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Exploring the Phenomenon of Presence in an Online Educational Environment Through the Lived Experiences of Graduate Nursing Faculty

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EXPLORING THE PHENOMENON OF PRESENCE IN AN ONLINE

EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT THROUGH THE

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GRADUATE NURSING FACULTY

By

John Rosselli

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ABSTRACT
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John Rosselli

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In this dissertation, the phenomenon of presence in an online educational environment is explored through the lived experiences of graduate nursing faculty who teach online. Greater understanding of the phenomenon of presence in online educational environments may lead to better learner-instructor relationships, higher levels of inquiry and critical thinking on the part of faculty and students, and ultimately better student outcomes. Utilizing principles of Hermeneutic Phenomenology and deductive inquiry, and based on the learner-centric Being There for the Online Learner Model, the author conducted in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of 13 graduate nursing faculty members who teach online at a major university in the northeast United States. The author also reviewed supporting documents pertaining to institutional structure, faculty development, the institution's learning management system, and online faculty job descriptions. Interview data were analyzed thematically, using the mixed-methods software Dedoose. Results of the study revealed four ways in which graduate nursing faculty experience the sense of presence (i.e., The Modes of Presence derived from the Being There for the Online Learner Model): Realism, Involvement, Immersion, and the Willing Suspension of Disbelief. Two broad themes, *Being there* and *Being Together* were also identified. *Being There* is the sensation that occurs when graduate nursing

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faculty feel or perceive they are physically in another location when teaching online. *Being Together* is the sensation that graduate nursing faculty are physically in the same space with others (i.e., their students), when they are actually separated by distance. In both cases, this is for varying lengths of time, and with varying frequency. The study identified three main conclusions: not all participants experience the sense of presence in the same way; *Being There* may also include the sensation of "Coming Here"; and, The Illusion of Nonmediation, as described in the Model, should be considered as a fifth Mode of Presence. Based upon these conclusions, I present implications for nursing education science and provide recommendations for creating the sense of presence in online educational environments.

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To

my loving parents

and

partner

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This hermeneutic phenomenological study sought to explore the phenomenon of presence, and better understand how graduate nursing faculty members who teach in online educational environments experience presence. In this chapter, I describe the nature of the research problem, and provide background, context, and significance of the problem. I then present the purpose of my research, and the research question I endeavored to answer. Special consideration is given to the research approach, assumptions, and the significance of studying the concept of presence in nursing education science. I complete this chapter by describing my perspective as researcher, and define key terminology that may not be commonly understood.

Background to the Model

In 2010, Lehman and Conceição published their book, *Creating a Sense of Presence in Online Teaching How to "Be There" for Distance Learners*. In it they presented and described The Being There for the Online Learner Model. The Model describes the intricate interaction between and among thoughts, feelings, and behavior, and their roles as antecedents to experiencing the concept of presence in online education (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). The authors defined presence as the sense of "being there and being together with others" in the online education environment (Lehman & Conceição, 2010, p.3).

The Being There for the Online Learner Model is a synthesis of concepts from disciplines such as computer science, communications, virtual reality, and education (Biocca, 1997; Lombard & Ditton, 1997; Minsky, 1980). Given that a universally accepted theory of presence remains elusive, Lehman and Conceição (2010) developed this model as a way to explain how *learners* experience the sense of presence in online environments.

Why am I Studying Presence?

In traditional classroom settings, educators and students are able to experience being present with others in the same physical location (i.e., the traditional classroom setting). Classroom participants experience the sense of presence when they, for example, smell the perfume of their neighbor, or brush against another as they walk by him or her. Equally important is the faculty member's ability to read non-verbal communication on the part of the students, for example, indicating that they are bored with the content. By being together in the same physical space, each individual has the potential to experience a sense of community and togetherness. Experiencing the sense of presence is different with faculty and students when they participate in online educational environments. The use of the five senses is diminished, and new ways of experiencing presence become necessary. In this study, I explore the ways in which graduate nursing faculty experience the sense of presence in the online courses they teach.

Addressing the Knowledge Gap

The Being There for the Online Learner Model was conceived and written to be learner-centric. Evidence for the elements of the Model: Experiences and Modes of Presence from the learner's perspective, and the Dimensions of the Learner, is well documented in scholarly literature across many disciplines. However, very little is known about the ways in which faculty members sense presence in the online courses they teach.

Using the Being There for the Online Learner Model (Lehman & Conceição, 2010) as a conceptual framework, my research sought to better understand how faculty members, specifically graduate nursing faculty members, experience presence. Better understanding of the faculty member's experience of presence may enhance positive learner-instructor relationships, improve faculty satisfaction and retention, and could even improve student outcomes.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to increase our understanding of the lived experiences of how graduate nursing faculty experience the sense of presence in the online courses they teach. This study sought to answer the question, "In what ways do graduate nursing faculty experience the sense of presence in online environments?"

Research Approach

With the approval of the universities' Institutional Review Boards, I studied how graduate nursing faculty experience the sense of presence in the online courses they teach by interviewing a purposive sample of 13 online graduate nursing faculty members at a private university in the northeastern part of the United States. I relied upon the methodological process for conducting hermeneutic phenomenological research and data analysis set forth by Max van Manen (1990). In addition to using van Manen's approach, I selected a portion of data for deductive inquiry. Deductive inquiry is a "theory testing process which commences with an established theory [or model or conceptual framework], and seeks to see if the theory applies to specific instances" (Hyde, 2000, p. 83). The purpose of this deductive inquiry was to search for congruent elements of The Being There for the Online Learner Model that are most central to my research question and specific participant experiences (Hyde, 2000). The research question was answered using a qualitative design approach consisting of document review and in-depth interview methods. The Being There for the Online Learner Model, a systematic review of the literature, and the principles of hermeneutic phenomenology, guided the interview question development process.

To solicit potential study participants, I sent information by email to all online graduate nursing faculty at the research site, asking them to participate. The email contained a detailed

explanation of the study including its purpose, deadlines, and potential participant risks and benefits. Faculty members interested in participating were asked to contact me by telephone. Upon contact, all potential study participants were screened using inclusion/exclusion criteria, and those who were eligible were asked to schedule an in-depth interview, lasting up to 90 minutes, at their convenience. Participants were interviewed via Skype. All interviews were audio and video recorded with the permission of the participants.

Parallel to the interview data collection process, I conducted a detailed review of relevant documents in order to gain further understanding related to the context in which the study participants experience presence in the learning management system and teleconferencing online environments. Documents pertaining to institutional structure, job descriptions, faculty development materials, and the teleconferencing software and the learning management system's online educational environments were selected and reviewed. For example, the majority of documents provided information related to the Department of Nursing, the Research Site, and its organizational structure. Others clarified online processes, and provided insight on the use of the learning management system and teleconferencing software.

To protect the privacy of respondents, all interview data, including interview recordings and transcriptions - transcribed by a professional transcriptionist, and reviewed by me - were entered into a password-protected computer, accessible only by the principal investigator. Neither the respondents' names, nor unique identifiers, was collected or recorded. Transcriptions were entered into the password-protected qualitative software program, Dedoose, for analysis. I alone was responsible for analyzing the data.

Assumptions

Based upon my extensive review of the literature on presence and the research site, I made two primary assumptions regarding this study. First is the assumption that online graduate nursing faculty can and do sense presence, even if they are unable to acknowledge the experience. Lehman and Conceição's (2010) The Being There for the Online Learner Model, and research studies in disciplines such as virtual reality, virtual environment, telecommunications, and human-computer interactions, support this assumption. The second assumption is that participants experience the sense of presence, as described by The Being There for the Online Learner Model, and the published research related to the concept of presence. This research is reviewed in Chapter 2. Indeed, the study, including the interview questions and data analysis, were based upon the Model and the presence literature. I acknowledge that by making this assumption, the true essence of the experience of sensing presence in online education environments may remain elusive.

Significance of Studying the Concept of Presence in Nursing Education Science

Nurse scholars develop, disseminate, and implement knowledge gained through research (Faucett, 2000). To that end, I believe that my research will contribute significantly to the discipline and science of nursing in the areas of online distance nursing education, faculty development, and the phenomenon of presence. It is important to study the phenomenon of presence because, while online distance nursing education is in its relative infancy, it continues to grow at a rapid pace (Mayne & Wu, 2011), and can now be enhanced through video teleconferencing capabilities. In just the last 10 years, schools of nursing went from offering a smattering of online courses to offering entire programs at all levels of nursing education (Mayne & Wu, 2011). For some institutions, embracing online distance nursing education is an

opportunity to increase revenue (Conceição & Lehman, 2011) and student enrollment, and respond to the faculty shortage (Mayne & Wu, 2011). When one combines those facts with the results of the 2010 meta-analysis by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) that indicated online learning, in higher education, is more effective than face-to-face learning, it is no wonder we are seeing such a rapidly growing enthusiasm for online distance nursing education (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

In 2011, Lehman and Conceição wrote about the importance of the concept of presence in online education. They, and others, believed that the creation of a sense of presence in online education environments is foundational to a positive learner-instructor relationship (Lehman & Conceição, June, 2011; Palloff & Pratt, 2007), and "produces a richer social atmosphere, develops a climate for high level inquiry and critical thinking, and generates a sense of the learners and instructor being together in the online classroom" (Lehman & Conceição, June, 2011, p. 1). I believe that the better the nursing profession understands presence, the better it will create experiences that increase a sense of community and interaction between faculty and students in online nursing courses. Understanding and increasing a faculty member's sense of presence may improve actual student outcomes, even beyond the outcomes of traditional face-to-face classrooms, and ultimately affect patient outcomes.

Researcher's Perspective

My interest in studying the phenomenon of presence is as a nurse educator. My enthusiasm for conducting this study stems from my passion for online education, instructional design and technologies, and experience working at the same research site and online environments as my study participants. At the time of this research, I will have been a faculty member in the study institution's Department of Nursing for over seven years.

Currently, I am the Director (Interim) of Department's Nurse Educator (NE) Program. The NE Program is offered only online. My position within the institution provided me with experiences as a course faculty, course coordinator, and course architect. I acknowledge that while my first-hand knowledge and experiences may prove valuable to the research process, they could have served as an impediment to rigorous, unbiased inquiry. To address this, I made every effort not to allow the fore-structures, pre-understandings, insider knowledge, and my own experiences to cloud my judgment, influence the responses of my participants, or lead to interpretive conclusions that are not supported by the data.

Definition of Terminology

Being There for the Online Learner Model - In 2010, Lehman and Conceição published their book, *Creating a Sense of Presence in Online Teaching How to "Be There" for Distance Learners*, in which they present and describe The Being There for the Online Learner Model. This Model describes the intricate exchange between thoughts, feelings, and behavior, and their roles as antecedents to experiencing the concept of presence in online education (Lehman & Conceição, 2010).

Presence - The sense of "being there and being together with others" in the online education environment (Lehman & Conceição, 2010).

Medium - The human-made technology that comes between ourselves (as user) and our environment, and our perception of that environment (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). In this study, the term medium is the computer software and hardware used when teaching online.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to increase our understanding of the lived experiences of how graduate nursing faculty experience the sense of presence in the online courses they teach. This study sought to answer the question, "In what ways do graduate nursing faculty experience the sense of presence in online environments?" I used The Being There for the Online Learner Model, developed by Lehman and Conceição (2010), as the conceptual framework for studying this phenomenon.

This chapter consists of three distinct literature review sections: Presence and The Being There for the Online Learner Model, Presence Across Disciplines, and Presence in Nursing Education Science. In the first section, *Presence and The Being There for the Online Learner Model*, I describe the concept of presence, and the Being There for the Online Learner Model. I demonstrate how this Model is grounded in research literature across many disciplines, and explicate any concepts not included in the Model. I then make clear my choice for selecting Lehman and Conceição's Model, and illustrate how this Model supports my research question. As The Being There for the Online Learner Model is student-centered, I demonstrate how Lehman and Conceição's (2010) understanding of presence, and the Model, could be changed slightly to account for perceptions that possibly could be experienced by the faculty member. Lastly, I describe how the Model contributes to our understanding of nursing science.

Section two, *Presence Across Disciplines*, provides an overview of the research literature from disciplines outside of nursing including virtual reality, virtual environments, telecommunications, education, and human-computer interactions. This section describes how presence is defined broadly across disciplines, and studied utilizing various subjective and objective measures. In the final section, *Presence in Nursing Education Science*, I critically

review the literature on presence as it relates to online nursing education environments, and detail the identified gaps in the literature.

Literature Search Process

The purpose of this systematic literature review was to gain understanding of the meaning of presence across disciplines, to deconstruct the Being There for the Online Learner Model using studies and sentinel articles from other disciplines, and to search for the meaning of presence within nursing science literature. For the literature on presence, I began by reviewing bibliographic sources referenced in the seminal text, Lehman and Conceição's book, *Creating a Sense of Presence in Online Teaching How to "Be There" for Distance Learners* (2010). I reviewed those references in the book that were most relevant to my research question. I then used search engines to identify other relevant sources; these search engines were: CINAHL, Ovid, PubMed, EBSCO, and ProQuest. I used the following inclusion criteria: English language only, and used traditional boolean search parameters, focusing on keywords such as presence, telepresence, virtual presence, social presence, nursing, and online and distance education. These searches yielded hundreds of sources, including periodicals, books, dissertations, and internet resources.

Only seven relevant sources on presence were identified in the nursing science literature. All seven sources are included and critiqued in this literature review. Across other disciplines, the initial search yielded hundreds of sources related to the phenomenon of presence. A narrow selection of relevant sources for this literature review was identified using sentinal, state-of-the-science, and previously selected publications.

Presence and The Being There for the Online Learner Model

Defining Presence in the Model

In 2001, Biocca, Burgoon, Harms, and Stoner discussed how the earlier works of Minsky (1980), Lombard and Ditton (1997) and others (Biocca, F., 1997; Ijsselsteijn, de Ridder, Freeman, & Avons, 2000) supported their argument that the sense of presence consists of two interrelated phenomena: *Telepresence* (the sense of being there), and *social presence* (the sense of being together with others) (Biocca, Burgoon, Harms, & Stoner, 2001; Lehman & Conceição, 2010). They argued that because humans are naturally social beings, the driving force behind physical presence (which occurs when two or more participants are in the same physical space) is simply to increase social presence (Biocca, Burgoon, Harms, & Stoner, 2001; Lehman & Conceição, June, 2011). Lehman and Conceição (2010) used this argument as the basis of their definition of presence in an online educational context. The authors defined the sense of presence as "being there and being together with others" in the online education environment (Lehman & Conceição, 2010, p.3).

The Impetus for Developing The Model

In 2011, Lehman and Conceição wrote about the importance of the concept of presence in online education. They, and others, believed that the creation of a sense of presence in online education environments is foundational to a positive learner-instructor relationship (Lehman & Conceição, June, 2011; Palloff & Pratt, 2007), and "produces a richer social atmosphere, develops a climate for high level inquiry and critical thinking, and generates a sense of the learners and instructor being together in the online classroom" (Lehman & Conceição, June, 2011, p.1).

Lehman and Conceição (2011) argued that experiencing a sense of presence in online environments does not happen spontaneously. Rather, they believed presence was the "result of awareness, understanding, intentional planning and design, and active involvement through experience on the part of the learner, the instructor, and other learners" (p.1). All participants can experience presence. Indeed, the student and instructor must also be able to "think, feel, and create" a sense of presence in the online environment (p. 1). To explicate this interchange between thought, emotions, and behavior, the authors developed a conceptual framework called The Being There for the Online Learner Model (Lehman & Conceição, 2010).

According to the authors, The Being There for the Online Learner Model illustrates both the connection and interchange of "thought, emotion and behavior", and their role as antecedents to a participant's experience of presence in online education (Lehman & Conceição, 2010, p. 7). The Model suggests this connection is essential to experiencing the sense of presence, and without it presence cannot be created or experienced (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). The Model describes four distinct ways one can experience the sense of presence: subjective, objective, social and environmental (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). It describes the ways in which learners experience the sense of presence through realism, immersion, involvement, and the suspension of disbelief (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). Lehman and Conceição believed that, through this model, learners could gain understanding and take control of ensuring they experience a sense of presence in their online courses (Lehman & Conceição, June, 2011).

