

“We Should Have to Take Therapy Classes”: The Need for a Trauma-Informed Approach to Public Relations Education

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ABSTRACT

Through interviews with female public relations educators, this study explored their lived experiences with emotion and student trauma as part of teaching and service obligations. Additionally, it examined how aspects of faculty’s own identity influence their feelings of willingness or ability to handle this often less visible aspect of our work. Findings from this study revealed the way that understanding trauma and vicarious trauma is vital in classroom settings—even those that do not actively deal with trauma. The goal of this study is to begin developing a trauma-informed approach to public relations education that better prepares educators for the emotional aspects of their various roles in academia and how to help students navigate emotional experiences.

Keywords: educator identity, emotional labor, feminist pedagogy, trauma, trauma-informed

In a 2020 article in the *Journal of Public Relations Education*, Bardhan and Gower provided a succinct overview of what many public relations scholars focused on issues of diversity and inclusion have been advocating for years: the crucial need for the public relations classroom to evolve past a space seen as simply technical, value-neutral training for the profession (e.g., Brown et al., 2011; Pompper, 2005; Waymer & Dyson, 2011). McKie and Munshi (2009) have argued that public relations students “must be prepared to engage in critical, reflective discussion and argument about the most pressing issues of contemporary society” (pp. 461-462). For many public relations educators and students, though, pressing issues such as racial injustice are not simply intellectual arguments happening in the classroom. These issues, particularly for marginalized groups, have real and tangible impacts on their lives outside of the classroom space. Additionally, students and educators alike are navigating a new reality for teaching and learning created by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has negatively impacted the health, safety, and well-being of individuals and communities (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). As educators, we cannot ignore these lived realities of our students or see student experiences as isolated from our roles in the classroom.

Furthermore, in the public relations field where we train students to be avid consumers of news and social media, the relentless onslaught of coverage of traumatic events facilitated by social media and 24-hour news coverage is having documented effects on mental health (Wayne, 2016). As such, there is a heightened awareness of the impact of trauma at both an individual and collective level (e.g., Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). While a few communication related subfields (most notably journalism) have dealt with the effects of trauma on students (e.g., Dworznik & Grubb, 2007), overwhelmingly postsecondary educators in our field receive little to no pedagogical training on navigating trauma with our students, both inside and outside of the classroom. While this is not an issue unique to public

relations, it is a discussion that public relations educators need to have as more people embrace the classroom space as a place to talk through challenging issues, such as racial discrimination and inequity, sexual harassment in the workplace, and gun violence.

Through interviews with 10 female public relations educators, we sought to understand their lived experiences with emotion and student trauma as part of teaching and service obligations. Furthermore, we explored how aspects of their identity influence their willingness or ability to handle this less visible aspect of our work. Our goal is to begin developing a trauma-informed approach to public relations education that better prepares public relations educators for the emotional aspects of their various roles in academia, which may include helping students navigate emotional experiences.

Literature Review

The following literature review provides an overview of the manifestation of trauma in higher education classrooms. Then, we more specifically discuss scholarship on emotion in public relations and draw connections to public relations education. Finally, research into educator identity and role strain are discussed.

Trauma in Higher Education

Much of the scholarly work on trauma and educational settings is conducted in the K-12 educational context (e.g., Cavanaugh, 2016). Yet, the impact of trauma does not simply go away once students begin their postsecondary education. Trauma is linked to systems of power, so who defines trauma and how it is defined have important implications for how people are impacted (Becker-Blease, 2017). While we recognize the limitations of all definitions, we start with the definition of individual trauma as:

an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful

or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019, para. 1)

In other words, trauma can cause intense physical and psychological stress reactions, overwhelming a person's ability to cope with their circumstances (Poole & Greaves, 2012). While trauma is often associated with abuse, neglect, or violent acts, it can be caused by any experiences that are out of a person's control and undermine a person's sense of safety and self-efficacy.

Educators must consider "student emotional safety as a necessary condition" for learning (Carello & Butler, 2014, p. 163). To illustrate the needs of contemporary students, a 2017 survey of undergraduate college students by the American College Health Association (2017) reported that students felt hopeless (51% reporting), overwhelmed (87%), exhausted (84%), lonely (62%), and depressed (40%). Although 40% of students self-reported feeling depressed within the last 12 months, only 17% reported seeking treatment from a professional. When asked "Within the last 12 months, [which of the following has] been traumatic or very difficult" 48% identified "academics" and more than half reported three or more of the listed issues, which included finances, sleep, and family issues. Although college educators should not be taking on the role of professional counselors, we must recognize that these issues can affect student performance in the classroom.

