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Beyond Trigger Warnings: A Survivor-Centered Approach to Teaching on Sexual Violence and Avoiding Institutional Betrayal

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Abstract

As sociology instructors increasingly include materials on sexual violence in their courses, both instructors and students express anxieties over how best to handle such sensitive conversations. This article critically examines the conventional advice to offer a trigger warning, which can interfere with student education (e.g., requiring survivors to miss out on a lesson) and does not adequately prepare instructors for the difficulties that may arise during discussions of sexual violence (e.g., managing victim-blaming comments). Using institutional betrayal as an alternative frame, this article builds a trauma-informed and survivor-centered pedagogy that offers specific examples and strategies of how to teach *to* survivors instead of *around* them.

Keywords

sexual violence, Title IX, institutional betrayal, gender, sexualities

As sexual violence becomes a more central focus of sociological scholarship on gender inequality, more sociology professors than ever are broaching the subject in their courses. Historically, the advice for professors bringing discussions of sexual violence into the classrooms has been simple: Include a trigger warning and permit students to leave the classroom without question or penalty (e.g., Lockhart 2016). The most thoughtful professors might also remind students of Title IX and counseling resources on campus. These strategies are intended to keep survivors from feeling trapped and traumatized in the classroom while also allowing professors to maintain control over the classroom dynamic and keep the class running as smoothly and normally as possible. They may also prepare students for emotionally difficult material, dependent on how the professor invokes them.

These traditional recommendations, however, violate the spirit of Title IX law by requiring survivors—who are predominantly women and gender or sexual minority students—to sacrifice an educational opportunity based on their previous experiences of gender-based violence if a classroom feels unsafe (Laguardia, Michaelsen, and Rider-Milkovich 2017). It is interruptions like these that are likely to blame for the educational disparities faced by survivors, such as lower GPAs and higher dropout rates compared to other students (Baker et al. 2016; Jordan, Combs, and Smith 2014).

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Instead of teaching *around* student survivors, I argue that professors should teach *to* them. In this article, I draw on years of experience conducting research and teaching courses on the topic of sexual violence and serving as a victim advocate for survivors undergoing forensic exams (or "rape kits") in the immediate aftermath of a sexual assault to provide an overview of what student survivors need to feel comfortable when discussing sexual violence and how professors can provide it.

WHAT DO STUDENT SURVIVORS NEED?

Most professors are now aware that survivors experience "triggers," or traumatic responses to benign stimuli that remind them of their sexual assaults. Triggers vary dramatically for each survivor and can be unpredictable (Ehlers, Halligan, and Clark 2005; Veraldi and Veraldi 2015). They might be as overt as a reminder that sexual violence exists and that they have traumatic memories associated with their own experiences of victimization, but they can also be much more difficult to predict. Someone chewing the same flavor of gum as the survivor's assailant or playing a song that had been on the radio during the assault are also examples of the types of seemingly random (from an outsider's perspective) stimuli that can distress survivors.

When a survivor is triggered, it can spark traumatic symptoms like anxiety, depression, and other posttraumatic stress disorder responses like flashbacks (American Psychiatric Association 2013). It can also change the way the survivor interprets other stimuli, affecting the senses like eyesight and hearing, and impairing memory function, impacting their ability to succeed in the classroom. Survivors may recognize the trigger immediately, or they may struggle to connect their distress to their trauma. Triggers can be especially overwhelming for college students because for so many of them, their sexual trauma is fresh. With such high sexual violence rates on campus (Cantor et al. 2015; Krebs et al. 2005; Swartout et al. 2015), it is likely that some of your students have been sexually assaulted recently—perhaps only the weekend before your lesson on sexual violence—or are currently in an ongoing abusive relationship and have not yet had access to the resources necessary to heal or learn coping skills for trauma management. As a professor, it is virtually impossible to predict and prevent survivors' triggers (Veraldi and Veraldi 2015), but it is important that you assist survivors in getting access to the resources required to manage them. A student experiencing a trigger cannot be expected to learn while in a traumatized mental state and may need individualized instruction or an alternative assignment to make up for material initially introduced during a time of extreme duress.

