redmond, 2016). Specifically, teacher self-efficacy is associated positively with the teacher's delivery of course information (Sehgal et al., 2017) which provides a contrary framework to examine the experiences of instructors using triggers or trigger warnings. Teacher self-efficacy is also positively associated with the instructor's role in facilitating teacher/student interactions (Sehgal et al., 2017). This can provide information to more deeply explore the perspectives of how instructors handle self-disclosures from students in class where they may have been triggered by academic content in their online asynchronous course. This association

also affords an opportunity to explore the feelings of preparedness of instructors to interact effectively and preform successfully in these stressful and difficult situations.

There is significant literature surrounding self-efficacy and collaboration (Sehgal et al., 2017) which emphasizes the importance of instructor training, field experience, and on the job training, such as shadowing. Another strength that self-efficacy brings to the current study is the perspective of trust in online group assignments between the student/teacher and in peer relationships (Du et al., 2018), which are explored in this narrative inquiry as participants' teaching pedagogy is shared during interviews. Du, et al. (2018) suggested "instructors of online courses are recommended to design high-quality group projects that are purposeful, meaningful, challenging and engaging" (p. 767). In the current study, the researcher study sought to explore the experiences of instructors in an asynchronous online environment and how they handled disclosures of trauma. Examining the experiences and perspectives of instructors with self-efficacy for this study provided a robust foundation for this research.

Review of the Literature

Through this study I sought to better understand the stories as told by seven online instructors of public and private HEIs in the US who taught undergraduate asynchronous online classes within the last 5 years (2017-2022) where academic content may trigger disclosure of students' personal trauma and/or sensitive information. This study provided an opportunity to learn from the experiences of participants and how they responded to student disclosures in their online asynchronous course(s). The instructor's comfort level in reference to how prepared they were to recognize signs of personal trauma in their students, was also explored. The review of the literature surrounding student self-disclosures of personal traumatic experiences in an online asynchronous college course is limited (Lindecker et al., 2021). However, there has been

significant research on triggers and trigger warnings (Boysen et al., 2021; Jones, 2020; Kim et al., 2020; Raypole, 2010; Sandon, 2018; Stringer 2016, 2018); pedagogy in education that includes different teaching styles and feedback (Hošková-Mayerová, 2016; Kadison et al., 2004; Lederer et al., 2021; Shrivastava et al., 2013; Yilmaz et al., 2017); challenges to teaching asynchronously online (Bashir et al., 2021; Duma et al., 2022; Gordon et al., 2021; Hrastinski, 2008; Kose et al., 2022; Martinez, 2012; Shin et al., 2021,2022; Tran et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2014); teaching with empathy (Crady, 2005; Kadison et al., 2004; Lindecker, 2021; Nikiforos et al., 2020), trauma informed teaching (Anderson, 2015), and recognizing signs of PTSD/trauma, recognizing victimization (Bedera, 2021; Cares et al., 2014; Carjuzaa et al., 2021; Olser, 2021; Parkway et al., 2010). These findings are significant and are discussed in the following sections.

Student Self-Disclosures

Student self-disclosures can enrich (or interrupt) the learning environment in its entirety (Frisby et al, 2013). Lindecker et al.'s (2021) research concluded more information is needed to better understand and examine student self-disclosures of personal information and trauma to their college online instructors. Lindecker et al. noted student self-disclosure of personal challenges and trauma was common, as experienced by 96% of surveyed faculty (n= 238). Utilizing purposive and snowball sampling with social network recruiting, the authors asked 238 online instructors with advanced degrees and teaching experience to complete an online survey using three categories: "demographics, faculty experience, and the Professional Quality of Life Scale version 5 (ProQOl5)" (p. 147) to collect information about participants' teaching experience, personal responsibilities, and priorities. They found most participants had students who shared "everyday challenges like family, financial, and employment issues to urgent and dangerous situations related to suicide, abuse, and addiction. Incredibly, survey responses

included seven mentions of student experience with suicidal ideation, or suicide risk and attempts" (p.148). Thus, as student mental health concerns increase around the nation (Conrad et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2022; Lederer et al., 2021), student/faculty relationships become more personal and complex (Crady, 2005; Kose et al., 2005; Gordon at al., 2021). The concept of academic content triggering self-disclosure is discussed further in the next section.

Triggers and Trigger Warnings

Trigger warnings first appeared in the media in the early part of the 20th century, but it was not until 2014 that a US HEI created a requirement for instructors to incorporate trigger warnings for their students (George et al., 2020). This controversial policy sparked an intense debate across North America "regarding the need for and efficacy of trigger warnings in classes" (George et al., 2020). Jones et al. (2020) argued trigger warnings are like PG-13 or *viewer discretion advised* warnings that are common now online, in theatres, and on media platforms. The question of trigger warnings (Bruce et al., 2020; Stringer, 2016, 2018), has been debated in the field of social sciences concerning courses that address sensitive material (Boysen et al., 2018). Trigger warnings can be either written or verbal (Stringer, 2016) and may promote equity, enabling students with traumatic backgrounds to participate in their studies in a similar fashion as their peers without trauma backgrounds (Stringer, 2016). Heath (2005) framed trigger warnings as an equity issue, stating:

> Students with personal experience of the topic may feel that they are on top of emotional volcanoes while others have the privilege of distance. These students are not receiving an equivalent educational experience, and other students do not get the benefit of their contribution. (p. 130)

Kulbaga and Spencer (2018) noted trigger warnings expand academic speech by engaging students more fully in their own learning.

Giving a trigger warning means providing prior notification about forthcoming content that may be emotionally disturbing (Boysen, 2017, Stringer, 2016). Ballbo et al. (2017) argued trigger warnings allow students to know what is coming and to prepare themselves. The authors found trigger warnings benefitted students with a history of trauma by providing them additional time to prepare for the material and, if appropriate, seek professional help (Ballbo et al., 2017). Ballbo et al. also proffered trigger warnings represent a teaching tool to facilitate classroom discussions about the severity of trauma-related material and problem-focused coping strategies. Instructors and students in social work, nursing, and psychology are often familiar with these topics and acknowledge that sensitive topics are an inherent part of a student's education. Yet some college students have begun to demand prior notification before the coverage of potentially disturbing content (Stringer 2016, 2018).

Stringer (2016) conducted an experiment asking students in her classroom to think of "content forecasts like weather forecasts, only more reliable" (Stringer, 2016, p. 5). She stated to her students:

> In tomorrow's lecture we will be looking at the origins of victimology in the
> 1940s. Our main task is to see their positivist approach and get a sense of the kind
> of victimological study they set in motion. But with the early victimologists there
> is sensitive content about victim blaming in general, and we will look at an
> example of victim-blaming in the context of sexual assault. (p. 5)

Stringer said students appreciated knowing what to expect in lectures and, in an end-of-semester survey, 98% of students registered strong support for this aspect of the course. Thus, Stringer suggested instructors use trigger warnings in the beginning of each sensitive discussion.

Bedera (2021) indicated sociology instructors include materials on sexual violence and domestic violence frequently in their courses and both instructors and students share concern and anxiety over how best to handle such difficult conversations. Ballbo (2017) and Heer (2005) recommended incorporating trigger warnings when teaching about trauma to facilitate classroom discussions about the severity the topics. Moreover, reviewing problem-related solutions may be helpful (Ballbo et al., 2017). Victimization and the costs of crime can be an afterthought in courses on crime and criminal justice, which often are focused on offenders (Gibbs, 2016). However, shifting attention to victims of crime potentially motivates students to better understand the causes and consequences of criminal victimization, in doing so improving the learning of course concepts and producing better-prepared criminal justice practitioners (Gibbs, 2016).

Eren et al. (2019) studied the motivations of criminal justice students to enter the major and pursue a criminal justice career, examining the influence of victimization. They studied criminal justice majors from two large, urban, majority-minority colleges in the northeast and found students reported victimization of self and those close to them as a significant influence on their motivation to enter the major (Eren et al, 2019). Cares et al. (2018) surveyed students in a large undergraduate victimology course to explore their attitudes toward trigger warnings. The authors noted considerable support for trigger warning use in victimology courses and indicated it did not appear to differ between crime victims and non-victims and that support was higher among females.

Concerns about triggering content may be applicable to all courses in which sensitive materials are reviewed and content discussed (Lockhart, 2016; Moje, 2007; Pithers, 2000). For example, in criminal justice courses, sensitive material, such as topics about interpersonal violence, domestic violence, sexual assault, systems of inequality and oppression, murder, and other violent crime, primary and secondary victimization are often addressed in class (Gibbs, 2016; Griner et al., 2020; Stringer, 2016).

Studies have also been conducted in other courses such as psychology (Boysen et al., 2018). Boysen et al. (2018) collected data from six different psychology departments across the US. Undergraduate psychology students (n = 751) reported their attitudes toward and experiences with trigger warnings in the psychology classroom (Boysen, et al., 2018). Results revealed many psychology students supported the use of trigger warnings, recognizing that such warnings as required for topics such as sexual assault, child abuse, and suicide (Boysen et al., 2018). An overwhelming majority of these psychology students indicated little discomfort with talking about sensitive topics in class (Boyes et al., 2018). The results also indicated if students experience discomfort, it had little or no effect on their learning (Boysen et al., 2018). The findings were important to the literature on content forecasting as it indicated students were not in support of avoiding sensitive topics and students taking these courses should expect to confront potentially disturbing content during psychology classes (Boysen et al., 2018). Ultimately, the authors noted relatively few students reported the type of distress trigger warnings are intended to prevent in psychology courses, but overall, students were supportive of instructors providing trigger warnings (Boysen et al., 2018). Spencer et al. (2018) concluded:

> Trigger warnings expand academic speech by engaging students more fully in their own
>
> learning. Specifically, we understand trigger warnings as a means of respecting students'

intellectual, emotional, and physical boundaries. By framing trigger warnings in this way, we argue that they are tools of worldmaking to the degree that they promise to improve accessibility, engage students better in learning, and cultivate more socially just and livable campuses. (abstract section)

Ballbo et al. (2017) asked 424 medical students in a cross-sectional survey if they believed trigger warnings helped them better understand the seriousness and sensitivity of the content being taught. They also surveyed students to see if trigger warnings increased awareness about trauma and its effects on health and well-being (Ballbo et al., 2017). Study findings indicated only a few students (11.2%) were aware of the term *trigger warning*. However, after describing this term with a formal definition on the online survey, 38.6% reported having had a professor use one (Ballbo et al., 2017). As such, many researchers agree, defining trigger warnings in addition to applying them in HE is a challenging and interesting debate (Jarvie, 2014; Stringer 2016, 2018).

The APA (2015) described *trigger* as a stimulus that results in a reaction and previously in the (2010) article *What it really means to be triggered* by C. Raypole, an emphasis on the definition of trigger as "anything that might cause a person to recall a traumatic experience they've had" (para. 1) is particularly relevant to this study. Prudent use of trigger warnings can enhance participation and discussion in the classroom (Lockhart, 2016). Some research indicated trigger warnings can either increase or decrease symptoms of distress (Sanson et al., 2019). Sanson, et al. (2019) examined trigger warnings as applied situationally and measured symptoms of distress. During their research, they provided both in person and online college students with a trigger warning before being exposed to sensitive materials while other like groups were not warned. Symptoms of distress in all college students were measured by conducting mini meta-

analyses on their data to further explore the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness with the uses of trigger warnings. They identified patterns and signs of trauma when analyzing the results and concluded a trigger warning was neither helpful nor harmful (Sanson et al., 2019).

Boysen et al. (2021) and Sanson et al., (2019) argued there is little empirical evidence to support the effectiveness of trigger warnings (Boysen et al., 2021). Boysen et al. examined the effects of trigger warnings in adults who viewed an online video lecture about sexual assault. In the study, participants reported their positive and negative feelings before and after the video, in addition to taking a test on the content. Participants then reported their attitudes about the necessity of warnings (Boysen et al., 2021). The authors concluded trigger warnings had no significant impact on participants' results.

Jones (2020) found both mixed or contradictory results in his research on trigger warnings on literature passages, stories, photos, and film clips. Jones found trigger warnings undermined participants' sense of their resilience in the future and their sense of the resilience of others. Robbins (2016) took a restrictive approach and concluded students who do not want to learn about these topics or cannot learn about these sensitive topics are too impaired by their own experiences and beliefs to be placed in the field setting working with clients. However, Cares et al. (2018) argued universal decisions mandating or advocating for or against the use of trigger warnings were premature. They determined further study on trigger warnings and their impact on student behavior and learning is warranted.

In addition to instructors as experts in the field of HE, librarians also play a pivotal role in reviewing content and literature. James (2017) studied library-based standards related to trigger warnings and suggested alternative perspectives through which academic librarians should view trigger warnings to arrive at the most beneficial outcome for all concerned. One alternative

perspective may be a three-step process in which a librarian considers trigger warnings after reflecting on the content, context, and mutual obligation (James, 2017, p.301). According to the American Librarian Association (ALA), academic libraries serve colleges and universities, their students, staff, and faculty (ALA, 2021). Recognizing that librarians are experienced professionals in the field of academic research, the ALA conducted research examining trigger warnings and their impact upon the HE community (ALA, 2020). Special consideration was given to librarianship because there is a connection with students on a daily basis. Thus, librarians should be provided with the skillset and training to engage in a meaningful and respectful way with students that may be experiencing difficulty with the information (James, 2017). In addition, Kim et al. (2020), Olser (2021), and Parkway et al. (2010) recommended increased training for instructors to handle students' personal disclosures of trauma that may have occurred because of sensitive academic content.

A proactive approach was suggested by Robbins (2016) and Boysen (2017). Many degree programs (i.e., social work) address most, if not all, the topics classified as triggers (i.e., domestic violence, sexual assault, death, discrimination). They suggested letting college applicants know in advance that such content is mandated in the type of work these professions require (Robbins, 2016). Robbins argued content forecasting at the time of course selection allows students to make fully informed choices about entering fields such as social work. However, the author also emphasized that permitting students to opt out of lectures or readings to avoid content that may cause discomfort or canceling entire lectures or classes to "assuage

student fears of emotional distress does a disservice to our students and to the profession"

(Robbins, 2016, para 13). Barreca (2016) wrote a strongly worded opinion piece in the Seattle

Times, stating:

> The day I'm forced to offer "trigger warnings" before teaching is the day, I stop teaching.
> To insist that I, or any other teacher, warn students that the material in a class might upset
> them defeats the purpose of education. Colleges and universities must remain institutions
> that inflame curiosity and, by their very existence, disturb those who enter their gates.
> (para. 2)

While Barreca (2016) strongly opposes the use of trigger warnings, Jones (2020) argued that

trigger warnings are not helpful for trauma survivors. In a study with trauma survivors (N = 451)

randomly assigned to either receive or not to receive trigger warnings before reading passages

from world literature. Jones found trigger warnings therapeutically reinforced survivors' view of

their trauma as central to their identity. Yet, Stringer (2016) argued in part for trigger warnings

describing this type of content forecasting are useful only specifically for students with trauma

backgrounds; for all other students, they are only as a matter of courtesy. While there is

substantial research on the use of trigger warnings and whether HEIs should use them, there

appears to be limited significant literature (Lindecker et al., 2021) that focus solely on the rates

of self-disclosures because of content triggering specifically, let alone online. This limited

research provides rationale to the current study exploring the perspectives and experiences of

college instructors and how they handled situations of self-disclosures with online students.

Teaching Pedagogies

How an instructor connects with a student can make a significant difference in the quality

of education and the experiences of both the teacher and the instructor (Daumiller et al., 2021;

Oliveira et al., 2021; Stronge et al., 2011). Moreover, the shift to ERE in 2020 required maintaining a sense of community, and providing emotional support, compassion, and empathy to students during uncertain times became priorities of instructors (Shin et al., 2021). Pedagogy describes the study of teaching, how material is presented, and how it is delivered to the student in the classroom (Nikiforos, 2020). Ball (2020) described pedagogy, curriculum, and content used by those in the education profession as reflecting the instructors' prior learning, classroom content, goals, training, and experiences. Teacher-centered pedagogy affords the instructor the opportunity to teach directly and impart information to the students directly, while learner-centered pedagogy provides the student a more active role in the process of learning (Kulbaga et al., 2018).

Combining teacher-centered and learner-centered pedagogy can provide a dynamic teaching and learning environment that is inclusive and considers multiple learning styles categorized by change, activity, and progress (Liguori et al., 2020). Liguori et al. (2020) also recommended combining technology with traditional teaching as a tool to help learning. The authors argued the broad spectrum of learning objectives that influence teaching behaviors in education are now happening online, but only recently, due to the shift during the pandemic. Further, they noted a hybrid of both teaching methods, while challenging, provides a call to action to document and collect new pedagogical innovations to improve practices in online education and teaching. In addition, pedagogies in the classroom are increasingly including mindfulness, empathy, trauma-informed teaching, sensitivity to potential triggering content, and recognition of mental health concerns (Kulbaga et al., 2018; Lindecker, 2021). Yet, the extent to which these are applied in the online setting at HEIs, has not been comprehensively examined, furthering the rationale for the current study.

Recognizing students bring a multitude of different life experiences to the classroom, and some may even be "rooted in traumatic experiences before entering college or experiencing trauma during their college experience" (Gutierrez et al., 2019, p. 11), incorporating trauma-informed approaches in teaching is critical to meet the needs of individuals who face overwhelming adversity (Anderson, 2015). These adversities may impact students' health and well-being (Wadsworth et al., 2008) and include family stressors (abuse, poverty), environmental stressors (COVID, illness, death) and trauma, impacting students' health and mental health (Anderson, 2015).

Online Learning

The approaches instructors use in the classroom become more complex yet can also be more innovative when applied online (Su et al., 2005). Distance education first appeared in the 1970s (Nikiforos, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic played a pivotal role in launching online education to a new level (Bashir et al., 2021; Duma et al., 2022). Rocca (2010) conducted an extended multidisciplinary literature review focused on college student participation in the classroom which included journals published from 1958 through 2009 that focused on student participation in the classroom. Rocca noted the preponderance of literature on online learning centered on the *in-class* online environment (p. 186). Öztürk (2021) examined students' evaluation of learning (i.e., interaction, feedback, academic and technical support, active learning) in an asynchronous online learning environment. In this qualitative study of education students, all (n=28) reported feeling isolated and expressed frustration with the lack of face-to-face interaction, few recorded lectures and feedback that took too long to receive, on average, from their instructors (Öztürk, 2021). Conversely, students also shared they were able to get

support when they needed it and appreciated the independence of the assignment schedule and ability to plan to complete assignments at their own speed (Öztürk, 2021).

Lindecker et al. (2021) argued online educational settings may result in increased student disclosure of "highly personal traumatic or challenging situations" (p. 146). They submitted because of the diversity of students taking courses (age, gender, demographics, personal challenges, various backgrounds, tech skill sets, etcetera), they are more likely to have experienced trauma or personal distress. Adult learners tend to embark on courses with much higher expectations than younger learners (Ferreira, 2018). Ferreira (2018) asserted adults are driven by "a need to know before they participate in a learning event is the foremost premise that distinguishes the mature learner" (p. 11). This idea of needing to know information in advance relates to the concept of trigger warnings. Ferreira further stated younger learners' need to know is based most often on "what they must learn to pass a test or achieve an academic accolade, andragogy assumes that the adult learners 'need to know is prompted by a desire to apply learning to some aspect of their professional or personal lives" (p. 11). Given these differences described above with regard to expectations between younger and adult learners, the arguments which surround content forecasting provide an opportunity for further consideration in the college classrooms, online and in-person.

Content forecasting in the online classroom or in syllabi may be especially beneficial to the adult online learner given the differences in the expectations of students taking online courses. Lindecker et al. (2021) reported nearly all participants (online instructors) said students have disclosed personal challenges or traumatic experiences to them. The authors noted within the last few years, HE has moved from their sole focus on academic training for the most prepared students to a more generalized philosophy of education to that now includes

"remediation, life support, mentoring, and coaching more diverse, challenged learners" (p. 151). Lindecker (2021) and Ferreira (2018) both acknowledged the ongoing trend of the complexities of online learning and online teaching.

Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic represented a stressful situation for the university population due to significant changes in instruction and living conditions (Auxiliadora et al., 2021). In their research on mental health during the pandemic, Lindecker et al. (2021) examined the relationship between student disclosures of personal challenges and teacher burnout and compassion fatigue, findings indicated that "student self-disclosure of personal challenges and trauma was common, experienced by 96% of surveyed faculty" and most faculty had low to average compassion fatigue scores (p. 144). Thomas et al. (2019) suggested schools develop strong cross-system collaboration between school staff and mental health professionals.

Similar to Lindecker et al. (2021), Lederer et al. (2020) found even before the pandemic. Online students were experiencing significant mental health concerns. Lederer et al. asserted food insecurity, financial hardship, isolation, uncertainty in the future, and lack of social connectedness hampers a student's performance. The authors recommended HEIs prioritize and expand services to support students by developing and delivering clear communication. They also suggested instructors offer help regardless of where a student may be physically located, given the online delivery that has now became part of many students' HEI experience. The authors underscored the fact that COVID-19 and remote contact to students removed the safety net of college resources and made providing mental health assistance to students even more difficult.

Students with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Students can bring to the classroom, various life experiences and trauma that may have happened prior to college or during college (Gutierrez et al., 2019, p. 11). Lindecker et al.'s (2021) study exploring student's self-disclosure rates to online faculty was particularly important to the current research study regarding the extent to which instructors feel prepared to handle these difficult moments. Lindecker at al. suggested:

> Future studies should further explore these strategies to determine what targeted supports and trainings would be beneficial for faculty and identify what larger support systems are needed outside the classroom to support student success, retention, and degree completion. (p. 151)

For individuals with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) viewing reminders of trauma can spark painful reexperiencing symptoms (e.g., flashbacks) (APA 2013; Harrigan, 2018; Jones at al., 2020, 2021). Harrigan's (2018) *The Trauma Survivor's Self-help Guidebook* provides supportive tools and techniques for individuals who have experienced trauma to practice when they are triggered. Harrigan argued this guidebook is different than other training guides because "it can be practiced while in a regulated state and still found and accessed when triggered" (p. 7). Historically, there have been limited opportunities for college instructors to receive continuing education seminars to learn more about and how to work with online students who exhibit signs of mental health concerns (Brown et al., 2022; Lindecker, 2021; Thomas et al., 2019). However, in recent years, these opportunities have become more available (Hodges et al., 2020; Roman, 2020).

Thomas et al. (2019) asserted schools should include trauma-informed practices but acknowledged it will require administrative support. The authors recommended schools

incorporate trauma-sensitive practices and that professional development remain a priority. Post-traumatic stress disorder is "a mental health condition that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing traumatic events. These events pose significant physical, emotional, or psychological threat to the victim or to loved ones, and are overwhelming, shocking, or dangerous" (APA, 2019, para 2). Academic conversations about PTSD symptoms date to 1597. Heer (2015) argued soldiers who are emotionally damaged by war have long known what PTSD involves; however, it was not until the 1960s when people became more aware of PTSD, that the public took a more sympathetic and humane view of soldierly suffering.