Rather than focusing solely on individual pathology, though, this project situates itself with approaches to understanding trauma that connect personal experiences to broader social systems that allow for trauma and oppression (Gómez et al., 2016). This is in line with Cvetkovich's (2007) scholarship on public feelings, which works to "create an approach to trauma that focuses on the everyday and

insidious rather than the catastrophic and depathologizes trauma and situates it in a social and cultural frame rather than a medical one” (p. 464). For example, issues such as racism, discrimination, and microaggressions have documented effects on the physical and mental health of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (e.g., Alvarez et al., 2016). The term racial trauma is used to describe the race-based stress that results from experiences of discrimination (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). Historical traumas such as slavery, colonization, and genocide can have intergenerational effects. For people belonging to multiple marginalized identities, “intersectional oppression such as racial, gender, sexual orientation, and xenophobic microaggressions contribute to the cumulative effects of racial trauma” (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019, p. 1). In other words, trauma does not just impact individuals; it also impacts communities.

Furthermore, people do not have to be directly affected by trauma to experience the effects of trauma. Vicarious trauma is when an individual experiences a traumatic event through indirect exposure. This indirect exposure is often gained through the storytelling of someone who experienced a traumatic event firsthand, making certain professions more susceptible to it (Carello & Butler, 2014). As Trippany et al. (2004) suggest, this is more than just being stressed out by difficult students. Vicarious trauma can have a strong impact on an individual’s understanding of themselves, their surroundings, and the world. Not surprisingly, a large portion of the research on trauma and vicarious trauma has focused on the relationship between the social worker/therapist/counselor and their patient (e.g., Bride, 2007; Trippany et al., 2004), and less has focused on the professor and student relationship. This provides an opportunity to fill the gap in literature about how trauma affects educators in the higher education classroom. For this project, we focus specifically on public relations educators.

Lack of Research on Emotion in Public Relations Education

Public relations professors often serve as boundary spanners between the worlds of academia and public relations practitioners. Although a small body of research has developed around the emotional experiences and requirements of public relations practitioners (e.g., Bridgen, 2011; Pieczka, 2006; Yeomans, 2007), little to no research to date has explored the role that emotion plays for public relations professors. Hochschild (2003) argued that the occupation of professor requires substantial amounts of emotional labor. Within academia, Bellas (1999) found that the emotional labor required of teaching and service aligned most closely with culturally feminine characteristics, with women spending more time on these tasks. In contrast, research and administration, viewed as more masculine, were afforded more time by men (Bellas, 1999). Similar to the technician/manager divide in public relations (Bridgen, 2011), the academic reward structure typically devalues the more emotional tasks that are assigned to or taken on by women.

Part of the reason for a lack of engagement with emotion as a topic in public relations education research may be because of a reliance on traditional Eurocentric masculine pedagogy, which validates removing oneself from the object of study and divorcing reasoning from emotions (Collins, 1989). Yet, there are alternative teaching approaches. As bell hooks (1989) wrote, “The feminist classroom is and should be a place where there is a sense of struggle, where there is visible acknowledgement of the union of theory and practice” (p. 51). hooks (1989) noted that this way of teaching is a “feminist intervention” and educators must “relinquish our ties to traditional ways of teaching that reinforce domination” (p. 52). This includes centering ‘personal stuff’ as a focus in the classroom. When students can make connections between their lived experiences, which includes their emotions, it can magnify critical

understandings of the lessons and classroom material (Valle-Ruiz et al., 2015).

Regardless of whether an individual identifies as a feminist instructor, the practice of these classroom management strategies can affect professors in substantial ways. Professors who understand the variety and diversity of lived experiences may actively include (or at least not avoid) emotionally charged subjects, such as sexual violence, racism, and ableism (Durfee & Rosenberg, 2009). This, in combination with an open approach to classroom dynamics, marks professors as non-judgmental advocates. For students who are experiencing trauma, talking about tough issues in the classroom may open the door for the student to disclose what is going on in their lives.

Educator Identity and Role Strain

Managing student disclosures can be one of many responsibilities facing faculty in higher education, with a large burden of this emotional labor falling on female professors (Lawless, 2018). Emotional labor refers to the “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (Hochschild, 2003, p. 7). Female faculty are susceptible to these disclosures because gender expectations tend to pigeonhole women in a role of a social support provider (Hayes-Smith et al., 2010). The role of ‘counselor’ is then added to the list of roles for female faculty, which may also include research supervisor, academic adviser, teacher, and/or mentor (Hayes-Smith et al., 2010).