The Being There for the Online Learner Model is a synthesis of concepts from disciplines such as computer science, communications, virtual reality, and education (Biocca, 1997; Lombard & Ditton, 1997; Minsky, 1980). Since a universally accepted theory of presence remains elusive, Lehman and Conceição (2010) developed this Model as a way to explain how

learners experience the sense of presence in online environments. I utilized this Model as a conceptual framework for understanding how graduate nursing faculty members who teach in online educational environments experience presence.

Deconstructing The Being There for the Online Learner Model

I began the literature review by identifying and reviewing bibliographic sources referenced in the seminal text, Lehman and Conceição's book, *Creating a Sense of Presence in Online Teaching How to "Be There" for Distance Learners (2010).* It was important for me to fully understand the resources used to develop the Model, and to use those orginal sources and the Model as foundations for my study. The goal of this section is to link the Model to its orginal sources, and to critique the Model and its composition in light of these sources.

Experiences of Presence. To create The Being There for the Online Learner Model, Lehman and Conceição (2010) built upon concepts outlined in Ijsselsteijn, De Ridder, Freeman, and Avons (2000). Lehman and Conceição (2010) identified and described four distinct types of *experiences of presence*: subjective, objective, social and environmental. *Subjective experiences* of presence take place in the learner's mind. Learners believe that, through illusioned perception, their online experiences transport them from where they are in the physical world to another (purely psychological) location (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). This perception gives the learner the sense of "being there" in the online learning environment. The *objective experience* of presence is realized when learners perceive they are physically in another location (Ijsselsteijn et al., 2000; Lehman & Conceição, 2010). Learners feel as if they are "actually located within the technology-mediated space" (Lehman & Conceição, 2010, p. 15).

Lehman and Conceição (2010) also described how leaners also sense a *social experience* of presence in online education. This experience is grounded in the concept of social presence

(Biocca et al., 2001). Lehman and Conceição (2010) believed that the social experience of presence is achieved when all of the learners within the online learning environment can sense they are with others (other learners and the instructor), and all participants respond to and interact with each other. Lastly, learners sense the *environmental experience* of presence. These environmental experiences center on two aspects of learning, the physical and the educational (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). Lehman and Conceição (2010) built upon Sheridan's notion that presence is sensed (or created) when learners are able to easily access and change or manipulate the online learning environment (Sheridan, 1992). Lehman and Conceição (2010) believed learners more easily experience a sense of presence when they can interact within the learning environment (or platform, or learning management system), and can work with the instructor to maximize their experience. Table 2-1 summarizes the descriptions of the experiences of presence according to Lehman and Conceição (2010).

Table 2-1

Experiences of Presence

Type of Experience	Description
Subjective	• Takes place in the mind
	• Online experiences transport learners from where they are in the physical world to another (purely psychological) location
Objective	• Learners perceive they are physically in another location such as inside the technology-mediated space
Social	• Learners sense they are with others (other learners and the instructor)
	• All participants respond to and interact with each other
Environmental	• Leaners have the ability to manipulate the online learning environment
	• Leaners have the ability to work within the learning environment
	• Learners have the ability to work with the instructor to maximize their experiences

Note. Adapted from: Lehman & Conceição (2010).

Modes of Presence. The illusion, or sense, of presence is established through four distinct modes of presence. These modes can be considered as the *ways* in which learners experience presence (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). As a primmer to experiencing presence, Lehman and Conceição (2010) argued that, in well-designed courses, the learner experiences the illusion of nonmediation. To understand nonmediation, one must first understand the term

medium. A *medium* is the human-made technology that comes between us (as technology users) and our environment, or at least our perception of that environment (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). A transparent medium, or what Lehman and Conceição (2010) and others called nonmediation, is one that is invisible, or goes unnoticed to the learner to such an extent that the learner's perception of the medium as certain reality no longer exists (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). In defining the modes of presence, Lehman and Conceição (2010) relied heavily on the work of Lombard and Ditton (1997), who are telecommunications experts.

The First mode of presence Lehman and Conceição (2010) described is *realism*. Realism relates to the degree that a particular medium (e.g. computer program, virtual reality) can create an environment including the people, objects, and events within it to look, sound, and/or feel like the mediated environment is actually the real thing (Lehman & Conceição, 2010; Lombard & Ditton, 1997).

The Second mode of presence is *Immersion*. Two types of immersion exist. *Perceptual Immersion* is the "degree to which a virtual environment submerges (or takes over) the perceptual system of the user" (Biocca & Levy, 1995, p.57). This requires the senses of the user to be immersed into the virtual world, and the perception of the real world around the user is diminished (Biocca & Levy, 1995). *Sense immersion* happens when the user's eyes are covered by a head-mount, gloves cover the hands, and headphones and earplugs muffle ambient noise (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). Examples of virtual reality environments include the online 3D virtual community, Second Life (Lehman & Conceição, 2010), and virtual reality games.

The third mode of presence is *Involvement*. When learners are involved with each other and the instructor in interactive engagement, a sense of presence is experienced (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). Interactive engagement activities may include group projects that require

discussion; partnerships with other learners; project management; project timelines; and presentations to their classmates (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). This mode of presence supports the learner's sense of "being together with others" in the online environment.

Lastly, the authors described the final mode of presence as the willing *suspension of disbelief*. When learners read a book, watch a movie, or see a play, they may willingly suspend their concrete analytical selves, allow themselves to become lost in imagination and their own creativity, and accept what they see, read, and hear as reality. "They recognize what is happening, but give up what they believe to be true" (Lehman & Conceição, 2010, p.19). This mode of presence supports the learner's sense of "being there…a feeling they are present in the total learning experience" (Lehman & Conceição, 2010, p.20).

Dimensions of the Learner. Based on the work of Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2001), Lehman and Conceição described the three *Dimensions of the Learner*. The first dimension is the learner's *inner world*. It is that place in the mind in which learners analyze and synthesize information presented in the online educational environment (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). It is a place in which learners reflect and store their innermost thoughts on the information presented. From this inner world, learners move to the outer world through a "*perceptual/conceptual process*" (Lehman & Conceição, 2010, p.20). This transition is where the learner communicates his or her experiences, thoughts, and opinions with other learners in the online learning environment in the third dimension of the learner, the *concrete world* (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). Lehman and Conceição argue these dimensions are important to the learner's experience of presence because the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors experienced through these dimensions directly affect the learner's experience of presence (Lehman &

Conceição, 2010). Figure 2-1 is an illustration and explanation of The Being There for the

Online Learner Model.

Figure 2-1

The Being There for the Online Learner Model
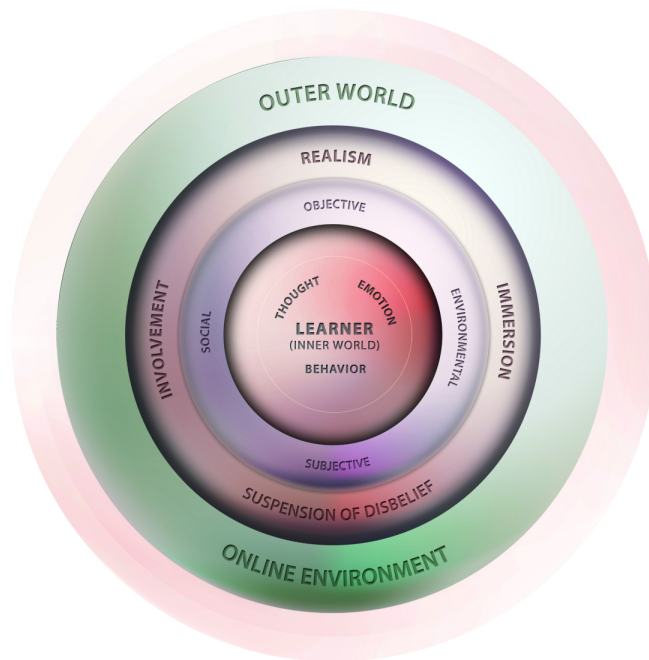
Lehman & Conceição, 2010. Used with authors' permission.

The authors describe the graphic depiction of the Model as follows:

> Think of the circular graphic in the figure as a cylinder containing three cylinders
>
> inside it, all of them in motion. The dark shaded lines between some of the cylinders
>
> highlight the interface between the inner and outer worlds of the learner. The outer
>
> cylinder is the physical world of the learner as a learner connects to the online
>
> environment via technology. The next two inner cylinders correspond to the types of
>
> experience and modes of presence. These two inner cylinders blend into each other and
>
> occur in combination of each other. Think of the center cylinder as the learner and the

learner's perceptual process, which includes the dynamic interplay between thought, emotion, and behavior. (Lehman & Conceição, 2010, pp. 22-23)

Using The Being There for the Online Learner Model

Can the Model be used to study the experiences of graduate nursing faculty members? The Being There for the Online Learner Model was conceived and written to be learner-centric. The experiences and modes of presence from the learner perspective, and the dimensions of the learner, are well documented and supported by the literature across disciplines. However, it is possible that The Being There for the Online Learner Model may also apply to the instructor. Indeed, in the description of the model, Lehman and Conceição (2010) make references to the instructor's mutual experience as they explain the learner's perspective. In doing so, they opened the door to using this Model to answer my research question: How do nursing faculty members experience the sense of presence in online education environments?

References to the instructor include Lehman and Conceição's (2010) argument that supports the importance of experiencing a sense of presence in online education. They argued that both learners and the instructor can experience a sense of "being there" (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). They believed that, for both learner and instructor, experiencing the sense of presence is not serendipitous. It requires the learner and instructor be aware of the environment, participate fully in the teaching-learning process, and ultimately take responsibility for thinking, feeling, and creating that sense of presence (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). Lehman and Conceição (2010) also believed that both learners and instructors could experience a sense of "being together in the online classroom" (p. 1).

Using Existing Literature to Enrich the Model.   Since the authors revealed the possibility this Model can be utilized to explicate the experience of sensing presence from the instructor perspective, it is important to reconsider the Model in the context of the literature used to develop the Model in the first place. An in-depth review of the literature (see Deconstructing The Being There for the Online Learner Model) yielded no reason to conclude that Lehman and Conceição's (2010) Model would not work to explicate the experience of sensing presence by instructors in the online environment. I found no contradictions between the Model and the extant literature. However, I was able to identify the concept of *Presence in Transportation,* and note its exclusion from the Model.   I believe the Model could be enriched by fully including the concept *Presence in Transportation* (Lombard & Ditton, 1997).

Lombard and Ditton (1997) identified three types of transportation. The first type of transportation, *You are There* is the perception that the user has been transported to another place or environment Biocca & Levy, 1995; Lombard & Ditton, 1997). This is similar to Minsky's (1980) perception of "Being there." The second type of transportation identified by the authors is *We are Together* (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). In this sense, media users believe that they share the same space as other users within the mediated environment. These two types of transportation lay the foundation for Lehman and Conceição's definition of presence. The last type of transportation is *It is Here.* In this instance, rather than transporting the user to another place, Lombard and Ditton (1997) argue that a sense of presence may bring an object, another user, or environment to the media user's environment.

It is Here is not a part of The Being There for the Online Learner Model, and is not part of the Lehman and Conceição's (2010) definition of presence. Consider that in online environments, the instructor is ultimately responsible for creating the teaching-learning

environment, and incorporating strategies into the online course that maximize the learner's ability to experience a sense of presence. As the instructor senses presence, it is possible that he or she may bring an object such as another user (i.e., the learners) to the instructor's environment. Therefore, it is conceivable that the instructor may sense that the learners are "Here" and "Together" with the instructor in the online learning environment.

Critique of Model and its Contribution to our Understanding of Nursing Education Science

The Being There for the Online Learner Model provides a conceptual framework from which we gain further understanding about the ways in which nursing faculty experience presence in online environments. The strength the Model brings to nursing science is its solid grounding in research literature across many disciplines. The major weakness of the Model is that, until this study, the Model has never been used as a framework for studying the sense of presence on students or faculty. Concurrent with this study, co-author of the Model, Simone Conceição, is currently conducting a study with students that explores the ways in which students experience a sense of presence in online learning environments.

As a professional discipline, nurse scholars develop, disseminate, and implement the knowledge gained through their research efforts (Faucett, 2000). To that end, I believe my research, supported by The Being There for the Online Learner Model, will contribute significantly to the discipline and science of nursing in the areas of online distance nursing education, faculty development, and presence. In this study, I endeavored to capture the experiences of presence of faculty members who participate in teaching graduate online courses. I believe the more the Nursing profession understands presence, the better it will create experiences that increase a sense of community and interaction between faculty and students in

online nursing courses. Understanding presence may improve the teacher-learner relationship, student outcomes, and ultimately affect patient outcomes.

Defining Presence Across Disciplines

In 1980, Marvin Minsky, the founder of MIT's Artificial Intelligence laboratory and an expert in robotics, wrote a visionary essay first describing the concept of *telepresence*. Building upon Robert A. Heinlein's 1942 short story, *Waldo*, Minsky theorized that as technology advances, scientists would be able to create an innumerable amount of instruments that could be controlled by humans remotely (Heinlein, 1950; Minsky, 1980). Soon, he believed, humans and machines would no longer be required to occupy the same physical space.

Minsky (1980) thought that remotely controlled instruments would allow humans (as *teleoperators* or *telefactors*) to control these instruments from anywhere in the world, even if that instrument was on another planet. He argued that as technology advances, so too will its ability to supply the instrument's user with an array of stimuli received through multiple human sensory channels such as sight, touch, pressure, textures, smell, etc. (Minsky, 1980). In effect, these types of *telepresence(s)* would enable the instrument's user to perceive a sense of "being there," as if the teleoperator was actually in the same physical place, or space, as the instrument (Minsky, 1980). Eventually, according to the author, the real-world application of telepresence would minimize dangerous (e.g. working in coal mines, colonizing other planets) and unpleasant tasks, and expand on the relatively limited abilities of humans (e.g. technology can work longer, harder, and be built stronger and more durable than humans) (Minsky, 1980).

Through his vision, Minsky described telepresence as the act of operating technology remotely (teleoperation), and experiencing, through the use of one's senses, the perception of "being there" in the same environment as the remote instrument (Minsky, 1980). Looking back

over the past three decades, one could argue Minsky's vision has become our reality. In recent

decades, humans witnessed the development of many remotely controlled instruments, including:

the rover on Mars; the pincher-like extensions used in underwater exploration and salvage;

remote controlled toy trucks, cars, helicopters, planes, robots; and a multitude of highly

interactive virtual reality games.

Since Minsky's 1980 essay, disciplines such as communications, engineering, computer

science, education, psychology, and nursing have adopted, adapted, researched and further

defined the concept of presence (Biocca, 1997; Lombard & Ditton, 1997). Yet, despite their best

efforts, researchers were unable to adopt a universally recognizable term for the concept.

Indeed, the interdisciplinary literature contains use of terms such as telepresence (Minsky, 1980),

virtual presence (Sheridan, 1992), mediated presence (Biocca, et al., 2001), and simply, presence

(Lehman & Conceição, 2010). A singular definition of presence remains equally elusive. Indeed,

many of the definitions in the literature are discipline-centric, and definitions even differ within

disciplines from study to study. In the hopes of bringing acceptance to a more unified

explication of presence, Lombard and Ditton (1997) analyzed literature from multiple

disciplines, and developed six conceptualizations to explain the concept of presence (Lombard &

Ditton, 1997). Each conceptualization is described below.

The first conceptualization is the *Presence of Social Richness*. Researchers in

communications and other disciplines believed that presence "is the extent to which a medium is

perceived as sociable, warm, sensitive, personal or intimate when it is used to interact with other

people" (Lombard & Ditton, 1997, p.4). For the purposes of this paper, the term *medium* is the

human-made technology that comes between us (as technology users) and our environment, or at

least our perception of that environment (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). These researchers believed

that a *transparent* medium (one that is invisible, or goes unnoticed, to the user so much that it causes the user the perceptual illusion of *nonmediation*) would provide the best opportunity for both verbal and non-verbal social interaction (Lombard & Ditton, 1997).