Entering college with PTSD symptomatology has been linked to poor academic performance and increased risk for dropping out of college (Baker et al., 2015). According to the APA (2019), symptoms of PTSD include feelings of anger, depression, frustration, and isolation lasting longer than a month. Because instructors are in regular communication with students, they are likely to observe signs and symptoms of distress (Kulbaga et al., 2018; Lederer et al., 2021). However, recognizing cues in student behavior in an online environment may be more difficult (Lindecker et al., 2021).

Musabig and Karimah (2020) identified four sources of stress: interpersonal, intrapersonal, academic, and environmental (Ross et al., 2008). Results from these studies all indicated most stressors come from intrapersonal stress such as finances and responsibilities and most students have more than just a single type of stress. Lindecker, et al. (2021) stated:

> With better understanding of the personal challenges and trauma that students disclose to faculty members, university leaders can consider how to more effectively support students who experience trauma or personal struggles. University leadership can identify ways to provide support and training to faculty members to be better prepared to help

students in need. By more effectively supporting faculty in their efforts to support students, we can more effectually ensure that students persist and succeed in their academic programs. (p. 152)

Recognizing symptoms of PTSD is not always easy to do, and the APA (2019) provides examples to consider when presented with signs that may not be typically considered warning signs of distress. For example, someone with PTSD may not be able to sleep because they're worried about having nightmares and this lack of rest can result in unpleasant moods, and difficulty concentrating, completing tasks, and functioning throughout the day (APA, 2019). Recognizing signs of distress in online students is important because in an asynchronous course completing tasks online is a main priority and expectation of all students (Öztürk, 2021).

Summary

Literature indicates the more challenging the discussion and difficult the content, the more likely a student may be to disclosure instances of personal trauma (Agllias, 2012; Ball, 2000; Carello et al., 2015; Reyes et al., 2012). Recent research on student participation has now started to include a focus on the *in-class* online environment (Rocco, 2010). Research confirms numerous benefits of online which has been supported by many companies, colleges, employees, and students as well (Hanafy, 2021). However, the literature is limited in exploring the perspectives and experiences of online asynchronous college instructors when students self-disclose personal trauma and/or sensitive information and the extent to which they are prepared to handle such disclosures (Barak et al., 2007; Greiner et al., 2022; Lantis, 2022; Lindecker et al., 2021).

The existing literature outlines challenges for online students in accessing mental health services, concerns about triggering academic content being taught without a supportive

framework, and trauma and stressful situations increasing at HEIs. Numerous researchers also considered the potential for increased training opportunities for instructors to incorporate new skills and teaching methods into their online classroom. The literature indicates there is more to be done, more to be researched, and more to be understood about student self-disclosure in online course and the extent to which instructors are prepared to handle these difficult situations. Thus, the current research project that explored the lived and told stories of asynchronous instructors is warranted and adds to the body of knowledge in the field.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1994, 1999) self-efficacy theory is the selected theoretical and conceptual framework for this study. The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study is to explore and better understand the experiences and perceptions as expressed in lived and told stories of seven instructors of public and private HEIs in the US who teach asynchronous online classes where academic content may trigger disclosure of students' personal trauma. In this study I explored the experiences and perspectives of the extent to which instructors felt prepared to recognize signs of personal trauma in their students. Using narrative inquiry as the methodology to investigate this study's areas of interest and gather data from the experiences and perspectives of seven online asynchronous college instructors provided an opportunity to hear their lived and told stories about students sharing stories of personal trauma in their lives with them. Utilizing a narrative inquiry approach afforded an opportunity to gain deeper insight on how the instructors felt, behaved, reacted, and thought (Bloomberg et al., 2016).

Recognizing the influence instructors have on their student's lives (Frisby et al., 2013), instructors' ability to recognize and react to student's personal trauma is an important skillset given the mental health crisis in HE (Kim et al., 2022). This issue is also timely, given the increased number of online students in the last several years (Lederer et al., 2021; NCES, 2020). It is important to understand instructors' sense of self-efficacy when exploring the shared experiences of faculty responding to their students' self-disclosure(s) of personal traumatic experiences in an asynchronous online environment. Thus, narrative inquiry was used to collect and analyze data collected through interviews regarding the extent to which faculty felt prepared to recognize signs of personal trauma in their online classrooms, as self-efficacy is comprised of

a person's attitudes, abilities, and cognitive skills (Bandura, 1977). One's levels of self-efficacy plays a major role in how individuals perceive situations and how they respond to such circumstances (Meijer, 1988; Shipper et al., 2020; Voica et al., 2020; Wang, 2021). Hodges (2008) first examined self-efficacy in the context of online learning environments and addressed the importance of the awareness of faculty teaching classes online to complete specific tasks.

In this study, I explored instructors' perceptions of their own performance, an important facet in self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) relative to the extent to which they felt prepared to recognize student self-disclosures and mental health concerns in the online classroom. Peterson et al. (2005) contended self-efficacy is the bedrock of human performance and Campbell et al. (1976) concluded human performance "can be regarded as almost any behavior which is directed toward task or goal accomplishment" (p. 64). More recently, Voica et al. (2020) asserted the correlations between self-efficacy and an individual's confidence levels can help teachers better understand students' emotions and anticipate their concerns.

The selection of narrative inquiry as a methodology allowed participants to share the difficult, sensitive, and perhaps transformative experiences captured in the lives of online instructors. The study incorporated one-on-one semi-structured interviews with questions constructed in such a way to explore the experiences and reactions of instructors teaching online in an asynchronous course in which students shared personal experiences of trauma and/or sensitive information. These open-ended questions captured the lived experiences shared by the instructors about the extent to which they felt prepared to handle these difficult situations and how they responded in the past when these self-disclosures by students have occurred.

Creswell et al. (2019) acknowledged narrative inquiry has become a legitimate and popular way to study teachers and educators. Thus, better understanding experiences of the past,

present and future helped capture their experiences and perspectives in the classroom. The participant's stories were coded and the overarching themes and patterns that capture the difficult moments in online classrooms from the instructor's perspective are reported here. I recruited participants using social media networking during a select period in the summer of 2022. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), "no two narrative studies will look alike" (p. 50). Thus, using qualitative narrative inquiry as a methodology may be applicable to multiple disciplines.

Qualitative narrative inquiry studies are used to explore and better understand the experiences and perceptions as expressed in lived and told stories of participants (Bloomberg et al., 2016). In the current study, experiences and perceptions as expressed in lived and told stories of asynchronous online course instructors in public and/or private HEIs in the US from 2017-2022 who have taught undergraduate asynchronous courses in which academic content may have triggered disclosure of students' personal trauma were explored. Lindecker and Cramer (2021) highlighted that their research indicated that most instructors teaching college level courses have little to no formal training in crisis intervention and referrals techniques. There is limited literature and research regarding disclosures in the online teaching environment, specifically in asynchronous courses, despite the increase in these classes being offered since 2020 when many, if not all, HEIs went virtual as a response to a global pandemic, COVID-19 (Lindecker, at al, 2021; Tran et al., 2021). Lindecker et al., (2021) emphasized more information and an in-depth look at the way online instructors handle disclosures is warranted. This study provided an important and rare opportunity to learn from the experiences of asynchronous online instructors and learn from the stories and perspectives of how these instructors handled student disclosures in their online asynchronous course(s).

Using Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1994, 1999) self-efficacy theory and drawing on their four antecedents: performance experiences, vicarious (learning) experiences, verbal persuasion (encouragement) and physiological (emotional) states, this researcher sought to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How do instructors handle disclosure of personal trauma when teaching sensitive academic content that may trigger previous and/or current personal traumatic experiences within their asynchronous online undergraduate students?

RQ2: How prepared do instructors feel to recognize signs of personal trauma in their students when teaching asynchronous online classes?

These research questions were explored remotely through semi-structured, one-on-one virtual interviews with seven instructors of public and private HEIs in the US who have taught asynchronous online classes within the last 5 years (2017-2022) in which academic content may have triggered self-disclosure of students' personal trauma and/or sensitive information.

Site Information and Population

This section includes a description about the study site and population that was recruited, selected, and subsequently interviewed for this study. To study college instructors' responses to their online students' self-disclosures of personal trauma in the online asynchronous environment, participants were selected who have taught or were teaching asynchronous online courses in the US within the last 5 years in which students self-disclosed personal information about their traumatic experiences.

Participants were recruited using social media networking (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn). The following criteria applied for selection of participants: (1) current or prior college online asynchronous instructor over the age of 18 years old, (2) have taught a minimum

of one class in an online asynchronous format, (3) the class or classes were taught in the US within the last 5 years (2017 through 2022), (4) participant has had at least one experience of a student sharing personal trauma and/or sensitive information with the class and/or instructor during the semester the instructor taught the class, and (5) participants are not employed by the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, Plattsburgh at Queensbury, Delhi, or Community College of New York (CUNY) Adirondack to avoid a conflict of interest.

To confirm the above criteria, participants self-identified and were asked to verify these criteria at the onset of the interview. After reviewing the participant information sheet with the participant, I or the participant assigned the participant a pseudonym to protect their identity. No personally identifiable information was used in the transcripts. Neither the participant's real name, nor employer's name, nor college name where they teach or taught courses, were used in the transcription, nor the study. Examples of student self-disclosure settings included but were not limited to the online class setting, via email, phone, in writing or in a subsequent office (remote or physical) visit. Participants were willing to take part in an interview for approximately 45 minutes to one hour.

To further explain the criteria for selection of participants, it is important to clarify the intent behind the selection of narrative inquiry as the methodology. For this study, as the researcher, I asked instructors to share their personal story and listen to the perspectives of the instructor and their experiences with either a single or in multiple occurrences of student self-disclosures in their online environment and capture the essence of their lived experiences in a narrative review. Using self-efficacy as the theoretical lens to guide this narrative inquiry, I gave voice to instructors who fit the study's criteria and who have not often been given the chance to

tell their stories nor share their experiences regarding such delicate and sensitive moments in teaching online, specifically in an asynchronous environment.

Collecting the stories and shared lived experiences of seldom-heard individuals supports the methodology of narrative inquiry (Creswell et al, 2019). There is not a required sample size for qualitative narrative inquiry studies. Unlike quantitative studies, narrative inquiry depends on the questions explored eliciting thick, rich, and voluminous data and takes into consideration the resources and time to conduct this type of research (Bloomberg, 2016; Creswell, 2020; Lewis et al., 2014). A sample size for a narrative inquiry study can range from just a single individual to a larger sample size (Creswell, 2020; Gutterman, 2015), but literature has placed emphasis on the number of participants in relationship to the research questions themselves (Lewis et al., 2014; Pitre et al., 2022).

Saturation of data is an important aspect to consider in narrative inquiry studies (Creswell et al, 2019). The type of data that narrative inquiry develops results in no two studies containing identical information. Rather, they are each distinct (Bloomberg et al., 2016). Creswell et al. (2019) defined saturation as "a state in which the researcher makes the subjective determination that new data will not provide any new information or insights for the developing categories" (p.628). Recognizing that the interviews in a narrative methodology are the raw data (Creswell et al., 2019) and the detailed, very personal experiences participants shared during this hour interview, the sample size of seven participants for this study fell within the range suggested by leading researchers (Creswell et al, 2019; Guetterman, 2015; Lewis et al., 2014; Pitre et al., 2022) to gather plentiful quality information to explore the patterns and capture themes from shared and lived told stories of participants (Bloomberg, 2016; Creswell, 2020).

This study captured either a single or multiple experience(s) depending on the instructor's recollection of their experiences when a student self-disclosed in their online asynchronous course. Therefore, the requirement to have taught even a single class during which this disclosure occurred and how the instructor recalled their experience responding to the student was an appropriate criterion. The only mode of online teaching and course offering that was explored in this study was an asynchronous model, therefore only instructors having taught or who were currently teaching in this specific modality were eligible to participate. The time frame of teaching a course asynchronously online within the last 5 years (2017-2022) as qualifying criteria for participants intends to capture anticipated differing perspectives of teaching. This is especially of interest to hear the experiences of instructors who taught and handled student self-disclosures in an online environment pre-COVID-19, during COVID-19, and now entering post-COVID-19 in HE. This time frame of 5 years was also selected when exploring the instructors' perceptions relative to their level of preparedness to recognize and respond to students pre-, during-, and post-COVID-19-time frames during these transitions and uncertain times in HE.

Sampling Method

Narrative research should result in an analysis of the data that has both the themes that emerge from the data and descriptions of the stories told from the participants (Creswell et al., 2019). The current study utilized a qualitative narrative inquiry design. Critical sampling is a type of purposeful sampling that usually occurs in case studies or phenomenological studies, but it is also used in narrative inquiry (Creswell et al., 2019). Savin-Baden et al. (2007) stated "the meaning-making through story construction and interpretation first happens between the narrator (person who had the experience) and the listener (researcher)" (p. 464). By interviewing instructors who self-identified they had students self-disclose previous and/or current traumatic

experience in their online asynchronous course, they met the criteria for the study, which is a form of critical sampling. However, if participants did not meet the criteria set forth, they were not interviewed. Once participants reached out to me by phone or email, I asked them to self-identify in writing or verbally that they met the basic criteria set forth above, and then once again confirmed this during the interview.

Recruitment did not take place until the study was reviewed by University of New England (UNE)'s Institutional Review Board (IRB) confirming that the research study protected the rights of human subjects during the proposed research period (Creswell et al., 2019). Upon approval, I engaged in purposeful sampling by utilizing social media networking to recruit multiple participants. The recruitment language during the purposive sampling identified the study's criteria for participation. Using social media network recruiting recognizes that social media is a powerful and effective tool to broadly recruit participants (Thornton et al., 2016) as well as considers COVID-related restrictions.

Social media allowed me to identify multiple participants within one site, affording a wide range of potential shared experiences and perspectives of instructors having taught asynchronously online at any university or college in the US. After interested participants reached out to me using the contact information on the recruitment posts (Appendix A and Appendix B) and their eligibility was confirmed, a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix C) was sent to them, and a time was be scheduled for interviews to begin. Two to three days before the interview, a reminder email with the time, date, and Zoom® link was sent to participants, along with a list of likely interview questions (Appendix D) for the semi-structured interview, so they were familiar and comfortable with the topic.

Zoom® has been proven to be an effective use of technology for interviewing, particularly in narrative inquiry studies (Pitre, et al., 2022). All interviews for this study occurred remotely, therefore there were no special COVID-19 safety precautions. Qualifying participants were interviewed so long as there were no conflicts of interest or limitations that excluded them from participation.

I passively recruited participants on social networking sites, such as my personal Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter accounts, and on LinkedIn. The first seven respondents who qualified and responded to my posts were emailed the initial email (Appendix E). Saturation was not considered in this study, as saturation is not the purpose of narrative inquiry (Creswell, 2019). This small sample size produced rich and plentiful data to analyze the experiences of the participants (Butina, 2015).

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

This section outlines the instrumentation and data collection procedures for this study based on the participant criteria. Each participant engaged in an approximate one-hour virtual semi-structured interview using the study questionnaire developed in preparation for the interview (Appendix D). Participants were able to terminate the interview for any reason and at any time. This interview occurred in a secure, confidential, and private environment using Zoom®. Pitre, et al.'s (2022) research endorsed Zoom® as a "platform to conduct narrative research" (para 1) and provided examples of how Zoom® allowed doctoral students conducting research "to cut cost, eliminate travel time, increase their sample size, and conduct research in a natural setting" (Pitre et al., 2002, abstract).

Principles highlighted in the Belmont Report were strictly adhered to, such as voluntary informed consent utilizing a participant information sheet (Appendix C) read by the participant

ahead of the interview and verbally acknowledged by the participant at the beginning of the interview. In the semi-structured interviews, previously developed interview questions (Appendix D) were asked of all participants, affording the flexibility for follow-up questions. The participants were provided an opportunity to review the interview questions (Appendix D) two to three days prior to the interview. These interview questions (Appendix D) were constructed in such a way to afford me the opportunity to ask sensitive and relevant questions corresponding with the literature reviewed for the study. I completed the interview in the time allotted, always remaining professional, courteous, and neutral, without interjecting my personal opinions (Creswell et al., 2019). During the interview, participants were offered the option of keeping their video camera on or off, but my camera always remained on to ensure participants I was in a private and secure location. And audio for both the interviewer and interviewee remained on.

Confidentiality of participants responses must be protected (Creswell et al., 2019). Anonymity in the research narrative summary of results is of the utmost importance. Participants were asked to select a pseudonym to protect their identity. Interviews were recorded, and redaction of participant identification (names of participants) corresponded with a password protected spreadsheet that remained confidential and, on a laptop, only accessed by me. I destroyed participant personally identifiable information (e.g., name, email, physical address, etc.) obtained for recruitment purposes after all transcripts were verified for accuracy

Data Analysis

The data collected in this narrative inquiry study were analyzed to garner a collective account as well as individual stories from college instructor's responses to their students' self-disclosures of personal trauma in an online asynchronous environment and the extent to which

they felt prepared to handle such situations. The qualitative data analysis and research software Atlas.ti® provided the tools to assist in coding the transcribed material in a convenient and systematic fashion. Utilizing these software tools or similar applications may assist with the reliability of replication in other studies. A first and second cycle of coding captured the primary content and true essence of the experiences and perspectives of instructors (Wicks, 2017). Saldana (2016) noted "the primary goal during second cycle coding is to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization from your array of first cycle codes" (p. 234). This second cycle afforded an opportunity to change or add new codes or even drop some codes all together as themes were developing.

The result of the analysis of the qualitative data was two-fold, the themes/categories that emerged and the description of the story of the shared lived experiences of the participants. Coding is an interpretative process and can often summarize data, not necessarily reduce data (Creswell, 2019; Wicks, 2017). In narrative inquiry studies, the study of shared experiences is told through stories, and prominence is on the stories told by the participants and how these stories are communicated (Merriam et al., 2016). The assistance of the computer-related software combined with a categorical analysis done by me as the researcher resulted in a balance and dependability this narrative inquiry study warranted. During the process of coding, as the researcher I viewed this through the lens of an analytic act and employed descriptive coding by summarizing primary topics (Wicks, 2017).

Data management takes place in three different phases: data preparation, data identification, and data manipulation (Merriam et al., 2016). With respect to data identification (coding) and data manipulation (segments searched for, sorted, retrieved, and rearranged) Atlas.ti® provided the electronic tools via software programs to assist the researcher; however,

Merriam et al. (2016) noted it is the researcher and not the software program who determines which "units of data go with the codes" (p. 223). Creswell et al. (2019) described narrative inquiry qualitative data analysis as detailed descriptions of information and identification of developing themes. By reviewing the interview and listening to the stories and experiences of instructors, identifying the themes in their stories helped these "qualitative interpretations situate findings withing larger meanings" develop (Creswell et al., 2019, p. 517).

Kim (2016) encouraged new narrative researchers to test, challenge, and explore the boundaries of narrative inquiry's methodologies. Wolgemuth et al. (2019) stated "the future of narrative inquiry is open, multiple, and likely to be influenced by shifts in thinking about the self, society, and social justice" (p. 2). There are 25 types of first cycle coding that are all different and there are six types of various second cycle coding methods (Rogers, 2018). Saldana (2016) defined a code as "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 4). Using this combination of descriptive coding and in vivo coding provided rich, descriptive, and in-depth understanding of the shared lived experiences of the participants.

Saldana (2016) noted while for some studies, one type of coding may be sufficient, researchers may decide that two or more methods are needed to fully analyze data in a particular study. Given the sensitive information shared in this study, a combination of *descriptive* coding (researcher-derived) and in vivo coding (participant-derived) was employed. This type of coding is known as descriptive coding. Descriptive coding afforded me an opportunity to "creatively observe the possible links and connections among different aspects of the data" (Merriam et al., 2016, p. 223). In *descriptive* coding, the researcher engages in extensive reading and review of the interviews and identifies the topics, creating codes for each topic and create descriptions of

what these excerpts represent, then finally reviews these codes to determine the meaning and themes of this data.

To enhance the analysis of the interview data, *in vivo* coding affords the opportunity to develop codes from the interview data rather than the researcher creating the codes from the literature and categorizing the data. While *in vivo* coding may be the most common name for this type of coding, other names that describe this type of coding include literal coding, verbatim coding, natural coding, and emic coding (Manning, 2017; Rogers, 2018). Using in vivo coding added to the descriptive coding because of the ability to capture the experiences of participants in their own words, creating additional themes that developed from the participants' stories and experiences (Rogers, 2018).

The language and terminology used by participants generated the code, allowing the voices of the participants to be heard in their own words. Given the sensitive information being shared and explored in the interviews, it was important to document their spoken words and the exact phrases in the results of the research. The themes that were subsequently created by the coding the collection of data in the literal words from participants reflected the shared lived experiences and direct stories that are told during the interviews (Manning, 2017). Saldana (2016) further underscored the importance of member checking when using *in vivo* as a coding method because meanings of words or phrases identified may be specific to a particular culture or group (Manning, 2017; Saldana 2016).

Limitations, Delimitations, Ethical Issues

Narrative inquiry is typically used for research that seeks to examine and to understand human experiences (Lal et al., 2012). Narrative inquiry is not a motionless methodology; it ebbs and flows (Wolgemuth et al., 2019). Creswell et al. (2019) described narrative researchers as

those who "hope to capture this story line as they listen to individuals tell their stories" (p. 519). In the current study, it was my hope to capture the lived and shared stories of seven college instructors who taught undergraduate asynchronous online classes between 2017-2022, in which academic content triggered disclosure of students' personal trauma. Potential ethical considerations and limitations were considered. With respect to limitations of narrative inquiry, while this type of research has become a practical and a worthwhile method to study teachers in education settings (Creswell et al., 2019) there were several limitations.

First, I only studied experiences in courses taught as asynchronous classes. Recognizing that ERE quickly became an essential model of teaching by traditional HEIs during the COVID-19 pandemic (Shin et al., 2022) and many faculty transitioned from teaching in-person to a blended model of learning (Lindecker et al., 2021), careful attention was given to the recruitment tools (Appendix A and Appendix B). The recruitment tools provided clear definitions of the type of instructors asked to participate in this study. However, this may be confusing for some online instructors who provided a combination of remote instruction both online and on campus throughout the semester, while other classes became fully distanced online (i.e., remote/virtual) learning environments, highlighting a wide amount of variety in teaching options (Shin et al., 2021). Universal definitions are complex and may not be widely known, as definitions continue to evolve as to what distance learning includes and what it does not.

Second, a limitation in this narrative study was the criteria that asked participants to confirm they witnessed and/or responded to student self-disclosure of personal traumatic information. The belief that the instructor perceived a student's personal self-disclosure in class should be sufficient but may not have provided the full scope of the experience. Limited literature supported such disclosures are even more difficult in an asynchronous environment

(Lindecker et al., 2021; Stewart et al., 2005; Thomas et al., 2017) and an instructor's ability to recognize student trauma may be disadvantaged in an online asynchronous modality (Olser, 2021; Parkway et al., 2010).