As the work of Tindall (2009) has demonstrated, there is also a double bind of race and gender for Black female public relations faculty. Professors of color face an additional burden of “negotiating a devalued racial status” that requires extensive emotional management in addition to bearing the burden of their own collective cultural trauma as described previously (Harlow, 2003, p. 348). Outside of the classroom, though, professors of color often have additional, often unseen labor; for example,

they frequently help to mentor and guide students of color who come to them for support (Turner, 2002).

The intersection of these different roles, personas, and responsibilities can result in considerable strain for professors. Stress may be added when the professor does not feel appropriately supported or trained to handle the situations (Hayes-Smith et al., 2010). Instead, issues are often addressed as one-off situations as they arise, rather than recognizing the systemic impact of trauma on our students and ourselves.

Based on this literature review, the following three research questions are posed:

RQ1: How, if at all, is trauma experienced by female public relations professors in the classroom?

RQ2: How, if at all, is trauma experienced by female public relations professors outside of the classroom?

RQ3: How do the identities of the professors influence how they process/manage the emotional labor aspects of academia?

Methods

To answer our research questions, we conducted 10 qualitative interviews with public relations professors working as full-time, part-time, tenured, and untenured faculty members in the United States. We implemented a more postmodern approach to interviews, conducting our interviews using active interview techniques.

Active Interview

Traditionally, researchers implementing interview methods are looking “to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 1). The interview is a way for researchers to explore phenomena as they are experienced and interpreted by the interview participant (Englander, 2012). In these cases, the interview is a way to gather a truth according to the interviewee. A key tenant of the active interview is the redistribution of power. Active interviews approach

the interview as a collaborative space, and the method is more concerned with process and the lived experience of the participant (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003).

The exchange of stories, experiences, empathetic statements, and concern provided an opportunity for meaning and knowledge creation to be constructed between the interviewee and interviewer, and not through the process of asking the “right” question and getting the “right” answer (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 68). In addition to being appropriate for the sample and subject matter, active interviewing addresses many feminist and intersectional critiques of method, which suggest that process is just as crucial as product (Haraway, 1988).

In the case of female public relations professors, we were most concerned with how our participants understood and interpreted their students’ trauma, their preparedness to handle those disclosures, and how these experiences affect their own personal and professional practice. Active interviewing provided us with the opportunity to probe and encourage our participants to avoid giving ‘ideal’ or ‘socially responsible’ answers, and it addressed multiple ways to interpret things and the multiple meanings that may arise related to our research questions (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003).

Research Positionality

The two authors of this study both enact a feminist pedagogy in their classrooms. According to Crabtree et al. (2009), feminist pedagogy “refers to a particular philosophy of and set of practices for classroom-based teaching that is informed by feminist theory and grounded in the principles of feminism” (p. 1). It is not just the infusion of feminist scholarship and topics into a standard lecture, but includes how a professor practices classroom management. These practices, which include consciousness-raising, social action, validating the personal experience, and social transformation, are centered around the idea that the classroom

can be a place to empower an individual. Our goal is to cultivate a “nonhierarchical relationship among teachers and students and reflexivity about power relations” (Crabtree et al., 2009, p. 5). A feminist pedagogy, and a feminist research approach, requires self-reflexivity and addressing our own positionality (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007).

As tenure-track white female public relations professors, both of us have experienced our share of student traumatic disclosures while in graduate school and as junior faculty members. The sharing of these experiences in online spaces led to the collaboration on this project to explore how other professors handle these often emotionally laborious, sometimes vicariously traumatic events. Although data collection for this project occurred prior to 2020, issues of racial injustice and the COVID-19 pandemic have made our commitment to discussing trauma and vicarious trauma as educators even more important to us.

Sample

Once we decided to interview female public relations professors, we recognized the value in achieving a degree of diversity regarding racial identity, position, and university-type. Our convenience sample consisted of 10 participants with whom we had existing close professional and personal relationships: six identified as white, two as Black, one as Asian, and one as Asian-American. The types of institutions ranged from R1 residential universities (two), R1 commuter (two), R2 commuter (one), R2 residential (two), teaching-focused commuter (two), and HBCU residential (one). In addition to the range of university-types, we also interviewed seven full-time, tenure-track assistant professors; one associate professor; one full-time, tenure track instructor; and one full-time, non-tenure track instructor. Pseudonyms are used when writing the results for this study to protect the anonymity of the participants (Appendix 1). This study received IRB approval. While we took care to diversify our sample, we do recognize the limitations of the small sample size and potential biases

from interviewing people with whom we have close associations.