The second conceptualization is the *Presence of Realism*. Presence of realism relates to the degree that a particular medium (e.g. computer program, virtual reality) can create an environment including the people, objects, and events within it to look, sound, and/or feel like this mediated environment is actually the real thing (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). This conceptualization has practical implications for the field of virtual environments and reality.

Third is the conceptualization of *Presence as Transportation*. As described previously in the explication of the Model, Lombard and Ditton (1997) identified three types of transportation: The first type of transportation, *You are There* is the perception that the user has been transported to another place or environment (Biocca & Levy, 1995; Lombard & Ditton, 1997). This is similar to Minsky's (1980) perception of "Being there." The second type of transportation is *It is Here*. In this instance, rather than the transporting the user to another place, Lombard and Ditton (1997) argue that a sense of presence may bring an object, another user, or environment to the media user's environment. The last type of transportation identified when perceiving the sense of presence is *We are Together* (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). In this sense, media users believe that they share the same space as other users within the mediated environment.

The Fourth conceptualization is *Presence as Immersion*. Perceptual immersion is the "degree to which a virtual environment submerges the perceptual system of the user" (Biocca & Levy, 1995, p. 57). This requires the senses of the user to be immersed into the virtual world, and the perception of the real world around the user is diminished. Sense immersion can happen

when the user's eyes are covered by a head-mount, gloves cover the hands, and headphones and earplugs muffle ambient noise (Lombard & Ditton, 1997).

The Fifth Conceptualization is *Presence as Social Actor within Medium*. This sense of presence takes place when the media users' perceptions lead them to overlook, or ignore, the mediated, artificial nature of some environments (e.g. virtual) and attempt to interact with them. Examples of this include talking to figures on the TV or movie screen (e.g., emoting angrily in response to a televised sports event), or the virtual reality figure that takes on humanistic qualities such as computer voice, appropriate human gestures, facial movements, and social cues (Lombard, 1995; Lombard & Ditton, 1997).

The sixth, and final, conceptualization that Lombard and Ditton present is the *Presence as Medium as Social Actor*. In this conceptualization, the sense of presence involves the media users' responses to cues provided by the media itself, not simply to people or computer characters within the medium. The idea is that if computers (technology) can behave and speak like humans, interact in real time, and fill social roles, even the most experienced users will respond to these media as social entities (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). Examples of this can be found on television and the big screen including Data in *Star Trek*, and C3PO and R2D2 in the movie *Star Wars*.

Lombard and Ditton defined P*resence* as the "perceptual illusion of nonmediation" (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). This definition is further described in Table 2-2. The authors argued that sensing presence is not possible unless the person is using a medium, or human-made technology. Presence either occurs or does not occur, it does not occur in degrees of intensity (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). They argued that a user who perceives that a particular medium or mediated experience creates more or less presence (a higher or lower degree of intensity) is

actually experiencing the number of instances in which the illusion of nonmediation occurs in the experience (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). The more often, or the longer, the illusion of nonmediation occurs, the more intense the user's sense of presence will be (Lombard & Ditton, 1997).

Table 2-2

Explication of the Definition of Presence

Concepts	Definition
Perceptual	Presence involves continuous (real time) responses of the human sensory, cognitive, and affective processing systems to objects and entities in a person's environment.
Illusion of Nonmediation	Occurs when a person fails to perceive or acknowledge the existence of a medium in his/her communication environment and response as he/she would if the medium were not there. This is also called "Transparency".
Medium	The human-made technology that comes between ourselves (as user) and our environment, and our perception of that environment.

Note. Adapted from: Lombard & Ditton (1997).

In 2000, Lombard reported the following clear explication of the concept of presence, taken from a now defunct Presence-L Listserv discussion board sponsored by Temple University (as quoted in Lee, 2004):

Presence (a shortened version of the term "telepresence") is a psychological state or subjective perception in which even though part or all of the individual's current experience is generated by and/or filtered through human-made technology, part or all of the individual's perception fails to accurately acknowledge the role of the technology in

the experience. Except in the most extreme cases, the individual can indicate correctly that s/he is using the technology, but at "some level" and to "some degree," her/his perceptions overlook that knowledge and objects, events, entities, and environments are perceived as if technology was not involved in the experience. Experience is defined as a person's observation of and/or interaction with objects, entities, and/or events in her/his environment; perception, the result of that perceived, is defined as a meaningful interpretation of experience. (Lee, 2004, p. 32)

Building on the work of Lombard and Ditton (1997), Ijsselsteijn et al., (2000) grouped the six conceptualizations into two broad interrelated categories: physical (the sense of being physically located somewhere) and social (the feeling of being together, communicating with others). They argued that while these categories may remain mutually exclusive, they are often *co-present*, or co-exist, in the same mediated experience (Ijsselsteijn, et al., 2000). Lehman and Conceição (2010) used their argument as the basis of their definition of presence in an online educational context. They defined the sense of presence as "being there and being together with others" in the online education environment (Lehman & Conceição, 2010, p. 3).

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Review of the Research Literature

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Measuring Presence in Virtual Reality, Virtual Environments, Telecommunications, and Human-Computer Interactions

This section provides an overview of research literature on presence in disciplines such as virtual reality, virtual environments, telecommunications, and human-computer interactions. To conduct a complete and exhaustive review of the literature on presence, as it is conceptualized differently by each of these disciplines, would be counterproductive, and provide little additive value to the study of presence in online learning environments. Consequently, I used original

sources referenced in Lehman and Conceição's book, *Creating a Sense of Presence in Online Teaching How to "Be There" for Distance Learners (2010),* and the references of these orginial sources to narrow my search to those sources most relevant to my research question. In this section, I provide an overview of how researchers in these disciplines study and measure presence, and the advantages and disadvantages these measures bring to the research process.

Presence began to take its foothold as a concept in the 1980's and 1990's and, as a result, gained importance in the fields related to human-computer interaction (e.g. virtual reality, virtual environments, and computer-mediated-communication) (Ijsselsteijn, et al., 2000). Researchers believed that if they could measure a user's sense of presence within a computer-mediated environment then computer programmers, and display, interface and content developers would be able to identify the factors that best create presence, integrate them into the computer-mediated experience, and ultimately enhance the experience of the user (Ijsselsteijn, et al., 2000). Early in the study of presence, researchers began by utilizing subjective post-immersion questionnaires given to participants immediately after the virtual immersion. Despite its disadvantages (enumerated below), some researchers continue to find utility in this method (Insko, 2003). Later, with the goal of creating more objective measures, researchers began to incorporate behavioral and physiological measures into their study design (Insko, 2003).

Research related to the subjective measure of presence. Researchers argued that since presence is a subjective sensation, it seems reasonable to measure one's sense of presence subjectively. Most often, this means employing a post-test (post-immersion) rating scale. Post-test rating scales have been utilized to study presence by researchers including Slater et al., (1997) who employed a post-test questionnaire, called the Slater-Usoh-Steed (SUS) questionnaire, to participants after they were immersed in a virtual environment. Researchers

asked participants three questions, using a Likert scale, to measure their sense of presence in the virtual environment; a) did the participants experience a sense of "being there" in the computer-generated world, b) how often did the computer-generated world experience become a dominant reality to the participants (in a sense, forgetting about the "real" world outside), and c) and if they considered the computer-generated world as a place they have "seen" or actually "visited" (Ijsselsteijn, et al., 2000; Slater, Usoh, & Steed, 1997).

In 1998, Witmer and Singer developed a presence questionnaire that focused on four major determinants of presence; control factors, sensory factors, distraction factors, and realism factors (Witmer & Singer, 1998). A more recent study by Nordahl et al. (2012) included the use of post-immersion presence questionnaires when studying the enhanced realism of virtual environments through the use of audio-haptic technologies. They wanted to learn more about the role of auditory and haptic technology feedback, and its ability to enhance realism in a virtual environment (Nordahl, Sarafin, Nilsson, & Turchet, 2012). Auditory technology includes any sound that is part of the virtual environment experience such as common ambient noises one would expect to experience if there were in a real environment. Haptic technology simulates a user's sense of touch or physical existence in the virtual environment. A common example of this technology includes 4D cinemas in which one's physical self is being influenced by technology such as a seat rumbling while the user is immersed in the big screen video launch of a shuttle take off. Another example includes the audio and vibratory sense a user feels when he or she enters a phone number into a smart phone. This sensation allows us to know that each phone number we enter on the key display was actually recognized by the phone.

Ijsselsteijn, et al. (2000) argued that post-test rating scales do not measure the user's "real-time" variations in experiencing the sense of presence. As a remedy, some researchers

applied a method called continuous presence assessment (Ijsselsteijn, et al., 2000).   Through this

method, participants were required to provide a continuous account of their sense of presence by

using an electronic slider to measure constant rate (Ijsselsteijn, et al., 1997; Ijsselsteijn, et al.,

1998). Table 2-3 illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of subjective measurement of

presence (Insko, 2003), specifically in post-test rating scales and continuous presence

assessments:

Table 2-3

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Subjective Measurement of Presence

Subjective Measurement	Advantages	Disadvantages
Post-Test Scale	Possess face validity	Fail to measure time-varying nature of sense of presence
	Easy to deploy, grade and interpret	May only reflect participant's memory at end of the experience
	Do not interfere with experience (Test)	Fatigue and boredom can influence responses
	Participants likely do not know what presence means	Prior experience may influence responses
Continuous Presence Assessment	Take into account time-varying nature of sense of presence	Distracts the participant from the experience by bringing participant back to "reality"
		Prior experiences may influence responses

Note. Adapted from: Insko (2003).

Research related to the objective measure of presence: behavioral measures. In an

effort to move away from subjective towards objective measures, scholars sought to measure the

involuntary responses of each participant as correlates to sensing presence in a virtual

environment (Insko, 2003). From this behavioral perspective, researchers argued that "the more

a participant feels present in a virtual environment, the more his responses to stimuli will more nearly match those behaviors he would exhibit in an identical real environment" (Insko, 2003, p. 113). Examples of behavioral measures studied in the literature include postural responses (Freeman, Avons, Meddis, Pearson, & Ijsselsteijn, 2000) and stress behaviors exhibited when a participant (virtually) comes near a deep pit in the ground. These behaviors can include leaning away from the pit, and tentatively testing the edge of the pit with one's virtual foot (Meehan, 2001). Other behavioral measures include startle responses, flinching and ducking, and closing one's eyes in uncomfortable situations (Held & Durlach, 1992).

The advantages of using behavioral measures to measure presence include the lack of subject bias, and lack of intrusion into the participant's experience (as compared to continuous presence assessments) (Insko, 2003). Disadvantages include greater bias, the inability to know for certain that the experience is what caused an observed behavior, and the post-experience work effort that goes into reviewing and grading participant videos (Insko, 2003).

Research related to the objective measure of presence: physiological measures.
There are myriad physiological responses to a virtual environment that can be measured. The majority of researchers prefer non-invasive physiological parameters such as monitoring the change in heart rate (Wiederhold, et al., 2001), skin conductance (Wiederhold, et al., 2001), and skin temperature (Insko, 2003). The advantages of using physiological measures to measure presence include being more objective than other types of measures (subjective, and behavioral), and a continuous measure of presence (Insko, 2003). Disadvantages include physiological responses could be the result of other stimuli, outside the virtual environment (Insko, 2003). Another disadvantage is that physiological responses vary from person to person, requiring researchers to measure baseline readings (Insko, 2003) and changes over time.

Evaluation of Literature and study implications. Review of the literature pertaining to the study presence across disciplines explicates two main measures of sensing presence: subjective and objective (i.e., behavioral, and physiological). In addition to explicating the advantages and disadvantages above, it is important to consider these measures and their utility studying the sense of presence of graduate nursing faculty in the online courses they teach. I agree it is reasonable to measure a subjective sensation (i.e., presence), subjectively. Researchers already measure presence subjectively through post-immersion scales and questionnaires or continuous presence assessment.

Continuous presence assessments require participants to provide an ongoing account of their sense of presence by using an electronic slider to measure constant rate. Consider, in an online educational environment, how distracting this method could be. If a participant is more concerned about whether they sense presence, the distraction can lead to an inhibited or absent sense of presence. It can even interfere in the teaching-learning process. The use of behavioral and physiological measures to study the sense of presence of graduate faculty in the online courses they teach is equally problematic. Behavioral and physiological measures are, while more accurate, less meaningful in the classroom than they are in an action-packed virtual reality games and other media. Virtual classrooms simply do not manipulate the environment to create stressors (e.g., the sensation of dangling off the side of a cliff, or confronting one's fears) that elicit involuntary behavioral or physiological responses.

Measuring Presence in Nursing Education Science

Scholarly research on presence in nursing science is scant and limited to the study of one type of experience of presence; that is, social presence. The section begins with a review of the concept of social presence, followed by a detailed systematic review of presence in the online

nursing education literature. Review of the literature revealed only seven research studies that sought to understand the role presence plays in online nursing education environments. Doctoral theses accounted for five of the research studies. The other two were articles published in the Journal Nursing Education Perspectives. Each of these studies is reviewed and critiqued below.

Defining social presence

Social Presence is both a concept and a theory (Social Presence Theory) that was first developed by Short, Williams, and Christie (1976). They defined social presence as "the degree of salience (i.e., the quality or perceptual prominence) of the other person in the interaction, and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships" (p.65, as cited in Cobb, 2009). They believed the quality of social presence is generated largely by the communications medium being utilized, and that each medium (such as text-based discussions, phone, audio tapes and other technologies available at the time) possessed a certain level of individual social presence capacity (Cobb, 2009). The authors also believed that the intimacy of these interactions (which could be influenced by physical distance, eye contact, smiling, and personal topics of conversation), and their immediacy (the psychological distance between communicators) could also contribute to, and enhance social presence (Cobb, 2009). Gunawardena (1995) defined the concept of social presence as "the degree to which a person is perceived as a "real person" in mediated communication" (Gunawardena, 1995, p.151). Through her research, she concluded that it was not the medium itself that determined the level of social presence, or possessed individual social presence capacity, but rather the techniques utilized by the moderator (e.g. the instructor) were responsible for creating a socially present environment (Cobb, 2009; Lowenthal, 2010).

The popular Community of Inquiry Model, created by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) includes social presence as one of its core components. This Model illustrates how learning occurs within a community (in this case, an online learning community) through the interaction of three essential components: social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence (Garrison et al., 2000). *Cognitive presence* is the participant's ability to construct meaning through consistent, sustained online communication (Cobb, 2009). *Teaching presence* is defined as "the ability of participants in the community of inquiry to project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to others as "real people" (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 94).

As did Gunawardena (1995), the authors also disagreed with Short et al., (1976) stating they do not "believe that the effect of media per se is the most salient factor in determining the degree of social presence that participants develop and share through the mediated discourse" (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 94). They further argued that social presence, combined with teaching presence, provides the foundation for critical thinking and positive student outcomes (Cobb, 2009).

Tu (2002) defined social presence as "the degree of feeling, perception, and reaction of being connected by CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) to another intellectual entity" (Tu, 2002, p. 2). Lastly, Kehrwald (2008) defined social presence as "an individuals ability to demonstrate [learners'] state of being in a virtual environment and so signal [their] availability for interpersonal transactions" (Kehrwald, 2008, p. 94). While no clear universally agreed upon definition of social presence exists, similarities within definitions above are worth noting. Most definitions included: a sense of connectedness or community (Biocca et al., 2001), a sense of "being there" and "being with" others (Lehman & Conceição, 2010), the perception that all

participants are "real" (Garrison et al., 2000), and the ability to develop interpersonal relationships with other participants through computer-mediated communication (Garrison et al., 2000). Upon examination of these and other definitions, it remains clear that researchers continue to define and redefine the meaning of social presence (Lowenthal, 2010).