Recognition and response to students online sheds light on the ineffectiveness of traditional cues of distress, uncomfortableness, trauma, and anxiety (Carjuzaa et al., 2021; Hrastinski, 2008; Martinez, 2012). Self-disclosures may happen during a discussion post-module, an email to the instructor, a phone call, an online office hour and many other non-conventional ways now more commonplace (Lindecker et al., 2021).

Bell (2011) reminded narrative researchers interpretation of events over time is essential to all narrative analysis and as events are recalled, the interpretation of the experience may change from its actuality. It is a limitation to the methodology that provides the realistic assumption that a disclosure from a student may now appear to have happened but went unrecognized, or a self-disclosure by a student was not really a disclosure of personal traumatic experiences at all, rather a misperception by the instructor due to a lack of training, an abundance of caution or familiarity in responding during such situations.

A third limitation was sample size. While there is not a required sample size for qualitative narrative inquiry studies, unlike quantitative studies (Bloomberg, 2016; Creswell, 2020; Lewis et al., 2014) a small sample size of seven participants within a five-year range resulted in few interested respondents, especially using social media as the sampling type. However, recognizing that a sample size for a narrative inquiry study can range from just a single individual to a larger sample size (Creswell, 2020; Gutterman, 2015) researchers have emphasized the number of participants in relationship to the research questions themselves should be a factor when considering a sample size (Lewis et al., 2014; Pitre et al., 2022).

Ethical Issue

Principles such as voluntary informed consent were confirmed by utilizing a participant information sheet (Appendix C) that was read by the participant prior to their interview and verbally acknowledged by the participant as evident in the interview script (Appendix F). As an instructor with the State University of New York at Plattsburgh and Delhi, I did not interview instructors employed at my institution. Furthermore, as an elected member of the Board of Supervisors in my community where a community college exists, I did not interview instructors employed by SUNY Adirondack.

Trustworthiness

Researcher bias is reduced by reviewing the themes identified after rereading interview transcripts to ensure they align appropriately with the data. These interviews used the transcription software Otter.ai® to provide secure, searchable, and manageable codes. Atlas.ti® provided the tools to code the transcribed material in a convenient and systematic fashion required in the analysis of data to identify patterns, themes and develop a meaningful system. The master list of participant identities will be maintained in a password-protected file on my computer until transcriptions have been verified and will then be destroyed. Transcriptions will be stored on a password protected personal computer that belongs to me. Contact information that is collected for the recruitment purposes, and any video/audio recordings will be destroyed at the earliest opportunity during the project (e.g., after the member checking process is completed). All other study data will be retained for a period of three years following the completion of the project. To ensure creditability of the interview questions asked in Appendix D, a pilot interview was conducted with a subject matter expert to test the questions and confirm the accuracy and creditability of the narrative inquiry sample/likely questionnaire (Appendix C).

Member Check

Interviews were the primary source of data collection for this study. As a qualitative researcher engaging in a narrative inquiry study, I was an "intermediary in knowledge co-construction in the collection, interpretation, and revelation of the meaning behind the stories" (Gavidia et al., 2022, p.1). Bloomberg et al. (2016) recommended to further ensure validity, whenever feasible feedback should be solicited from study participants. Hence, ensuring all participants are offered an opportunity to review the transcripts to ensure accuracy and accurate documentation of their interviews was critical to the study.

Interviews were recorded with participants with Zoom® and transcribed using Otter.ai®. After transcription was complete, I emailed a copy of the transcript to the participants for review. They had five days to review the transcript. During the review process, they had the right to delete and/or edit the transcript. Once participants were done reviewing the transcript, I asked that it be emailed back to me so I could analyze the data. If I did not hear back from the participant by day six, I accepted it as their approval of the transcript as is and moved on with the analysis. I verified during the interview (Appendix F) that the participant was aware of this information and consented to this process.

Transferability

The selection of narrative inquiry as the methodology (Bloomberg et al., 2016) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) as the theoretical and conceptual framework provided the potential to "elicit rich, thick descriptions" (Bloomberg et al., 2016, p. 172). This type of detailed description in qualitative research findings afforded a greater likelihood that transferability is feasible for this proposed study (Bloomberg et al., 2016). An added benefit of a pilot interview conducted with a subject matter expert (my secondary advisor with UNE and asynchronous online

instructor) to test the questions and confirm the accuracy and creditability of the narrative inquiry sample/likely questionnaire (Appendix D) was that this verification enhanced the transferability of the study. Other researchers will be able to use this study and results to initiate further topics of research. Decision makers and stakeholders in the community may use this study and results as a document to raise awareness emphasizing the importance of recognition and response to students' self-disclosures in the online environment. Specific attention was paid to adequate descriptions of sample and setting to increase the transferability. In addition, online instructors, especially asynchronous instructors may use this study as a guide in their workplace when creating their online modules and content.

Dependability

Reviewing the data and retelling the story is a process that identifies the patterns and themes (i.e., field texts), organizing these elements and then presenting a retold story that will provides and understanding of the individual's story (Creswell, 2019). Coding is an interpretative process and can often summarize data, not necessarily reduce data (Creswell, 2019; Wicks, 2017). During the process of coding, as the researcher I viewed this through the lens of an analytic act and employed descriptive coding by summarizing primary topics (Wicks, 2017). The assistance of the computer-related software described above combined with the analysis done by me as the researcher resulted in a balance and dependability that this study warranted.

Confirmability

Qualitative data recognizes how the results of the study can be traced back to its original origins utilizing a journal describing field notes (Bloomberg et al., 2016). Another perspective of confirmability, particular in quantitative research corresponds to objectivity (Bloomberg et al., 2016). Bloomberg, et al. (2016) said results are based on data rather than "an outcome of the

biases and subjectivity of the researcher" (p. 177). In the current study, demographical information was collected and provided in the analysis regarding the experience(s) the participant had with the college at which they taught.

Not all college instructors are full-time professors. In fact, with the reduction in college budgets and financial uncertainty, many colleges utilize adjunct instructors as a regular basis. Adjunct is a term frequently used in higher education but still definitions may vary within the profession (Layou et al., 2022). Adjuncts faculty make significant contributions to both student and full-time faculty success (Layou et al., 2022). This is also a benefit for students to hear from teaching faculty that are or have worked extensively in the field. For the adjunct faculty member, this is a chance for professionals in the field to share their area of expertise with those excited and willing to learn about topics important to them, to inspire youth and those continuing their education to enter the field and lobby to make changes that are important to their communities and to society. Additional strategies to limit bias and strengthen the confirmability in the research have been employed during the design of the likely questions used for the interview (Appendix D). As the researcher I remained reflexive and completed peer reviews with an expert colleague to pilot the questionnaire.

Role of the Researcher

As an adjunct instructor in criminal justice, I have personally experienced student self-disclosure of personal traumatic experiences both on campus and in online classes. My experience is what made me an excellent candidate to conduct this research, but it also highlights how important it is to maintain objectivity in research (Bloomberg et al, 2016; Creswell et al., 2019). Sparking my interest to conduct this type of research stemmed from noticing a pattern of disclosure each time I gave a presentation or lecture with respect to victimology over the last 20

years. Some students stayed after class to disclose or even sometimes during a class a student shared with others that they or someone they loved had been a victim of a crime. They shared with me they did not know where to turn and that while the student reported the victimization and the offender was often times held accountable in the criminal justice system, many times the student stopped short of describing to me the counseling they received, if any.

Over 20 years, I have learned by experience in the field that so many professionals, students, and community members were unsure where to turn for themselves, let alone refer a victim of crime for assistance. They were unaware of the state and federal victim compensation programs and what rights and services were available to them. Once I completed my master's in criminal justice with Boston University and started teaching more classes, both online and on campus, I quickly learned this disclosure pattern was not unique to my guest lecturing. In fact, there were a few students each semester taking my courses in victimology, advanced victimology, human trafficking, war on drugs, comparative criminal justice, and white-collar crime who disclosed personal traumatic experiences to me, and each time it was after or during a module on sensitive academic content. As teaching moved to almost all remote, I was familiar with this mode of teaching and welcomed it but noticed disclosures from students increasing. I suspected it was due to the stressors of COVID-19 but for me, the concern was the same.

As I started to hear from other instructors who did not have similar backgrounds to mine, I quickly learned if disclosures occurred, there was not a clear-cut policy or procedure to assist students that was effective in immediately accessing their mental health concerns. I learned many instructors did not utilize trigger warnings or provide content forecasting in syllabi or course materials, let alone before a video or presentation. I became concerned with the number of

students suffering alone, silently, online, in class, or on a discussion post; feeling isolated, alone, and unsure of what to do.

I believe with enhanced training, policies, resources, and support, faculty teaching online and on campus will recognize this challenge. Many educators started teaching because they want to make a difference in someone's life. They wanted to help. They hoped to inspire. It is the hope that this study and subsequent results sharing the experiences of faculty members will reignite that desire to do more and to provide information that will be helpful in facilitating a change in the online environment in HE.

Summary

The narrative inquiry structure can provide participants a rare occasion to share their stories with me by "telling, re-telling and reliving their experiences" (Bloomberg et al., 2016, p. 51). Conversely, as the researcher, I was "to be immersed in the complexity of the multiple layers of stories we as human beings' live day to day" (Bloomberg et al., 2016, p. 51). I sought to explore and understand the experiences and perceptions as expressed in lived and told stories of asynchronous online course instructors in public and/or private HEIs in the US in which academic content may trigger disclosure of students' personal trauma and/or sensitive information. College instructors have significant influence in their student's lives (Frisby et al, 2013). This study provided an opportunity to share the lived and told experiences and perspectives of online instructors during some very difficult situations in their teaching careers. Narrative inquiry is a popular type of qualitative research has become a legitimate and well-known way to study teachers and educators and that understanding their experiences (past, present, and future) and tells a powerful story capturing their experiences and perspectives (Creswell et al., 2019).

In this study, after recruiting occurred on social media, seven asynchronous online instructors meeting the study's following criteria were interviewed. The qualifying criteria was as follows: (1) current or prior college online asynchronous instructor over the age of 18 years old, (2) taught a minimum of one class in an online asynchronous format, (3) the class or classes were taught in the US within the last 5 years (2017 through 2022), (4) at least one experience of a student sharing personal traumatic or sensitive information with the class and/or instructor during the semester that the instructor taught the class, and (5) not employed by the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, Plattsburgh at Queensbury, Delhi, or Community College of New York (CUNY) Adirondack. Examples of student self-disclosure settings included but were not limited to either in the online class setting, via email, phone, in writing or in a subsequent office (remote or physical) visit and participants were willing to participate in a remote interview with me for approximately one hour.

A prepared list of interview questions was utilized (Appendix C), and the meetings were recorded using Zoom®. Any identifiable information was redacted, and the interview data were transcribed using a professional transcription service. Data were analyzed and coded using professional coding software and patterns emerged from the shared stories of participants.

The literature review from Chapter 2 helped guide the summary of the themes and patterns and I used Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy as my conceptual and theoretical framework for the study to view and analyze the data collected. It was a privilege to be the researcher in this study and an honor to hear about the experiences and perspectives participants shared with me about student self-disclosures in their classrooms and how they, as educational professionals, responded. Insights gained from this study provided important qualitative data that is timely, relevant, and critical for policy makers, instructors, and administrators in HE as they battle

increasing numbers of student mental health concerns in an online environment (Ball, 2000; Bali, 2018; Bannister, 2019; Barak et al., 2007; Cunha et al., 2020) and rising experiences of trauma in students' lives (Dhawan, 2020; Gelles et al., 2020; Lindecker et al., 2021). The following chapter includes a presentation and analysis of these data.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS/OUTCOMES

The purpose of this narrative qualitative study was to explore and understand the experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of asynchronous online course instructors in public and/or private higher education institutions within the United States where academic content may trigger disclosure of students' personal trauma and/or sensitive information. The participants in this study have taught, or are teaching, asynchronous online courses in the US within the last 5 years where students have self-disclosed personal information about their traumatic experiences. The purpose of this study was to provide an opportunity to learn firsthand from the experiences of asynchronous online instructors and learn from the stories and perspectives of how these instructors handled student disclosures in their online asynchronous course(s) and the extent to which they felt were prepared to recognize signs of personal trauma in their students. The research questions were:

RQ1: How do instructors handle disclosure of personal trauma when teaching sensitive academic content that may trigger previous and/or current personal traumatic experiences within their asynchronous online undergraduate students?

RQ2: How prepared do instructors feel to recognize signs of personal trauma in their students when teaching asynchronous online classes?

In this chapter, I present the findings of the current study, which are categorized into categories and themes with descriptive examples of experiences (subcategories) that were identified during the process of analyzing the data from seven participant interviews.

In Chapter 3, I described the criteria for participants to be considered in this study and only those meeting such criteria were recruited and interviewed. Participants were asked the

same eight fundamental interview questions (Appendix D) regarding their experiences teaching asynchronously online where students have disclosed personal trauma and/or sensitive information to them. Follow-up questions were asked to engage participants in describing their experiences. Interview questions focused on their experiences and perspectives and their descriptions of how they recognized, responded to student disclosures as well as how prepared they felt to assist students when disclosures of personal trauma and/or sensitive information happened in their online course(s).

Transcripts of the interviews were uploaded to the Otter.ai® transcription platform and redaction of any identifying information was completed. I reviewed each transcript in detail to ensure the automatic recording was properly converted and to confirm confidentiality of all participants in the now redacted transcript by removing geographical information, names of participants, names of Higher Education Institutions (HEI), and so on. Each participant had the opportunity to member check their transcript after the interview was completed and redacted. Once member checks were completed and the previously conveyed time to review the transcripts expired, each transcript was entered into Atlas.ti® for coding, organization, and interpretation, which resulted in identifying themes and subthemes that emerged from the 45–60-minute one-on-one interviews.

In the following sections, I present the findings from each of the categories that were developed. I also identify the corresponding themes and provide descriptive examples of participants' experiences. As a result of organizing the data from the interviews, the following categories were developed: (a) How Professors Issue Disclaimers (b) How Students Deliver Disclosures, (c) Examples of Student Disclosures, (d) How Professors Respond to Disclosures, (e) Impact on Professor's Wellbeing and (f) Training.

Six themes emerged from a thorough review of the categories that were identified during the coding and analysis process. Each theme and category correspond with specific detailed examples provided by participants, identified within this study as subcategories. There are approximately 28 descriptive examples, which are detailed stories and experiences of instructors responding to disclosures by students sharing traumatic experiences of sexual assault, domestic violence, homelessness and more as told by the participants in the study. Figure 3 reflects the categories and themes that emerged from coding.

Figure 3

Categories and Themes that Emerged from Coding
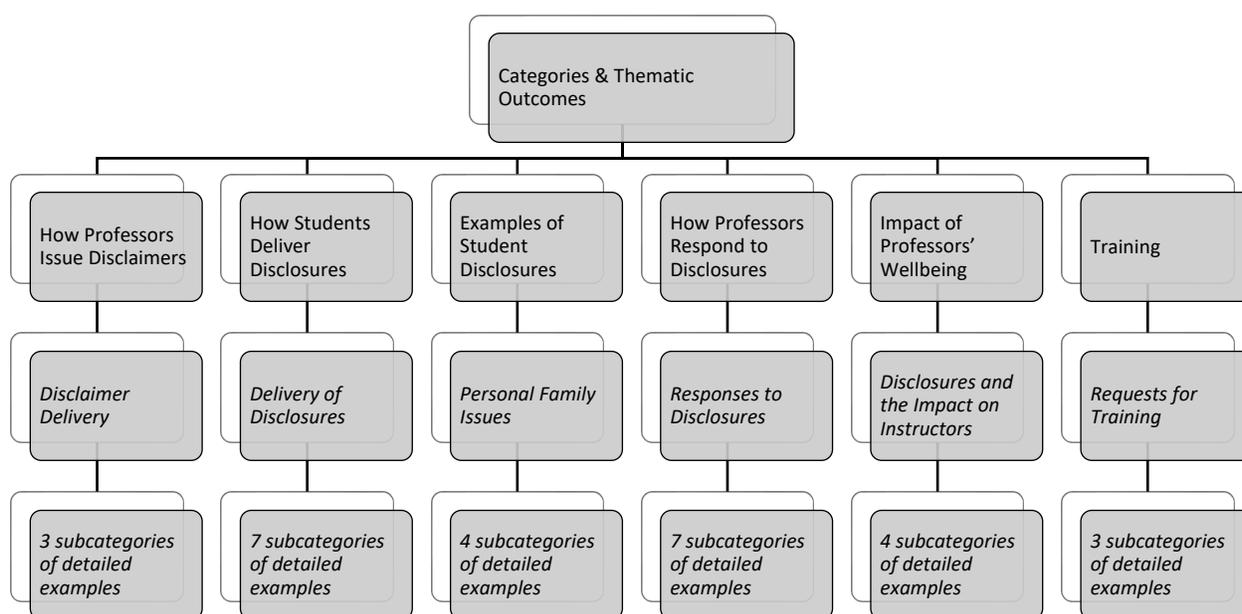
Note: Figure 3 explains the categories and themes that emerged from coding the data.

The *How Professors Issue Disclaimers* category includes the theme of *Disclaimer Delivery* illustrating verbal persuasion as an antecedent of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory.

The *Examples of Student Disclosures* category includes the theme *Personal Family Issues* illustrating vicarious experiences through the lens of Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1994) self-efficacy theory. The *How professors respond to disclosures* category includes the theme *Responses to Disclosures* illustrating verbal persuasion as an antecedent of Bandura's self-efficacy theory. The *Impact on Professors' Wellbeing* category includes the theme *Disclosures and the Impact on Instructors* illustrating physiological states as an antecedent of Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1994) self-efficacy theory. Lastly the *Training* category includes the theme *Requests for Training* illustrating vicarious experiences as an antecedent of Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1994) self-efficacy theory. In the following section, I present the method of analysis, the results, and a summary of the results of the data collection.

Analysis Method

The data were collected during 45 through 60-minute interviews with seven participants. Once interview transcripts were transcribed in Otter.ai® and identifying content redacted, member-checking was completed, and a first cycle of descriptive coding and in vivo coding (Wicks, 2017) ensued. Data were coded and organized into related codes and groups for each interview (Saldana, 2016). The second cycle of coding afforded an opportunity to change and add new codes while dropping some altogether as themes developed (Saldana, 2016). The end result of this analysis was two-fold; themes/categories emerged and the description of the story of the shared lived experiences of the participants also arose (Creswell et al., 2019; Merriam et al., 2016; Saldana, 2016).

Coding

Each participant had the opportunity to member-check their interview transcript. Once the member-checked transcripts were approved, the transcript was uploaded to Atlas.ti®. In

Atlas.ti®, each transcript was read in detail prior to coding. Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1994) social learning theory of self-efficacy was used as a lens to understand the concerns surrounding the challenges of recognizing and responding to student disclosures online. Using both in vivo and descriptive coding, themes were identified that ultimately led to summary findings relevant to the growing field of teaching asynchronously with special attention paid to assisting online students with their mental health, which has been identified as an ongoing area of concern in colleges across the nation (Kim et al., 2022; Lederer et al., 2021). Once I established the codes using the above methods to guide me, I read the transcripts again and coded the text to develop categories and themes, such as examples of student disclosures and how professors respond to disclosures, all with subcategories including descriptive examples. One final review was done after this to narrow down the groups and further compare the data collected from the interviews for an all-inclusive interpretation of participants' perspectives and experiences.

Organization

After coding all the transcripts, the networks tool in Atlas.ti® (both the web and desktop versions) were used to organize the data. I created 185 codes and 444 specific quotes from seven data sets to assist in organizing the themes and subthemes that developed through the coding process. I further narrowed down the codes to groups (networks) of approximately six. Within each network, there were imported codes (or nodes) on blank pages of approximately six groups, into which quotations from the transcripts were imported (narrowed down to approximately 170) and then coded with the respective node. Quotations were further organized into six separate documents under each category for use in the information provided in the following section so that the data were presented in a logical manner. Six themes emerged each with a respective

category and as a result 28 subcategories emerged, which were important to document by describing the patterns of behaviors by participants when handling situations of disclosures.

Presentation of the Results and Findings

As a result of organizing the data from the interviews the findings from each of the categories and identified corresponding themes and descriptive examples (subcategories) of participants' experiences are presented in this section. Each of the seven participants were provided an opportunity to select a pseudonym. All but one participant asked that I assign their pseudonym. I assigned participants letters of the alphabet to reflect their pseudonym, and, in one instance, a participant (Participant Rosiland) chose their own pseudonym. Seven participants were interviewed in May and June of 2022. Table 1 summarizes the participant's demographic data.

Table 1

Participant Demographics Data

Participant	Gender	Highest Degree	Years of Online Teaching	Type of Institution	Online Course(s)	Position at Institution
Participant A	Male	Doctor of Philosophy	10	Public and Private	Criminology, Sociology, Research methods	Term hire
Participant B	Female	Masters	2	Public	Sociology	Adjunct
Participant C	Male	Doctorate in Education	20	Public and Private	Organizational Leadership, conflict management, higher education leadership	Adjunct
Participant D	Female	Masters	3	Public	Education	Adjunct
Participant Rosiland	Female	Doctor of Philosophy	3	Public and Private	Psychology	Full time Professor
Participant F	Female	Doctor of Philosophy	15	Public, Private and for profit publicly traded	Medical Billing, Health Care	Adjunct

| Participant G | Female | Doctorate in Education | 5 | Public and Private | Student development, English | Adjunct |

How Professors Issue Disclaimers

This category includes the theme of *Disclaimer Delivery* illustrating verbal persuasion as an antecedent of Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1994) self-efficacy theory with three subcategories of descriptive examples which include (a) Warning about Making Disclosures; (b) Trigger Warnings; (c) Referral Information for Help. The use of the word *disclaimer* is one I assigned to represent the participants' general description of a message given to students regarding the content of the class that may be difficult to hear or read about, the services available to students sent by email, posted in the course or written in the course materials or a statement prior to disclosure or a reply to students, post-disclosure of the services offered, privacy concerns or mandated reporting that may occur. All seven participants discussed some type of disclaimer, either written or verbal provided either by themselves or by the college as part of the policy and procedures at the school. Several participants used multiple messaging techniques to provide disclaimers to students. Different types of disclaimers to students provided by the participants in their classes were described.

Warning About Making Disclosures

All participants discussed their desire to help students navigate learning difficult material and wanting to assist students when they are in need. To provide as much information as possible in their courses about sensitive topics, some participants shared they advised students ahead of time regarding modules that included topics such as sexual assault, domestic violence, etcetera. Other participants shared statements about what happens if a student shares personal trauma and/or sensitive information in class so that they are informed prior to sharing with the instructor

or the class such information. For example, Participant Rosiland said she ensures her students know from the start of class she is available to discuss any issue with her students. She stated:

> I believe that I have this a responsibility to my students to keep them in a safe place. In the beginning of the class, I tell them not to disclose anything that they're not comfortable with everyone knowing. And if they are having issues that they can always ask me about it, and it's an online class, but I'm there for everybody. And they tend to take that seriously.