Procedure and Analysis

We conducted semi-structured interviews, with the average interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Most interviews were conducted over the phone or through video conferencing software, with two interviews conducted face-to-face. All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed by our student-workers or graduate assistants.

We analyzed the data using a three-part analytical process. First, data were analyzed through an open coding approach, which identified general themes and codes. We read the transcripts in a close line-by-line manner. By starting with an open coding system, we could sort literal codes into more abstract ones (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Once literal and categorical themes were identified, we analyzed the data using an axial and selective coding process to build connections across various categories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Results

In this section the results of the research are presented, discussing how female public relations professors experience trauma inside of the classroom, outside of the classroom, and how their identities influence how they process and manage the emotional labor aspects of academia.

Experience of Trauma Inside of the Classroom

Four primary themes emerged regarding the female professors' experiences with trauma inside of the classroom, which were *acknowledgement of public trauma, considerations of private trauma, personal disclosures as teachable moments, and balancing fairness with humanness.*

Acknowledgement of public trauma. The public relations professors interviewed discussed how collective, societal issues impact both the student and professor experience in the classroom. Carol, an African-American professor working at an HBCU, said that "it's a very

traumatic experience to be Black in America,” which heavily influences the classroom experience for her and her students. Considering her classroom of primarily African-American students, Carol said:

We can't avoid discussions about Trump and whatever type of PR is going on with him, and then it also leads to discussions from there about their safety in America and how they feel about HBCU's being cut from funding and things like that. Students have expressed to me some things that I'd never thought about. One student said in class, sometimes they feel unsafe because with the climate in America that Trump has fostered with racism and outwards oppression, they feel that being on an HBCU campus, they are targeted. Because if someone wanted to do something to African-Americans there is a whole university, if they wanted to have a mass shooting or something.

Of importance is the recognition that this public trauma is not separate from public relations because “we need to train informed students who'll turn into informed practitioners.” This is not just training in specific skills, but also a more holistic understanding of publics' historical and contextual experiences. Carol continued:

Our work in the field is not separate from sexual assault, it's not separate from racism and discrimination, it's not separate anymore. I think once upon a time, we went to school, and we learned about PR, and we didn't talk about sexual assault because that ain't got nothing to do with what we're talking about here, and in this day and age it's just not separate.

Jade expanded upon this idea by saying that this is “work that often doesn't get discussed in communication curricula, but it helps bridge gaps between the social worlds that our students are living in and the possibilities of work that they can do outside of the traditional scope of strategic communication.”

Considerations of private trauma. Several participants highlighted that students have been more interested in discussions about race and politics since 2016. This can be challenging for professors to navigate, though, because of considerations of the diverse experiences and potential traumas that students bring into the classroom. Ashley discussed her struggle with finding this balance, reflecting “how do you walk that line, how do you give them space to have those conversations because they’re clearly desperate to have these conversations and not like offend people or make people uncomfortable.” Jade brought up a discussion her class had about the Philando Castile shooting and said that “as a strategic social media class, it has absolutely nothing to do with race and politics and any of that kind of stuff, but my class often turns into a safe space for those kind of topics...because I feel like it’s my job as someone in power to make space for those kind of conversations.” As a result of this conversation, “two students hung out after class in my office with me, and they were talking. They were crying about how this particular Black man who was murdered by law enforcement, how it could have been their brother or their father.”

Ashley further discussed considerations of potentially triggering students who have gone through traumatic experiences, such as sexual assault. In one class she had a student who had disclosed to her that she had been sexually assaulted and was visibly uncomfortable in class:

I kinda tried... to keep it in a more positive space until class was over and I could talk to her and say, ‘I tried’... So, we had a conversation about it later and she was like no, that that was fine, that she was okay with that. But I feel like I’m really cautious about having conversations about that particular topic when she’s in the classroom. Chances are good that there are other students who have dealt with sexual assault in other ways in the classroom, or other sort of major traumatic stuff.