Measuring social presence in online nursing courses

In 2005, Brownrigg examined the role of social presence in online nursing educational environments. She sought to determine the relationship between 'connectedness' and social presence, prompt feedback, the learner's collaboration and interaction between peers, and student and faculty interactions (Brownrigg, 2005). Using Billings' Framework for Assessing Outcomes and Practices in Web-based Courses, Brownrigg conducted a descriptive, correlational study with a significant research sample comprised of 463 self-selected BSN, RN-to-BSN and MSN nursing students from four participating schools of higher learning (Brownrigg, 2005). Each participant was asked to complete two surveys; the Social Presence Survey (14-item), created by Gunawardena and Zittle (1997), and the EEUWIN survey (57-item) instruments (Brownrigg, 2005).

As early pioneers in the study of social presence and computer-mediated communication in online educational settings, Gunawardena and Zittle (1997) built upon Gunawardena's previous work (1995) to create the *Social Presence Scale* as a subscale in their previously created GlobalEd Questionnaire. The Social Presence Scale is a post-test measurement that includes 14 items that asks students to rank their responses from 1 to 5 (1 = Strongly Disagree, and 5= Strongly Agree). Gunawardena and Zittle tested the scale for internal consistency and yielded a Cronbach's Alpha score of .88 (Lowenthal, 2010).

The Social Presence Scale has been utilized as a measure of social presence in both nursing and non-nursing online courses (Cobb, 2009). Richardson and Swan (2003) used a modified version of the Social Presence Scale to examine "the relationship among students' perception of social presence in online courses, students' perceived learning and their satisfaction with the instructor" (Richardson & Swan, 2003, p. 71). In this correlational research design, Richardson and Swan surveyed a group of 97 students who completed an online course in 2000. Results indicated that students who perceived higher social presence scores also perceived they learned more from the course than those who perceived lower social presence scores, and reported greater satisfaction with their instructor (Richardson & Swan, 2003).

The EEUWIN instrument is a 57-item survey developed by the Flashlight Program of the American Association of Higher Education (Cox-Davenport, 2011). Forty questions measure nursing student perceptions of outcomes, practices, and the use of technology in web-based courses. Fifteen questions focus on participant demographic data, and two questions are open-ended, allowing students to elaborate on the strengths and weaknesses of the course (Cox-Davenport, 2011).

Analysis of Brownrigg's data included a test for reliability. Cronbach's alphas for the Social Presence Survey were .69. Typically, a Cronbach's Alpha of .70 or higher is considered an adequate measure of reliability (Takvakol & Dennick, 2011). These results could point to a weakness in this study. Cronbach's alphas for each sub-scale of the EEUWIN survey were .79 for connectedness, .84 for student-faculty interactions, and .88 for interaction with peers (Brownrigg, 2005). The relationship between the practices of prompt feedback, collaboration and interaction among peers, and student-faculty interaction and the outcome of connectedness was tested. Notable outcomes included a strong correlation between connectedness and student-

faculty interactions (r =.820, p<.001), and a moderate correlation between social presence and connectedness (r =.515, p<.001) . In a multiple regression test, the variables student-faculty interaction and the interaction among peers accounted for 71.5% of the variance in connectedness. Feedback did not contribute to variance in connectedness. Brownrigg (2005) also utilized regression analysis to determine the relationship between social presence and the outcome of connectedness. The results indicated that social presence accounted for 26.5% of the variance in connectedness (R^2=.265, p<.001).

In 2005, Kaiser explored the meaning of presence in online nursing courses. She utilized a grounded theory approach to examine how nurse educators conveyed being present to students in online classrooms, how students interacted with faculty and others students, and if nurse educators engaged students in ways they could be present with their patients (Kaiser, 2005). Seventeen nurse educators and 16 students from 15 universities participated in online focus groups. Questions for each group were very similar. Below are examples of focus group questions Kaiser asked nurse educators (Kaiser, 2005, pp. 43-44):

- Describe some strategies that you feel are helpful in establishing a sense of presence in online courses.
- Are there qualities that an online educator should possess that enhance the notion of presence?
- Can you share some examples of how others, (students and guests) convey being presence to you in the cyber classroom?

From the data collected in the focus groups, Kaiser developed the "Theory of Connecting/Being Present in Online Nursing Courses" (Kaiser, 2005, p. 65).

The researcher identified conditions or antecedents to being present, including the actions and interactions of faculty and students, and their personal characteristics. Barriers to being present in the online classroom included "life events, " the decision not to interact, and varying technological capacities of its participants (Kaiser, 2005). Other barriers include faculty workload, infrastructure, and individual preference for independence. Participants were motivated to be present when they wanted to keep in touch, to give and receive support, or when the course required it (Kaiser, 2005). Participants reported connecting to others via video conferencing, email, phone, or face-to-face. Finally, the consequences of connecting or not connecting with others were identified. Not connecting led to having an absent instructor, isolation of students, and diminished faculty role (Kaiser, 2005). Connecting with others led to positive course outcomes, increased student satisfaction, and positive student-faculty relationships (Kaiser, 2005).

Kaiser's (2005) research focused on what it takes to be present in online environments, as if presence was the intentional physical act of being there and being connected with others that creates presence. She based her research on how presence is understood as it evolved over time to include its meaning in technology. However, I am not certain that the author reached a full understanding of presence as it related to online educational environments. Rather, I believe she considered the dictionary definition of presence, as it was originally intended, and incorporated it into a limited understanding of presence in online educational environments. A more thorough background in the concepts of presence in online educational environments, disciplines outside nursing and education, social presence, and the Community of Inquiry Model are necessary steps to gain full understanding of the phenomenon of presence.

In 2008, Cobb studied social presence among RN-to-BSN students in online nursing courses to better understand its relationship to satisfaction and perceived learning, and to know if the differences between social presence, perceived satisfaction and perceived learning related to student demographic characteristics (Cobb, 2008). Utilizing Billing's Framework for Assessing Outcomes in Web-based Nursing Courses (Billings, 2000) as a theoretical framework, Cobb recruited 128 students in an RN-to-BSN program from a northeastern college in the United States (Cobb, 2008).

Cobb utilized two survey instruments, the Social Presence Scale described above, and a 10-item Satisfaction Scale. Cronbach's Alpha was measured at .87 and .85 respectively. As did Richardson and Swan (2003), Cobb (2008) reported that social presence is highly correlated with overall course satisfaction (r=.63, p<.001). There was also a strong correlation between social presence and perceived learning (r=.61, p<.001). Social presence and instructor performance were found to predict overall satisfaction and perceived learning. Social presence and perceived learning were found to have no relationship to student characteristics. I share Cobb's assessment of her study's limitations. She highlighted concerns that her sample may not fully represent all nurses who take online courses. She also believed that participants were exposed to a multitude of instructor influences outside the scope of the study.

In 2011, Cobb published the methodology and results of her 2008 study. In the article she provided the following recommendations to faculty who wish to create a sense of social presence in their online courses. These recommendations included (Cobb, 2011, pp. 118-119):

- Providing discussion forums for introduction,
- Taking an active role in facilitating class discussions,
- Ensuring students' viewpoints are acknowledged, and

- Providing instructors with information on best practices in online education

In 2009, Joyner conducted a phenomenological study to determine "how doctoral students perceive the development of social presence in asynchronous learning environments," while using social presence theory as her conceptual framework (Joyner, 2009, p. 9). To carryout this study, Joyner recruited 18 online doctoral students who were in their first- to fourth-year of school. Telephone interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide.

A sample of the interview questions is included below (Joyner, 2009, pp. 126-127):

- Do you feel that you know some of your classmates, even though you communicate with them online? Why or why not?

- What do you think about when you are preparing to post a message to the course discussions? Do you think about how you will sound to others? Why or why not? Do you think about how what you say will influence how other think of you? Why or why not?

- Did you use any strategies to put personal touches in your message? If so, why did you want to make yourself sound more personal in online discussions? If no, why not?

- As the tone of your voice is not available in the online educational environment, did you find that a big constraint when communicating with your peers? Why or why not? If so, what did you do to overcome the constraints?

The researcher reported that the participating doctoral learners identified four key themes that describe the development of presence: writing skills of the poster, content and requirements, building relationships with colleagues and instructor, and interaction in and out of the classroom (Joyner, 2009). The interview questions above are good at probing into the experiences of social

presence. They are specific to asynchronous online learning, and some would need to be modified to account for experience with synchronous learning environments. Other questions relating to the three other types of experiences of presence (i.e., objective, subjective, and environmental presence) could also strengthen this study.

In 2011, Cox-Davenport explored the faculty's perception of 'climate factors' and their role in creating social presence in an online course (Cox-Davenport, 2011). Climate factors refer to the overlap of social presence and teaching in the Community of Inquiry Model (Garrison et al., 2000). Specifically, climate factors "consist of faculty influences of students' communication, cohesion, and self-expression in the online course (Cox-Davenport, 2011, p. 5). The purpose of her study was "to generate a grounded theory regarding the understanding and practice of nursing faculty related to their use of climate factors in establishing social presence in an online course" (Cox-Davenport, 2011, p. 6). In this study, 10 nurse educators who participated in faculty interviews, course visualizations, and review of syllabi (Cox-Davenport, 2011).

Using grounded theory methodology, analysis of the data revealed the core theoretical category of "humanizing" as a central climate factor in establishing presence (Cox-Davenport, 2011). The researcher concluded that faculty understood social presence in three distinct perceptions, shared professional members, facilitating connections, and student control (Cox-Davenport, 2011). Actions to create social presence, as identified by faculty, included being a cyber role model, maintenance of both the course and students, and the awareness of student behaviors.

Building upon previous literature on social presence, Mayne and Wu (2011) examined the effects of "purposeful integration" of certain social presence strategies into an online

graduate research course. Using a modified Social Presence Scale based upon Richardson and Swan (2003), and Rovai's Self-Report Classroom Community Scale (Rovai, Wighting, & Lucking, 2004). Twelve items were selected to Social Presence, specifically those that represented cohesiveness, spirit of trust, belonging, and social community (Mayne & Wu, 2011). In this comparison study, researchers selected two sections of a graduate research design course. The instructor for one section integrated social presence techniques, while the instructor for the other course did not (Mayne & Wu, 2011). Twenty-six students participated. Results of the study found no significant difference between the groups for age. The Social Presence scores indicated that the group that integrated social presence techniques had significantly greater perceptions that the expectations for the online learning course were met, and would likely continue taking online courses (Mayne & Wu, 2011).

Gaps in the Literature

Literature across disciplines. As technology development and the creation of virtual environments is not my area of expertise, it would be difficult to postulate what gaps in knowledge exist in the study of presence in other disciplines such as human-computer, virtual reality/environment and telecommunications. However, a review of their most significant studies, specifically as they pertain to study methodology and measurement, brings to light possible strategies for measuring presence in the fields of online education and nursing. Review of the literature supports the use of subjectively measuring the sense presence in graduate nursing faculty in the online courses they teach with post-immersion scales, questionnaires, and similar methods of capturing data. What is interesting about the review of the literature in nursing is that it includes only seven research studies related to presence, and all but one directly relate to social presence. It is unclear why this is the case. It may simply be the result of each

researcher's selection of literature to review. It is also possible that, until Lehman and Conceição (2010) synthesized the literature of presence from multiple disciplines, a full understanding of presence could not be realized.

Literature in nursing education science. In reviewing the nursing research literature related to presence, I identified significant gaps, including:

- Researchers only studied Social Presence. They did not research other experiences of presence (i.e., subjective, objective, and environmental) explicated in the Being There for the Online Learning Model and extant literature.

- No researcher has studied how (graduate) nursing faculty experience the sense of presence in the online courses they teach.

- The Being There for the Online Learner Model has not been used to research presence in nursing education science.

- Nursing researchers studied presence only in the context of asynchronous learning environments. This could be the result of the infancy of video conferencing technology at the time these studies were conducted. Video teleconferencing technology is now more effecting and widely used, which prompts me to strongly consider studying those who experience presence in online learning environments that incorporate synchronous video teleconferencing capabilities.

Conclusion

The Being There for the Online Learner Model is grounded in research literature across a multitude of disciplines. Lehman and Conceição (2010) created a conceptual framework in an attempt to explicate how learners in online education environments experience the sense of presence. They defined presence as "Being There and Being Together with Others" in the online

educational environment (Lehman & Conceição, 2010, p. 3). In the Being There for the Online Learner Model, Lehman and Conceição describe and illustrate the relationship between the different types of experiences of presence, the ways in which learners experience presence, and how the dimensions of the learner affect their sense of presence.

Lehman and Conceição (2010) created their Model to be learner-centric, but they also describe how instructors may also experience the sense of presence. It is possible that including the concept of "It is Here" may enrich the Model as a more instructor-centric framework upon which one can answer how nurse faculty experience the sense of presence in online learning environments. The Being There for the Online Learner Model provides a solid, multi-disciplinary foundation upon which I studied the experiences of graduate nursing faculty members who teach in online courses.

A thorough review of the literature on presence across disciplines such as communications, engineering, computer science, education, and psychology provided a solid background for understanding the sense of presence. In the 1980's and 1990's, the goal of researchers was to measure a user's sense of presence so they could identify the factors that best contributed to experiencing the sense of presence, and ultimately enhance the experience of the user (Ijsselsteijn, et al., 2000). They measured a user's sense of presence by utilizing subjective post-immersion questionnaires, continuous presence assessments, behavioral measures, and physiological measures. Review of the literature supports the use of subjectively measuring the sense of presence in graduate nursing faculty in the online courses they teach with post-immersion scales, questionnaires, and similar methods of capturing data.

Nursing Science literature on sensing presence in online education environments is scant and limited to the study of one type of presence; that is, social presence. Within the seven

studies identified, none of the researchers addressed broadly the concept of presence to include other experiences (i.e. subjective, objective, and environmental). Nor did they take into account how graduate faculty members experience the sense of presence in these online educational environments. Lastly, I identified no studies in which the sense of presence using synchronous video teleconferencing capabilities was addressed.

Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter provides a comprehensive description of the overall research design, beginning with the rationale for using a qualitative research approach, hermeneutic phenomenology, and deductive inquiry methods. Next, the research site, from which the study participants were recruited, the research population, research sample, methods for data collection, management, and data analysis are described. Lastly, ethical considerations, and issues of trustworthiness are reviewed.

Study Synopsis

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to increase our understanding of the lived experiences of how graduate nursing faculty experience the sense of presence in the online courses they teach. This study sought to answer the question, "In what ways do graduate nursing faculty experience the sense of presence in online environments?" The study answered the question using a qualitative design approach consisting of document review and in-depth interviews of a purposive sample of 13 participants.

Design

Using a qualitative research approach

Ritchie and Lewis (2003) believed that if we, as researchers, are to gain a value-added understanding of the world, we must engage our research participants to tell us about their experiences, thoughts, feelings, and life stories. To do this, researchers must use a qualitative approach. Qualitative approaches to research are not utilized to determine causality, provide a quantitative accounting of the phenomenon being studied, or to test a hypothesis. Rather, qualitative research "is a systematic, subjective approach used to describe life experiences and give them meaning" (Burns & Grove, 2005, p. 52). It is an opportunity for the researcher to

discover meaning in another's social experience (Burns & Grove, 2005), and the context in which this phenomena exists (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). A qualitative approach provided me the opportunity to better understand the meaning of presence by eliciting from the study participants perceptions, thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and associated meanings related to their experiences teaching in an online educational environment.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Grounded in its philosophical underpinnings, methods related to hermeneutic phenomenology were used to investigate the everyday experience, or *Lifeworld*, of nursing faculty members who teach in online educational environments, specifically as the experiences relate to their sense of presence. German philosopher and mathematician, Edmund Husserl, who practiced in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is considered to be the father of the philosophy and method of inquiry called phenomenology (LeVasseur, 2003; McConnell, Chapman, & Francis, 2009; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). From his disillusionment with the contemporary scientific methods of his time, he developed a method of inquiry called descriptive (eidetic) phenomenology (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Descriptive phenomenology is epistemological (Mackey, 2005). Husserl believed the researcher is most concerned with understanding the lived experiences of others, and reducing those experiences to common essences, or ideas (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Husserl also believed consciousness was something all humans experienced (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Consciousness, or human awareness, according to Husserl, was not only universal, but also intentional, which Husserl called *intentionality* (Cohen et al., 2000). He argued that one who is conscious of something is doing so intentionally, and the study of one's experiences with phenomena could reveal that consciousness (Cohen et al., 2000).