Participant Rosiland also utilizes the announcement section of the learning platform to send group emails and follows up as needed. She shared a message that she typically sends to students:

> 'If you're feeling like this, or this, then then you might want to get some counseling.' And I do it as a group thing so I'm not singling anyone out. But then some students, I single out and privately let them know that I think they could benefit from [counseling].

Participant A also shared his approach with students, to fully inform them. He said:

> If they wanted to talk to the police, they probably would have already. And then for you to have to sell it and say them, 'Now that you've told me this, I have to make a report,' That's just going to freak them out. So, it's really important to give them that warning ahead of time that, 'I'm okay with you telling me these things, but just know, here's what the process is if you do that.'

While statements about content and what to expect from instructors as a response for disclosures in asynchronous environments appeared to be a common practice, providing warnings in the case of content triggering disclosures were also methods of providing support to students and is explained in the following section.

Trigger Warnings

Content forecasting, also known as trigger warnings, are disclaimers and/or statements described by participants specific to the difficult content students are learning that may trigger disclosure of personal trauma and/or sensitive information (Stringer 2016, 2018). Participant Rosiland described her approach as "I put [a disclaimer] everywhere." However, she stated:

I still would like to have more help. Sometimes I wonder if I'm doing the right thing. And I want to make sure that I'm helping them. I think I'd be more effective if I had some sort of training.

Participant A described how he addresses difficult content with his students. He said:

This is a topic that probably will hit and if it didn't happen to you, you probably know somebody. And so, I tried to explicitly say 'I know that that's probably the case, I want you to be able to talk about what you want to talk about, don't talk about things, you don't have to disclose anything you don't want to.' And that's part of also the statement when I say, 'If we're talking about something, and it's too intense for you, or too traumatic, then it's okay to disengage or ask for an alternative assignment.'

Participant A also provided an example of a time that this occurred, recalling:

I've definitely in an asynchronous class had a student who had experienced sexual violence that semester, and who asked to not do the chapter that related to sexual violence because it was too fresh. And I gave an alternate assignment instead.

After students have disclosed personal trauma and/or sensitive information to the instructor, there were various reactions ranging from acknowledgement to referrals from participants. In several instances participants provided referral information ahead of time while others provided these resources post-disclosure.

Referral Information for Help

Participant B said she lists all the counseling information and the Student Health Center contact information at the start of class and in her syllabus. She stated that it is encouraged at her university and since COVID, it has now become a policy. However, she shared she has "been doing this for years." Conversely, Participant C shared while he does not specifically list a disclaimer or information for services in his syllabus, he believes there is a "push" for the university to include this information in the syllabus. Participant C said he regularly gives out counseling information and resources because he is so familiar with the services and he is also a student affairs administrator at his college, even giving advice to other instructors on sharing the counseling information with students. He stated:

> I also am very familiar with the resources because of my work. So, whenever questions arise, I don't have to go to 10 sources to find out. I just know to say, 'Oh, you should contact the Counseling Center and here's the here's the website.' I really should put those in my syllabi.

In addition to making a referral in the CMS for counseling should a student need it, Participant A provides a weekly video message about the class content and possible impact on students. He said:

> Every week, I would post a video that says, 'Hey, everybody, this is a topic for the week. Here's some concerns. Here's some things I think we should think about. Here's my

response to what you did last week, and here's how the grading went. And here's what I

think kind of the situation is.' And then so I would probably mention it in that video.

He further explained how he provides a disclaimer before certain modules in which the content

may be difficult to learn about. He stated:

> I'd say, 'We're talking about really tough topics this week. So, I know some of you, this is
>
> probably going to be personal for, in fact, I know a lot of you this will be. So, make sure
>
> that you are looking after yourself. And you never have to disclose anything you don't
>
> want to disclose.'

All participants described occurrences of disclosures in their asynchronous courses. However,

how participants recognized these disclosures varied. In the following section, participants

discussed how students deliver disclosures in asynchronous classrooms.

How Students Deliver Disclosures

The *How Students Deliver Disclosures* category includes the theme *Delivery of*

Disclosures illustrating performance experiences as an antecedent of Bandura's (1977) self-

efficacy theory with seven subcategories of descriptive examples which include (a) *Privately by*

Email; (b) *Zoom;* (c) *Assignments;* (d) *Discussion Boards;* (e) *By Text;* (f) *In Private Messages*

or Chat; and (g) *Red Flags.* All seven participants described the way in which they perceived

students' method of disclosures and shared their experiences of recognizing student self-

disclosures of personal trauma and/or sensitive information in asynchronous classes.

Privately by Email

Five of the seven participants described either disclosures or follow-up to disclosures in

email correspondence. Participant G described receiving an email from a student disclosing

concerns about "mentally not handling school right now" and another student emailing asking

for resources for shelter after being kicked out of their apartment. Participant G also noted it was not uncommon have "a lot of students" email and ask, "Can you help me out?" Participant F also described emails which read, "They can't function, and students have wrapped themselves into a state of anxiety." Participant D described an email she received from a student stating it was an "emergency." Participant B said it was more typical for a student in her classroom to privately send an email self-disclosing personal trauma and/or sensitive information. She described learning about a student losing both her sister and her husband in the same semester via email when the student asked for an extension and asked to set up an appointment during office hours through Zoom® to "have discussions about, whatever is on their mind or any personal information they want to discuss." However, Participant Rosiland highlighted that after reading a discussion board on which a student disclosed having difficult personal concerns and "going through a really bad time," she responded to the student via email suggesting counseling. Participant A expressed concern over responding to a student via email in a pre-COVID world. He said, "How do you respond when somebody tells you that they've been sexually assaulted? How do you respond with email? How do you do that in a way that's effective and compassionate?" Participant A said with Zoom® he is more likely to respond to disclosures online differently but did not recall students emailing him disclosures. Participant C did not discuss any examples in which students used email for self-disclosure.

Zoom®

Three of the seven participants discussed office hours in Zoom® as a way that they recognized disclosures. As mentioned above, Participant A shared students have used Zoom® to self-disclose either by appointment or during office hours. He shared why some of his students disclosed to him via Zoom®, stating:

During that spring [COVID 2020], I had a few individual Zoom® meetings, once people

started using Zoom® all the time to say, 'Are you okay? Do you want to set up a Zoom?'

And maybe one or two students have done that and talk to those students who are having

life trouble and school trouble. And they're not turning their homework in…and then

somehow, I get them to say, 'Things are really messed up for me right now.' And then I

say, 'Why don't we set a meeting and talk about this and figure out what your options

are?'

Similar to Participant A, Participant B said:

Whenever students have wanted to tell me private information, I encouraged them to

meet with me during my office hours, which I do have office hours online through

Zoom®. And so, they can make an appointment to meet with me. And then that's what

we can have discussions about, whatever is on their mind or any personal information

they want to discuss.

Participant Rosiland also utilized Zoom® office hours and by appointment. She stated

that she uses Zoom® as a way to listen when students need to talk and has experienced student

self-disclosure. She said:

I'm not a counselor, and I don't think I should try to be because I really don't have that

sort of experience. But I am there to listen when students need to talk. And sometimes

that's all they really need. I'll pick one day a week and I'll have a half an hour, which can

go longer if it has to, but where I'm on Zoom®, and they can meet with me on Zoom® if

they want to. Some students that are having issues will meet with me there, too. I know

that it's online and asynchronous. And if you want to do the work and never talk to me,

>you can do that. And that's fine. But I try to be available to help students so that they get the most out of the class.

Participant C, D, F and G did not describe examples of students self-disclosing personal trauma and/or sensitive information during office hours or by appointment online using Zoom®. The following section will discuss how students use assignments to disclose disclosures.

Assignments

All participants discussed the online format and requirements in some detail expected of students taking courses asynchronously. While most participants shared their perceptions regarding the feeling of privacy about disclosures by students, only Participant A shared experiences of student disclosures in submitted assignments. He said:

>I asked them to write a two-page short essay about the topic of the week and their personal experience with it. It was not uncommon for students to report that they had been sexually abused or experienced sexual violence or knew somebody who had experienced sexual violence.

Participant A noted disclosures were frequent particularly in these kinds of essay assignments. Participant A also noted that he recognized student disclosures in assignments about eating disorders and depression. Participants A and G both described providing an alternative assignment for a student who self-disclosed personal trauma and/or sensitive information surrounding a topic where an assignment was due but not necessarily recognizing student self-disclosure in a submitted assignment. In the context of sharing his [Participant A] perspective with me about referring a student to the counseling center, he referenced assignments that he would refer to in that process. He said:

I've also reached out directly to the counseling center. And I'll just say, 'Hey, the student

wrote an assignment and they said something. I think they need to get help because I'm

really worried they have an eating disorder, or I'm really worried that they're depressed.'

Participant Rosiland discussed the use of assignments submitted in the course module and she

expressed requirements that in assignments that used "critical thinking processes" which resulted

in students expressing experiences that the assignments "were eye-opening" she did not describe

student disclosures in assignments. Participants B, C, D and F also did not share experiences

where student disclosures took place in submitted assignments. The following section will

discuss how students use discussion boards for disclosures.

Discussion Boards

Discussion Boards are the most common method of disclosure recognized by instructors

teaching asynchronous courses. Six out of seven participants indicated having at least one

disclosure by a student on the discussion boards. Participant A described being surprised by how

openly students talked about personal trauma and/or sensitive information in discussion posts.

He said:

People did talk about traumatic events, like the death of the parent or of a close relative.

And those discussion posts sometimes or experiences of racism, they would talk about

that. Students of color would talk about their experiences with racism, but not as much

like the sexual violence part, I guess.

Much like participant A, Participant C shared his experiences of disclosures in discussion boards.

Many times, content online is introduced and discussed in such modes of communication in the

online delivery platform and as a result, student disclosures are frequent in such forums. He said:

For example, if we're talking about a leadership strategy, somebody might say, 'Oh, I experienced this, I'm a victim of domestic abuse.' And there was a lot of conflict management going on, and 'I needed to step up, and I needed to learn to take control of my situation.' And some of that sort of personal disclosure.

Participant D recalled several experiences related to student disclosures on discussion boards. She described a student sharing details about a divorce, another about a custody battle and other personal struggles. She also shared about a time when there was offensive language and strong opinions that were offensive to many and required her to share information about the Code of Conduct regarding appropriate discussions and sharing opinions following up with students in the discussion post and by private messages. Participant Rosiland also had similar experiences and frequency of disclosures on the discussion board. She said some students will:

self-disclose that they are a recovering addict, or that they have been raped. I find that students now seem to have less desire for privacy, or less concern about their privacy, and seem to share a lot more than students used to when I started teaching 20 years ago. I don't know if that's because they're online and they feel anonymous, or they're getting support from a source like social media. But I do think that they do self-disclose more, both in real life classes in asynchronous classes.

Participant Rosiland also shared another experience when a student disclosed in a discussion forum that they were a recovering addict in their opening discussion which promoted others to respond in the discussion forum about members of their family who struggled with addiction, and they understood what it was like.

Participant F experienced several students disclosing personal trauma and/or sensitive information in the discussion forums. In one instance, a student said she was sexually assaulted

by her supervisor. Other students shared their faith and belief or non-belief in God. Participant G did not share instances in which there was a disclosure in the public discussion forum, but rather an approach to a private discussion forum with her students. She relayed experiences of student disclosures during forums and while she offered alternative online live lectures, in the discussion forums she offered waiting rooms to provide a private setting for sensitive discussions, unlike full public forums where all students observe the postings. She said:

> In this forum, I've had students where I had to [say], 'I have to put you in this room and put you on hold while I talk to this student,' or I have students wait until the very end, and everyone's chiming off. They're like, 'Hey, Dr. (name redacted), wait.' So, it's like, 'Oh, yes. What can I do to help you?' So even though this forum is not exactly the way that they want it to take the class, it has allowed them to maybe forcefully ask for help. But it feels more private because it's not in front of the class.

Participant B did not share any experiences in which a student disclosed personal trauma and/or sensitive information on discussion boards. However, several participants discussed additional ways students deliver disclosures other than discussion boards. The following section addresses how students use text messages to disclose.

By Text

Participants D, F and G referenced disclosures using texts. Participant F observed an increase in frequency of disclosures by text:

> My students text me. And they call me Dr. (redacted) because my name is ridiculous to try to pronounce. But they call me Dr. (redacted), and they'll text me at all kinds of crazy hours. I do think because I have a little bit more rapport with them they're more comfortable talking to me about stuff.

In another instance, Participant F described following up with a student who was not participating in class and asking if they are okay via text. In this case, the student disclosed that she was a victim of sexual violence. Participant D also shared limited experiences with students texting disclosures of personal trauma and/or sensitive information. She said, "My number was something I provided at the beginning for emergencies. And she did activate it and wrote 'I hope you don't mind. I'm using your personal number; it is an emergency.'"

Participant D also shared another experience where texting a disclosure of personal trauma occurred. She explained one student said she witnessed a family member dying in front of her. These texts continued throughout the entire semester and continued "even after the course was concluded." Participant G described using the text option when she sees a student is academically failing to ask the student if there is anything she can do to help, stating that this way she knows she has done everything she can do to help the student. For example, one student disclosed their daughter had COVID after Participant G reached out via text. In another example she texted students about WIFI hotspots and the availability for students. She said, "I try to get all that out there, via email, via text, so that they can be successful. There is no excuse and no reason to not finish classes." Some participants said despite their school policies asking students to only use school approved email addresses or school chat features on the online course platform, some students still texted their cell phones when sharing personal traumatic and/or sensitive information. In other instances, the student chose to deliver the disclosure using private messages or chat features as explained in the following section.

In Private Messages or Chat

Most participants generally had the same experiences related to the infrequent use of private messages and chat for student self-disclosure. Two out of seven participants shared

experiences in which students have disclosed personal trauma and/or sensitive information in private messages online or in private online chats. Participant C stated:

> In terms of illness, that often is not in a discussion for the entire class. But in private messages or chats, just to me, to make me aware, like, 'Oh, Professor, I want to make you aware that I have XYZ, and I may need some flexibility with assignments or deadlines.'

Participant G discussed the compared experiences she has had with student disclosures in private chats to a face-to-face teaching environment. She stated:

> When people are personable people and are used to seeing you face-to-face they may feel a little intimidated coming up to you, or waiting after class and everyone's like, 'Why are they waiting? What are they doing?' But when you're online, they shoot me a private chat.

While all participants experienced varied delivery methods of disclosures, they also indicated sometimes red flags were present. If red flags were present, and if the participants identified the warning signs, they were able to offer help in response.

Red Flags

Four participants discussed *red flags*, or warning signs or alerts that students are having trouble. By recognizing red flags, participants believed they were able to recognize possible distress and provide support if needed. This recognition of red flags typically resulted in a conversation about the more difficult disclosures by students. Some participants shared that not having the ability to be detect potential concerns using traditional methods of communication (i.e., facial expressions, sounds of student voices) online versus teaching on-campus or in real-time online (synchronously) presented challenges. Participant G described her thoughts on recognizing red flags, stating, "I've had students participate in classroom discussions

asynchronously and they turn in their discussions. But the major assignments, they just don't do. And to me, that sends off a red flag." Participant G also explained why this red flag is connected to student disclosures, noting "And then you realize there's something wrong, where they don't feel equipped to be able to handle whatever's going on in their life and tackle the harder parts of the class." Participant F did not experience self-disclosure in emails, but said it was the lack of email communication that signaled a problem for her. She shared:

> Everything stops. I've seen a lot more of that. Not in just emails and texts, but also in discussions, in the discussion board with one another where they just can't function. And so, they miss assignments because they've wrapped themselves into this state of anxiety where nothing happens.

Participant C echoed the warning signs in more difficult circumstances and described his experiences:

> I think the harder cases for students are when they don't disclose but exhibit some sort of behavior…like [they] are always on time with assignments and discussions, and then fall off the face of the earth for two weeks. Those are the real difficult ones, because as an instructor, I don't have to reach out to them. They don't do their work; they don't do their work. And it's all online. So, do I really know them? I know their name. I know I asked for a bio. I know a little bit about them.

Participant Rosiland indicated grades may be an indirect indicator to her regarding recognizing student disclosers that may not be as easy to recognize. She discussed her thoughts on "indirect indicators" relative to her observations. She said:

> Students that weren't turning anything in because they were really depressed, and then they got some counseling, or at least realize that people thought that they were deserving

of counseling and should get some help. So, they feel better. Then you can tell when their

grades go up, and they start turning in more assignments.

Just as the types of modes for delivery of disclosures varies in asynchronous courses, the

examples of student disclosures varied. The following section contains detailed examples of the

types of disclosures students share in asynchronous courses as experienced by the participants in

this study.

Examples of Student Self-Disclosures

Throughout the interview process, participants were asked to describe examples of

students self-disclosing personal traumatic experiences and/or sensitive information during the

time they were teaching asynchronous classes within the last 5 years. Each participant

experienced student self-disclosures and the experiences and perspectives were unique to each

situation and student. Participant C confirmed what other participants had shared regarding

frequent student disclosures of personal trauma and/or sensitive information in the online

classroom and described several disclosures over years of teaching. Participant A described the

"wildly different backgrounds" of students. Examples of student disclosures relate to the theme

Personal Family Issues. The following subcategories contain specific detailed examples: (a)

Family Tragedies; (b) *Survivor of Domestic Violence;* (c) *Mental Health Issues;* and (d) *Racism*.

Family Tragedies

Each participant shared their students have struggled with loss. The definition of loss

varied, as did the extent of the loss. However, each participant said students disclosed personal

information about loss with them. Participant D recalled a time a student told her about "a very

messy divorce and shared a bit more information than what the student would have like to" when

making a request for an extension for an academic deadline. In another situation a student shared

information about "an ugly custody struggle with her ex-husband" on the discussion board where other students were also able to see the details the student wrote.

Participant B described a student who stopped participating in coursework and when she notified the instructor by email regarding her lack of engagement in the course, she disclosed she had lost her sister that semester and her husband also died during this time. Participant D described a conversation with a student who lost a family member. She said, "She had disclosed that she had witnessed a person in her family dying in front of her and was just falling apart in the middle of the course." Participant D described a student disclosure about a miscarriage and how traumatized the student was from the experience. She described how frequently the student reached out to her yet stayed disconnected from the coursework.

Family tragedies were often described differently by participants, but one consistent disclosure by students occurred about sexual violence and were common amongst participants teaching courses that included information about this topic. Participant A said in gender studies, sociology, and criminology courses, student self-disclosures were not uncommon. He noted students frequently disclosed they had been sexually abused, experienced sexual violence, or knew someone who had experienced sexual violence. Students disclosed this while writing a two-page short essay about the topic of the week in the course module submitted online in the course delivery platform. He also shared an experience of an international student which he described as particularly egregious and disturbing:

> I remember one time during Spring 2019 when we had to go asynchronous all of a sudden. And I remember, it was a particularly rough one, because a whole bunch of students had very similar stories. Women had very similar stories of being sexually molested. And as children, and basically being told, 'We can't help you.' Either not being

believed, or when explicitly said, 'Well, we can't mess up this person's life.' (recalling the conversation with student as she shared what she was told about the offender).

Several participants shared experiences of student self-disclosure surrounding sexual violence. Participant Rosiland had students disclose they had been raped. Participant F also described a student in her leadership course responding to her in a discussion board that she had been raped by a previous boss during a discussion about relative power bases in leadership. This student said she was still recovering from that abuse. Participant F said while other students were able to view this disclosure on the discussion board, no other students commented on the post. Participant F also described a student sharing with her in a chat room that she was raped. Much like sexual assault, custody battles, and divorce proceedings disclosed by students, participants reported disclosures of domestic violence in their asynchronous courses.

Survivor of Domestic Violence

Participants C and F shared experiences of students disclosing they were victims of domestic abuse. Participant F recalled a disclosure that involved both homelessness and domestic violence. She stated, "I have one student who was telling me she was just evicted from her house and had her car bashed in by the same guy; horrible stories of domestic abuse." Participant C shared a recent experience about a student who disclosed she was a survivor of domestic violence, stating:

> Recently, one of my students disclosed that she was divorced and had been part of the domestic violence situation that she overcame. And she authored a book, and was doing all these things, but she obviously felt it was important for me to know that she was a victim of domestic violence.

He recalled his surprise, "that this particular student was very comfortable in sharing her story. And again, I take that as part of her journey to share her story and not be ashamed." Participant F shared experiences of "almost terror" as one student disclosed horrible stories of domestic abuse in an effort to share why her work would be late:

> She was evicted. And then she's living out of her car and her abuser started smashing in her car as she barely got away. She actually had a domestic violence report with the local PD [police department]and they were moving her undercover to another city because it was so bad.

Both participants discussed responding with concern and with offers to assist if they were needed in the above situations, however types of disclosures varied in courses and one consistent example of discourse by students in their online classrooms focused on concerns surrounding mental health.

Mental Health Issues

All participants agreed students have disclosed information in their courses about mental health. Participant A described disclosures from students about having eating disorders before entering college and are now struggling with their body image in college. Participant B observed an increase during COVID-19 of students disclosing some anxiety and stressors and challenges they are struggling with during the pandemic. Participant Rosalind also described the frequent disclosures about their different disorders such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or dyslexia. Participant F described multiple disclosures in the healthcare courses she teaches online. She proffered her students often disclose physical illness and disabilities as well as issues surrounding mental health. She said:

I just had a student who died of cancer recently, but right up until the end, she was in the

classroom. So very ill, very anxious, [and] what I call vapor lock in anxiety that they just

get so anxious that just can't function then, everything stops.

Much like Participant F, Participant C described students disclosing family issues and, in

this case, it was about a student sharing information with respect to their children with special

needs and how they are struggling to be a good parent. He said:

… it's the illness that people, in my reflection, share publicly. That's more of a private

thing. Sometimes there are people who will share about their children, like, 'I have a

child with special needs. And this impacts me [student] in these ways. I [student] really

try to be a good parent.' I think sometimes online lends itself really well to disclosure

because there's an anonymity factor, right? 'I [referring to students] don't know who you

are. And I [referring to students] can share with you all that my son has special needs,

and I'm really working hard to be a really good parent.' I don't know if that really comes

up in conversation, in person, in a traditional classroom, it might after a time.

Participant G recalled:

One student emailed me writing, 'I mentally can't handle school right now. I got into this

thinking, this is a community college level, going back from a university coming here, on

a smaller scale, thinking that I could accomplish my educational goals, if I came back to a

smaller scale instead of a larger institution. And unfortunately, I am not able to mentally

do this. I cannot commit, even though the asynchronous schedule.' There are time

constraints, of course, but it's disciplined. And a lot of students sign up thinking, 'In my

own time.' [But] not necessarily, so you have to be disciplined. And that particular

student said mentally, 'I can't do it. I'm not mentally strong enough to do this without some type of structure.'