In addition to classroom conversations, private disclosures from students often come because of “a request for an extension on an assignment.” Nicole continued that:

It’s an email saying ‘I’m dealing with something can I please have an extension? I need to come talk to you in office hours.’ And then they come talk in office hours, then, depending on the student, it snowballs, or they let a little bit out. I don’t try to probe it out of them, but many of them are very forthcoming.

As a relatively new teacher, Lauren discussed the emotional labor of teaching she had not considered because “it’s not just coming in and sort of saying, here today we’re going to talk about crisis communication, but what kind of crises might be going on in your lives.” For Lauren, having to consider these personal traumas of students comes into play because it “impacts whether they’re going to turn in an assignment on time, so I’m having to sit down with them and say, ‘Hey look what’s going on? You’re not turning in an assignment.’” Jessica echoed this sentiment by offering an example of a student who approached her after class regarding a breakup. This student told Jessica, “‘He locked my computer and I do not have access.’ That’s what my students are experiencing. They sit in my classroom and that’s what happens to their lives.”

Personal disclosures as teachable moments. Professors also discussed the personal disclosures they made during the class that, if not traumatic, were difficult situations or moments they found themselves in that can serve as teachable moments for their students. Tellingly, these personal disclosures often come from the professor’s experiences as part of a racial minority group or with organizational power dynamics. Carol and Lauren discussed racial discrimination they had experienced during their time as practitioners, as well as during graduate work. Carol said that “I’m very open with them, and I tell them about my experiences with discrimination... and how that impacted me and how I ultimately

tried to use it for the better.” Similarly, Lauren will utilize personal disclosures “as much as it fits with the conversation” to try “to weave in some experience that I’ve had and sort of position it in a way that they really sort of get what I’m talking about.” Patricia will talk to her students about an experience she had as a young female at an ad agency when a male supervisor made a comment about her skirt length that made her feel uncomfortable.

Personal disclosures not only come from discriminatory experiences, but also just lived experiences that might provide affirmation or guidance to students who may be facing situations they never bring up to professors. Jade is open about her sexual orientation, gender identity, and experiences with mental health:

I’m a very nontraditional female. I’m a very masculine presence. And so that’s just my sort of functioning in the classroom. I, in certain circumstances, have disclosed my battles with mental health and my family history of that, if it fits with the context of the topic.

Becca utilizes personal disclosures during her ethics discussion to offer real-life examples.

Balancing fairness with empathy. Professors struggled with balancing empathy towards students who might be facing personal challenges during a semester with fairness towards all students in class. In discussing a plagiarism situation in which Patricia felt an honest mistake had been made, she said, “There’s a lot of negotiating like [Patricia] the human and [Patricia] the administrator that has to address the faculty and explain why I didn’t turn these students in to the university board.” Ashley noted, “I think is the piece where I still struggle with the most.” She continued, “How do I say, here’s the policy, here’s the thing I’m holding everyone to, but your life is shitty and I think those are extenuating circumstances, and so, I want to honor the fact that you confided in me

or that I'm trying to help you with something. So how do I do that?" In describing a situation in which a student had fabricated a story about a traumatic incident, Bethany said:

I thought about the ethics of care because I thought, in a normal situation, I would be like, "You lied about your absence, so I'm going to dock all those points." Like in a normal syllabus application situation, and I ended that view with the ethics of care because I thought, "Maybe she's barely surviving right now." I mean, she looked awful those final days she was attending class. Like, maybe she's barely staying alive and do I really need to tax her like that? So, I ended up not doing anything.

Because of her position as graduate director in her department, Patricia discussed the "whole faculty approach" in addressing known student trauma by "just giving the students flexibility with deadlines and helping them know there's resources on campus."

Experience of Trauma Outside of the Classroom

Three primary themes emerged around navigating the experience of trauma outside of the classroom, which included a need for *perspective taking*, combining this with a need for *boundary setting*, and a recognition that *we are not therapists* when students come to us with certain challenges, but there might be opportunities for professional development in that area.

Perspective taking. Participants often struggled with identifying what should be considered as trauma. For two of the professors interviewed, Hurricane Harvey had directly impacted their campus, so to them that was a clearly traumatic experience for the students and the community in which they live. In several interviews, participants talked about considering issues from the student's perspective. Nicole qualified the label of trauma when related to a student experience saying, "It's not like a trauma, like the typical trauma that you would think of when you

think of the word, but it's something that is completely preventing the student from doing well." Lauren furthered this by discussing trauma as something "that's dramatic to the individual that really sort of lives with them, the core of who they are, and is hard for them to grapple with." Because people have different capacities to cope with negative events that can occur in their lives, in many cases this assessment of trauma is highly individualized and based on the specific circumstances. This can be emotionally taxing for public relations educators to consider, though, because as Ashley said it is often a situation that "requires sustained conversation or sustained aid."