There is another—and perhaps even greater—risk in the classroom, however. Survivors can experience *institutional betrayal*. Institutional betrayal refers to "institutional action and inaction that exacerbates the impact of traumatic experiences" (Smith and Freyd 2014). Actions and inactions associated with institutional betrayal include minimizing the severity of a victim's experience, refusal to take proactive steps in preventing or addressing victimization, responding inadequately to claims of trauma, creating an environment in which similar traumatic events seem more likely, making it difficult to report traumatic experiences, and punishing trauma victims in some way for coming forward (Smith and Freyd 2013). This type of betrayal not only compounds previous traumas but also creates new ones. These traumas are so severe that some have called similar maltreatments "the second rape" (Madigan and Gamble 1991) and are the result of how organizations (and the actors within them) treat survivors—or negotiate "rape work" (Martin 2005).

Survivors who experience institutional betrayal are at greater risk of anxiety, depression, sleep problems, sexual problems, and dissociation (Smith and Freyd 2013, 2017). The risk of institutional betrayal is especially pronounced among people of color (e.g., Black, Indigenous, and other people of color; referred to as BIPOC) and queer people (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, asexual, or queer people; referred to as LGBTQ; Cortina 2014; Gómez 2015; Guadalupe-Diaz 2017; Parent & Ferriter 2018; Smith, Cunningham, & Freyd 2016). Institutional betrayal primarily takes place in organizations that a survivor trusted, making a classroom with a beloved professor a place where institutional betrayal is particularly likely and especially harmful. It can also intersect with harms perpetrated by other organizations, such as the criminal justice or health care systems. Professors can reinforce the harms of other organizations by betraying their students in the same way. Alternatively, professors can shield students from internalizing those harms by teaching students about systemic failures to support victims and modeling approaches that treat survivors better. Although there is a focus in public discourse about

whether instructors broach the topic of sexual violence, *how* they do so is just as important.

Many of the responses educators label as *triggers* from survivors are better described as new traumas resulting from institutional betrayal in the classroom. Despite the insinuation of much of the public debate on triggers, the discussion of sexual violence is not inherently hurtful for survivors. Inappropriate comments (e.g., victim blaming, normalizing or minimizing violence) can harm victims, but survivor-supportive comments can heal them (Ahrens, Cabral, and Abeling 2009), and universities can show solidarity to survivors by acting with courage around discussions of sexual assault and improving the treatment of survivors on campus (Ahmed 2015; Freyd 2019). By centering survivors and using trauma-informed methods, professors can create healing spaces that offer survivors the information they need to make sense of what happened to them. To do that, all educators' central concern in teaching on the topic of sexual violence should be ensuring that survivors do not feel betrayed by your or any other actor in your classroom. In doing so, professors can simultaneously create an environment where triggers are less likely to occur and more manageable when they take place.

PREVENTING AND ADDRESSING INSTITUTIONAL BETRAYAL

For the remainder of this article, I provide examples of classroom interventions that can prevent or minimize the harm of institutional betrayal in development of a survivor-centered pedagogy. In doing so, I seek solutions for common classroom betrayals that do not require survivors to withdraw from their education. Specifically, I imagine ways to prevent six common manifestations of institutional betrayal in the order they are likely to occur over the course of a semester: refusal to take proactive steps in preventing or addressing victimization, responding inadequately to claims of trauma, minimizing the severity of a victim's experience, making it difficult to report traumatic experiences, punishing victims in some way for coming forward, and creating an environment in which similar traumatic events seem more likely. The goal of this article is not to offer an exhaustive list of trauma-informed practices or hypothetical scenarios in which they should be invoked, but instead to provide instructors with some detailed recommendations for concrete steps to take in their classrooms to minimize the risk of institutional betrayal.