Participant Rosiland described self-disclosures by students about addiction, arguing addiction issues may add to concerns about mental health:

Some students will self-disclose online because they are a recovering addict. One student disclosed to everybody in his opening discussion, 'This is me, and this is what I am.' And everyone that chose to respond to him was very positive about it, and said they had members of their family that struggled with addiction, and so they understood what it was like.

Participant C described teaching an undergraduate class and how students who served in the military or are serving in the military spoke about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). She said, "Many students in the military have spoken of PTSD, [and] have mentioned that this is this is a part of their world." Just as mental health concerns, victimization and family tragedies were examples of student disclosure in participants' online asynchronous courses, racism was also a frequent example of types of disclosures.

Racism

Participant A said when teaching about violence, racism, and other sensitive topics, there were more disclosures than while teaching other topics. "It's almost always the class content. Because we deal so directly in those subjects with violence and racism and sexism and class. And when I'm teaching research methods, I barely hear anything, because it's not thematically related." Participant B recalled during an introduction to sociology course discussion about race and ethnicity, a student said, "He can never take his skin color off, he's always Black every single day, in the world. And, he has, consequences, that he has to deal with as a result of that."

Participant F also heard students talking about experiencing racism, noting, "I had some students talking about experiencing racism in their lives. And so, the students are talking about their cultural backgrounds and how it's different to be Black and White." Participant F shared how this student disclosure promoted conversations for further discussions about diversity, inclusion, and equity. This led to different perspectives being shared and she recalled one student telling her about oppression in Nigeria. The responses by participants described their patience and empathy.

How Professors Respond to Disclosures

The *How Professors Respond to Disclosures* Category identified themes related to *Responses to Disclosures*, with the following subcategories: (a) Teaching with empathy*: I always try to respond in an empathetic way*; (b) Acknowledging the disclosure: *I'm sorry*; (c) Following up*: I often find myself reaching out;* (d) Referral for professional services: *I'm a teacher, not a counselor* (e) Connecting students with community resources; (f) Providing additional time for academic assignments; (g) Providing support: *meeting them halfway*; and (h) Utilize the CMS: Course Management System: *I would put a comment in that section.*

Teaching with Empathy: I always try to respond in an empathetic way

In every interview, participants exhibited signs of teaching with empathy. While only three participants spoke directly about teaching with empathy, four participants described teaching with empathy. Participant A said, "my first thing I want to do is to try and be a human being and convey empathy and understanding." He described himself as having a great deal of empathy for his students. Participant B described her feeling of being "better equipped to kind of identify or to help or to be empathetic and compassionate to my students when they are struggling." She stated:

The other big reason why I've been able to be more empathetic and authentic is just because of my own personal loss. And what I've been going through and so it has really opened my eyes more to people who struggle with mental illness or with stressors or issues that might be affecting them in their academic performance.

Participant C expressed said he always tried to respond in an empathetic way. While Participant D did not use the term *empathy,* she said offering online condolences was challenging, rather, she shared her personal experiences with students.

Similarly, Participant Rosiland, said:

I try to get them to realize that everybody has struggles and we have to work with them. And if we need extra help, we should contact someone… I'm there for them, but a lot of them seem to think, 'I had a bad education in high school so I can only do this much,' or, 'I don't know how to read well, so I can only get this far.' And I try to get them to look beyond that and see that we all have stuff. Not saying that if they were a victim of some sort of crime or awful thing. That's not the same thing. But I'm just saying sometimes we all have difficulties, and you can get beyond that is basically the story.

While Participant F did not use the term *empathy,* she said her approach was rooted in how she was raised:

You have to address people on a personal level and engage with people as people. And when I can't help them, I don't know where to go with that. It's very frustrating for me because I do feel their pain and I tend to know my students very well by the end of the term. I can tell you how many kids they have. I know where they work. I know all kinds of stuff about them. That's just the way I teach.

Lastly, Participant G described her approach to teaching with empathy and desire to learn what is going on personally with them. She did not use the term *empathy* but described awareness about her students and how "mentally you don't know what a person is going through." She stated:

> …you need to be as open and honest and communicate because the first thing you have in common is you're human. We've been where you are. Don't just assume I'm just going to give up or don't just assume they won't understand. Try me.

Just as participants described teaching with and expressing empathy to students who disclose personal trauma and/or sensitive information in their online asynchronous courses, acknowledging the disclosure was a typical response by participants.

Acknowledging the Disclosure: I'm sorry

All seven participants asserted once they recognized the disclosure, they acknowledged the disclosure. Participant C said he "always tries to acknowledge 'I've read what you shared. And that I'm sorry that this is something that you've experienced'." Participant A acknowledged in an asynchronous class his response would typically be in writing as feedback to a submitted assignment. He said, "Whereas because I study race, and racism and microaggressions I have a ready-made understanding. I can see that that would be a difficult experience or a traumatic experience for [a student]." He also described in detail an assignment he gives on gender violence:

> When we do the chapter on gender violence, and the chapter on gender and interest, statistically, probably at least a quarter of the women in this room have had sexual violence under them and 10% or 15% of the men probably have. This is a topic that probably will hit [close to home] and if it didn't happen to you, you probably know

somebody, and so, I tried to explicitly say, 'I know that that's probably the case, I want you to be able to talk about what you want to talk about, don't talk about things, you don't have to disclose anything you don't want to.'

Participant A also shared an overall approach to students when disclosing personal trauma in his classroom. He said he tells victims of trauma:

'I'm sorry, that that happened to you. That's a terrible experience.' And certainly, in her case [sexual abuse disclosure], I said, 'I can't believe that people didn't take your side and, I just want you to know that I believe you and that person should never have done that to you.' And then I probably say something like, 'I hope you're okay.'

Participant B also described an experience teaching a class in sociology in a lower division course with second year students. When a student shared his experiences with racism, she responded by saying:

Thank you so much for sharing that and for being so honest with us. It's so important that we get a perspective from different folks, And each of us has a different social location, a different experience, and I really thank you for that honesty.

Participant D acknowledged she is flexible with assignments and says, "I'm sorry you are going through this." She said there are times she does not engage, such as a during a disclosure about a "messy divorce" because she "didn't feel the need to know." However, she described an additional response to this disclosure by privately messaging the student:

I did message her quietly and say, 'Remember, when you're putting it out there that all of this is archived and everyone in the class is seeing it and try to stick to the topics.' And [the student replied] 'Well, the rubric says to make the personal connections to your experience.' Valid point, but I do get a little nervous about that.

Participant Rosiland said despite having a PhD in Psychology, she is a biopsychologist not a counselor:

> I'm not going to be good at being a counselor, but I'm here for [students]. And I'll try to get [them help if I feel [they need it. I'm not a counselor, and I don't think I should try to be because I really don't have that sort of experience. But I am there to listen when students need to talk. And sometimes that's all they really need.

Other participants described reaching out proactively to students when red flags surfaced.

Following Up: I often find myself reaching out

Six of the seven participants said they noticed how much more follow-up they have now with students to check-in, regardless of disclosing personal trauma and/or sensitive information in the online classroom. Participant D did not specifically provide details regarding reaching out to students as a matter of practice. It was clear from her discussion she is very engaged and passionate about teaching. The other six participants described similar feelings about reaching out to students. Participant A described a typical conversation as "expressing empathy, checking in, [and] encouraging them to get help." Participant B expressed concern about follow-up with students given large class sizes, especially being online. Participant C described the benefits of reaching out to students:

> I often find myself reaching out to them saying, 'Hey, I haven't seen you in 2 weeks, is everything okay?' And sometimes that will then say, 'Oh, I was ill,' or, 'I had a parent who died,' or, 'I've been experiencing x, y, z.' So those things do happen.

Participant Rosiland said because she discusses depression and anxiety, she often proactively reaches out via group emails. She said depression and anxiety are common with students.

> And, if [they're] feeling like this, then then [I tell them they] might want to do

get some counseling, and I do it as a group thing. So, I'm not singling anyone out. But

then some students, I will single out and privately [and] let them know that I think they

could benefit from this.

Participant Rosiland shared enthusiasm for student engagement similar to Participant F.

Participant F used an analogy to describe student engagement as "a magician, you have to pull

the rabbit out." She also spoke in great detail about the follow-up and assistance she provides her

students with, especially as an instructor at a community college where she finds first year

students are much more in need of this type of attention. Lastly, Participant G said she reaches

out to students to follow-up and asks questions such as:

> 'What are some of the issues you think you can't tackle?' And one of them was school,
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> and one of them was work, and trying to prioritize. So, we just discussed, 'What are your
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> goals? Let's see what we can do to help you prioritize some of these goals. How many
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> classes are you taking? What are the classes you are taking? Is there anything that you
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> could withdraw from and possibly take next semester? Are you on financial aid? Because
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> it does affect, withdrawing from certain classes.' So, these specifics I needed to know to
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> be able to help steer them. And I do disclose, 'I am your professor, I am not your
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> counselor, but I can be an assistance to the best of my ability, and I can forward you to
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> someone.' I always tell them, 'Please speak to your advisor before you do anything.'

Reaching out in different ways to respond to students who disclose personal trauma and/or

sensitive information in their asynchronous course appeared to be common amongst participants.

The following section describes referrals to counseling centers or for mental health assistance by

participants.

Referral for Professional Services: I'm a teacher, not a counselor

All seven participants described referrals to counseling as a response to disclosures as determined by the content of the information shared with them. Policies, if any, surrounding referrals, were not consistent and six out of seven participants indicated they would like to receive more training on responding to student self-disclosures in the online environment. Some specific examples of referrals for counseling were shared. Participant F described an experience in which a student disclosed previous sexual assault in response to academic content in a module. She acknowledged the disclosure by responding to the student via text and asking, "Are you okay?" and providing information about how advisors can assist her with counseling options.

Participant F was not alone in her advocacy of counseling services for students. Participant A said 7 years ago he did not recall counseling services being so accessible, but now with Zoom®, so many students are able to use various remote methods for counseling. He noted what a difference this can make for students taking classes in an asynchronous platform. Participant C asserted when questions arise, because of his work in student services, he knows exactly where to send students for counseling and assistance. Participant G had a similar perspective as Participant C did. Participant G previously worked in the field of human services and had extensive knowledge of resources in her community. Participant Rosiland argued students new to psychology seem to believe everyone is a counselor but stressed the importance of referring students for help to those that are trained and prepared to provide the services. She said:

> I try to make sure that I remember that I'm a teacher, not a counselor, but I do try to be there for them. And again, if I'm not capable of providing what they need, I send them to somebody else and make sure that they got there.

She added, she emails students to say, 'This is the number you need to call if you want to get counseling, and I think that you'd benefit from it." However sometimes referring international students for help may be challenging. As Participant B learned from disclosures by her international students, connections to counseling may not be well known. "I probably wouldn't know where to direct my students from Japan, [but I] always just let them know that they're not alone."

Lastly, while Participant D acknowledged the lack of training in recognizing and responding to student disclosures at the college level, she was well-versed in working with students in the K-12 environment and familiar with resources there. She spoke several times about conferring with other colleagues for informal support and was hesitant to provide any "official counseling" in class for fear of the possible legalities for the school and the sincere intent to have the student in need engage in "official counseling." Just as it is important to connect students with counseling and mental health resources, assistance reaching community resources for various reasons remained a priority of participants.

Connecting Students with Community Resources

Six out of seven participants confirmed their familiarity with the counseling centers for their respective colleges. However, only Participant G expressed confidence and extensive familiarity with resources available to students in her classes. She was also the only participant to teach for both a community college and a larger university. Throughout her interview, she stated multiple times that there was a significant difference in outreach to students between the two institutions. It has been her experience that the community college is better equipped to provide resources directly to students and more supportive training and support to instructors:

I know being a college student is stressful enough. Having other crisis is going to put

more of a strain on the goals [students] trying to reach. So, if I can help [them] eliminate

a little bit of the barriers, then I can and I will. I'll do the best that I can.

She described disclosures from students regarding homelessness, food insecurities, and poverty. Participant G believed most students new to college were unaware of the resources available to them. For example, she told me about an agency called Community Feed that she referred students to, stating:

One of the crises that probably during the pandemic that has happened was food

shortages. They have a food pantry for college students called the Community Feed. And

a lot of students don't know about this resource. [It] is a place where they physically can

go, or they can go online. They have these boxed meals, that feeds up to four people. And

they can order them twice a week, no questions asked, as long as they're a college

student, and they have their ID. And so when I tell you I want to be a resource for my

students. I really, really do.

Academic flexibility and advocacy for students was a frequent pattern by participants and providing extensions for academic timelines is described below.

Providing Additional Time for Academic Assignments

All participants said they allowed students to turn in academic work late if circumstances warranted. They all described their academic freedom and authority to make these exceptions, noting that the end of semester is not always an option for extensions. All participants also had similar experiences recalling instances when students reached out for an extension and disclosed personal trauma and/or sensitive information to support the request for additional time. While the details of the disclosure varied Participant G offered alternative assignments, should content

negatively impact a student. Participant F referenced an example of a student with multiple stressors, including victimization as referenced previously in Chapter 4, which is not as common in the classroom for the majority of the instructors interviewed, given the extensive detail provided. Participant's F main priority was the student's safety and after that was addressed, she was able to grant an extension. Participant F also shared an example of a student who was a victim of domestic violence. Once she determines the student was safe, she asked her the following questions:

> Okay. So how can I help you? Because I can do certain things academically, extend dates, and whatever, but my hands are tied otherwise. So how can I help you? What is it that you need for me to get to a comfortable position within the classroom? And have you talked to your advisors, because maybe you need to take a term off just to get healing, so you're not bruised and broken? She'd already been put in the hospital for multiple times by this person.

Some participants provided examples of accommodations while others described a collaborative effort to assist students in need.

Providing Support: Meeting them halfway

All participants indicated they have provided support to students who disclose personal trauma and/or sensitive information in their online asynchronous classroom. Support has multiple definitions and can look very different. What was consistent in each interview were the efforts each participant took to respond in professional, responsible ways to student disclosures in their classes. For example, Participant B shared her experience regarding flexibility and compassion as a result, in part due to COVID. She stated:

I have the aptitude now to be compassionate to them and empathetic. And partly, that's

because during COVID I was teaching at two schools, and both schools really

emphasized being compassionate, being understanding, being lenient, meeting them

halfway, because we're all trying to figure this out together.

Participant C noted that while he has a background in student affairs, not all faculty have the

same skill sets and training around disclosures.

There were several times participants discussed an added resource provided by the

college of an academic course management system and how helpful this software was in

providing information to students, advisors, and other stakeholders.

Utilize the Course Management System

Utilization of a course management system (CMS) was discussed by five of seven

participants. The application of a CMS appeared to be relatively new as described by

participants. Participant B said since the pandemic, her college asked that different services

available to students become part of the items an instructor shares with students, but it is

something that she has done "for years," and she encourages her students to take advantage of

those services "that are there to set you up for success." Participant B also said she lists these

services in her syllabi as well, but she did not share any information regarding a CMS.

Participant Rosiland described using the CMS at her school by creating an academic alert. She

described this alert being entered "so the counseling center will send them an email and say, it

looks like you might benefit from some counseling, give us a call." Participant Rosiland says she

then is likely to check in with the student she referred to "to make sure that things are not going

south." Similar to Participant Rosiland, Participant G uses the alert system at her school (CMS)

but described it as a frustrating process, sharing that college officials in her school said that "if

they want to fail, they get an F" but she did not share details about this alert in the context of counseling referrals. Participant F provided an example that highlighted the distinctly different processes between the two schools she works for. She said the nonprofit college she works for has a fairly new 24/7 counseling referral system. She described this as "a lifeline" that sends students messages of concern. The other school Participant F works for, a public college, has a different policy:

> The only thing we've been told to do is refer them to their advisors. And their advisors can't really do anything. Their academic advisors tell you which class to take. So beyond, FERPA [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act] training of what we can and can't say in a school, and you're supposed to just contact your Title Nine Coordinator.

Similar to Participant F, Participant C has taught for many schools over his 20 years of teaching and stated that every place is different. He provided an example of a campaign for faculty to assist students in need:

> If a student presents a concern to me, I can go to this link and click a button. Like, Rachel's in my class and said these things, and I'm really concerned about her well-being. And then that information goes to a whole team of people who will determine what needs to be done.

He said he does not use university resources too frequently:

> A couple times, I have referenced university resources. I think that there are a lot of students online who don't realize that they can avail themselves of the resources at the university. So, I would share that, but I try very hard. I don't want to be intrusive.

Participant A also said his school uses CMS. He stated he used CMS to share instructions with the class (disclaimer) such as, "Don't worry about saying anything, you don't want to say," and,

"[You can] talk to me," and "I try to put links to like the Counseling Center." As difficult recognizing and responding to disclosures may be, participants also shared the impact that such disclosures have on them.

Impact on Professors' Wellbeing

The *Impact on Professor's Wellbeing* category includes the theme *Disclosures and the Impact on Instructors* illustrating physiological states as an antecedent of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory with four subcategories of descriptive examples which include (a) *Professional Balance: I've been told, you don't have to do this, it's not your job;* (b) *Professional Boundaries: while I felt like a counselor – I'm not a counselor;* (c) *Emotional Impact: It just became very emotionally draining;* and (d) *Not Feeling Prepared to Recognize and Respond: I was very nervous.* Participants shared very personal and sometimes difficult experiences. Often, they disclosed they were, in fact, impacted by the disclosure of personal trauma and/or sensitive information shared by their students.

Professional Balance: I've been told you don't have to do this. It's not your job

Participant F said at her college they are "increasingly being told that we need to connect with our students, we need to connect with our students because they have to feel a sense of community and belonging" yet this underscores how difficult these professional versus personal boundaries may be. However, Participant C shared that he experienced a disclosure from a student who was divorced and had been part of a domestic violence situation that she overcame. He went on to say that "she authored a book, and she was doing all these things, but she felt it was, she obviously felt it was important for me to know that she was a victim of domestic violence. And that was somewhat new to me". Participant A described how he doesn't "take it [student disclosures] home with him. He stated:

From my perspective, I don't experience it as devastating. I have a great deal of empathy for my students that go through these things. I do feel sad or angry, especially right in the moment of reading that or hearing about it, but it's very rare for me to take it home with me. I'm able to care about them. And I hope they're okay.

He discussed professional boundaries and his experiences, saying:

But also know that I'm not their parent. I'd be happy to help them. But my capacity for doing that…I don't want to overreach my abilities, or my relationship with them, either. So, I feel offering that support and understanding and pointing them in the direction of people who can help them more is my role. And so, then I don't feel responsible… It doesn't stick with me unless I actively think about it. But I think for some people, it may be a much more burdensome experience.

While participants shared concerns about maintaining boundaries, both personally and professionally, they also discussed the emotional impact as instructors.

Emotional Impact: It just became very emotionally draining

Participant D explained while the situations she encountered were emotionally difficult, she believed she made a difference "more so than as if I was teaching the class." Participant Rosiland described the worry she sometimes has about students and self-harm. She said:

I've been lucky that I haven't lost any students yet, but they do self-harm sometimes. I feel like, hopefully, I recognized enough. But it would be great to have a class that taught you how to recognize and how to deal with online students having issues.

Despite the emotions, efforts, and worry some participants shared, Participant F continued to connect with her students as much as possible but that it is difficult for her. "When they hurt, I hurt because they're my students. And I get to know them as people. And the distinction between

humanizing a professor and being a human is becoming very porous. It's very difficult to separate that." In addition to the emotional impact, participants described their perceptions about their own preparedness to handle disclosures.

Not Feeling Prepared to Recognize and Respond: I was very nervous

Participants all discussed a desire to learn more about responding to disclosures and to participate in trainings to increase their skillset to on how to best respond to and handle sensitive situations in their online classroom. Participant D described her response to disclosure as a search for "the 'right' language. She said:

> I was choosing every word in my digital communication carefully…But I don't know if I did the right thing either and I don't know who to take that information to because I don't want to go to go to my supervisors and say, 'Hey, this happened and I'm inept.' But it was a little scary.

Participant F also shared her frustration with not being able to find trainings to help her respond to student disclosures. She stated:

> All of us have to do professional development, right? We all have to do that to keep our jobs. But I have not found one single way that talks about dealing with online students in this sort of problem. Not one!

Participant F inquired about how others are impacted by student disclosures, asking:

> I am curious to see how other teachers are impacted by this. I know that, personally, because I do feel very vested in in my students' well-being, that I have cried over my students in the past and recently. And I feel very personally impacted when I know that they are impacted. And not being able to do anything with that is exceedingly frustrating.

Participant Rosiland agreed with Participant D and said she "...sometimes wonders if I'm doing the right thing. And I want to make sure that I'm helping them." The request for additional support for instructors and specified training to handle disclosures continued to be a frequent concern, even for those with years of experience teaching or backgrounds in social service fields. The following section explores the experiences and perspectives of participants regarding training and support for instructors.

Training

The *Training* category includes the theme *Requests for Training* when handling situations of student disclosure, illustrating vicarious experiences as an antecedent of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory with three subcategories of descriptive examples which include (a) *Lack of Training and/or Support in Responding to Student Disclosure;* (b) *Technical Training on How to Teach Online;* and (c) *Less Prepared: New instructors*. In the following section, participants provided their perspectives of the extent to which they felt prepared to handle student disclosures in an asynchronous environment.

Lack of Training and/or Support in Responding to Student Disclosure

Training discussions continued to be a focal point of the interviews regarding the extent to which participants felt prepared to recognize and respond to students during disclosures. Participant A's perspective on content in the classroom highlighted the aspect of preparation and less about likelihood. He said, "It'd be weird if they're teaching microbiology, and for the student to tell the instructor they were sexually assaulted. But I also feel many instructors would be completely incapable of handling it if they did get that information." Participant A believed he did not need the additional training others may. He said:

Some of it is just the experience of teaching the classes and the learning I have done about all different kinds of difficult and traumatic experiences that students can have. All of that has helped a lot. I think I'm lucky in the sense that the subject area of my expertise is intimately related with topics of trauma, violence, and injustice. I don't have to do extra work to learn about how you're supposed to treat people who have been victims, or what people might experience.

Participant D referenced once again an experience previously shared in Chapter 4 when a student witnessed a loved one dying in front of their eyes and began to suffer academically mid-semester to underscore the stark differences between her K-12 previous teaching experience and her now working with adults online as an instructor in the field of education. Similar to Participant D, Participant Rosiland recalled detailed experiences in the online classroom and discussed the type of training provided to her and how she has had to draw on personal experiences. She shared:

Absolutely nothing has been provided. I raised four children. So sometimes [students] have issues, and I was like, 'Well I think I, I can help you with that. Because I've seen this before.' Or 'Does this solution seem to work for you?' But if it's something that I really feel uncomfortable [with], I can't make [students] not be depressed. I can't fix that. And I discuss depression and anxiety because they're so common with my students.