Boundary setting. Particularly for those in administrative roles or with direct student advising responsibilities (whether academic or of PRSSA chapters), dealing with student trauma outside of the classroom was more of an issue than for those who primarily deal with students in a classroom setting. This can be a challenge for professors to set boundaries with students who may view them as a confidant and a friend, in addition to the professional relationship that exists. Because of the close relationship we can have with students—particularly graduate students, Patricia described a recent situation with a student she worked closely with who had experienced a breakup. She recognized that she had been "thinking about her a lot more and trying to reach out to her without passing over some kind of professional boundary." Not all female professors want to be viewed in this role by students, though. Bethany said that:

I was pushing back against a student who kept trying to share and I just wanted to talk about her thesis. That was emotionally draining for me because I knew I wasn't meeting her needs and she was wanting me to meet her needs.

"We should have to take therapy classes." An overarching theme in this category was the exploration, and oftentimes unresolved

conclusion, of when our roles shift from public relations professor to therapist. When talking about different options regarding how graduate students can be better prepared to manage traumatic disclosures as faculty members, Becca suggested that public relations professors take a course in psychology. She said, “We should have to take therapy classes.” Nicole agreed with that sentiment, “Half the time I’m fine with it [the disclosures], and the other half of the time I’m sitting in there crying with them. I feel like I need a degree in counseling someday to deal with this job.”

For others, their own personal experiences with therapy helped them handle student disclosures. Ashley discussed using strategic disclosures of her own in combination with tactics she picked up in therapy to help her students cope. Ashley described the situation: “I’ve never been so glad that I’ve been to as much therapy as I have in my entire life because the time that she sat here basically felt like a therapy session, and I had to be like the therapist.”

Patricia also used experience with therapy to help students. Patricia told us, “I’ve been to therapy. But also [my husband] is a therapist so we’re constantly talking about the different therapies.... So, I kind of have a little bit of non-professional, but insider, understanding.”

Identity and Emotional Labor in Academia

The way female public relations professors understood, processed, and acted on traumatic student disclosures was often connected with how they identified as people and professionals. Two primary themes emerged around this, which were *motherhood status* and *minoritized identities*.

Motherhood status. Nicole thought that the fact that she is a mother influenced how she interacted with students. When students come to her with their trauma, she often relies on her maternal instincts, even though she was unsure if that is an appropriate strategy. Nicole said, “What I do is provide a ‘mom’ experience – ‘We love you no matter

what' kind of thing. It's helpful in the moment, but what they need are suggestions and ways to get there." This identity is also what helps Nicole establish boundaries and practice self-care because her own children need her.

Becca told us how her lack of motherhood status influences the additional work she is asked to do:

I don't have children which makes me one of only like one other person in the department who doesn't have kids. So, I don't have responsibilities like "I can't work Thursday night because I have to take so-and-so to Girl Scouts." So that's sort of been a theme in my adult career – that I don't have kids. So, people know if they need something, I can do it. I know that means I get asked to do things that other people don't get asked.

Minoritized identities. For Jade, she felt her visibility as a queer person on campus identified her as someone who could talk to and advocate on behalf of queer students. Although Jade acknowledged that as a marginalized woman it made sense that students seek her out, it still didn't necessarily make her feel comfortable with that role: "[A] particular student sort of latched onto me in ways that were uncomfortable for me as a faculty... Like they would confide in me. They would wait for me by my office even though we had no appointment." The student began to become more needy, which in turn took a toll on Jade. She said:

On one particular occasion, the student had said to me that they were considering taking their own life. So, I had this legal and ethical responsibility to act on that knowledge. I called the health center on campus and I put the student in touch, but for me ... I would kind of go out of my way to avoid this particular student because engaging with them was often very emotionally exhausting and taxing.

As a person who has also navigated privileged spaces, Carol saw

her role as a Black woman in higher education as an opportunity to lead by example. Carol talked about helping students find allies, and how to work with mentors who do not look like them. Showing students how to “govern” themselves in these institutionally white spaces added an extra layer of guilt when Carol thought about her own wellbeing as a professional. She explained:

I’m the only PR professor, the students come to me for advising and looking for internships and for career development, so I spend a lot of my office hours with my students and sometimes I have to go to my colleague’s office and hide out there. And you hide out because the students, I love them, they need a lot from me and I’m the only one.