Day One: Taking Proactive Steps in Preventing or Addressing Victimization

From the first day of class, instructors can be proactive in centering survivors and making a trauma-informed classroom. Syllabus statements are a particularly effective way to offer resources to students because many instructors already reference their syllabi throughout the semester and make them easily accessible online. There are many campus and community resources available to survivors that instructors can reference on their syllabi, including the counseling center, the campus victim advocacy program, Title IX reporting options, the local rape crisis center, the statewide Coalition Against Sexual Assault, and any local or national hotlines for crisis intervention. Some campuses also include support for survivors as part of programming for BIPOC and LGBTQ students. Because many triggering events are nearly impossible for professors to predict, making resources available throughout the semester is the only comprehensive way to ensure survivors have them when they need them.

Because many students—including student survivors—will never have encountered this information before, it is crucial that professors describe the services provided by each resource as well as any measures taken to make them more accessible (e.g., sliding scale fees, free services). Professors should not assume that students will already have a working knowledge of *any* resources, including campus Title IX services. Although it is common for universities to require all professors to include a Title IX-focused syllabus statement for each of their courses, students have reported to me that their professors did not give these statements much attention and that students still had basic questions about Title IX, such as: What is Title IX? What kinds of things are reportable to Title IX? What happens when you make a Title IX report?

Explaining what each resource can provide and how to access the services available is key for student survivors to effectively use the resources available—especially if they would prefer to do so privately and without requiring more assistance from the professor. I also recommend providing a template for how a student can request more information from the instructor without disclosing a sexual assault. This can help mitigate some of the concerns faculty have about mandatory reporting

responsibilities, but, more importantly, it allows for students to seek help without a requirement that they put their trauma on display for their professor's evaluation. For example, an instructor could say, "If you would like more information about the resources available, you can ask me at any time this semester. You do not need to tell me why you are asking to get help for a friend, another student, or yourself."

Professors can also begin centering survivors and preparing students for discussions of sexual violence on the first day of classes. Each semester, I begin all courses that include material on sexual violence the same way. I tell students explicitly that we will cover controversial and sensitive topics, including the kinds of violence that many students may have experienced firsthand. At that point, I (literally) sit down and position myself as a learner. I ask students what they need to feel comfortable when having tough conversations in class, including how they would like to address missteps when someone—either a peer, the instructor, or perhaps themselves—makes a mistake and causes harm. To facilitate this discussion, I use materials about creating vulnerable spaces, such as Brené Brown's (2011) "The Power of Vulnerability" and the first chapter of Rebecca Campbell's (2001) *Emotionally Involved*. I ask students to write down ways they can be vulnerable in the classroom, what they will need from their peers to feel comfortable with those vulnerabilities, and what they can offer their peers to encourage communal vulnerability and emotional safety.

Because sexual violence is so sensitive, I end class by inviting students to share additional thoughts or concerns over email and compile a list of norms available online for reference throughout the term. I remind students that we can revise the norms as needed and actively invite them to come to me when I have made a mistake or they have an additional need. I make clear that the burden for addressing a traumatic reaction in the classroom is on the professor, not the student experiencing the reaction. By demonstrating a willingness to listen to them, centering their needs, and changing the classroom environment from the very beginning, instructors can help students feel comfortable coming to them throughout the semester, having made it clear that they will take a proactive stance in addressing harms that stem from victimization.

Lesson Planning: Responding Adequately to Claims of Trauma

One of the primary ways professors respond inadequately to claims of trauma is by providing inaccurate and/or inappropriate information about sexual violence—be that in course materials or in response to students' questions. To put it simply, as an instructor teaching on the topic of sexual violence, you have an obligation to know your stuff. You cannot respond adequately to students' questions or concerns about sexual violence without some substantive expertise on the topic. Still, even academic experts on sexual violence will have gaps in their knowledge, especially as activist efforts proliferate in (and after) the #MeToo era. Instructors should be humble and recognize the unique expertise of survivors in the classroom, taking feedback from survivors and perhaps inviting students engaged in activist efforts to instruct the class as appropriate, if desired, and with adequate compensation.