She described how her career in psychology provides her an advantage to responding to students when they disclose in her courses, but she is not certain it does all of the time and still would like "some sort of training." All but one participant voiced concerns that training for responding to online student disclosures has not been sufficient, if provided at all. Additionally, Participant F said:

> There's no great training that I've ever seen in 18 years of teaching… I have never seen a
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> training about how to handle this level of personal terror. But in in many cases, I get them
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> when they are terrified when they finally reach out to me about something, or they
>
> desperately need to talk to someone, and I am not trained for that. I've even thought about
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> trying to get mental health CPR [cardiopulmonary resuscitation]. I've advanced that
>
> concept to my faculty, but it never went anywhere.

She continued to highlight this by describing a need for training that will reaffirm her approach
and provide useful tools for responding:

> I think if I had a process whereby I could say, in this environment or this situation, this is
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> an appropriate academic redirect, and that is a counseling redirect, then I might feel a
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> little bit safer dealing with these things. But I'm not a trained psychologist by any stretch
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> of the imagination. I can do mediation, negotiation, facilitation, and arbitration. Not one
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> bit of that helps me with a student who's being beaten. I mean, there's nothing I can do
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> with that.

Participant B described difficulty not being able to see his student's gestures and facial reactions.
He said, "I couldn't tell by seeing their faces, their reactions." Participant B said, "Being
asynchronous is a unique animal, I think, because sometimes it seems unidirectional." While
there seemed to be consistent requests for additional training in handling student disclosure in an
asynchronous course, some participants described extensive technical training provided at their
institutions.

Technical Online Training

Three participants discussed how training was provided at their schools to teach in an online format, but not necessarily extensive training on how to respond to students sharing personal trauma and/or sensitive information online in their courses. Participant A stated:

> To teach online at the school where I was originally at [university], we had to take a weeklong training about how to teach online before they would let us teach online…they actually had an instructional design department at that school that had a very strict rubric for the structure and content of online courses that had to be approved by that department before you could teach the class.

Participant B also acknowledged receiving some training, but still did not feel "fully qualified to teach online." She stated:

> I don't think the training has really been there, and, in fact, I still feel sometimes not really fully qualified to teach remotely 100% even though that's what I've been doing for the last 2 years, and I'm going to continue doing that in the fall semester of this year. But I'm getting better and I'm taking some courses this summer; self-directed courses. But I don't really feel like the training has really been there, I feel like it's been lacking to a large degree for a lot of us who didn't really have kind of a history or background and teaching remotely, and we were kind of just thrown out there, sink or swim.

Participant D teaches classes in education and designs curriculum, yet she believes "in hindsight now, I think that it's something I want to bring to my university." She shared while not being a full-time instructor, she advocated for training. Participant D also expressed concerns over what to retain digitally and how to respond officially, yet not offer any "official counseling or medical advice." She stated:

I did save any communication because it was all digital in both cases. I did archive it just

for myself to make sure I didn't give any official counseling, advice, or medical advice. I

[took a] screenshot [of] some texts and I saved just as a protection.

The following section describes perspectives about new instructors and how they may handle

disclosures, should they occur.

Less Prepared: New instructors

Participants A, C and D shared their concerns about new instructors being less prepared,

and that experience is a benefit, especially in situations of students disclosing personal trauma

and/or sensitive information in their asynchronous course. Participant C stated:

I think that universities have to figure out a way to onboard faculty with the tools

necessary for them to recognize issues, challenges, and resources. I think especially now,

in light of school shootings, and all the things that happened.

Much like Participant C, Participant A voiced concerns about new instructors feeling less

prepared. He said, "I feel like people may be less prepared, especially people who are new, who

haven't had to go through some of that training." Participant A expressed that he:

felt very well prepared because I had been teaching for about 10 years. So, I had a good

chunk of teaching experience under my belt, I had gotten that mandated reporter training

a few years before at the other school, before I was working here. And so that also really

helped a lot in terms of feeling like I know what I should do here.

Participant D was hopeful that in HE, as opposed to K-12 education, full-time faculty

receive training in recognizing and responding to student disclosures in the classroom. She said:

I'm going to guess that as full-time staff people, we get trauma training and protocols and

crisis training, and we get a lot of PD [and] professional learning to help us deal with

that. And now, more than ever, because mental health has risen so much in the last 5 years. But as an adjunct, I did not have anything whatsoever.

Perspectives regarding training and participant experiences in the asynchronous online environment were shared by each of the participants. The emphasis on being prepared to teach topics that may trigger disclosure and recognize how disclosures are delivered by students, along with examples of the types of disclosures participants have experienced, descriptions of how instructors respond, and the impact disclosures have on instructors, have all been captured in the sections above. The following section contains a brief summary of findings.

Summary of the Findings

Understanding the experiences and perceptions as expressed in lived and told stories of asynchronous online course instructors in public and/or private higher education institutions in the US where academic content may trigger disclosure of students' personal trauma was the purpose of this study. Participants taught asynchronous online courses within the last 5 years and experienced students' self-disclosure of personal information about their traumatic experiences. Six themes emerged based on these interviews and 28 descriptive examples served as subcategories which were identified during the process of analyzing the data. The sections described above in detail indicated the findings from each of the categories that were developed and identified.

The emergent themes were: (a) How Professors Issue Disclaimers (b) How Students Deliver Disclosures, (c) Examples of Student Disclosures, (d) How Professors Respond to Disclosures, (e) Impact on Professors' Wellbeing and (f) Training. In the *How Professors Issue Disclaimers in Their Classes* theme, each of the seven participants experienced student self-disclosures and the experiences and perspectives were unique to each situation and student.

Specific examples of disclosures were reported to illustrate the type of disclosures experienced by participants. In the theme describing the theme of instructor's *Disclaimer Delivery*, all participants described the way in which they perceived students' method of disclosures were delivered and shared their experiences recognizing student self-disclosures of personal trauma and/or sensitive information in asynchronous classes. Experiences and perceptions related to the theme regarding *Examples of Student Disclosures*, the theme of *Personal Family Issues* emerged, and specific examples were provided by each. With respect to the theme of *How Professors Respond to Disclosures*, all seven participants discussed some type of disclaimer, either written or verbal, provided either by themselves or by the college as part of the policy and procedures at the school.

Several participants used multiple messaging techniques to provide disclaimers to students. The theme of *Responses to Disclosures* emerged from the data as participants described the different types of disclaimers they provided to students. The theme regarding *Impact on Professors' Wellbeing* included the subtheme *Disclosures and the Impact on Instructors*, provided valuable insight on the emotional impact of student disclosures on the participants and how they were impacted by the disclosure of personal trauma and/or sensitive information shared by students. Lastly, the theme relating to the category of *Training* contained experiences of participants and their respective perspectives of the extent to which they felt prepared to handle student disclosures in an asynchronous environment and their *Requests for Training*.

The findings will be explored in relation to the literature in the following chapter, Chapter 5. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the significance of the study findings relative to the literature. In addition, recommendations for future study and a call to action for implementation is discussed.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Since 2000, the mental health crisis in higher education (HE) underscored the importance of prioritizing students' mental health (Kadison et al., 2004). Research in HE confirmed students may disclose personal trauma and/or sensitive information in their college classrooms when learning about sensitive academic content (Greener et. al., 1984; Lindecker et. al., 2021; Papadatou-Pastou et al., 2019). However, there is limited literature and research regarding disclosures in the online teaching environment, specifically in asynchronous courses, despite continual increase in enrollment of online studies in the US (NCES 2020). In higher education, especially in courses such as criminal justice, psychology, nursing etc., sensitive academic content is taught in classrooms on-campus and on-line and these difficult discussions may result in students' self-disclosure of previous and/or current personal traumatic experiences (Agllias, 2012; Ball, 2000; Carello et al., 2015; Reyes et al., 2012).

In the Spring of 2020 after the nation declared COVID-19 a pandemic in March of 2020 (FR Doc. 2020-05794, 2020; WHO, 2020 according to the NCES (2020) there were 19.4 million students enrolled in college and 87 percent of students were enrolled in some or all online courses. During COVID-19, college students experienced unprecedented challenges resulting in substantial mental health concerns, which put both their health and academic success in jeopardy (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020; Lederer et al., 2021). Reflecting on the experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and looking ahead to a post-pandemic teaching environment in higher education, many more students became reliant on online courses emphasizing the importance of effective practices for addressing mental health online (Kose et al., 2022). As research develops and there is a greater understanding of online teaching it is

important to recognize and respond to the growing number of students that may share experiences of personal trauma in the online classroom (Booth, 2012; Carello et al.; 2014; 2015; Rocca, 2010; Swan et al., 2005). Despite the climbing instances of mental health concerns in college, students and the possible triggering academic content taught in the physical and the online classroom (Conrad et al., 2020), research by Lindecker and Cramer (2021) recognized that many faculty teaching in higher education have little to no formal training in crisis intervention and referrals techniques such as therapy, counseling, or psychology. Research conducted in the Spring of 2020 by Active Minds, when the COVID-19 pandemic was officially declared around the world (Active Minds, 2020), concluded that one in five college students reported their mental health had significantly worsened under COVID-19. Findings from this study also concluded that more than half (55%) of the students interviewed (n=2086) said they did not know where to go if they or someone they knew needed mental health services right away (Active Minds, 2020). Looking ahead, these research findings indicated that higher education needs to be prepared to help students heal and address mental health concerns in a post-pandemic world (Active Minds, 2020).

Reflecting on the above-mentioned concerns surrounding mental health in higher education (HE) and taking into consideration the limited research available exploring the readiness of instructors to recognize and respond to students in online asynchronous classroom environments, in this study, I explored the lived and told stories of online instructors to examine their perspectives of how student disclosures were handled in their online asynchronous course(s) and the extent to which they feel prepared to recognize signs of personal trauma in such circumstances. This narrative inquiry qualitative study's findings are important to the field

of HE to further understand the experiences of instructors and identify future action that may be taken to further assist professors and respond to student mental health concerns.

To understand the experiences and perceptions as expressed in lived and told stories of asynchronous online course instructors, the purpose of this current narrative inquiry study was to explore the experiences of asynchronous online instructors in public and/or private higher education institutions in the United States where academic content may trigger disclosure of students' personal trauma. Furthermore, this study afforded an opportunity to learn firsthand from the stories and perspectives of how student disclosures were recognized and responded to in online asynchronous course(s). The seven participants interviewed in this study have taught asynchronous online courses in the United States within the last five years where students have self-disclosed personal information about their traumatic experiences as outlined in Chapter 3. In response to the open-ended interview questions, which focused on the experiences and perspectives of these instructors, participants described how they recognized, responded to, and how prepared they feel to assist students when disclosures of personal trauma and/or sensitive information happens in their classrooms in an online classroom. Participants engaged in individual member checking of their redacted transcript by each participant occurred. Upon approval of the transcripts by participants, each transcript was entered into Atlas.ti® where coding, organization, and interpretation occurred and resulted in identifying themes, categories and subthemes which emerged from the 45–60-minute one-on-one the interviews.

The data that emerged from the interviews were then interpreted using Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1994) social learning theory. In particular Bandura's definition of self-efficacy, which is defined as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1977, p. 2). Applying

Bandura's self-efficacy theory, a subset of Bandura's social learning theory, and the respective four antecedents to self-efficacy (1) performance accomplishments (2) vicarious experience (learning) (3) verbal persuasion (encouragement) and (4) physiological (emotional) states, these collected data were interpreted. In the following sections, I present results of the coding, organization, and interpretation of data. The findings from each of the categories that were developed with corresponding themes and descriptive examples of participants' experiences are presented: (a) How Professors Issue Disclaimers (b) How Students Deliver Disclosures, (c) Examples of Student Disclosures, (d) How Professors Respond to Disclosures, (e) Impact on Professor's Wellbeing, and (f) Training. Additionally, in the next section, the findings from each of the two research questions are described relative to the literature, which acts as a foundation for the study. The findings are aligned with the literature. Lastly, in the following section, I will be interpreting the findings that were shared in Chapter 4, then explore the implications of this research study and finally make recommendations for action and future research.

Interpretation of Findings

In this section, I review the major findings from this narrative inquiry study with respect to the study's two research questions. I also share these results with respect to the literature when evaluating the research questions using the data from the study. At the end of this section, I will discuss the conceptual and theoretical framework of this study utilizing Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1994) social learning theory, more specifically self-efficacy to interpret the findings and examine the implications of the perspectives and experiences of asynchronous online instructors (Bandura, 1977).

Research Question One

With the intent of answering the first research question of "How do instructors handle

disclosure of personal trauma when teaching sensitive academic content that may trigger previous and/or current personal traumatic experiences within their asynchronous online undergraduate students?" I explored the lived and told stories of asynchronous online instructors to seek to understand how they handled situations where students self-disclose personal trauma and/or sensitive information in their courses by using Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory as a lens to answer this research question. The following categories reflect a response to the first research question in this study: (a) How Professors Issue Disclaimers; (b) How Students Deliver Disclosures and (c) Examples of Student Disclosures.

How Professors Issue Disclaimers

In this category I provided detailed examples of how disclaimers were delivered to students in asynchronous classes. A pattern of Disclaimer statements emerged as a theme illustrating verbal persuasion as an antecedent of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory in this category which included three subcategories: (a) Warning about Making Disclosures; (b) Trigger Warnings and (c) Referral Information for Help. There has been significant research as it relates to content forecasting also known as trigger warnings (Boysen et al., 2021; Jones, 2020; Kim et al., 2020; Raypole, 2010; Sandon, 2018; Stringer 2016, 2018).

While there has been much controversy on college campuses with respect to the use of trigger warnings (George et al., 2020), in the current study all seven participants described some type of disclaimer or statement to students regarding how they either proactively discuss sensitive academic content that may result in student self-disclosure or statements to students about what to expect should they disclose and what resources for assistance may be available. Specific examples of these disclosure disclaimers have been described in Chapter 4. One participant provided a description of a message given to students regarding the content of the

class in a form of a weekly video to all students. In this video, the participant said the content learned in the specific module for the week may be difficult to hear or read about. Literature supports the use of trigger warnings identifying these statements as either written or verbal (Stringer, 2016) in HE and may promote equity, enabling students with traumatic backgrounds to participate in their studies in a similar fashion as their peers without trauma backgrounds (Stringer, 2016). However, this current study provides another alternative, video messaging, common in online courses as illustrated by one participant in this study. Furthermore, Ballbo et al., (2017) determined in a qualitative analysis that trigger warnings allow students to know what is coming and to prepare themselves.

In the current study, all seven participants discussed their desire to help students navigate learning difficult material and wanting to assist students when they are in need. Consistent with the literature, this study supplemented the findings of Stringer (2016) who students appreciated knowing what to expect in lectures. In a survey at semester's end, stringer found 98% of students registered strong support for this advanced notice. To provide as much information as possible in their courses about sensitive topics, some participants said they advised students ahead of time regarding modules that included topics such as sexual assault, domestic violence etcetera. Other participants said they provided statements about what happens if a student shares personal trauma and/or sensitive information in class so students are informed prior to disclosing. One participant noted students are told at the beginning of class "not to disclose anything that they're not comfortable with everyone knowing." This participant also asserted class emails were sent to students with information about counseling services should they have concerns or emotional reactions after learning about the content. Another participant said he provided information to his students about what he legally has to report as a mandated reporter versus what he does not, so

students are aware of the next steps after disclosing personal trauma and/or sensitive information in his asynchronous online course.

The next section details what happens after the disclaimers from instructors are presented to students. Often, students self-disclose in a variety of way, using multiple modes of communications. In an effort to better understand how participants recognize and respond to self-disclosures, I examined how students deliver the disclosures to answer the first research question.

How Students Deliver Disclosures

From the category of *How Students Deliver Disclosures,* emerged a theme of types of *Delivery of Disclosures*. This theme and its respective subthemes illustrated performance experiences as an antecedent of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory with seven subcategories of descriptive examples which include (a) *Privately by Email;* (b) *Zoom;* (c) *Assignments;* (d) *Discussion Boards;* (e) *By Text;* (f) *In Private Messages or Chat;* and (g) *Red Flags.* All seven participants described the way in which they perceived students method of disclosures were delivered and shared their experiences of recognizing student self-disclosures of personal trauma and/or sensitive information in asynchronous classes. Literature has referenced that the way in which an instructor connects with a student can make a significant difference in the quality of education and the experiences of both the teacher and the instructor (Bandura, 1986; Daumiller et al., 2021; Oliveira et al., 2021; Stronge et al., 2011). However, literature about how students disclose in an asynchronous environment appears to be limited.

This current study highlighted the importance of connections between students and instructors, which aligns with the literature, but specific types of delivery add to the existing body of research, especially for asynchronous environments. Findings revealed the most

common method of disclosure in an asynchronous classroom is in the discussion board. Six out of seven participants shared they have had this experience and mentioned their surprise about how openly students shared such personal information publicly. One participant hypothesized that perhaps it was due to the online presence and the feeling of anonymity, but she has experienced more online self-disclosures than in-person class disclosures of personal trauma and/or sensitive information.

The second most common way students self-disclose is by emailing the instructor to share personal trauma and/or sensitive information, with five out of seven participants experiencing this delivery method. One participant said it was not uncommon have "a lot of students" email and ask, "Can you help me out?" Three out of seven participants shared experiences in which students disclosed via Zoom® or text, with participants noting that Zoom® disclosures increased during the pandemic. Private messages and chat disclosures were only experienced by two participants, making this method of delivery less common. Lastly, the least likely method of delivery was in a written assignment uploaded using the academic course management software, as only one participant reported this experience. However, all participants discussed the importance of online formatting and requirements to address some aspect of privacy concerns.

Liguori et al. (2020) recommend instructional styles include combining technology with traditional teaching as a tool to help learning. Many participants in this study shared the significance of recognizing red flags in an asynchronous course. Specifically, four participants identified recognition of warning signs or *red flags* in their courses and how this acted as an alert that students are having difficulty. Participants that recognized these red flags in their courses believed they were able to provide students with the support warranted. This also led to

recognizing more difficult and sensitive disclosures by students that were not able to be identified using traditional methods of communication (i.e., facial expressions, sounds of student voices) if courses were taught on-campus or in real-time online (synchronously).

Results from this current study align with literature in the field that indicates because instructors are in regular communication with their students, they are likely to observe signs and symptoms of distress (Bandura, 1986; Kulbaga et al., 2018; Lederer et al., 2021). However, recognizing red flags in student behavior in an online environment may be more difficult (Lindecker et al., 2021). One participant in this current study described being aware of "indirect indicators" for both positive and negative observations. A different participant shared his perspective that warning signs may be more difficult to identify in more difficult circumstances. Instructors are not face-to-face with students as they are on campus or by video in a synchronous online class, and recognizing traditional cues of distress, uncomfortableness, trauma, and anxiety is more difficult (Bandura, 1986; Carjuzaa et al., 2021, Hrastinski, 2008; Martinez, 2012). These participants' experiences in this current study are consistent with current research described in Chapter 2 and underscores the importance of the instructors' ability to recognize and respond to instances in which students self-disclose personal trauma and/or sensitive information, especially in an asynchronous online environment. These difficult circumstances address the varying degree of examples of disclosures discussed in the next section.

Examples of Student Disclosures

All seven participants reported experiences of students disclosing personal trauma and/or sensitive information in the courses. These findings align with Lindecker et al.'s (2021) study reporting that 96% of surveyed online faculty reported students self-disclosed personal information to them. Furthermore, in Chapter 4, I provided specific examples capturing the

experiences of participants describing the types of information shared with them by students. Each of the seven participants experienced student self-disclosures and the experiences and perspectives were unique to each situation and student. Previous research indicated examples range from everyday challenges such as family, financial, and employment issues) to urgent and dangerous situations such as suicide, abuse, and addiction (Lindecker, 2021). Results from this current study are akin to the literature with 100% of participants reporting students disclosing personal traumatic and/or sensitive information in their online courses. More specifically, experiences in regard to family tragedies, domestic violence, mental health issues, and racism were reported in the findings of this current study. Seven participants reported students sharing experiences of loss with them. One participant had a student disclose her loss after suffering through a miscarriage, while another participant told of a student sharing intimate feelings regarding a divorce and custody battle. Another participant described a student sharing details of witnessing a family member dying in front of her and another participant recalled an international student sharing childhood sexual abuse.

Some participants described students sharing experiences of domestic violence. One participant described a domestic violence survivor sharing descriptive moments of abuse in real time, being evicted from her house, and having her car vandalized by her abuser. This participant described these experiences as "horrible stories of domestic abuse." Every participant shared examples of disclosures as reported in detail in Chapter 4. The examples were wide-ranging, from abuse, to mental health concerns, enduring illnesses, PTSD, struggling as parents, and racism.

Lederer et al. (2020) argued even before the pandemic and shift to predominantly online courses, students were experiencing significant mental health concerns. One participant in the

current study shared he experienced a wide range of disclosures over years of teaching, while another participant described an increase of disclosures due to the online structure of the class environment. Regardless of the time frame when disclosures happened, it is apparent examples of disclosures were wide-ranging and described intimate experiences in students' lives. These reports of personal traumatic and/or sensitive information by students to their instructors are consistent with the literature as described in Chapter 2. Students may experience trauma during or even before college and as a result a multitude of different life experiences are brought into the classroom (Gutierrez et al., 2019, p. 11). In addition to previous trauma, Lederer et al. (2020) indicated that there are many other concerns students present in the classroom, such as food insecurity, financial hardship, isolation, uncertainty in the future and lack of social connectedness. Online or on-campus, these student concerns can all impact a student's performance. Similar experiences were described by all participants in this current study. One participant reported a student disclosing that attending college at a larger university with so many time commitments in an asynchronous course was not something the student could navigate well, recalling the student saying, "I can't do it. I'm not mentally strong enough to do this without some type of structure." Another participant mentioned one of their students disclosed they had food insecurities and lived in their car.

Data from this study suggested asynchronous instructors' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) to recognize student trauma may be disadvantaged in an online asynchronous course (Thomas et al., 2017). As a result, findings from this study answered the first research question and was supported by the literature. In the next section, I explore Research Question Two, reporting the findings of the extent to which instructors feel prepared to recognize signs of personal trauma in their students when teaching asynchronous online classes.

Research Question Two

The current narrative inquiry study adds to the limited body of existing research by reporting the lived and told stories of seven online instructors in asynchronous courses. In an effort to answer Research Question Two, "How prepared do instructors feel to recognize signs of personal trauma in their students when teaching asynchronous online classes?" participants were asked open-ended questions regarding their responses to disclosures and how prepared they felt to recognize signs of personal trauma in their online asynchronous students. Adding to the experiences and perspectives captured above from participants with respect to Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, three categories emerged answering the second research question. *How Professors Respond to Disclosures, Impact on Professor's Wellbeing* and *Training* were all categories that represented the lived and told stories of participants in the online asynchronous environment. In the following sections, I describe in more detail participants' perspectives and experiences.