Racial identity weighed on white faculty members in different ways. As a white woman, Ashley was cognizant of the power dynamic in the room when she tried to engage her predominantly African-American students about racial violence, “The first couple of times I tried to talk about it in my head I was like, ‘Do I sound like an idiot? Am I somebody who can talk about this and students would actually want to participate in a conversation?’”

Talking about race also gave pause to Becca, but she felt it was too important to not include it in her conversations. In a lecture about branding and Aunt Jemima, Becca was nervous to move forward with describing the brand: “I was like, ‘I’m going into this horribly racist description and I was so uncomfortable because I’m a white woman talking about racism. But yeah, I feel like it’s important that we talk about it....’”

These examples suggest that female public relations professors are cognizant of their experiences, motherhood status, bodies, privilege, and/or oppression. These factors weigh heavily on how faculty manage student disclosures, what (or if) they choose to disclose anything about themselves, and the potential roles they believe they may play in a

student's life.

Discussion

While we may talk about creating boundaries and policies to help alleviate the emotional creep of student trauma into our lives, the experiences of the researchers and those interviewed suggests that these boundaries can be quite permeable. It is with this in mind that we consider how we might provide faculty with more support and resources to handle the emotional labor of their jobs.

Reducing Role Strain: Supporting Students by Supporting Faculty

A struggle identified by all participants was how to balance the multitude of roles they are asked to take on in their professional careers. Many professors in this study indicated that they were not prepared for the types of disclosures they received; when taken in conjunction with the pressures of tenure, family life, service, and research responsibilities, they often felt like emotional labor they were not prepared to manage.

Research suggests that female faculty members, and women in general, are often socialized to cope out loud (i.e., seek out support during stressful times) (Hayes-Smith et al., 2010). This often manifests in female faculty implementing a more "open door" policy when it comes to students looking for help, which was experienced by interviewees. This open-door policy, however, means female faculty must take care to set professional boundaries or they may find themselves at odds with the quantifiable measures of tenure, promotion, or their overall success as a faculty member. Another way that role strain manifested for faculty was through the lack of training incentives. Many of the faculty talked about the necessity of receiving training to be better equipped to handle these situations; but as Jade indicated, those who seek it out are usually not the faculty who need it the most. Jade, who works at an R1 university and feels a lot of pressure regarding how her time is best utilized, said about training, "Unless it's tied to our tenure or our merit or things like that,

I think there needs to be institutional implementation of those things. There needs to be incentivization, because otherwise, people don't do it." She continued, "I'm already the one that's going to go to the diversity workshop even though all my work is informed by theories of diversity and inclusion. So, I'm not necessarily the one that needs to be at this."

The act of incentivization by administration could help build this emotional labor into the role of professor, which theoretically could reduce the role strain experienced by faculty (Hayes-Smith et al., 2010). Initiatives can also involve better partnerships between departments and university resources. In many cases, public relations educators only knew what university resources existed by doing the legwork to help students find them. The resources that can help to emotionally support students should not be invisible, and we should not just see our responsibility to students as simply academic because their emotional wellbeing is implicated in academic success.

Trauma-Informed Leadership

Our sample of public relations professors were already primed to think about how to make their spaces more inclusive and healing for students. As the findings indicate, professors took great care to listen to students, strategically disclose their own identities or struggles, and seek out professional development opportunities to better serve their students' emotional needs. As we outlined, resources, incentives, and encouragement from administrators can help balance this workload and support faculty who are already doing the work, and those who want to better contribute to the efforts, which may alleviate role strain. Although individual classrooms and one-on-one relationships are often the site for these discussions, administrators and leaders can (re)think policies and environments that better support faculty and students during traumatic times. Although professional development may be crucial to establishing a trauma-informed pedagogy long-term, administrators must consider how

the pandemic is affecting their faculty as well and work to not overburden faculty with meetings, webinars, and workshops.