Guest speakers can also provide the expertise needed, especially in courses that are not specifically focused on violence or gender inequality; however, it is crucial that professors are cautious in making guest speaker selections. All guest speakers should have a trauma-informed and survivor-centered focus, such as representatives from a local rape crisis center or researchers who focus on victim-centered scholarship. Guest speakers who may have participated in student survivors' institutional betrayal, including Title IX coordinators or campus police, are never appropriate. Professors should solicit anonymous feedback from students about their reactions to guest speakers to aid in deciding whether to include a guest speaker in future semesters of the course.

When selecting course materials (e.g., readings, films) on sexual violence, it is essential that they take seriously the impact of sexual trauma on survivors. To do otherwise is to put students at risk of institutional betrayal. For example, a professor who assigns a think piece that argues that the concern about campus sexual assault is overblown or an essay that invokes rape myths sends a message to all survivors in the classroom that their professor does not consider claims of trauma legitimate. Similarly, it would always be inappropriate to require students to recreate "both sides" of recent debates about sexual violence policy (e.g., Title IX reform around "due process") because it would mandate students to respond dismissively or minimize claims of trauma—and, therefore, put them at risk of institutional betrayal—as part of an assignment. Although there is space for engaging with texts (e.g., federal mandates, campus Title IX policies) that have harmed survivors to critically analyze them, this requires a strong degree of trust and

skill that must be built over the course of a semester. In courses that have short units on sexual violence or are taught at an introductory level, this can be difficult to guarantee, making it safer to focus on materials that center experiences of trauma, such as validating excerpts from survivor memoirs (e.g., Miller 2016, 2019) or survivor-centered explanations of the ubiquity or social causes of sexual violence (e.g., Hlavka 2014; Sweet 2019). When selecting materials, I recommend that professors ask themselves one guiding question: Would this material be useful to a survivor trying to make sense of their sexual assault or heal from sexual trauma?

Class Discussions: Recognizing the Severity of a Victim's Experience

When discussing sexual violence in class, it will be impossible for survivors in the room to divorce their experiences of trauma from the academic discussion. Whether they share their own histories of violence or choose to keep them private, they will be at the forefront of their minds as you teach. To avoid institutional betrayal, it is essential that professors recognize the severity of the traumas of their students. This is especially important during class discussion when students' personal views (which are shaped by their experiences) are shared.

During class discussions, there are a few common ways that these traumas come to the forefront. One that instructors often worry about is a student disclosing that they are a survivor during the course of a lesson. Although many instructors immediately focus on how to manage mandatory reporting requirements, schools typically have an exemption for mandatory reporting when disclosure takes place for educational or activist purposes. These exemptions reflect that survivors who disclose in the classroom often do it for reasons other than help-seeking, such as teaching their peers about trauma. As a professor, your role is to allow the survivor sharing their experience to do so on their own terms.

It is crucial not to silence a survivor or chide them for sharing their experience. Even if your school does not allow such an exemption, it is crucial that survivors are invited to share relevant components of their own experiences if desired. Instructors should consider how survivors can share their own experience-informed insights without making a report against a survivor's will—and that might include breaking campus policy. The alternative of silencing survivors or controlling their narratives is never acceptable. Asking students to avoid speaking about their personal traumas indicates that professors do not recognize the impossibility of disentangling a history of trauma from an academic discussion on the topic.

Instead, model a respectful response to the disclosure, such as thanking the survivor for sharing their story and allowing the survivor to choose when to engage with the class after making their original comment. Treat the survivor as an expert on their own trauma (and on sexual violence more broadly), but avoid requiring survivors to continue to educate. If a survivor does want to make additional comments, prioritize making space for them. They are, after all, experts with a unique perspective to share. Once the class is over, an instructor may compliment the survivor's participation in the discussion, but do not make comments that make the survivor feel singled out or compelled to continue sharing their traumas. To put it simply, treat the survivor like any other student who just had a really great day in discussion.