Husserl believed participants represent the world in which they live, and their experiences have scientific value (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Another important element of Husserlian (descriptive) phenomenology is the argument that the researcher must bracket (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007), or set aside and momentarily forget, all prior personal knowledge of the phenomena in order for the phenomenon to truly reveal itself and the study to maintain its scientific rigor (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Indeed, even conducting a literature review, or creating an interview schedule (i.e., a list of questions) may be considered anathema to the Husserlian phenomenologist. According to Husserl, the goal of the researcher is to make certain, through thoughtful self-reflection, that all biases and perceptions of the phenomena are bracketed. Husserl called this practice, transcendental subjectivity (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

A student of Husserl, Martin Heidegger, believed that any description of one's life experience could never be void of interpretation (Mackey, 2005). According to Wojnar and Swanson (2007), Heidegger argued that the experiences of others, and the researcher's full understanding of those experiences, "cannot occur in isolation of their culture, social context, or historical period in which they live" (p. 174). To fully understand a particular phenomenon and its meaning, interpretation of these life experiences (van Manen, 1990), in this broader context, must take place. Through this lens, Heidegger put great emphasis on understanding the phenomena in context (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

According to Mackey (2005), In addition to the need for understanding phenomena in context, Heidegger believed that one's existence is, "embedded in-the-world and our being-in-the-world cannot be separate from the world" (p. 181). He postulated there are many ways of Being-in-the-world. One such way was to simply be aware of one's own existence in the world, or the awareness of one's own Being (Mackey, 2005). He called this concept, *dasein* (Wojnar &

Swanson, 2007).   The understanding of one's Being can be achieved in an accounting of one's average typical daily experience (Mackey, 2005). This process of understanding can be performed through self-interpretation, or interpretation by others (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Heidegger's insisted that, when using phenomenology as a method of inquiry, the researcher should participate in both descriptive and interpretive activities (Mackey, 2005). The interpretive process requires the researcher to take the description of the experiences the participant reports as reality, or at face value (Mackey, 2005). For the researcher, the interpretive process begins when he or she engages in the phenomenon for the first time (Mackey, 2005). The process continues throughout the entire analytical process (Mackey, 2005). The interpretive process requires the researcher to "pursue the fore-structures and thematic meanings held in the data" (Mackey, 2005, p. 182).

Fore-structure is everything that is known or understood about a phenomenon prior to the beginning of the interpretive process (Mackey, 2005). Fore-structure is the "context dependent knowledge, opinion and experiences, which the researcher and participants bring to the research study" (Mackey, 2005, p. 182). For Heidegger, interpretation is a process of making explicit those fore-structures (background meaning), and reconsidering their meaning through the understanding of participant experience (Mackey, 2005).

Heidegger believed the researcher could not fully be able to interpret the meanings of participant experience without considering *time* and *space* (Mackey, 2005). In hermeneutic phenomenology, "all human experience is grounded in time, and that the experience of time is fundamental to an understanding of Being, and ways of being" (Mackey, 2005, p. 183). The researcher must understand the participant's experience as it is situated in time, so that time as an experience is revealed (Mackey, 2005).

Heidegger believed Being-in-the-world is not only temporal, but is also spatial (Mackey, 2005). He argued that everything in the world, "belongs somewhere" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 171), including human beings. *Being-in-the-world* means that humans are spatially situated, something he calls "the there" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 171). Heidegger believed, "from the position of 'the there,' the person is always either bringing something close to them ('here'), or experiencing it as remote ('yonder')" (Mackey, 2005, p. 184). The idea of bringing someone close to them, or experiencing them as remote, was not solely about the physical distance. Being spatially situated is also about a person's closeness to, or what matters to the person about, that something (Mackey, 2005).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology and the Study of Presence

Hermeneutic phenomenology provides a strong philosophical and methodological basis to fully understand the experience of presence. The tenants of hermeneutic phenomenology can be incorporated into a study's design as a means to investigate the everyday experiences of graduate nurse faculty members as they teach in online educational environments. The principles of hermeneutic phenomenology enabled me to gain understanding, and interpret the experiences of, graduate nursing faculty through the context of institutional, social, cultural, historical, and other influences.

Further support for using hermeneutic phenomenology, both as a philosophical underpinning and a method of inquiry to study the sense of presence, comes from its similarities to how researchers conceptualize the sense of presence across all disciplines, especially online education. Lehman and Conceição's (2010) defined the sense of presence as "being there and being together with others" in the online education environment (Lehman & Conceição, 2010, p. 3). Inherent in this definition is the idea that to actually 'be there', and 'be together with others'

in the online educational environment, the individual must also be aware of his or her Being-in-the-world of computer mediated technology; Heidegger's concept of *dasein*.

Hermeneutic phenomenology and presence also share similarities related to the importance of understanding spatial situatedness as it relates to one's experience. Heidegger's ideas about spatial situatedness paralleled closely with Lombard and Ditton's (1997) conceptualization of *Presence as Transportation*. Lombard and Ditton (1997) identified three types of transportation, as described previously. The first type of transportation, *You are There,* is similar to Minsky's (1980) perception of "Being there," and Heidegger's concept of "the there" (Heidegger, 1962, p.171). The second type of transportation is *It is Here*. In this instance, rather than the transporting the user to another place, Lombard and Ditton (1997) argue that a sense of presence may bring an object (Heidegger's 'the something'), including another user, to the media user's environment, a concept that Heidegger calls "here". The last type of transportation, *We are Together,* loosely parallels Heidegger's concept of 'here,' bringing the something close.

Research Site

I conducted the research study in the department of nursing of a private academic institution in northeastern part of the United States. The Department of Nursing offers undergraduate and graduate programs. The undergraduate program offers a traditional and second-degree Bachelor's program. At the graduate level, the Department offers Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP), Nurse Educator (NE), Adult Gerontology Acute Care Nurse Practitioner/Certified Nurse Specialist (AG-ACNP/CNS), Nurse Anesthesia (NA), and Women's Health/Nurse-Midwifery (WH/NMW) programs.

In 2011, the Department of Nursing partnered with a private education company to deliver its graduate programs online. This private company partners with institutions of higher education to deliver rigorous degree programs to students online. The company provides its partner institutions with technology, instructional design, a learning management system infrastructure, and admissions and post-enrollment student and faculty support services. Currently, with the assistance of the private education company, the Department of Nursing offers all of the on campus graduate nursing programs except the Nurse Anesthesia Program through its online modality.

As of November 2012, the Department of nursing had 56 full-time, and more than 166 part-time faculty members, a majority of whom taught in one or more of the online programs. All full-time nursing faculty members possessed a master's degree, and 54% had doctorates. As many as ten full-time faculty members were engaged in doctoral study, and four completed a terminal degree in nursing in the past five years. Full-time faculty members were on 12-month contracts; adjunct faculty members (the university designation for anyone who teaches part-time) were hired with either 12-month or semester-long contracts.

The Learning Management System (LMS)

The learning management system (LMS), upon which the online nursing program content is delivered, incorporates the best of available web technologies. The LMS has a familiar social network presentation. Like other platforms, this LMS is a place for students and faculty to click to in order to communicate, find asynchronous learning materials and other resource, and to post and review grades. Individual classroom sync-sessions, conducted by course faculty, use the Adobe Connect video conferencing software. These technologies, used synergistically, provide the student and faculty a rich, interactive, online educational environment.

Online Graduate Nursing Faculty Members' Responsibilities

Online faculty members are assigned to any of the following roles: Course Architect, Course Coordinator, and/or Course Faculty. The *Course Architect*, supported by the partnership, is responsible for all aspects related to the development of an online course. These responsibilities include the development of modules, the hiring of subject matter experts, and the overall instructional design process. Those architects who are full-time faculty members are given workload allocation to develop the course, while adjunct (part-time) faculty are provided a fee-for-service. Once the course is complete, the architect may no longer have any affiliation with the course, or may assume the responsibilities of the course coordinator or course faculty.

Course Coordinators are faculty members who have the following responsibilities: overall management of a 'live' course, the periodic review and update of course materials, the development of course session guidelines on how to conduct the live sync-sessions, and all other responsibilities of a faculty member in-charge of a particular course. Course Coordinators must also hold regular course faculty meetings to offer mentorship, and provide or receive feedback regarding course operations and student issues. It is possible the course coordinator was not the course architect, and had little input into the instructional design process.

Course Faculty members report to the Course Coordinator and are responsible for teaching course content to students and facilitating the live sync-sessions. Teaching occurs in online sync-sessions conducted through Adobe Connect software. Because students learn material through the LMS platform, sync-sessions are intended to verify, clarify, and amplify the student's knowledge through various active learning strategies.

The online instructor to student ratio is typically 1 faculty member to 10-12 students. For courses that include more than 12 students, the Department of Nursing offers additional sync-

session opportunities. Course Faculty members choose the presentation style of content, maintain command of group discussions, prepare for seminars by completing requisite readings and lectures, and answering students' questions. Course faculty maintain office hours, provide content tutoring and remediation, monitor learners' performance, provide timely feedback, and grade assignments and examinations. Course Faculty members also keep the Course Coordinator and/or Program Director abreast of any student issues.

Researcher's Role at Research Site

I have been a faculty member in the Department of Nursing since 2007. Currently, I am the Director (Interim) of the Nurse Educator (NE) Program. The NE Program is offered only online. I have experience as an online course faculty member, course coordinator, and course architect. While I was likely to be known by some of the participants in this study, I worked with only three other faculty members in a supervisory capacity. These three faculty members were excluded from the study (see inclusion criteria below). The other faculty members who teach in the online programs hold primary placements in the graduate core and other specialty programs (i.e., FNP). I hold no supervisory authority, nor do I evaluate or mentor any of these faculty members. I am one of only a few males in the Department. Ultimately, I believe the compromise of my objectivity, or exertion of any unintentional or negative influence or privilege over these participants, was extremely low.

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Research Sample

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Selecting Participants

Morse (2000) argued that when estimating the number of research participants necessary to reach saturation, the estimate depends upon a multitude of factors such as the scope of the study, the nature of the topic, the quality of the data, the study design, and the use of shadowed

data. For example, if the scope of the study is large (i.e., the research question is broad), more participants will be necessary to reach saturation (Morse, 2000). The researcher must also consider the size of the study (e.g., the amount of data, interviews) against its additive value to answer the research question(s) (Morse, 2000). The nature of the topic may also influence participant size. If the topics are difficult to understand, or are less obvious to the participants, the researcher may find himself requiring more data, and thus, more research participants (Morse, 2000).

Equally important for the researcher to consider is the quality of the data collected. Some participants are open, articulate, and can speak freely about the phenomenon in question. Other participants may be less open, less able to describe their experiences, or less willing to share (Morse, 2000). These data-related factors influence sample size. The study design can also influence the number of participants necessary to reach data saturation. Some designs require only a single interview, while other designs call for repeated interviews of the same participant (Morse, 2000).

The use of shadowed data should also be considered when estimating participant size. Shadowed data are collected from participants when they relay the experiences of others, and compare these experiences to their own (Morse, 2000). Morse believed that shadowed data could be very useful to the researcher because it "provides direction for theoretical sampling, and the clues that it provides in turn enhances the analysis. It simply moves analysis along more quickly" (Morse, 2000, p. 4). Lastly, Morse explained the inverse relationship between the amount of usable data and the number of participants necessary to reach saturation. She reported, "The greater the amount of usable data obtained from each person (as number of interviews and so forth), the fewer the number of participants" (Morse, 2000, p. 4). Morse goes

on to explain that when conducting a phenomenological study, one in which the researcher may be interviewing the same participant more than once, the large amount of data that may result would require fewer necessary participants for the study (Morse, 2000). She estimates 6 to 10 participants for this type of multi-interview study (Morse, 2000).

Grounded in the recommendations outlined by Morse (2000) above, a purposive sample of approximately 10-15 participants was considered appropriate for this study. The Being There for the Online Learner Model, as a resource, provided the parameters for creating this study's research question, and a framework from which I designed the interview questions/guide.

Because the study's interview questions are concise, purposeful, and limited in scope, the need for interviewing the same participants more than once became unnecessary. I feel confident that conducting only one interview, lasting up to 90 minutes, allowed enough time to collect quality, usable, data. Conducting only one interview, using a limited number of questions, and ultimately gathering less data overall, supports utilizing a higher number of participants in the study to assure data saturation (Morse, 2000). In these circumstances, a sample of 6-10 is too small for this study. A sample of 10-15 participants appeared to be a more reasonable approximation of the number of participants necessary to assure collection of quality, usable, and sufficiently saturated data. Consequently, a purposive sample of 13 participants was interviewed for this study.

The study population consisted of graduate nursing faculty who teach online through the research site's online initiative. All eligible participants met the following inclusion criteria. The Participant:

- Was full-time or adjunct (part-time) faculty member who taught online though the online initiative at least twice since its launch in March 2011

- Taught graduate core courses, or courses within the FNP, AG ACNP/CNS, or NMW/WH specialties

Research site faculty members were excluded from participation in the study if the faculty member:

- Taught in the Nurse Educator Program
- Was a director, assistant director, or held any other administrative supervisory duties within the research site's online initiative

Recruitment and Research Participation

Information about this study was sent by email to all online nursing faculty, asking them to participate in the study (See Appendix A). The email contained a detailed explanation of the study including its purpose, deadlines, and participant risks and benefits. Faculty members who were interested in participating in this study were asked to contact me by telephone. Upon contact, all potential study participants were screened using the inclusion/exclusion criteria, and those who were eligible were asked to schedule an interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes, at their convenience. These interviews were conducted via Skype, a method that was convenient to and comfortable for, the participant. All interviews were audio and video recorded with the permission of the participant. Data were collected over the course of nine days, between 5/20/13- 5/28/2013.

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Document Review

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Parallel to the interview data collection process, a detailed documents review ensued. Documents pertaining to institutional structure, job descriptions, faculty development materials, and the teleconferencing software and the learning management system's online educational environments were selected and reviewed to gain further understanding related to

the context in which the study participants experience presence in the learning management system and teleconferencing online educational environments. For example, the majority of documents provided information related to the Department of Nursing, the Research Site, and its organizational structure. Others clarified online processes, and provided insight on the use of the learning management system and teleconferencing software.

Data Collection and Procedures

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

Hermeneutic phenomenology. As a general guide, I relied upon the methodological process for conducting hermeneutic phenomenological research set forth by Max van Manen (1990) to conduct my research. In 1990, van Manen introduced six methodological themes and procedures for scholars to consider when conducting hermeneutic phenomenological research. These were not intended to be a prescriptive set of procedures, but rather a compilation of method-related themes that could promote "inventiveness and stimulate insight" (van Manen, 1990, p. 30), nor did they provide a prescriptive step-by-step methodology for this study. Interestingly, van Manen also believed the "method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is that there is no method" (van Manen, 1990, p. 30), a disconcerting view for the novice researcher.

Van Manen outlined the following themes related to conducting hermeneutic phenomenological research (van Manen, 1990, pp. 30-31):

- Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and

- Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

Table 3-1 illustrates the first three themes and their related research activities. I used these research activities as a guide for conducting my research. The research activities related to data collection and analysis include orienting oneself to the phenomenon, the generation of data, and strategies for conducting a thematic analysis. Appendix B presents an outline of the relationship between van Manen's themes as they relate to the study of presence using the Being There for the Online Learner Model as a conceptual framework.