How Professors Respond to Disclosures

The *How Professors Respond to Disclosures* category outlines a theme respective to each of the participants' experiences and perspectives, *Responses to Disclosures*, with the following subcategories which identified detailed examples in each of the following seven areas: (a) Teaching with Empathy*: I always try to respond in an empathetic way*; (b) Acknowledging the Disclosure: *I'm sorry*; (c) Following up*: I often find myself reaching out;* (d) Referral for Professional Services: *I'm a teacher, not a counselor* I Connecting Students with Community Resources; (f) Providing Additional Time for Academic Assignments; (g) Providing Support: *Meeting them halfway*; (h) Utilize the Course Management System: *I would put a comment in*

that section. The lived and told stories of these seven participants relative to how they responded to disclosures highlights verbal persuasion as an antecedent of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory in this category. There is existing literature referred to in Chapter 2 regarding pedagogy in education that includes different teaching styles and feedback (Hošková-Mayerová, 2016; Kadison et al., 2004; Lederer et al., 2021; Shrivastava et al., 2013; Yilmaz et al., 2017); teaching with empathy (Crady, 2005; Kadison et al., 2004; Lindecker, 2021; Nikiforos et al., 2020), trauma informed teaching (Anderson, 2015), recognizing signs of PTSD/trauma and victimization (Bedera, 2021; Cares et al., 2014; Carjuzaa et al., 2021; Olser, 2021; Parkway et al., 2010).

Seven participants described their responses to students' disclosure that were empathetic and caring. While only three participants spoke directly about teaching with empathy, four participants described it. For example, one participant said his "first thing I want to do is to try and be a human being and convey empathy and understanding." Another participant described feeling "better equipped to kind of identify or to help or to be empathetic and compassionate to my students when they are struggling." Existing research (Shin et al., 2021) focused on the shift to ERE in 2020, which required maintaining a sense of community, providing emotional support, compassion, and empathy to students during uncertain times, which became priorities of many instructors. The experiences of the participants in this study are aligned with existing research but also emphasize the importance of ERE and asynchronous online teaching. Participants in this study demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy, which allowed them to recognize disclosures of personal trauma and/or sensitive information in their online teaching environments (Bandura, 1986).

All seven participants said once they recognized a disclosure, they acknowledged the disclosure. One participant described telling a student who was a victim of a crime that "I believe you…I'm sorry that happened to you…that's a terrible experience," demonstrating pedagogies in the classroom have appeared to have changed to include mindfulness, empathy, trauma-informed teaching, sensitivity to potential triggering content, and recognition of mental health concerns, all of which demonstrate self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986; Kulbaga et al., 2018; Lindecker, 2021). Six of the seven participants noted the increase in student follow-up necessary, regardless of disclosing personal trauma and/or sensitive information in the online classroom. One participant described a typical conversation as "expressing empathy, checking in on them, encouraging them to get help" while another said her course content often includes sensitive academic content, as depression and anxiety are frequently discussed. Therefore, she proactively reaches out to provide counseling options. These types of responses exhibit a strong sense of self-efficacy and aligns with the literature (Bandura,1986, 1994; Anderson, 2015). Incorporating trauma-informed approaches in teaching is critical to successfully meeting the needs of those individuals who face overwhelming adversity (Bannister, 2019; Brown et al., 2022; Carello et al., 2014; Cares et al., 2014).

All seven participants described referrals to counseling as a response to disclosures as determined by the content of the information shared with them. Policies surrounding referrals were inconsistent and six out of seven participants indicated they would like to receive more training on responding to student self-disclosures in the online environment. Some specific examples of referrals for counseling were shared in Chapter 4. By creating vicarious experiences, as one participant did when providing support to a colleague when faced with a difficult disclosure, offers "an opportunity to refer students to the departments within our institutions that

are trained to deal with trauma" (Gutierrez et al., 2019, p. 15). However, recognizing additional resources outside of mental health resources that are available to students when responding to student self-disclosures is particularly helpful.

In this research study, six out of seven participants confirmed their familiarity with the counseling centers for their respective colleges in terms of making referrals. However, only one participant expressed confidence and extensive familiarity with resources outside her college that were available to students in her classes. This participant described disclosures from students regarding homelessness, food insecurities, and poverty and said her prior experience in human services provided a feeling of confidence that left her equipped to make these essential referrals in a timely manner. Lastly, while participants shared various ways to provide support to students, they also responded to student disclosure by providing extensions to academic assignments. They asserted this can be helpful and provide opportunities for success, along with the CMS colleges provided, described in Chapter 4. Yet, the impact on participants was significant. In the following section, I examine the emotional impact on instructors as they handled these disclosures in their asynchronous online courses.

Impact on Professors' Wellbeing

According to one of the few research studies on student self-disclosure in an online environment, Lindecker et al. (2021) reported student self-disclosure of personal challenges and trauma was common, experienced by 96% of surveyed faculty (n= 238). Thomas et al. (2019) suggested schools should include trauma-informed practices but acknowledged it will require administrative support. Thomas et al. (2019) further recommended schools incorporate trauma-sensitive practices and teacher and staff professional development remain a priority. These recommendations are consistent with the findings from this study.

The *Impact on Professors' Wellbeing* category includes the theme *Disclosures and the Impact on Instructors,* illustrating physiological states as an antecedent of Bandura's (1986, 1994) self-efficacy theory, with four subcategories of descriptive examples. These include (a) *Professional Balance: I've been told, you don't have to do this. It's not your job;* (b) *Professional Boundaries: While I felt like a counselor – I'm not a counselor;* (c) *Emotional Impact: It just became very emotionally draining;* (d) *Not Feeling Prepared to Recognize and Respond: I was very nervous.* Participants were open with me and shared very personal experiences when describing their perspectives of preparedness to respond to student disclosures. Participants also shared incredibly difficult moments when recognizing and responding to student disclosures with me as part of this research. Participants spoke freely when sharing their feelings about a need for additional support and training, sometimes with emotion as they described how they were personally impacted by student disclosures of personal trauma and/or sensitive information in their courses.

Adversities in the lives of students may impact their health and well-being (Wadsworth et al., 2008) and include family stressors (abuse, poverty), environmental stressors (COVID, illness, death) and trauma, impacting students' health and mental health (Anderson, 2015). However, what emerged as a result of this study was an emphasis on how incredibly responsible and drained participants may feel when left without resources, training, and support to respond to disclosures of students. One participant said at her college they are "increasingly being told that we need to connect with our students because they have to feel a sense of community and belonging," which was consistent with existing research described in Chapter 2. However, the approaches that instructors use in the classroom become more complex yet innovative when applied online. More specifically, Öztürk's (2021) examined students' evaluation of learning

(i.e., interaction, feedback, academic and technical support, active learning) in an asynchronous online learning environment. In this qualitative study (n=28) of education students, participants reported feeling isolated and expressed frustration with the lack of face-to-face interaction, few recorded lectures and feedback that took too long to receive (Öztürk, 2021). Conversely, students also said they received support when they needed it, appreciated the independence of the assignment schedule, and the ability to plan to complete assignments at their own speed (Öztürk, 2021). One of the findings of this current study also concerns feedback from instructors in the asynchronous environment.

Participants shared concerns about maintaining boundaries, both personally and professionally, and discussed the emotional impact as instructors. One participant explained while the situations she encountered were emotionally difficult, she believed she made a difference "more so than as if I was teaching the class" while another describing the difficulty in

balancing professional boundaries, stating:

> It's really hard on me. When they hurt, I hurt because they're my students. And I get to know them as people. And the distinction between humanizing a professor and being a human is becoming very porous. It's very difficult to separate that.

Other participants confirmed what Lindecker et al. (2021) noted about HE moving from a sole focus on academic training for the most prepared students to more of an overall view of education to that now includes "remediation, life support, mentoring, and coaching more diverse, challenged learners" (p. 151). This weighed heavily on participants in the current study. All seven participants discussed a desire to learn more about responding to disclosures and to participate in trainings to increase their skillset to on how to best respond to and handle these

sensitive situations in their online classroom. One participant said responding to disclosures was "it was a little scary" and another wondered how other instructors were impacted by these experiences. She said she is invested in her students' well-being, adding, " I have cried over my students in past and recently, and I feel very personally impacted when I know that they are impacted. And not being able to do anything with that is exceedingly frustrating."

Lindecker et al. (2021) examined the relationship between student disclosures of personal challenges and teacher burnout and compassion fatigue and Thomas et al. (2019) suggested schools develop strong cross-systems of collaboration between school staff and mental health professionals. The results of this current study support this existing research. While all seven participants indicated being impacted by student disclosures, six out of seven said they would feel more comfortable with additional support and training. The one participant who indicated they had previous professional and personal experience assisting individuals with tragedies said additional information on responding in the online environment would be helpful, especially given the rising number of students taking online courses.

With 19.4 million students currently enrolled in college, 87% were enrolled in some or all online courses in the Spring of 2020 (NCES, 2020). Thus, providing training and support to instructors to help with responding to students' mental health is urgent. In the following section, I discuss the need for and requests from participants in this current study in relation to the literature supporting ongoing professional development in HE.

Training

Historically, there have been limited opportunities for college instructors to receive continuing education seminars to learn more about and how to work with students who exhibit signs of mental health concerns in the online (Brown et al., 2022; Lindecker, 2021; Thomas et

al., 2019). However, in recent years, considering the COVID-19 pandemic and the switch to online learning, these opportunities have become more available (Hodges et al., 2020; Roman, 2020). Yet, research (Lindecker et al., 2021 and Ferreira, 2018) indicates complexities of online learning and online teaching. Specific challenges to teaching asynchronously online have been discussed in multiple areas of research (Bashir et al., 2021; Duma et al., 2022; Gordon et al., 2021; Hrastinski, 2008; Kose et al., 2022; Martinez, 2012; Shin et al., 2021; Tran et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2014) and this current study adds to the body of research addressing recognition and response to student self-disclosures in asynchronous classes.

The *Training* category that developed in this current study includes the theme *Requests for Training* illustrating vicarious experiences as an antecedent of Bandura's (1986, 1994) self-efficacy theory with three subcategories of descriptive examples provided in Chapter 4 which include (a) *Lack of Training and/or support in Responding to Student Disclosure;* (b) *Technical Training on How to Teach Online Provided;* (c) *Less Prepared: New instructors*. This study examined the complexities of personal trauma and/or sensitive information shared with instructors in an online asynchronous environment. Furthermore, this study underscores the importance of the desire from participants to engage in additional professional development to assist their students as they struggle with personal tragedy in their lives. This participant feedback aligns with the literature as prior research indicated mental health concerns are on the rise in higher education (Conrad et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2022; Lederer et al., 2021) and relationships between students and instructors have become more personal and complex (Crady, 2005; Kose et al., 2005; Gordon at al., 2021).

Participants demonstrated self-efficacy during discussions about training which continued to be a focal point of the interview with participants when discussing the extent to which

instructors felt prepared to recognize and respond to students during these difficult moments (Bandura, 1977). In Bandura's (1986, 1994) summarized self-efficacy as individual's beliefs about their abilities to perform during events that impact their lives (Bandura, 1977, p. 2). One participant said his extensive human services background remains incredibly helpful responding to student disclosures but also noted more training would be helpful. He said:

It'd be weird if they're teaching microbiology and for the student to tell the instructor that they were sexually assaulted. But I also feel many of the instructors would be completely incapable of handling it if they did get that information.

Another participant noted "absolutely nothing has been provided" when asked about training on handling disclosures in her online classrooms. She added she often wonders if she "is doing the right thing." All but one participant voiced concerns that training for responding to online student disclosures has not been sufficient, if provided at all. This is consistent with the literature (Liguori et al., 2020). Liguori et al., (2020) stated that the broad spectrum of learning objectives which influence teaching behaviors in education are now explored online but only recently due to the shift during the pandemic. Liguori et al., (2020) continued on, noting that a hybrid of teaching methods of both traditional and online while challenging provides a call to action to document and collect new pedagogical innovations to improve practices in online education and teaching. As more recognition occurs and perceptions change regarding teaching with mindfulness, empathy, trauma, sensitivity to potential triggering content, and recognition of mental health concerns change, so have pedagogies in the classroom (Kulbaga et al., 2018; Lindecker, 2021).

Some, not all student disclosures have been linked to the academic content in college courses as topics are discussed regarding sexual assault, domestic violence, etc. (Agllias, 2012;

Ball, 2000; Carello et al., 2015; Reyes et al., 2012) however this current study highlights that

academic content is not always the reason for disclosure and that regardless of the type of course,

student disclosures are common. In fact, emphasis on training to recognize and respond was

expressed by three participants in this current study with respect to requests for extensive

technical training on how to teach online but recognized that training to respond to online trauma

and disclosures has been limited, if even offered. One participant said that even after a few years

of teaching online and "some" training on teaching online, she still does not "feel qualified to

teach online." She added, "I feel like it's been lacking to a large degree for a lot of us who didn't

really have a history or background in teaching remotely, and we were kind of just thrown out

there, sink or swim."

Three participants voiced concerns about new instructors being less prepared. One

participant stated, "I think that universities have to figure out a way to onboard faculty with the

tools necessary for them to recognize issues, challenges, and resources. I think especially now, in

light of school shootings, and all the things that happened." Perspectives regarding training and

experiences in the asynchronous online environment were shared by each of the participants.

With respect to performance experiences (outcomes), participants believed their self-efficacy

was low because handling situations of disclosures are mastery experiences where individuals

preform successfully (Bandura 1977, 1986, 1994). In this study, most participants indicated more

training is needed to perform successfully (Bandura, 1994). Research Question Two has been

answered by the findings of this study and supported by the literature.

Implications

In this narrative inquiry research study, I sought to further understand and explore the

experiences and perceptions as expressed in lived and told stories of asynchronous online course

instructors. These seven participants taught in public and/or private higher education institutions in the United States within the last 5 years and all experienced situations where students in their asynchronous course resulted in disclosure of students' personal trauma. I utilized the conceptual and theoretical framework of Albert Bandura's (1977, 1986, 1994) social learning theory, specifically self-efficacy as a lens to explore participants beliefs about their performance relative to recognizing and responding to student disclosure of personal trauma and/or sensitive information in asynchronous environments. Included in this conceptual and theoretical framework an added emphasis on the four antecedents of self-efficacy were explored relative to the study and discussed in detail in Chapters 2 and 4.

As a result, the findings indicated all participants experienced situations in their asynchronous online course of student self-disclosure of personal trauma and/or sensitive information and students shared these experiences with instructors in a variety of ways. All participants also engaged in at least one method of disclaimer notifications to students while teaching sensitive topics and six out of seven participants said they did not feel prepared enough to recognize and respond to students disclosing personal traumatic information to best assist them in their online environments. All participants provided detailed examples of their experiences and perceptions about the impact of handling these difficult situations. Lastly, six out of seven HEIs to effectively respond to student disclosures in their asynchronous online courses as a matter of their ongoing professional development.

These findings add to the existing literature and corresponding research (Barak et al., 2007; Greiner et al., 2022; Lantis, 2022; Lindecker et al., 2021) which detail challenges for online asynchronous instructors and their students' ability or willingness to access mental health services for trauma and stressful situations. Thus, it is essential participants' experiences and

perspectives are shared with decision makers in HE to expand the training and support offered to those teaching asynchronously online. The implications of this current study are timely and essential for decision makers, instructors, college officials, and mental health providers as a call to action to increase support and training for online asynchronous instructors. Implications for practice include opportunities to enhance training, preparedness, and access to mental health services for students in online college learning environments who may have been triggered by learning sensitive course content

Furthermore, the review of the literature surrounding student self-disclosures of personal traumatic experiences in an online asynchronous college courses are limited (Lindecker et al., 2021) and this current study seeks to narrow the gap of information in this asynchronous arena. Student self-disclosures have the possibility to enrich (or interrupt) the learning environment in its entirety (Frisby et al., 2013). Because of this, these findings provide valuable data for future research to be conducted about why disclosures occur in asynchronous environments and what support systems should be in place to further assist instructors and online students.

Recommendations for Action

The results from this study provide insight to the challenges of recognizing and responding to student disclosures of personal trauma and/or sensitive information when teaching online asynchronous courses. The recommendations for action as a result of this study are consistent with the limited research with regard to online classes conducted by Lindecker et al., (2021) which concluded that a "better understanding of how student self-disclosures is perceived and handled by faculty members provides an opportunity to inform institution-level student support practices, faculty support practices, and faculty training initiatives" (p. 3). The results of this current study suggest a call for action to HEIs to provide more opportunities for

asynchronous instructors to attend training and access support when teaching asynchronously.asynchronously. This training should provide instructors with specialized attention to learning advanced techniques and develop skill sets to recognize disclosures and specific information for responding to situations if and when they occur. Examples of resources in the community that may be accessed to address online mental health assistance and other community agencies should be included in additional training and/or resources provided to instructors to share with students.

Existing literature (Lindecker et al., 2021) suggested online educational settings may result in increased student disclosure of "highly personal traumatic or challenging situations" (p.146). Because of the diversity of students taking courses (age, gender, demographics, personal challenges, various backgrounds, tech skill sets, etc.) coupled with the idea that they are more likely to be experiencing trauma or personal distress, this current study's findings concur and suggest a call to action. A call for action specifically to colleges and universities to include standardized language (disclaimers) in course material, syllabi, and online modules. Special emphasis should be placed on proactively providing resources and referral information to students, should content or other circumstances prompt disclosures of personal trauma and/or sensitive information in the asynchronous online environment.

Lastly, Bandura's (1986, 1994, 1999) self-efficacy theory, which acted as a guide for the conceptual framework and a lens for the theoretical framework of this study, supports the theory of self-efficacy which linked all "of the elements of this research process: researcher interests and goals, identity and positionality, context, and setting (macro and micro), formal and informal theory, and methods" (Ravitch et al., 2017, p. 5). This is particularly relevant, as experiences of instructors are reflected in the findings of this research because "people are self-organizing,

proactive, self-regulating, and self-reflecting. They are contributors to their life circumstances not just products of them" (Smith et al., 2005, p. 9). Findings from this study indicate the substantial impact on asynchronous instructors while recognizing and responding to instances of self-disclosure and may act as a call to action to college officials, HEI decision makers and to mental health professionals to offer support and counseling to instructors as they respond and react to these very stressful and difficult moments in their online classrooms. This may also serve as a confirmation to instructors themselves that it is acceptable and appropriate to reach out for help, to ask for clarification and more information on resources available to students and to themselves for self-care, and to explore or suggest best practices within their college policies which address the surrounding circumstances of expected responses to student disclosures of personal trauma and/or sensitive information in the asynchronous online environment.

Recommendations for Further Study

In addition to the above recommendations to Higher Education Institutions (HEI) as a result of these findings and to provide additional training and support for both instructors and students in asynchronous online environments, further research studies surrounding the unique challenges of recognizing and responding to student disclosures of personal trauma and/or sensitive information in asynchronous courses is warranted. Based on the findings reported in this study, the following further research is recommended:

- This study did not address why students are disclosing personal trauma and/or sensitive information in the asynchronous online environment. Future research could focus on the reasons why some students share this information and others do not, would supplement this research.

- Acknowledging that adult learners are headed back to the classroom online and tend to embark on courses of learning with much more advanced needs and higher expectations than younger learners (Ferreira, 2018), future research would be helpful to identify different skillsets for responding to student disclosures of adult learners and alternate techniques for recognizing student disclosures for adult learners.

- This study focused solely on asynchronous courses however additional research could be conducted to compare in-person, synchronous, and asynchronous instructors to determine if there are unique sets of circumstances in each type of teaching or if the experiences and perspectives are similar regardless of the modality of teaching.

- Several participants in this study reported a concern for newly hired or less experienced professors teaching online, experiencing student disclosures, and their capacity to respond. Future research could be conducted to explore the experiences of new instructors teaching online and/or in-person to evaluate their comfort level to recognize and respond to student disclosures.

- Providing accurate and timely referrals for assistance and showing compassion and empathy are critical qualities and skillsets for college instructors, especially during student disclosures. Results from this study indicated instructors are not all familiar with how to access or determine available resources, especially for their online students. Further research is warranted on how to connect resources to students in various geographical locations, when students do not reside in the immediate community.

- Lastly, future research should be conducted on best practices for instructors and decision makers in HE to consider and provide to faculty to assist them in recognizing and responding to disclosures from students regarding personal trauma and/or sensitive information in the asynchronous online environment.

Conclusion

There are times that students may disclose personal traumatic experiences and sensitive information when learning about academic content (Greener et. al., 1984; Lindecker et. al., 2021; Papadatou-Pastou et al., 2019). This narrative inquiry research study adds to the limited body of existing research by reporting the lived and told stories of seven online instructors in asynchronous courses by highlighting student disclosures and the responses by instructors teaching in asynchronous classrooms. This research study sought to further understand and explore, in-depth the experiences and perceptions as expressed in lived and told stories of seven asynchronous online course instructors in public and/or private higher education institutions in the US within the last 5 years where academic content may have triggered disclosure of students' personal trauma and/or sensitive information. Six themes were developed based on these interviews and 28 descriptive examples emerged as subcategories which were further identified during the process of analyzing the data from seven interviews with participants. These categories included: (a) How Professors Issue Disclaimers (b) How Students Deliver Disclosures, (c) Examples of Student Disclosures, (d) How Professors Respond to Disclosures, (e) Impact on Professor's Wellbeing and (f) Training. As a result, the findings indicated that all participants experienced student self-disclosure of personal trauma and/or sensitive information in their asynchronous online course and shared these experiences with instructors in a variety of ways.

All participants also engaged in some type of disclaimer while teaching sensitive topics. Six out of seven participants said they did not feel prepared enough to recognize and respond to students disclosing personal traumatic information and/or sensitive information to best assist students in their online environments. All seven participants provided their feelings about the impact of handling these difficult situations, both personally and professionally, and six out of seven participants reported a desire for additional training and support from HE to effectively respond to student disclosures in their asynchronous online courses.

This study's findings regarding the difficult and sensitive moments in asynchronous environments when students disclose personal trauma and/or sensitive information represents an important collection of experiences and perspectives not often told. The goal of this researcher was to better understand the lived and told stories of asynchronous instructors when students disclosed personal trauma and/or sensitive information in their classrooms that may have been triggered by academic content. A conceptual and theoretical framework provided a lens to guide the study and view the results. Six categories developed from the interpretation of the data, each with a respective theme and several subcategories providing detailed experiences from instructors. Participants shared their feelings regarding the significant impact disclosures have on them as well as a clear, powerful message for enhanced professional development and support when and if they recognize and respond to student disclosures. Results also indicated participants experience disclosures in their asynchronous courses and, as instructors, they do not feel as prepared as they would like to in these circumstances.

Recommendations for future research surrounding student disclosures were made in Chapter 5. In addition, in this chapter several recommendations for a call to action were discussed. Specifically, a call to action to provide further support to instructors, best practices

for disclaimer statements, and responses to students in these circumstances were described in Chapter 5.