Making space for survivors to control their own engagement with the class discussion might require making some changes from your standard teaching pedagogy. You may cover less material or let the discussion flow in a different direction than you had in mind. It might mean holding your tongue when a survivor shares an experience that contradicts a view you hold or the academic consensus on the topic. Sometimes, you may feel conflicted about where the class ended and wonder if you should have jumped in to take control back to ensure that other students got what you desired from the class. Resist these impulses to maintain the status quo and trust that the survivors in your class have valuable insights of their own. A central component of a trauma-informed teaching pedagogy is to allow survivors control, as opposed to wielding control over them, which may be reminiscent of their sexual assaults.

Sometimes, survivors' experiences with in-class disclosure are more tumultuous. If a survivor (or any other student—many survivors will opt against disclosing) appears upset, there are multiple approaches you can take to mitigate additional harm. In general, it's important to avoid singling out an upset student. Doing so is not only uncomfortable in the moment, but it may lead other students to treat the survivor differently outside of class as well. Instead, give the class a break and reach out to the student one-on-one. Ask what they need and offer suggestions about ways to make the class more manageable. Make adjustments to the

lesson plan as needed. To give survivors more time to process, you might plan individual writing assignments, small group work with trusted peers, or taking more breaks than usual.

For example, I teach a lesson in which students listen to recorded survivor narratives about how sexual trauma impacted them long term. To manage the assignment, I normalize emotional reactions in advance, pointing out that even students who have no personal ties to trauma sometimes tear up. This helps survivors feel like having an emotional response won't be akin to disclosing their survivor identity, allowing them to remain in class more comfortably. I require students to take notes about things that stood out to them in the narratives as well as their own feelings. The latter allows them to recognize their feelings in advance to manage them before they become overwhelming, making it easier to stay in class or know when they need to step out. The former removes any stigma from taking notes on emotional reactions. Afterward, we discuss students' feelings first, and many find it validating to recognize how many other people found the material emotionally taxing. Studying sexual violence *is* emotionally taxing. Making space for the feelings that surface not only makes them more manageable, but it also can teach us a lot about the nature of sexual violence (Campbell 2001).

Survivors are not the only students who have personal ties to sexual violence that may come up during discussion. Although professors rarely like to think about it, it is extremely likely that you have perpetrators of gender-based violence taking your classes as well. After all, studies indicate that as many as 11 percent of college men commit a rape before graduation (Swartout et al. 2015). There are also a multitude of other reasons that students may hold rape-supportive attitudes, such as having a close friend who was accused of sexual assault or simply growing up in a culture that normalizes, excuses, and condones men's acts of violence (e.g., Manne 2017). Instructors should consider in advance how they will respond to comments that blame victims or are otherwise supportive of sexual violence. A failure to address harmful comments from students can make an instructor appear to endorse those views and cause institutional betrayal. Instructors need to be prepared to jump in.

Because most rape-supportive attitudes are based on misunderstandings about rape (e.g., rape myths), instructors can usually intervene on an inappropriate comment by responding with science if they are knowledgeable enough on the topic of sexual assault. For example, if a student claims that most women who report rapes are lying, a professor can provide information about the low rate of false reports (e.g., Lisak et al. 2010). Professors, however, need not always be the person to respond to these types of hurtful claims. If students appear eager to respond themselves, it can be empowering for a professor to cede space (and power) to survivors to fight their own battles. In that case, instructors can reinforce the comments made by survivors. The primary goal in these moments of conflict is not necessarily to change the mind of the student who made the inappropriate comment, but to avoid institutional betrayal by supporting survivors. In doing so, a professor may change minds anyway but also ensures it will not be done at the expense of those already harmed by sexual violence.