Table 3-1

Outline for Conducting Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research – From Orientation to

Thematic Analysis

Methodological Themes	Research Activities
Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world	• Orient to the phenomenon • Formulate the phenomenological question • Explicate assumptions and pre-understandings

Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it	• Generating data
	  o Use personal experience as a starting point
	  o Trace etymological sources
	  o Search idiomatic phrases
	  o Obtain experiential descriptions from participants using interview methods
	  o Consult phenomenological literature
	  o Initiate protocol writing

Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon	• Conduct a thematic analysis
	  o Uncover thematic aspects in Lifeworld descriptions
	  o Isolate thematic statements
	  o Compose linguistic transformations
	  o Glean thematic descriptions from artistic sources
	  o Interpretation through conversation
	  o Undergo collaborative analysis
	  o Lifeworld existentials as guides to reflection
	  o Determine incidental and essential themes

Note. Adapted from: Van Manen (1990).

        Turning to a phenomenon that seriously interests us and commits us to the world.

Van Manen described three research activities that would enable me to find interest in, and

ultimately commit to my phenomenon of interest, the sense of presence in online educational

environments. These activities include orientation to the phenomenon, the formulation of the

phenomenological question, and the explication of assumptions and pre-understandings (van

Manen, 1990). *Orienting to the phenomenon* urges the researcher to identify a phenomenon that

holds special interest (van Manen, 1990). My orientation to the phenomenon of presence is as a nurse educator. My interest stems from my passion for online education, instructional design and technologies, and experience working in the same online educational environments as my study participants.

When considering the *formulation of the phenomenological question*, van Manen asked us to consider what that phenomenon is really like (van Manen, 1990). He believed that the phenomenological question "must not only be made clear, understood, but also lived by the researcher" (van Manen, 1990, p. 42). Phenomenology requires us to ask, "What is it like to have a certain experience" (van Manen, 1990, pp. 44-45). As I considered the work of van Manen, I knew it would be necessary ask participants what it is like to experience the sense of presence (how and in what context) in their online educational environments.

The process of explicating assumptions and pre-understandings is important to the process of studying phenomena. As did Heidegger, van Manen suggested that Husserl's method of bracketing is difficult to maintain. Details of our experiences with the phenomenon, through literature review or personal knowledge, may find their way back into our minds and influence the research process in every way (van Manen, 1990). Van Manen argued that it would be "better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions and theories" (van Manen, 1990, p. 47). The best way to deal with our assumptions, according to van Manen, is to allow them the opportunity stand up to scientific scrutiny (van Manen, 1990). That is, try to use the information against itself, if possible, to expose any flaws in those assumptions or pre-understandings. In addition to the assumptions addressed above, I hold many assumptions about, and pre-understandings of, the sense of presence as a result of an extensive review of the

literature, and from my own personal experience at the research site and teaching in online educational environments.

      Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it: Generating data. After explicating all assumptions and pre-understandings, it is not surprising that van Manen's next research activity relates to the u*se of personal experience as a starting point*. As part of the research process, I considered my experience with the phenomenon of presence in online educational environments. Van Manen argued that my experiences may also be the experiences of my participants (van Manen, 1990). He believed this reflective exercise could help better orient me to the phenomenon of presence (van Manen, 1990). As I conducted this exercise, I took into account the special meanings I give to these experiences. Van Manen argued that, "it is to the extent that my experiences could be our experiences that the phenomenologist wants to be reflectively aware of certain experiential meanings" (van Manen, 1990, p. 57).

      Van Manen wrote that, over time, the words we use to describe a phenomenon may lose their meaning (van Manen, 1990). He believed it was the researcher's responsibility to study the etiology, or to *trace the etymological source*, of the words we use to describe phenomena to determine if those words still accurately describe the experiences they are intended to convey (van Manen, 1990). In my study, I researched the origin of the words used to describe the sense of presence such as sensing, presence, experiencing presence, and creating presence, nonmediation, being there, and being together with others. I next *searched for idiomatic phrases*; those most commonly associated with the phenomenon of presence. Van Manen believed these phrases are created by those who experience the phenomenon itself, and often provide additional insight about that phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Throughout the research

process I identified these phrases from the literature and participant interviews, which ultimately provided additional insight into my understanding of presence.

After considering my own personal experiences with the sense of presence, tracing its etymological sources, and searching for idiomatic phrases, I obtained the experiential descriptions of the phenomenon from participants using interview methods, document review, and demographic survey methodology. Van Manen (1990) described the goal of phenomenological research as the study of the participants' experiences, and the meanings of those experiences, to better understand the phenomenon being studied. He wrote, "We gather other people's experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves" (van Manen, 1990, p.62).

Types of Data Collected

The types of data collected to answer the research question included demographic, contextual, perceptive, and theoretical information. Demographic information includes information that will help to develop a participant's profile (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). I obtained the following demographic information to develop participant profiles:

- Age

- Gender

- How many years have you been teaching nursing courses?

- How many years have you been teaching nursing courses online?

Contextual information was collected through a documents review, and included the culture and environment of the setting (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Understanding the culture within which a phenomenon is studied can only enhance our understanding of that phenomenon. As I stated earlier, Heidegger argued that the experience of others, and the researcher's full understanding of

those experiences, "cannot occur in isolation of their culture, social context, or historical period in which they live (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 174). To fully understand the sense of presence, and its meaning, interpretation of contextual life experiences (van Manen, 1990) of the graduate nursing faculty must take place.

I reviewed cultural and environmental contextual data specific to this study, including: the mission and vision of the organization; and the organizational chart; the leadership structure; the roles of its employees; its policies and procedures for online teaching and learning; the research site's recent Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) self-study; and faculty development and training. These documents helped to provide the necessary contextual information necessary to answer the research question (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Perhaps the most important information collected was the participants' perceptions about the phenomenon. These data were collected through an in-depth interview process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Equally important is a detailed understanding of the learning environment itself. I reviewed both the learning management system and the video teleconferencing software. In this chapter, I reviewed how these learning environments operate, what technology is available to students and faculty, and to what extent will they contribute to the participants' experiences. Lastly, I reviewed the theoretical information including all of the information collected by the researcher from various sources including an extensive literature review prior to the data collection process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). This information helped me interpret, analyze, and synthesize the data more easily (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

I structured the following interview questions to collect contextual, perceptive and theoretical information necessary to answer the research question. The questions are separated into two distinct categories. Category 1 (Table 3-2) questions aimed at collecting general data

related to the participants' experiences teaching in online educational environments. Beginning the interview with these more general questions helped spur conversation, provide opinion and examples, and begin to probe into the participants' experiences of presence.

Category 2 (Table 3-2) questions are more focused and probing. These questions are aimed directly at the participants' experiences of presence. They rely heavily upon the experiences of presence as outlined in Lehman and Conceição's (2010) Being there for the Online Learner Model and the principles of Heideggerian Phenomenology. These probing questions helped find meaning beyond the surface of the participants' responses, and make relevant any connections and interpretations based upon what we already understand about presence.

I also asked what participants heard from the experiences of others in an effort to collect shadow data. The question responses, examples, and what they know of the experiences of others helped me to uncover the participants' thoughts, feeling, and emotions, which can affect the experience of presence in the online educational environment (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). Table 3-2 also illustrates the connections between the Category 2 interview questions, elements of the Being there for the Online Learner Model, and hermeneutic phenomenology.

Table 3-2

List of Category 1 Interview Questions and Connections between the Category 2 Interview questions, elements of the Being there for the Online Learner Model, and hermeneutic phenomenology

Interview Question	Elements of the Being there for the Online Learner Model & Hermeneutical Phenomenology
Category 1 Questions:	
What do you enjoy most about teaching online?	
What do you find most frustrating about teaching online?	
Compared to face-to-face teaching, what is missing in online teaching?	
Describe your relationship with students online in your online classes.	
How effective as an instructor do you feel when teaching online?	

(continued)

Interview Question	Elements of the Being there for the Online Learner Model & Hermeneutical Phenomenology
Category 2 Questions:	
Describe your ability to easily access (manipulate) and utilize the [research site's] online environments.	Environmental Experience of Presence
Describe your ability to provide input to the research site and its partner about the online environments.	Environmental Experience of Presence
Describe how integral a part of that environment you are.	Environmental Experience of Presence
In what ways do you interact with and respond to students in the research site's online environments?	Social Experience of Presence
When working in research site's learning environments, to what extent do you feel the sensation that you are <u>physically in another location</u>?	Subjective Experience of Presence Heidegger – Consideration of Space

(continued)

Interview Question	Elements of the Being there for the Online Learner Model & Hermeneutical Phenomenology
When working in the research site's learning environments, to what extent do you feel the sensation that you are physically <u>in the same space with others</u> when you are actually separated by distance?	Objective Experience of Presence Heidegger – Consideration of Space
How close is working in the research site's online environments to working in a traditional face-to-face classroom?	Mode of Presence – Realism Heidegger – Being in the World
In what ways <u>is it less real</u> to work in the research site's learning environments than it is to work in a traditional face-to-face classroom?	Mode of Presence – Realism, Perceptual Immersion & the Willing Suspension of Disbelief Heidegger – Being in the World
What role does time play in your experience working in the research site's online environments?	Heidegger – Consideration of Time

(continued)

Interview Question	Elements of the Being there for the Online Learner Model & Hermeneutical Phenomenology
When working in these online educational environments, how aware are you of your real world surroundings?	Mode of Presence – Perceptual Immersion
When wearing headphones and/or earplugs, how aware are you of your real world surroundings?	Mode of Presence – Sense Immersion
In what ways are you involved with your students' in-group discussions, learning projects, study groups, and posting on the [LMS's social media] wall?	Mode of Presence – Involvement
When teaching your online classes, in what ways do you feel the sensation that your students come to you and your physical space, when you are actually separated by distance?	Heidegger – The Here
What have you heard from other faculty about their experiences in teaching online for the research site?	Shadowed Data

(continued)

Interview Question	Elements of the Being there for the Online Learner Model & Hermeneutical Phenomenology
How do those online teaching experiences of other faculty relate/compare to yours?	Shadowed Data
Do you ever forget you are actually using the computer technology during class? If so, in what ways?	Illusion of Nonmediation

Data Management

To protect the privacy of respondents, all interview data, including interview recordings and transcriptions – transcribed by the professional transcriptionist, and reviewed by me – were entered into a password-protected computer accessible only by the principal investigator. Neither the respondent's name nor unique identifiers for the respondents was collected or recorded. Transcriptions were entered into the password-protected qualitative software program Dedoose, for analysis. I alone was responsible for analyzing the data.

Data Analysis

Conducting a Thematic Analysis

According to van Manen (1990), thematic analysis is the "process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meanings and imagery of the work" (p.78). van Manen (1990) presented the following research activities to successfully conduct a thematic analysis: uncover thematic aspects in *Lifeworld* descriptions, isolate thematic statements, compose linguistic transformations, glean thematic descriptions from artistic sources, undergo collaborative analysis, and determine incidental and essential themes.

First, I uncovered the thematic aspects from my participants' *Lifeworld* descriptions (i.e., their day-to-day activities) of their experience with the sense of presence. Van Manen referred to the uncovering of thematic aspects of Lifeworld descriptions as an attempt to capture the fullness of the experience within a short thematic phrases that capture an element of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). He admitted, however, that this uncovering never fully captures the entirety of one's experience (van Manen, 1990).

I began the process of uncovering thematic aspects of my participants' *Lifeworld* descriptions of their experiences in online learning environments by isolating thematic statements from the recorded texts of their interviews. Van Manen (1990) suggested three different approaches to isolating thematic statements. They include the (p. 93):

- Wholistic or sententious approach,
- Selective or highlighting approach, or
- Detailed or line-by-line approach

With the wholistic or sententious approach, van Manen (1990) suggested taking the totality of the text and ask, "What sententious phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or main significant of the text as a whole" (p. 93)? The selective or highlighting approach, requires the researcher to read the text and ask, "What statements or phrases seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described" (p. 93)? Lastly, the detailed or line-by-line approach requires the researcher go through the transcript line-by-line and ask, "what does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described" (p. 93)? Depending on the raw data and the question asked, I used a combination of these three approaches in my study.

I engaged my participants in conversation about the phenomenon and their experiences. I used the opportunity to ask for clarity of responses, find deeper meaning in those responses, and aid in my interpretation (van Manen, 1990). Van Manen called this experience *Interpretation through Conversation* (p. 97). Van Manen (2990) recommended that researchers share drafts of findings with others. In addition to engaging in conversation with my participants, I elicited help from my colleagues (described later) and committee members through a *collaborative analysis process*. Committee members offered critique and recommendations regarding my interpretation of the findings, development of conclusions, and implications for nursing education science.

Van Manen (1990) argued that the researcher must reflect upon four existential themes when analyzing data; themes that fall outside of those identified through thematic analysis. They are the lived space, lived body, lived time, and the lived human relation. The concept of the lived space very much parallels Heidegger's concept of special situatedness. According to van Manen, *lived space* is that space that one feels. It is that "human landscape in which human beings move and find themselves" (p. 102). For my participants, the 'lived space' is not only the physical space in which they enter the online educational environment, but also the perceived or felt space within the online educational environment itself.

The *lived body* refers to the fact that, no matter what the circumstances, we meet others through his or her corporeal form (van Manen, 1990). Because of this, the risk that we might misread another's body is considerable. Van Manen (1990) believed that, through our bodies, we could be open with others about ourselves, and we can just as easily conceal. When I considered how the lived body relates to the study of presence, I realized that these participants would indeed be able to see each other's corporeal body through the teleconferencing software. To address the issues related to the lived body, I included an interview question that asked

participants the ease in which they can read the non-verbal communication of the online students.

Lived time refers to the subjectiveness of time while the participant is experiencing the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). This parallels Heidegger's concept of temporality. Van Manen (1990) and Mackey (2005) agree, the researcher must understand the participant's experience as it is situated in time, so that time as an experience is revealed. To address lived time in my study, I included an interview question that asked participants what role time plays in their experiences when working in the online classroom and learning management system environments. Lastly, the *Lived other* refers to the relationships we form with others, through conversation and interaction, as a means to move beyond our corporeal selves and the concerns of the lived body (van Manen, 1990). To address the issues related to the lived other, I included interview questions that asked participants about their connections and relationships with their online students.

The last research activity van Manen (1990) described in the process of thematic analysis was to determine if the identified themes are incidental or essential. As a researcher, I distinguished between the themes that are "unique" to the phenomenon of presence from those that are related to presence incidentally, and could also be related to other phenomenological experiences (van Manen, 1990). Van Manen described the goal of this exercise to be the discovery of "aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is" (p. 107). As I have described, the major elements of The Being There for the Online Learner Model relate to some degree to each of van Manen's (1990) existential themes.

Deductive Inquiry

In addition to conducting a thematic analysis, I selected a portion of data for deductive inquiry. Deductive inquiry is a "theory testing process which commences with an established theory [or model or conceptual framework], and seeks to see if the theory applies to specific instances" (Hyde, 2000, p. 83). This section presents the results of my deductive inquiry, in which I explored the application of the Being There for the Online Learner Model. I specifically addressed the ways in which graduate nursing faculty experience the Modes of Presence, and the Illusion of Nonmediation in the online courses they teach.

I began the deductive inquiry by establishing the concepts and their relationships delineated in Lehman & Conceição's (2010) Modes of Presence. In creating the Modes of Presence, the authors sought to describe or predict ways in which learners experience the sense of presence. Using the data collected in this study, I conducted a modified pattern matching process between participant experiences, the Modes of Presence, and the Illusion of Nonmediation (Campbell, 1975) to determine if this element of Model holds true for graduate nursing faculty.

<div align="center">**Ethical Considerations**</div>

To ensure that all possible measures were taken to protect the human subjects participating in the study, I carried out all processes as proscribed by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, and research site (See Appendix C). Specifically, as part of the recruitment process I used a written informed consent script (See Appendix D) that includes information about the study's background and purpose, study plan, risks, benefits, confidentiality, and the rights of the research participant. Within this script, participants were notified that there was no associated risk to participating in this study.

Participants were also informed that while they may not experience any direct benefits from participation, information collected in this study may benefit others in the future by helping them identify how nurse faculty experience presence in online education environments. They were further informed that I would collect no names or unique identifying information with the data collection tool, the interview would be audio-recorded, I would take notes during the interview, and specific steps would be taken to safeguard the recordings, interview notes, and transcriptions. These materials were kept in a locked file in a locked office at all times. Transcriptions of the audio-recordings and the interview notes were kept in a password-protected computer, accessible only to me.