Research in HE (Greener et. al., 1984, Lindecker et. al., 2021; Papadatou-Pastou et al., 2019) indicates it is likely students may disclose personal traumatic experiences in their college classrooms when learning about sensitive academic content that may trigger disclosure of previous and/or current personal traumatic experiences. The results from this study confirm that this is in fact occurring, however it is important to note that these experiences of disclosures are happening in online classrooms taught asynchronously and are not limited to the type of course (i.e., criminal justice, psychology, etc.) rather disclosures were evident in all the courses taught by participants in this study. Furthermore, the results from this study indicate an immediate need for additional training and support for instructors as they handle instances of student disclosures in their online courses. This study highlights a significant concern for not just instructors teaching courses asynchronously, but this study provides a rare, raw view of the lack of training and support to prepare our instructors to recognize and respond to student self-disclosures, which are at times incredibly personal, traumatic, and troubling. Existing research described in Chapters 1-5 coupled with the findings of this study only reconfirm the reality of mental health concerns rising in college courses.

The results from this study indicate that not only are students reaching out, the impact extends far beyond the moment of disclosure in the course and instructors are feeling the pressure, emotion, and responsibility to not just listen, but to empathetically respond, help and provide critical resources to students. Institutions of higher education have a responsibility to recommend and/or require innovative statements of disclaimers, provide support to instructors and tactfully yet with sensitivity tackle these critical moments when students open up and ask for

help. This study can serve as a wake-up call for policy makers and invested partners in higher education to act and to act now, providing resources for their own faculty and staff to feel supported, valued, and prepared when these moments of trauma are shared by students.

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Appendix A

Flier For Study Recruitment Advertisement (Social Networks)

ATTENTION: Do you teach classes ONLINE and are you willing to participate in research to help make a difference in higher education?

If YES….I am calling on online college instructors…

Currently, I am working on my dissertation in Education and Leadership at the University of New England (UNE). For my research, I am looking for volunteers that are willing to participate in a study who are college instructors that teach online (specifically in a course that is 100% taught online independent of any "real-time" instruction- otherwise known as an asynchronous class) who have experienced students who self-disclosed personal traumatic experiences. If you fit the following criteria a Zoom® interview will be scheduled for approximately 60-minutes:

1. Be over 18 years old
2. An online asynchronous college instructor
3. Have taught a minimum of one undergraduate course within the last 5 years (2017 through 2022) in the US
4. Experienced student self-disclosure of personal traumatic experiences and/or sensitive information in your college online course
5. Not be employed by the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, Plattsburgh at Queensbury, Delhi, or Community College of New York (CUNY) Adirondack to avoid a conflict of interest with me as the principal investigator because I am employed there and/or am elected to serve on an oversight governing board.

If you fit these criteria above and are willing to participate in my research study, then I want to hear from you! I would like seven participants for this study….please reply as soon as possible. I will send out an updated recruitment announcement to individuals that expressed interest indicating that recruitment is now closed. Should there become a need for an additional participant, I will reach out to them given their interest (i.e., a participant has an extraordinary circumstance and cannot participate as planned). In addition, I will announce that I have closed recruitment in my social media advertisements. The best way to reach me is by contacting me at:

Email: Rseeberconine@une.edu

In your email, please include your contact information (personal email address and the college you are/were teaching for when this student self-disclosure occurred). I will then follow up with an email with more information about this research study and a participant information sheet. I look forward to hearing from you and would like to schedule this interview as soon as possible to hear your story.

Please rest assured that this study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at University of New England. If you have any questions, or would like additional information, you may contact me or my lead faculty advisor via email.

Project Title: RESPONDING TO STUDENT DISCLOSURES: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF ONLINE COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS EXPERIENCES HANDLING DISCLOSURES OF PERSONAL TRAUMA IN THEIR ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE CLASSROOMS

Principal Investigator: Rachel Seeber Conine, Rseeberconine@une.edu.
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Luevano, gluevano@une.edu

Thank you very much for your time and I look forward to hearing from you. If you do not meet the selection criteria, but know someone who does, please pass this information to them for consideration.

Appendix B

Social Media Language For Recruitment Posts

Recruitment text for social media post (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn)

FACEBOOK

It's finally time!!!! I have been approved by the University of New England to start research for my dissertation! Now, I need your help! We all know the power of Facebook can have in connecting people. If you fit the criteria listed below, I would like seven participants for this study….please reply as soon as possible. I will send out an updated recruitment announcement to individuals that expressed interest indicating that recruitment is now closed. Should there become a need for an additional participant, I will reach out to them given their interest (i.e., a participant has an extraordinary circumstance and cannot participate as planned). In addition, I will take down my initial social media advertisements. I hope you will consider volunteering for my study & if not, please share the following request for participants in my study with your friends, contacts, colleagues and on social media. Thank you for your help! All the information you need is below, and you can just hit share or if interested in participating, please see my contact information below. Thank you again for making a difference in my goal of earning my Ed.D!

****

Calling all interested online college instructors…. Currently, I am working on my dissertation in Education and Leadership at the University of New England (UNE). For my research, I am looking for willing participants who are college instructors that teach online (specifically in asynchronous classes) who have experienced students who self-disclosed of personal traumatic experiences. If you fit the following criteria, I will schedule an interview via Zoom® for approximately 60-minutes:

1. Be over 18 years old

2. An online asynchronous college instructor

3. Have taught a minimum of one undergraduate course within the last 5 years (2017 through 2022) in the US

4. Experienced student self-disclosure of personal traumatic experiences and/or sensitive information in your college online course

5. Not be employed by the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, Plattsburgh at Queensbury, Delhi, or Community College of New York (CUNY) Adirondack to

avoid a conflict of interest with me as the principal investigator because I am employed there and/or am elected to serve on an oversight governing board.

If you fit these criteria above and are willing to volunteer to participate in my research study, then I want to hear from you! I have turned the comments off for this post so the best way to reach me is by contacting me at:

Email: Rseeberconine@une.edu

Or by private message (Rachel Seeber Conine) on Facebook

In your email, please include your contact information (personal email address and the college you are/were teaching for when this student self-disclosure occurred). I will then follow up with an email with more information about this research study and a participant information sheet. I look forward to hearing from you and would like to schedule this interview as soon as possible to hear your story.

Please rest assured that this study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at University of New England. If you have any questions, or would like additional information, you may contact me or my lead faculty advisor via email.

Project Title: RESPONDING TO STUDENT DISCLOSURES: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF ONLINE COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS EXPERIENCES HANDLING DISCLOSURES OF PERSONAL TRAUMA IN THEIR ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE CLASSROOMS

Principal Investigator: Rachel Seeber Conine, Rseeberconine@une.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Luevano, gluevano@une.edu

Thank you very much for your time and I look forward to hearing from you. If you do not meet the selection criteria, but know someone who does, please pass this information to them for consideration.

INSTAGRAM

TEXT with the above-referenced recruitment flier attached as an image (jpg)

It's finally time!!!! I have been approved by the University of New England to start research for my dissertation! Now, I need your help! If you fit the criteria listed below, I hope you will consider volunteering to participate in my study and if not, I hope that you will share the following request for participants in my study with your friends, contacts, colleagues and on social media. Thank you for your help! All the

information you need is below, and you can just hit share or if interested in participating, please see my contact information below. Thank you again for making a difference in my goal of earning my Ed.D!

#UNEresearch #EdD #Goals #Onlineteachingstudy #Lookingforstudyparticipants

TWITTER:

Tweet post text with the above-referenced recruitment flier attached as an image (jpg)

It's finally time!!!! I have been approved by the University of New England to start research for my dissertation! But now, I need your help! Please retweet this pic! Thank you for helping me reach my goal of earning a doctorate! #UNEresearch #itstime

LinkedIn

Post text with the above-referenced recruitment flier attached as an image (jpg)

My name is Rachel Seeber Conine, and I am a doctoral candidate for my doctorate in Education and Leadership at the University of New England. My research study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at University of New England. I hope that by utilizing social media recruitment on your Facebook page that there may be interested participants that are willing to volunteer to participate in my study (provided you fit the criteria attached) or know someone that might be interested.

 If you have any questions, or would like additional information, you may contact me or my lead faculty advisor via email.

Project Title: RESPONDING TO STUDENT DISCLOSURES: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF ONLINE COLLEGE INSTURCTORS EXPERIENCES HANDLING DISCLOSURES OF PERSONAL TRAUMA IN THEIR ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE CLASSROOMS

Principal Investigator: Rachel Seeber Conine, Rseeberconine@une.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Luevano, gluevano@une.edu

Thank you very much for your time and I look forward to hearing from you. If you do not meet the selection criteria, but know someone who does, please pass this information to them for consideration.

Appendix C

Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Information Sheet Version Date:	*April, 2022*
IRB Project #:	0422-19
Title of Project:	Responding to Student Disclosures: A Narrative Inquiry of Online College Instructor's Experiences Handling Disclosures of Personal Trauma in their Asynchronous Online Classrooms
Principal Investigator (PI):	Rachel E. Seeber Conine
PI Contact Information:	*Rseeberconine@une.edu* Cell Phone: (518) 361-4992

INTRODUCTION

- This is a project being conducted for research purposes as part of a doctoral dissertation.
- The intent of the Participant Information Sheet is to provide you with pertinent details about this research project.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions about this research project, now, during or after the project is complete.
- Your participation is completely voluntary.
- The use of the word 'we' in the Participant Information Sheet refers to the Principal Investigator and/or other research staff.
- If you decide to participate, you have the right to withdraw from this research project at any time without penalty. If you decide to withdraw from the project any data collected will be deleted and will not be used in the project.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT?

You are being invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Principal Investigator Rachel Seeber Conine, a doctoral candidate at the University of New England. The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the experiences and perceptions as expressed in your lived and told stories as an online asynchronous college instructor teaching undergraduate. It is my hope to recruit seven participants for this research study. To participate in this study, you must fit the following criteria:

1. Be over 18 years old
2. An online asynchronous college instructor
3. Have taught a minimum of one undergraduate course within the last 5 years (2017 through 2022) in the US
4. Experienced student self-disclosure of personal traumatic experiences and/or sensitive information in your college online course

5. Not be employed by the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, Plattsburgh at Queensbury, Delhi, or Community College of New York (CUNY) Adirondack to avoid a conflict of interest with me as the principal investigator because I am employed there and/or am elected to serve on an oversight governing board.

Your experiences and your comfort level when responding in these situations is an important perspective to share in this research. Stakeholders may read these findings and determine ways to improve training and continuing education for online instructors. The results of this study may also help identify ways to recognize, respond and refer online students to remote mental health and crisis counseling services. This study is being conducted as part of my dissertation.

WHY AM I BEING ASKED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT?

You are being asked to participate in this research project because you read my post on social media and would like to volunteer as a participant who fit the above criteria.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT?

Participants who fit the above criteria will participate in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview, conducted by the Principal Investigator (Researcher Seeber Conine). The interview will be designed to gather information about your story teaching an asynchronous online course(s) when your student(s) self-disclosed personal traumatic and/or sensitive information in your college online classroom and how prepared you felt to handle this situation. You will participate in one interview via Zoom® and a list of likely questions will be emailed to you prior to the interview, noting there may be follow-up questions because of our conversation. It is anticipated that the interview will last approximately 60 minutes. You have the option of turning off your camera during the interview. During the interview, the Principal Investigator (Researcher Seeber Conine) will have her camera on so that you can see her. She will be in a secured location where no one can hear the interview. The interviews will be recorded using Zoom® and stored on the password protected personal computer of the researcher. The interview will be transcribed using Otter.ai®.

Before the interview begins, we will review this form (Participant Information Sheet) together. I will then ask for your verbal consent to be a willing participant for this study. Next, the Principal Investigator or the participant will assign the participant a pseudonym to protect the identity of the participant, which will be used throughout the transcription, and the study. The researcher will not use the participant's personal information in the study. Instead, a pseudonym will be used for the participants name, their school, and subject they teach. After transcription is complete, the Principal Investigator will email participants separately the transcription for accuracy (member-checking). During this time, participants will have the right to delete and/or edit the transcript. Participants will have five days to review their transcript after receiving it. If the Principal Investigator does not hear back from participants by day six, the Principal Investigator will accept this as approval of the transcript.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS INVOLVED FROM BEING IN THIS PROJECT?

There are limited risks involved in this study. Due to the single-case study design and the small sample size, identification of interviewees is possible. Loss of confidentiality or breach of confidentiality is always a potential risk of participation in research. Please refer to the section 'What About Privacy and Confidentiality' in this document for information on steps taken to minimize the risks from occurring.

If there are questions that arise during the interview process that may cause concern, the participant may end the interview at any time or exit the study without any repercussions. You will have the right to skip or not answer any question that is posed to you for any reason. Contact information that is collected for the recruitment purposes, and any video/audio recordings will be destroyed at the earliest opportunity during the project (e.g., after the member checking process is completed). All other study data will be retained for a period of three years following the completion of the project.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS FROM BEING IN THIS PROJECT?

There are no likely benefits to you by being in this research project; however, the information we collect may help us understand complexities of teaching online asynchronous classes and recognizing and responding to students that self-disclose personal trauma and/or sensitive information in the online classroom. Potential benefits may be future opportunities to improve training to instructors and increased referrals to students in need of crisis counseling and mental health assistance.

WILL YOU BE COMPENSATED FOR BEING IN THIS PROJECT?

You will not be compensated for being in this research project.

WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY?

We will do our best to keep your personal information private and confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Additionally, your information in this research project could be reviewed by representatives of the University such as the Office of Research Integrity and/or the Institutional Review Board.

The results of this research project may be shown at meetings or published in journals to inform other professionals. If any papers or talks are given about this research, your name will not be used. We may use data from this research project that has been permanently stripped of personal identifiers in future research without obtaining your consent.

The following additional measures will be taken to protect your privacy and confidentiality:

- I will safeguard your data through the use of a password-protected personal computer, which only I have access to.
- I will strip interviews of all personally identifiable information during the transcription process. I will use a pseudonym instead of your name during the transcript member-checking, and throughout the study. The participant's real name, nor employer's name, nor

college name where you teach or taught courses, will not be used during the transcription, or the study.

- During the Zoom® interviews, I will be in my home, isolated and in a secured room where no one can hear the interview. The participants will be in an isolated location of their choice. My camera and audio will always remain on. The participant may decide to turn off their camera if they prefer but the audio will remain on for recording the entire time.
- For interviews, I will destroy the audio/video recording at the earliest opportunity during the project (e.g., after all transcripts have been verified for accuracy).
- I will destroy participant personally identifiable information (e.g., name, e-mail, physical address, etc.) obtained for recruitment purposes at the earliest opportunity during the project (e.g., after all transcripts have been verified for accuracy).
- Contact information that is collected for the recruitment purposes, and any video/audio recordings will be destroyed at the earliest opportunity during the project (e.g., after the member checking process is completed). All other study data will be retained for a period of three years following the completion of the project.
- A master list will be used to retain identifiers linked to coded study data. This master list of participants will contain the participant name, email, cell number and college name that they were teaching for at the time of the student self-disclosure and this information linked to a single pseudonym per participant. The master list is stored securely, and separately from the study data in a password-protected file on the researcher's computer. The master list will be destroyed once member-checking is complete.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS PROJECT?

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research project. If you have questions about this project, complaints, or concerns, you should contact the Principal Investigator listed on the first page of this document.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Office of Research Integrity at (207) 602-2244 or via e-mail at irb@une.edu.

Appendix D

Interview Questions

General Rapport Questions

1. How long have you been teaching asynchronously online classes (as an adjunct, part-time/full-time)?
2. Can you share with me your previous professional experience in your field?

Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Literature
RQ1: How do instructors handle disclosure of personal trauma when teaching sensitive academic content that may trigger previous and/or current personal traumatic experiences within their asynchronous online undergraduate students?	3. Can you tell me about a time when a student or students in your class self-disclosed personal traumatic experiences and/or sensitive information? a. Can you elaborate regarding the specific details of the disclosure (as best as you can remember) 4. Given your experience, can you share with me your perspective on the reasons for the student to share this information (for example were students learning about content that may have been triggering content, did the student react to another person's post). a. Do you think that this changed in terms of frequency or reasons for disclosures pre/during and now almost post COVID?	Agllias, 2012 Ball, 2000 Bashir et al., 2021 Boysen, 2014 Carello at al., 2015 Dayagbil et al., 2021 Duma et al., 2022 Felson et al., 2021 Gordon et al., 2021 Hrastinski, 2008 Kim et al., 2022 Kleim et al., 2016 Lederer et al., 2021 Lindecker et al., 2021 Norze et al., 2021 Pelosi et al., 2020 Reyes et al., 2012 Shin et al., 2021 Smalley, 2021 Thomas et al., 2017 Tran et al., 2021 WHO 2021, 2021 Xie et al., 2014 Yilmaz et al., 2017

RQ2:

How prepared do instructors feel to recognize signs of personal trauma in their students when teaching asynchronous online classes?

5. Can you describe to me how prepared you felt at the time to recognize student self-disclosures online?
a. and now? If different, please elaborate

6. Can you provide me with examples of how you recognized these disclosures?
a. can you share with me how resources and referrals were offered to assist the student, if appropriate.

7. Any last thoughts you would like to share with me about this topic?

8. Just a couple final demographic questions for background – what is your highest level of education? How long have you been teaching college?

Bandura, 1977,1986
Cares et al., 2014
Carjuzaa et al., 2021
Crady, 2005
Hošková-Mayerová, 2016
  Hrastinski, 2008
Kadison et al., 2004
Kim et al., 2020
Kose et al., 2022
  Lederer at el, 2021
Lindecker et al., 2021
  Martinez, 2021
Olser, 2021
Parkway et al., 2010
Raypole, 2019
Sandon, 2018
Shrivastava et al., 2013
Stewart et al., 2005
Stringer, 2016, 2018
Thomas et al., 2017
  Xie et al., 2014
Yilmaz et al., 2017

Appendix E

Email to Participants

Dear [Name]

Thank you for expressing interest in my research study. My name is Rachel Seeber Conine, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of New England (UNE). As a doctoral candidate, I am required to conduct research on a topic of interest that will answer specific research questions. To do so, I have chosen my dissertation research on Responding to Student Disclosures: A Narrative Inquiry of Online College Instructors Experiences Handling Disclosures of Personal Trauma in their Asynchronous Online Classrooms. For my data collection, I am seeking volunteers to participate in one, approximate 60-minute interview via Zoom® in May or June of 2022.

By conducting this study, I hope to understand the stories of online asynchronous college instructors who encountered students who self-disclosed personal traumatic experiences during their online course. The findings of this study may provide institutions with data to improve training and education on how online instructors can care for students who self-disclose personal traumatic experiences to them.

By responding to my social media post, you can confirm that you fit the following criteria:

1. Be over 18 years old
2. Are an online asynchronous college instructor
3. Have taught a minimum of one undergraduate course within the last 5 years (2017 through 2022) in the US
4. Have experienced student self-disclosure of personal traumatic experiences and/or sensitive information in your college online course
5. Are not employed by the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, Plattsburgh at Queensbury, Delhi, or Community College of New York (CUNY) Adirondack to avoid a conflict of interest with me as the principal investigator because I am employed there and/or am elected to serve on an oversight governing board.

Before the interview begins, we will review the Participant Information Sheet together. I will then ask for your verbal consent to be a willing participant for this study. Next, the participant or I will assign the participant a pseudonym to protect your identity, that will be used throughout the transcription, and the study. Your real name, nor employer's name, nor college name where you teach or taught courses (if provided), will not be used during the transcription, or the study. After transcription is complete, I will email you your transcription for accuracy (member-checking). During this time, you will have the right to delete and/or edit the transcript. You will have five days to review your transcript after receiving it. If I do not hear back from you by day six, then I will accept this as approval of the transcript.

Your involvement with my study is voluntary. The information gathered from this study will be published as group results and cannot be traced back to the participants. You may choose to stop the interview or retract your transcript at any time, skip questions that you are not comfortable with, or not participate at all. You participation will be kept confidential.

I attached the participant information sheet to this email. Please review and let me know if you have any questions or concerns about it or my study. Otherwise, I look forward to hearing from you to schedule your approximately 60-minute interview via Zoom® ®.

Yours sincerely,

Rachel

Rachel Seeber Conine
Doctoral Candidate, University of New England

Appendix F

Interview Script

Researcher: Thank you so much for volunteering to participate in my study. My name is Rachel, and I will be conducting today's interview. Before we begin, I would like to remind you that you were provided a participant information sheet after emailing me to participate in this study and I would like to go over the content of this participant information sheet before starting our interview for a moment. Now that we have reviewed this form together, do you have any questions or concerns with respect to that document? Do you verbally agree to be a willing participant in this study?

Researcher: Thank you. This is your story and I appreciate that you are sharing your lived experiences and perspectives with me. Would you like to choose a pseudonym that you would like to use? If not, would you prefer that I assign you one?

Researcher: Thank you. I anticipate this interview will take approximately 60 minutes.

My study seeks to explore and understand the experiences and perceptions as expressed in lived and told stories of asynchronous online course instructors in public and/or private higher education institutions in the US where academic content may trigger disclosure of students' personal trauma. My goal is to explore the lived and told stories of instructors to provide an opportunity to learn firsthand from these experiences and perspectives of instructors handled student disclosures in their online asynchronous course(s) and how prepared they were to recognize signs of personal trauma in their students.

I will be recording today's conversation with Zoom® and it will be transcribed using Otter.ai®. After transcription is complete, I will email you a copy of your transcript for your

review. You will have five days to review your transcript. During the review process, you will have the right to delete and/or edit your transcript. Once you are done reviewing the transcript, please email it back to me so that I can analyze the data. If I do not hear back from you by day six, I will accept it as approval of the transcript as is and will move on with the analysis. Are you okay with this?

Researcher: Thank you. Since we are on Zoom®, if you want to, you may turn off your camera or keep it on, that is up to you. I will keep mine on so that you can still see me. I am in a secure place where no one can hear our conversation

Researcher: Do you have any questions before we begin?

Researcher: Thank you. Can I please obtain your verbal consent to begin the interview process?

Researcher: Thank you. This interview is comprised of 8 questions. As you may recall, I have previously emailed you the list of likely questions for our interview. Please know that it is very likely that I may ask follow-up questions to your answers in order to fully listen to and explore your lived experiences. Other than two or three demographic questions, the focus of the questions are on your experiences as students have self-disclosed to you about traumatic experiences/sensitive information in your online class and how comfortable or prepared you felt to recognize and respond to these student self-disclosures.

If at any time you feel uncomfortable during the interview just let me know and we will stop. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. If you prefer not to answer, just let me know and we will move to the next question. This interview will be audio-video recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai®. Do you have any questions for me before we start?

Researcher: Ok, question one…

Researcher: (At the conclusion) That concludes today's interview. Otter.ai® will be used to transcribe this entire conversation and I will email you a copy directly. Please review this transcription to ensure accuracy. If there are any inaccurate or unclear findings, please email me within five days of this interview so we can review your concerns together. My email is rseeberconine@une.edu. Thank you very much for your time and willingness to participate in my study.