In addition to overtly hurtful comments, students can cause harm to survivors in more passive ways, such as refusing to pay attention or creating distractions from the course content. Responding to this as an instructor can be difficult, particularly because some students who have chosen to disengage are likely doing it to manage emotional reactions to their own traumas. There are a few ways to address the issue. For classes that focus on especially sensitive topics, I ban laptops in my classroom. To ensure that a laptop ban does not disparately impact students with disabilities, I never include material from that day on exams or require its inclusion in writing assignments. Instead, I encourage the use of less distracting coping mechanisms, such as writing out feelings, drawing, or bringing comfort items to class like a warm beverage, a snack, or a blanket. In preparation for especially taxing days, I allow students to coordinate as a group to care for each other, such as planning a potluck or having one student bring in a pet, even if these activities may take some time away from course instruction.

I also find it helps to name that some students seek out distractions to manage trauma so that survivors no longer view disengagement as inherently dismissive and hurtful. Discussions of trauma stewardship (Lipsky and Burke 2009) can be useful in helping all students consider the impact of their disengagement on others. Students are permitted to leave the classroom as needed (including skipping days of class altogether when there is particularly emotionally challenging content—no questions asked); however, offering all of these alternative ways to manage content gives survivors more agency in the decision of whether to attend class. They know there will be space for survivors—including the emotions that survivors have when discussing

trauma—which makes it possible to attend class if they would like.

Office Hours: Making It Easy to Report Traumatic Experiences

When a professor succeeds in turning a classroom into a healing space for survivors, it is common for students to view them as a trusted figure for navigating trauma in other parts of their college experience (Branch, Hayes-Smith, and Richards 2011; Richards, Branch, and Hayes-Smith 2013). For example, a professor who has developed a strong relationship with their students may be the first person a student chooses to tell about a sexual assault or ask for assistance in navigating convoluted university reporting options. Indeed, professors who invoke trauma-informed practices may be more likely to receive violence disclosures than other faculty (Branch et al. 2011; Richards et al. 2013). Although there are a variety of ways that university representatives react to these types of disclosures and requests for assistance, the best way to respond is with support that maximizes the survivors' autonomy (Holland and Bedera 2020). Help survivors get the information they need to make the best decision for themselves—and respect whatever decision they choose to make. As someone in a position of power over the student, it is never appropriate for an instructor to offer an opinion or recommendation about how a survivor should manage their trauma. Still, there are ways professors can be supportive, such as making validating comments or offering to accompany a survivor to a campus resource they wish to use. Above all, students are often looking for instructors' organizational expertise. Be knowledgeable about the resources and reporting options available and share that information with inquiring students.

Mandatory reporting policies can complicate instructors' ability to respect survivors' decisions, particularly if a survivor does not wish to report their sexual assault to the university. Before teaching a course that includes sexual violence, it is essential to clearly understand your reporting obligations as an instructor. Whereas most universities have some kind of mandatory reporting policy, many do not require professors or graduate student instructors to abide by them (Holland, Cortina, and Freyd 2018), and mandatory reporting is not required or even encouraged by the federal government (U.S. Department of Education 2020). If constrained by mandatory reporting obligations, be thoughtful about the questions you ask and information you gather that you could be required to disclose in a report. For example, a report usually cannot be formalized into an actionable complaint without the survivor's cooperation if the specific nature of the misconduct violation and name of the perpetrator are not included.

In general, instructors should not request details about a survivor's sexual assault to respect the survivor's privacy and avoid retraumatization. If forced to file a report, be sure that the survivor knows what will be disclosed in the report, who will receive it, and what next steps to expect. When sharing these expectations with a student, be sure that you are not discouraging the survivor from sharing their experience with you or seeking other types of resources on campus. Holding the position of a mandatory reporter should not shut down all other types of communication about sexual violence, including on the topic of campus sexual assault adjudication. Professors should also be mindful that sometimes defying a harmful or unjust policy is the more student-centered course of action than falling in line with the bureaucratic status quo.