To further protect the participant's confidentiality, I recommended that prospective participants respond to my initial informational email by phone only. The interviews were conducted via Skype. Interviews were recorded only after the written (via informed consent document) and subsequent verbal permission (asked and recorded at the time of interview) of the participant had been obtained. I also determined that in any reports from the study, including published articles, would not identify the specific research site. This measure further protects the confidentiality of the research participants. Moving forward, the research site will only be described as a private institution of higher learning in the eastern United States. Applications for institutional review board approval were submitted and approved by University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee and the research site.

Actions to Assure Rigor

I endeavored to conduct a rigorous qualitative study by addressing issues of trustworthiness. To demonstrate trustworthiness and contribute to rigor, operational techniques

to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were incorporated throughout the study.

Credibility

Credibility answers the question of how accurately the researcher represents the experiences of the participant (Shenton, 2004)? To ensure credibility in this study, I took the following actions (Shenton, 2004; Tuckett, 2005):

- Worked diligently to understand the culture at the research site's department of nursing, and continued to maintain a relationship of trust with the research participants

- Employed tactics to help ensure honesty from the participants including giving each the opportunity to refuse to participate and emphasize that the researcher is working independently as a way to reduce fear of retribution or loss of credibility

- Engaged in iterative questioning

- Engaged in frequent debriefing sessions with major professor and student colleagues

    In lieu of using member check methods to establish credibility, I followed van Manen's (1990) collaborative analysis process. In this process, I identified four colleagues who work at the research site, but were not participants in my study. After securing permission, I emailed each of them the Chapter 4 findings for their review and comment. In the email I asked them to answer the two following questions:

- What, if anything, in the findings relate to your own experiences teaching online at the research site?

- Do you concur with the findings?

    All four colleagues responded with editorial comments aimed at strengthening my paper. All of the colleagues displayed genuine interest in the findings, and believed many of the

participant responses were powerful. Three of the four answered the specific questions outlined above. The three colleagues reported they could easily and clearly relate their own experiences teaching online at the research site to the experiences of the participants. Like the participants, it became clear not all of my colleagues experience the sense of presence in the same way (see Chapter 4 findings). All three colleagues concurred with the study's findings.

Transferability

Transferability is the idea that the findings and conclusions of one study can be applied to similar populations and situations (Shenton, 2004). It is not the researcher who is responsible for drawing conclusions about transferability. Rather, the responsibility falls on the researcher to include in his research the most detailed description of research process and contextual information related to fieldwork. It is up to the reader to determine if the researchers finding or conclusions are transferrable. To ensure the research process, findings, and conclusions were sufficiently detailed in the current study, I took the following actions:

- Provided a detailed account of contextual influences, including the characteristics of the organization

- Provided a detailed 'thick" description of the phenomenon of presence (Shenton, 2004; Tuckett, 2005)

Dependability

Dependability refers to the process of providing a detailed account of the research process that will enable other researchers to repeat the work. The process "should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily gain the same results" (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). Providing such a detailed account of the research process also

allows the reader to determine if the research was conducted properly (Shenton, 2004). To ensure the research conducted meets the standard of dependability, I took these actions:

- Described in detail the research design and its implementation
- Described the step-by-step process of data gathering

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the researcher's objectivity throughout the research process (Shenton, 2004). The goal for the researchers is to ensure the "findings are result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). In an effort to ensure objectivity, I did the following:

- Considered my own experiences, biases, and prejudices about the phenomenon and research process
- Created a comprehensive audit trail that traced the research process step-by-step, including all decisions made in each step (Rodgers & Cowles, 1993)

Conclusion

This study sought to answer the question, "In what ways do graduate nursing faculty experience the sense of presence in online environments?" This question was answered using a qualitative design approach consisting of document review and in-depth interview methods. A purposive sampling of 13 participants was interviewed for this study. The study population consisted of graduate nursing faculty who teach online at a major university in the northeast United States. I used a methodological strategy that combined the application of van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological approach, and deductive inquiry.

To solicit potential study participants, information was sent by email to all online graduate nursing faculty at the institution, asking them to participate. The email contained a

detailed explanation of the study including its purpose, deadlines, and potential participant risks and benefits. Faculty members who were interested in participating were asked to contact me by telephone. Upon contact, all potential study participants were screened using inclusion/exclusion criteria, and those who were eligible were asked to schedule an in-depth interview, lasting up to 90 minutes, at their convenience. These in-depth interviews were conducted via Skype. All interviews were audio and/or video recorded with the permission of the participant.

Parallel to the interview data collection process, I conducted a detailed documents review. Documents pertaining to institutional structure, job descriptions, faculty development materials, and materials related to the institution's learning management system were reviewed to gain further understanding, and provide context to study participants' responses about how they experience the sense of presence in the online courses they teach. I implemented specific strategies that ensured all possible measures were taken to protect the human subjects participating in the study as proscribed by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, and the research site. Lastly, I explicated the strategies I used to increase trustworthiness and rigor in the study.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to increase our knowledge and understanding of how graduate nursing faculty members experience the sense of presence in the online courses they teach. This study sought to answer the research question, "In what ways do graduate nursing faculty experience the sense of presence in online teaching environments?" For purposes of this study, presence is defined as the sensation of "being there and being together with others" in the online education environment (Lehman & Conceição (2010, p.3).

This chapter presents the key findings obtained from 13 in-depth participant interviews conducted with educators who teach courses for an online graduate nursing program. The findings are separated into three distinct sections. Section one describes basic participant demographic information including gender, age, and length of experience teaching online. Section 2 presents the findings and interpretation of the deductive inquiry using the Being There for the Online Learner Model. The last section presents the results of a thematic analysis related to the overall understanding and definition of presence.

Demographic Description of Participants

All 13 participants were female, and work either part-time or full-time at the research site. The average participant age was 52 (s = 11.003), ranging from 30- to 69-years-old. Participants averaged 4.3 years of experience teaching online nursing courses, ranging from six months to 23 years, with a mode of two.   Participant 13 reported having 23 years of experience teaching online. Further probing clarified that her online experience included teaching distance nursing education in a variety of ways including through the U.S. postal service mail and online when that technology became available. She reported, "I was with this before distance was cool…the computer was not yet ubiquitous, and we did a lot by mail, we did a lot by phone, and we did

some on campus intensives as well" (Participant 13). Table 4-1 provides a complete list of

participant demographics, including length of each interview (question and response portion

only).

Table 4-1

Participant Demographics

Participant ID	Length of Interview (min:sec)	Age	Years Teaching Online Nursing Courses
1	49:49	39	3
2	27.40	56	2
3	55:57	60	1
4	46:44	69	2
5	42.00	37	2
6	53:36	56	10
7	39:40	58	7
8	39:47	30	1
9	30:29	54	1.5
10	55:09	47	1
11	35:55	61	2
12	36:30	55	0.5
13	43:04	58	23

Deductive Inquiry: Ways of Experiencing Presence

This section presents the results of the deductive inquiry, which explored the application of the Being There for the Online Learner Model. I specifically addressed the ways in which graduate nursing faculty experience the Modes of Presence, and the Illusion of Nonmediation in the online courses they teach.   Findings are presented first by examining each Mode of Presence as it is explicated in the model. The participant experiences are then matched to each mode of presence.

Modes of Presence

Realism. One of the ways in which participants experience the sense of presence in the online courses they teach is by perceiving the online teaching environment as being *just as real* as the traditional face-to-face classroom environment. *Realism* relates to the degree that a particular medium (i.e. video-teleconferencing virtual classrooms offered in the participants' online program) can create an environment - including the people, objects, and events within it - to look, sound, and/or feel like that mediated environment is actually the real thing (a traditional face-to-face classroom environment) (Lehman & Conceição, 2010; Lombard & Ditton, 1997).

When asked if the participants' experience teaching online was any less real than their experiences teaching in a traditional face-to-face classroom, five (39%) participants reported that teaching online was just as real as teaching in a traditional face-to-face classroom environment. Participant 12 believed that the synchronous (i.e. video teleconferencing) nature of the classrooms put online teaching on equal footing with traditional face-to-face teaching. She responded:

No, quite honestly I don't think it is (any less real) because I am – I have said this now a lot, five, six, seven, eight times. I really I do I don't see any difference…when you can *see* somebody, and there is no difference, there mainly isn't the difference.

Participant 10 concurred:

I feel like there's very little that is not real. I mean I feel like class is class, and I do feel like we are there and I do feel like it's real. So, I would say there's probably (very little) to me that feels like it's not real.

Participant 5 also believed that teaching online is every bit as real as teaching in a traditional face-to-face environment. She argued online faculty work harder, and longer hours, than her traditional counterparts. When asked if she believed teaching online was less real, she responded:

Oh definitely not. I don't think it's less real at all. I think it imposes a new level of challenges. The faculty have to get that much better at addressing things that (our) on-campus counter parts may not have to deal with. So, I think it makes you a better faculty member. Yeah and, for me, my productivity - I don't know if this is "real" but (my) productivity compared to when I was on campus, and I would have to get up, get myself ready, drive the campus, find parking, go in, then I would have that social time with faculty. It was 9:30, 10 o'clock before I did anything productive. Now, you know (when teaching online) you don't have commute time. You don't have primping time. You don't have any of those things. You're on 24/7, so your productivity I think is much higher when you take out all those other pieces. In terms of being real, that's one part of it you know when you go to work (in a traditional face-to-face program) the workday ends, you go home, you come back the next day, so that's the hardest part for me. And,

when we talk about having a real job maybe and people not appreciating that when you're full-time distance, you're on all the time. I mean it never seems to end, so that's and I don't know if I'm using the word real the right way.

As with the other participants, Participant 13 believed that teaching in the online environment was just as real as teaching in a traditional face-to-face classroom. She also believed that questions similar to the one I asked her appear to be biased toward the traditional face-to-face, campus-based, classroom setting model. She responded:

So, here's what I'm going to say about that question. It's totally a campus-based question. Distance learning is real. It has a very long history of success, (and) I've been involved since 1990. It works. And, so I think one of the things at (the institution) is there's sort of transition from on campus culture to a distance culture. There are some real benefits to this; from midwifery in particular we were a small subspecialty. And it's not offered around every corner. It's really saved our profession. And, so I think it's that question comes out of people hanging on to the old way of not evolving. So I would say it is real, it's real it happens, it's not like the tooth fairy it is real.

A majority of participants (8/61%) believed that teaching online was less real than teaching in a traditional face-to-face environment. Of those who believed that *teaching online was less real*, four participants reported the reason for this was their inability to experience others in the same physical space. Participant 7 explained:

It's less real only in the sense that you're not able to touch anyone. But I never felt like it was any less of a connection with the students. I always felt like – like I said, I had a big screen, I could see them and I felt like – and I actually felt like I connected with them more just because it was a smaller class and I could see each one of them on the screen.

But I guess that's – you can't touch anyone. I guess that's the only thing that I can say that's not real.

In her description, Participant 6 illustrated what it means to be physically present with another being:

And that's something that people can't understand, unless they've done both I think. In some ways it's (the traditional face-to-face teaching environment) more real because there's just something about seeing people in person where you, you get a sense of them…You get a sense of what they smell like, and what they really look like, and how they walk and you know things like that, which makes it more real. And, there's an environment like the classroom looks a certain way and there's a window and it smells a certain way, and so its forever engrained in your brain.

Participant 2 also believes that online teaching environments are less real because of the lack of physical proximity between herself and her students. She stated:

I think that again, I've mentioned this before. The less realness comes from the impersonal environment that comes with a virtual world. You don't have the reality of having the group of people who are in the same space simultaneously, physically, and there's something's to be said, like I said that energy that happens in the classroom, that's kind of unconscious, people sort of bounce of each other, you know, it's a little artificial when you are in a virtual classroom.

Lastly, Participant 1 captured her experience as follows:

So, I would say the physicality is probably the biggest thing, the actual being there would be the thing that makes Adobe not as real because I don't feel physically connected to them, you know, as in they are in my space. Yes, psychologically, I guess it's a little

different, that that's the connection I guess you get. I don't want to sound like I'm trying to read their mind, kind of psychological, but you just – it's a different feeling obviously, the social feeling is supposed to be physical. So, that's one of the main differences – it's just that physical being would be probably one of the biggest ones I would say.

Four participants believed that the lack of physical proximity makes the overall online teaching experience less real than when teaching in a traditional face-to-face environment. These data suggest that participating in traditional face-to-face experiences may enhance realism in subsequent online teaching environments. For example, programs that require students to attend a physical meeting (i.e., on campus) at the beginning of a program, or hybrid models, in which participants come together intermittently throughout the length of a nursing program, may enhance the graduate nursing faculty member's ability to experience the sense of presence in subsequent online teaching experiences.

Immersion. Participants also experience the sense of presence in the online courses they teach by immersing themselves in their virtual classroom environment. Extensive review of the literature reveals two types of immersion: sense and perceptual immersion. *Sense immersion* happens when the user's (i.e. a gamer) eyes are covered by a head-mount, gloves cover the hands, and headphones and earplugs muffle ambient noise (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). Similar to gamers, educators may use headphones or earplug to increase the sound in the virtual environment and muffle ambient noise and distraction. To better understand their experience with sense immersion, participants were asked if they wear headphones and/or earplugs when teaching. Six (46%) reported they never or rarely wear headphones and/or earplugs. Seven (54%) reported they always wear headphones and/or earplugs.

Perceptual Immersion is the "degree to which a virtual environment submerges (or takes over) the perceptual system of the user" (Biocca & Levy, 1995, p.57). This requires up to five senses of the user to be immersed in the virtual world, and the perception of the real world around the user to be diminished (Biocca & Levy, 1995). For example, those who play video games (i.e. gamers) often find themselves completely immersed in the game's virtual reality. The sounds and screen movements stimulate the gamers' senses to such a degree that their perceptions of the real world environment around them are greatly diminished (e.g. the gamers may not easily notice someone knocking on the door, or the telephone ringing, or someone calling our their name). Participants were asked if, when teaching in these online environments, how aware are they of their real world surroundings (regardless of whether they wore headphones and/or earplugs).

Participant 7, who uses headphones and/or earplugs when teaching online 100% of the time, reported the she "really wasn't aware at all. I mean I was focused on being in the class". Participant 3, who never uses headphones and/or earplugs when teaching online, believed that:

As long as there is nothing distracting going on, then I almost forget that I'm here. But if, for example, there was a car accident, and was just a fender bender, I'm looking at the road that runs in front of my house and I, that distracted me. But, if things are quiet and it's just the usual track of going up and down then, I almost lose the sense of being here, I feel like I'm in that space that I share with the students.

Participant 2, who also never uses headphones and/or earplugs when teaching online, reported a similar experience:

Well, I'm sitting in the chair, but I don't really consider – I don't really consider that I'm in my office at home. I really feel enveloped within that learning environment. I would say that I don't even think of myself sitting in a chair anymore.

Participant 4, who uses headphones and/or earplugs when teaching online 100% of the time, also experienced diminished real-world surroundings, stating:

I am aware to a degree but – my eyes are pretty much on the screen or on my desk, like in the room where I teach, there are windows over to the side and I could look out and I don't think, I've ever done that during this class, and I thought I would. You know, even just to rest my eyes for a second. One thing I wish were not the case in that when you're aware, I mean, we're talking about surroundings, I'm not so aware of my surroundings, I'm aware of my image being on the screen.

Others did not perceive that their real-world surroundings diminished when teaching online. Participant 6, who uses headphones and/or earplugs when teaching online 100% of the time, reported that she was quite aware of her real-world surroundings, but did not elaborate. Participant 5, who uses headphones and/or earplugs when teaching online 100% of the time, also did not perceive her real-world surroundings were diminished. In addition to teaching in the online environment, she simultaneously had to care for her baby and elderly mother-in-law. It is possible these simultaneous important responsibilities inhibited her ability to fully immerse in the virtual environment. She reported:

I never really thought about it. I think I'm pretty aware. I mean I have to be with the baby in the house, and a 91-year-old. So, I don't, -- I never felt like I wasn't aware. I mean you can still hear.