Trauma-Informed Teaching: A Future Direction for Public Relations Education

Trauma-informed teaching is not advocating that public relations professors serve as therapists for students. Instead, “[i]n trauma-informed services, professionals are not required to treat trauma; rather, they approach their work with the understanding of how common trauma is among those they serve...” (Poole & Greaves, 2012, p. xvi). It is about acknowledging student trauma histories to make learning and safety central to the classroom experience (Carello & Butler, 2014). Developing trauma-informed educational environments has been found to improve student performance, educational climate, student retention, and overall teacher satisfaction (Oehlberg, 2008). This study calls on higher education to create a “culture of sensitivity through institutional implementation of trauma-informed practices” and buy-in from administrators (Crosby, 2015, p. 226). Establishing a trauma-informed classroom environment can include ensuring students know in advance what materials will be covered, intentionally selecting examples, knowing campus and community referrals, and handling student disclosures with empathy and care (McCammon, 1995).

A trauma-informed approach can be considered in line with a feminist ethic of care. An ethic of care focuses on obligations and responsibilities, a concern for others, and feelings of compassion, whereas an ethic of rights and justice focuses on a more rigid set of practices focused on fairness (Nunner-Winkler, 1994). We could see public relations educators struggling with this tension in their approaches to students, with most falling in line with what could be considered an ethic of care because of a flexibility in moral reasoning rather than rigid adherence to standardized rules and principles (Gilligan, 1982). While professional lines

and boundaries are healthy and should certainly be maintained, there is more ambiguity within that stance that we believe needs to be recognized.

Trauma-Informed Teaching Practices: What Professors Can Do Now

Professors who are committed to approaching the classroom using a trauma-informed approach should look to feminist pedagogy, crisis communication, and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic to glean strategies.

Feminist pedagogy. A major tenet of feminist pedagogy is the acknowledgement of lived experience and how those lived experiences influence classroom dynamics (Durfee & Rosenberg, 2009). As Lal (2000) indicates, the real world is the classroom and vice versa, so it is important for professors to center ‘personal stuff’ in the feminist classroom. Professors can provide a space for students to work through tough issues, such as sexual assault or racist microaggressions. The goal here is not necessarily to solve the issues for the student, but rather acknowledge that the classroom is a place where students can struggle (hooks, 1989).

Crisis communication. Not every student will respond to crisis or trauma in the same way, therefore flexibility is key for developing strategies. That said, Hobfoll et al. (2007) outlined five essential components of mass trauma intervention, which can provide professors with a trauma-informed framework strategy: promoting safety, calming, sense of self and community efficacy, connectedness, and hope. Understanding these elements, in addition to knowing how to communicate using trauma-informed approaches that center trustworthiness and transparency, support, collaboration, and empowerment, are steps public relations professors can take to implement more trauma-informed practices (SAMHSA, 2014).

COVID-19 trauma. As the findings from this study indicate, faculty are at the frontline when it comes to providing support to their students during the pandemic, and the mental health impact of COVID-19

is another serious public health crisis. With social distancing and isolation increasing, so are the ramifications of that: heightened risk of depression and anxiety, increased substance abuse, domestic violence, and greater impact on already diagnosed mental health conditions (Haider et al., 2020).

The practices, strategies, and tactics learned and implemented during the pandemic can be applied to other student traumas. *Learning for Justice*, a collective of free resources for educators, recommends that educators not avoid or sanitize trauma. Dr. Kiara Lee-Heart (2020), a professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, recommends acknowledging and legitimizing the pandemic's effect, engaging the topic, and giving students the space and means to analyze and be their own experts. Similar approaches can help students cope with other crises and traumas.

Conclusion

When asked if the participants felt they had been prepared to handle the emotional aspects of their job through graduate education or other forms of instructor training, without failure everyone laughed and said they had not been prepared at all. In order to grapple with these issues, though, we have to recognize that they exist and that female professors, often junior faculty, and especially women of color or professors in other minority groups, are doing this type of emotional labor without training or credit. Additionally, and most importantly, professors need to feel heard and supported. Many of our interviewees appreciated the opportunity to talk about these issues. It is important for us to recognize that we are not alone in these struggles.

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Appendix 1. Interview Participant Overview

Alias	Position	University Type	Race
Patricia	Associate Professor	R1, Commuter	White
Jade	Assistant Professor	R1, Commuter	White
Ashley	Assistant Professor	R2, Commuter	White
Carol	Assistant Professor	HBCU, Residential	Black
Lauren	Assistant Professor	R2, Residential	Black
Becca	Instructor	Teaching, Commuter	White
Jessica	Assistant Professor	Teaching, Commuter	Asian (Chinese)
Nicole	Instructor	R1, Residential	White
Emily	Assistant Professor	R1, Residential	Asian-American
Bethany	Assistant Professor	R2, Residential	White