As a final—and important—concern, it is often the case that a professor who has a negative reaction to a survivor's disclosure does so not because they wish to do harm but because they are a survivor themselves or otherwise deeply emotionally impacted by hearing a story of sexual violence (see Hayes-Smith, Richards, and Branch 2010; Lipsky and Burke 2009). It is crucial that instructors have a plan for managing their own emotions around sexual violence disclosure without burdening the survivor. For example, many survivors would feel uncomfortable if a professor responded to a disclosure by having an over-the-top emotional reaction or disclosing their own history of violent victimization. Instead, I (and others before me; see Branch et al. 2011) recommend building a supportive network among like-minded faculty to process these difficult moments together and prioritize self-care. Instructors can also make use of many of the same resources they share with students.

Although there are many varied ways to manage self-care while teaching a course on sexual violence, I will share my own cultivated habits as an example. I think of self-care as a three-tiered process: routine self-care, event-responsive self-care, and emergency intervention self-care. Routine self-care refers to regular practices that prevent emotional burnout and create a reserve of emotional spaces for taxing days. For me, it includes pleasant things that I find replenishing, like keeping my weekends free for leisure time with my loved ones,

but also the more mundane and essential stuff like getting enough sleep, exercising regularly, and making time for health-affirming practices like therapy and physical checkups.

On particularly taxing days, I have a plan in place for event-responsive self-care. When I was a victim advocate, I worked in the hospitals, and that meant I habitually washed my hands at the end of a shift. In my mind, this has become synonymous with telling myself, "The hard part is over—you aren't an advocate right now." The one time I forgot to wash my hands at the end of a graveyard shift, I couldn't sleep until I did—and afterward, I slept soundly. To this day, I still wash my hands after research interviews or tough interactions with student survivors. I also allow myself comforting indulgences like eating macaroni and cheese for dinner, lighting a candle, or simply giving myself the afternoon off of work. When these small comforts are not enough, I have a network of colleagues and friends (most of whom do similar work) who I can call on to debrief with—and I will return the favor for them in the future.

Despite these practices, there are some events that are too difficult to push aside within a few days. In those cases, I rely on emergency interventions. I recognize that it may be time for this type of self-care if I find myself overreacting to minor irritations, feeling overwhelmed by usually easy tasks, or struggling to sleep. In that case, I schedule an appointment with my therapist and may take a step away from other responsibilities to make time to identify the source of my anxieties and process why my reaction is so overwhelming. After that, the solution is often more self-care. For additional strategies and reflections, I recommend Rebecca Campbell's (2001) *Emotionally Involved* and J. E. Sumerau's (2017) "I See Monsters."

To prevent burnout and ensure that students are treated ethically, it is also key that instructors set their own boundaries about how they would like to engage with students during disclosures. Commonly, professors report that they do not feel skilled enough to manage the intricacies of sexual assault disclosure (Hayes-Smith et al. 2010). That is perfectly okay—professors are academics, not counselors. Instead of trying to perform a role that makes you uncomfortable, professors should plan in advance how to make clear to students what their boundaries are while also responding supportively (see Holland and Bedera 2020). For example, a professor who does not feel equipped to do crisis intervention may tell a student, "I do not feel fully qualified or prepared to give you everything you deserve, but I would love to support you in the ways I can, like listening to you and helping connect you to the resources you need." Professors who desire more training in managing disclosures may also ask other faculty on campus or seek out a 40-hour crisis counselor certification from a local rape crisis center, domestic violence shelter, or Coalition Against Sexual Assault.[1]

Building Relationships: Rewarding the Victim for Coming forward

The period of time after a sexual assault disclosure to a professor can be anxiety provoking for student survivors. Although most professors likely do not have the intent of punishing a student for disclosing and lack the institutional power to access the most severe types of punishments (e.g., taking other disciplinary action), students worry that they will be seen or treated differently by their instructor. For example, women survivors fear they will be considered less competent based on gender stereotypes about women being overly emotional or irrational. A professor's primary goal following a disclosure should be to support the survivor and reassure the survivor that their disclosure has not negatively impacted your opinion of them. The easiest way to do this is to allow a survivor's disclosure to have a positive impact.

This does not mean giving students unfair advantages such as grading them more leniently or allowing distracting behavior in class. However, professors can clearly demonstrate that they still see the student as academically capable by offering professional mentorship, inquiring about a student's career goals, or sharing opportunities that may be of interest to the student (e.g., internships, research positions). In future interactions, an instructor should avoid mentioning a survivor's trauma history unless they volunteer an update or request additional guidance. Still, as previously mentioned, professors are not counselors and are not qualified to take on that role. Instead, instructors should provide referrals to the appropriately trained professional for a survivor's trauma-related needs and then return the relationship with the student to its intended role: educating the student and assisting in professional development.

End on a High Note: Creating an Environment in which Sexual Violence Seems Less Likely

As sociologists, we are accustomed to the complaint from students that our classes are depressing. The study of social problems can feel cynical and overwhelming, especially to undergraduates who

are learning about them for the first time. The stakes may be particularly high for classes that discuss personal issues like sexual violence because leaving students with the impression that sexual assault is a predictable and inevitable part of society inherently leaves them with the message that sexual violence is likely to happen in the future—and that feeling is similar to a sentiment that can cause institutional betrayal. Professors are not responsible for solving sexual violence to change the realities of the academic scholarship that exists. However, professors can end a unit or a semester on sexual violence on a high note, particularly by focusing on activist efforts or sexual violence interventions that show promise.

In my class, I do both. To start, I teach a class on interventions that not only don't work but may exacerbate the problem, such as traditional workplace sexual harassment trainings (e.g., Bingham and Scherer 2001). Although this may appear disheartening, the implication of the lesson is optimistic: We have identified a problem, and we know the solution. By ending these harmful programs (and others like them), we could see a marked improvement immediately. Next, I introduce empirically validated programs that have proven more successful, such as feminist, empowerment-focused women's programs and bystander intervention (Cares et al. 2015; Senn et al. 2015). Although these approaches have their limitations, they offer recommendations about how students can individually diminish the risk of sexual assault on their campus. Students' critiques of the programs also invite discussion on what interventions they would prefer, allowing them to practice dreaming about and planning for a less violent future.

Finally, we end with structural changes, such as criminal justice reform and restorative justice (Karasek 2018; Koss, Wilgus, and Williamsen 2014; Richie 2012), that test the limits of their imagination. We end the semester asking what survivor-centered justice would look like and exploring the role of meaningful accountability in the prevention of future violence. I also make a point to share opportunities for students to get involved in activist efforts in their community, such as distributing information about campus and local antiviolence organizations (e.g., V-Day, rape crisis centers, YWCA), and lead a discussion on starting organizations and pointing out that students already know a number of other people who would like to join them in their efforts. Even if it hasn't arrived yet, this collective imagining allows students to picture a future where violence is less likely.

CONCLUSION

As more sociologists than ever integrate material on sexual violence into their classes, students and professors have a lot of apprehension about how to navigate trauma in the classroom. Whereas survivors are typically seen as obstacles during a lesson, a survivor-centered approach views survivors as what they truly are—experts on sexual violence whose experiences, views, and ideas are instructive in creating transformative courses. By focusing on survivors' needs, especially around the avoidance of institutional betrayal, instructors can develop a pedagogy uniquely suited to teaching on sexual violence while ensuring that their courses will be more healing than harmful to the survivors in attendance.

EDITOR'S NOTE

The reviewers for this manuscript were, in alphabetical order, Katherine Branch and J. Sumerau

NOTE

1. Crisis counselor certifications are primarily focused on deescalation tactics, providing emotional support, and connecting survivors to community resources. They are not a replacement for therapy. Even professors with a crisis counselor certification (or even a therapy-focused degree) should not act as a therapist and should become comfortable with setting boundaries with students and connecting them to appropriate resources.

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