Lastly, Participant 12, who never uses headphones and/or earplugs when teaching online, believed the two worlds (i.e. the virtual and the real world) were integrated, and does not experience the perception of diminished real-world surroundings. She reported:

> They are completely integrated. If anything, it's easier (to perceive my real-world surroundings) because I'm so (much more) familiar with my office than I am with unfamiliar classroom that I may only go to once a week or something. That work is less familiar to me and I know where things are, less easily probably, where are the lights switch, where the button is for that, the computer, because you know if we – the computer, you know it's – and then the different any true and were, so that and I think it means (I am) comfortable at my real surroundings, the surroundings when I'm doing it online, because it is in my office and also I'm familiar with it.

Involvement. Another way the participants sense presence in the online courses they teach is by involving themselves in interactive engagement activities with their students (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). Participants were asked in what ways they involved themselves with their students in activities such as in-group discussions, learning, projects, study groups, and postings on the virtual classroom's social media wall. Six (46%) participants reported they are actively engaged with their students through facilitating discussions during the synchronous (video teleconference) sessions. Four (31%) participants listed using the classroom's social media wall to interact and engage with students. Three (23%) participants reported mainly engaging students through email, and three (23%) reported they respond to those students by a variety of means in a timely manner. Table 4-2 provides a complete listing of all the reported ways the participants involved themselves in interactive engagement activities with their students.

Table 4-2

Involvement With Students

In what ways are you involved with your students' in group discussions, learning projects, study groups, and postings on the LMS Wall?	Number Of Participants (n=13)	Percent of Total Participants
Facilitate discussion during sync sessions	6	46%
Interacting with students on classroom's social media wall	4	31%
Contacting/engaging through email	3	23%
Responding to students in a timely manner	3	23%
Providing individualized attention	2	15%
Holding virtual office hours	1	7%
Hosting study groups	1	7%
Allowing for submission of rough drafts	1	7%
Provide ample and substantive feedback	1	7%
Engaging in course social group	1	7%
Providing encouragement	1	7%

(Willing) Suspension of Disbelief. Lastly, participants experience the sense of presence in the online courses they teach through their (willing) suspension of disbelief. For example, when we read a book, watch a movie, or see a play, we may willingly suspend our concrete analytical side, and allow ourselves to become lost in imagination and creativity, and accept what

we see, read, and hear (or otherwise sense) as reality. When we suspend disbelief, we "recognize what is happening, but give up what we believe to be true" (Lehman & Conceição, 2010, p.19).

In this study, I did not ask participants specifically about their experience with suspension of disbelief. However, the concept underpins many of the interview questions and participant experiences. For example, in order for participants to perceive that teaching in online environments is just as real as teaching in traditional face-to-face environments, there must be some level of suspension of disbelief. There is also suspension of disbelief when one forgets, or no longer notices, the computer technology makes teaching online a possibility. Indeed, the themes *Being There* and *Being Together,* presented next, require the participant to willing suspend disbelief.

Illusion of Nonmediation

Participants also experience the sense of presence in the online courses they teach through experiencing the illusion of nonmediation. Lehman and Conceição (2010) argued that, in well-designed courses, the learner experiences the illusion of nonmediation. To understand nonmediation, one must first understand the term medium. A *medium* is the human-made technology that comes between us (as technology users) and our environment, or at least our perception of that environment (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). A transparent medium, or what Lehman and Conceição and others called nonmediation, is one that is invisible to the user, or goes unnoticed, so much so that the user perception of the medium as certain reality no longer exists (Lehman & Conceição, 2010; Lombard & Ditton, 1997). In the Being There for the Online Learner Model, the Illusion of Nonmediation is not recognized as a mode of presence, but rather as an outcome of well-designed online course. Indeed, Lehman & Conceição (2010)

argued, "When we participate in an online course that is well designed, we often forget that technology in the learning experience" (p. 18).

In this study, the medium is computer technology, both hardware and software. When I asked participants if they ever forgot they were actually using the computer technology during class, approximately half (7/53%) responded they did forget at times. Participant 4 reported she sometimes forgets, or fails to notice the computer technology. She reported:

> Yeah, I think it (the computer) does (go away) for a period of time. When you have a snafu or glitch it becomes abundantly clear. When you have a student who all of a sudden can't hear when you're in the live classroom, but yeah, I can forget about this technology to a degree, which is surprising just given that at the beginning, never thought that could happen. But yeah, there's a lot I take for granted, and if we get in a discussion that is pretty rich or intense, yeah, I feel like that's all I'm focusing on. It's as if we were in a room together. It doesn't last two hours for sure, but for periods of time.

Similar to Participant 4, Participant 3 stated:

> Yes I do (forget about the computer technology) … and I think that goes back to that feeling like I'm in this shared space with these students. Its, you always feel as though you are not using some technology but that you, and don't think I'm crazy, almost that you've been transported to this space that you are sharing with your students and it's yeah when you back up and you look again you see, oh yeah, yeah the computer is there. But when I'm interacting with a student and I'm looking at a student or a student is presenting and I'm concentrating on what the student is saying, it's almost as though I'm there with them.

Participant 10 described her experience with the illusion of nonmediation as becoming more frequent over time:

> The more that I – yeah the more that I do it the less – yeah I mean initially when – certainly my very first semester I feel like I was very tied and tethered by the technology, because I was afraid something was going to go wrong, and I wasn't going to be able to troubleshoot it, what do I tell a student if it doesn't have audio, how do – like how do I have them come back in if they drop out of class, so I felt like until I got comfortable with the technology I felt much more tethered, but now I really don't, I don't I don't sit there through class and think about technology, I just feel like I'm in class.

Participant 7 compared her online teaching experiences with experiences in a simulation center:

> Well it's – I guess the best example that I can give you and this is a little off task but I also teach – I'm the simulation coordinator at [another institution] and I find that if you go into a situation and I talked to the students about this, you know that things aren't real. But if you just accept that and get into the scenario or what the activity is it that you're doing, you forget about – you don't think about the things that aren't real. And I think that applies to the online learning environment. You just focus on what you're doing and that whole piece about it not being that you can't touch things and that the people aren't really in your house or in front of you that all goes away.

For those who could not forget they were using computer technology during class, the most common responses listed the concern for computer technology breakdown as the reason. Participant 12 provided a very direct response concerning her concerns with technology. She reported:

No I never forget [the computer technology] because I'm terrified it is going to break down any particular time and how I'm going to reconnect. That is quite stressful for me at the moment but I don't think it is anything to do with the teaching. It is because I'm still not really techy about it.

Participant 13 also expressed concerns about the computer technology. She responded:

No, no [I do not forget about the computer technology] because there's, there's just a slight bit of the anxiety of "what if". There's been a time or two where a storm, this is the other thing about a national program. A storm can be in my area and not anybody else's. And worrying about what would I do if my electrical power went out or something likes that.

In addition to computer technology concerns, Participant 8 believes that her inexperience managing the virtual classrooms keeps her from forgetting the computer technology all together. When asked if she forgets the computer technology is there, she responded:

I would say rarely. Unless we have a very good class discussion but there is still going to be sometimes where students are talking - try to talk over each other because there is not that same conversation dialogue as real time. I think it's better on the LMS than within some of the other online classroom situations but there is still that delay or that kind of uncertainty of "Is she asking me or is she asking everybody?" within discussions. So I would say I am conscious of the online environment at all times. No, because there is always some sort of a student gets kicked out or the power point doesn't show up properly, or there is feedback from someone, so I think the online component is always there.

Thematic Findings

This section presents the findings of the thematic analysis guided by van Manen (1990). The thematic analysis of the data yielded two major themes related to the sense of presence: 1) *Being There* and 2) *Being Together*.

Being There

Being there emerged as one of the main themes related to how nurse educators sense presence in the online courses they teach. Participants experience the sensation of *Being There* when they 1) teach online and 2) feel (or sense) they are physically in another location. Participants can sense or feel that they are physically in another location (the sense of *Being There*) through their subjective and objective perceptual experience. The subjective experience of *Being There* happens when the educators *feel they are being transported* from where they are in the real physical world to another (purely psychological) location (Lehman & Conceição, 2010).

The objective experience of *Being There* is realized when educators *perceive they are physically in another location* (Ijsselsteijn et al., 2000; Lehman & Conceição, 2010). Educators sometimes feel as if they are "actually located within the technology-mediated space" (Lehman & Conceição, 2010, p.15), or some other identifiable space such as a virtual classroom somewhere in the middle of the country. To better understand the participants' subjective and objective experiences of sensing *Being There*, I asked if they ever feel the sensation that they are physically in another location when teaching online.

Eleven participants (85%) reported that they felt the sensation they were physically in another location while teaching online. Participant 1, who described the feeling of being

transported to another location (subjective experience of *Being There*) and sensing that new location (objective experience of *Being There*), reported:

> My consciousness, my awareness, and my feeling is that we are, we're in an area, but it's a separate area, which you know is our [virtual] classroom. So, it's like the place for me. That's where I guess my brain kind of goes and sits because you could see them, and you know, you can see yourself in their too [objective experience of *Being There*]. I just kind of get psychologically transported into the net…I feel like they are all at different places and we are all meeting up in this classroom and so, I kind of get – when I say transported in the internet [subjective experience of *Being There*], I kind of get transported into that classroom, so I'm not physically standing there in front of them, but my brain kind of processes it maybe is.

Participant 3 was able to describe her objective experiences of *Being There*. She stated:

> Like we are in a - like we've come together in this space that we occupy physically together, but it's not like being in a class room but its – you may think I am completely nuts, but I do feel once I got used to the environment that actually we are creating this virtual space, this holographic kind of space if you would, where we are sitting together in this space and that we are occupying the same space together rather than feeling like I'm talking to somebody that's in a completely different place 3000 miles away.

Participant 8 described that she feels as if she goes somewhere over the mid-western United States: "I kind of feel like our classroom is somewhere in the middle of the country and everyone is just kind of uploading…into somewhere over Oklahoma or something like that" (subjective and objective experience of *Being There*). Similarly, Participant 2 believed she was transported right into the learning environment (subjective and objective experience of *Being*

There). She commented, "I'm sitting in the chair, but I don't really consider – I don't really

consider that I'm in my office at home. I really feel enveloped within that learning environment"

(Participant 2).

Participant 5's experience of feeling as though she is in another location manifested only

when she was one-on-one with students, and rarely when she was with a group of students in the

online (virtual) classroom. She also reported sensing that she sometimes senses she is in her

students' homes (objective experience of *Being There*):

> I think when you get 10 people and they're all in different locations, you know, I don't
>
> tend to feel as much that way [*Being There*]. Especially when you get a group of several
>
> students. I will say, when I have one-on-one meetings with students it feels much more
>
> like I am sitting in my office, or sitting in their living room or wherever.

As an instructor for an online advanced health assessment course, Participant 5 spent

significantly more time with students in a one-on-one setting, often grading student performance

by reviewing submitted videos, than she did teaching through video conferencing. Participant 5

described in detail what it was like to watch these one-on-one performance videos. In answer to

my question about being in another location, she responded:

> But I mean my answer to this maybe a little bit unique, depending on who else you
>
> interviewed, but for us we literally look at videos that people have made 20 minutes, 30
>
> minute videos they have made in their kitchen, in their bedroom, in their living room, so
>
> and they've done this you know exam on their spouse, their boyfriend, their girlfriend,
>
> their friend, so that after watching, you watched seven or eight of those videos over the
>
> course of 14 weeks, you really feel like, like you're accustomed to that person's

bedroom, if the lamp is changed in the background you notice it, you know [objective experience of *Being There*]?

Coming Here

These findings raise the possibility that there is an antithesis of *Being There:* if participants have the ability to sense they are in another physical space when teaching in online courses, is it not possible these educators could sense psychologically that students sometimes come to them and their (the instructors') physical space instead? Indeed, the philosophy of hermeneutics supports this argument. Heidegger (1962, p. 171) believed that everything in the world "belongs somewhere", including human beings. Being-in-the-world means that humans are spatially situated, something he calls "the there" (Heidegger, 1962, p.171). This aligns well with the concept and theme of *Being There.*

The there, here, and yonder. According to Mackey (2005), Heidegger also believed, "from the position of 'the there' the person is always either bringing something close to them ('here'), or experiencing it as remote ('yonder')" (p. 184). Asking the participants if they sense that their students come to them in their physical space when teaching online, despite being separated by (physical) distance, represents Heidegger's concept of "here." Bringing others close to them (bringing them here) is more than just physical distance, it is also about a person's closeness to, or what matters to the person about, that something (Mackey, 2005), such as an educator's relationship with students.

Lombard and Ditton's (1997) concept of *Presence in Transportation* also supports the notion that experiencing the sense of presence may bring the learners to the instructor's physical environment. An element of Presence in Transportation is *It is Here*. In this instance, Lombard and Ditton (1997) argue that, rather than transporting the user to another place, experiencing the

sense of presence may bring an object, another user, or environment to the media user's (in this case, the educator's) physical environment. This additional understanding of "Here" is illustrated in that participants' responses.

Experiences of coming here. Approximately half of the 13 participants (6/46%) reported they feel the sensation that students come to their physical space, even though they are separated by distance. Of the six participants who felt the sensation that students come to their physical space, one (17%) reported she senses that students come to her when she meets with them one-on-one through Adobe Connect. She explained, "when I have one-on-one meetings with students, it feels much more like we are sitting in my office, or sitting in their living room, or whatever" (Participant 5).

Participant 7 reported sensing students come to her physical space during one of the live-sync sessions. She described the following example:

> I remember a storm was coming in and I was starting, you know I have windows all over
> my house, and I could see the clouds rolling in and I started getting worried about them
> [the students], and they weren't even here.

Three other participants reported that they sense that students come to their physical space, prompting the educators to clean and arrange that physical space before class. Another participant reported that students come to her physical space, but did not describe that experience.

Being Together

The second theme identified through analysis is *Being Together*. Lombard and Ditton's (1997) concept of Presence in Transportation identifies a specific type of transportation, *We are Together*. "We are Together" is the idea that media users believe they share the same space as

other users within a mediated environment (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). In this study, the theme *Being Together* represents the participants' sensation that, when teaching online, they sense they are physically in the same space with others (i.e. their students), when they are actually separated by real, physical distance. In this study, I asked participants to what extent they feel the sensation they are physically in the same space with others, when they are actually separated by distance. Eleven (85%) reported they have felt in the same space as others, while 2 (8%) reported they never feel the sensation they are physically in the same space with others. When describing the sensation of being together with others, Participant 10 stated:

> I think truly being able to see everybody, it would be totally different environment if all we had was audio. But when you have audio and video, I think we all truly are present in class. So for me my computer room is my physical space, but I think hearing and seeing the students each week allows us all to have our classroom space. Which I'm sure was absolutely the intent of having live synchronous sessions when the program was created. It's very unique, and I know I've looked online and students tell me as they've looked online for different programs, you know that this is a very unique way of doing distance education and I truly *don't* get a sense that one student is in California and somebody else is in Iowa and somebody else is in South Carolina when we are in class, we're all in class. Right, and I don't have any concept of being separated by distance when we're in class.

Participant 11 also described similar experiences. She reported:

> I mean, I have to say, I'm not acutely aware that I am sitting in my office. I also don't feel like I've got an out of body experience joining people somewhere although that's the fact of the matter. So, I would definitely say you know since the students aren't in my

room, and I'm not in their personal space obviously, we are somewhere in a virtual

world, but I just haven't given that a lot of thought.

Participant 3's experience provides insight into how she came to sense she was in the same space

with others as:

Finding myself in the virtual world, and I feel like I've actually been in the presence of

these other people where I didn't need another online format at all and that's how I felt

when I was in a brick and mortar classroom, I felt like I was actually in the presence of

these other people. Together, not my space, not if like they are coming to my space, I

feel like me as the instructor and the students are coming into *our* space. Where it's a

combination of everybody spaced together, and now we've got this space that's uniquely

ours. I can't reach out and physically touch them, but I can virtually touch them by my

physical actions and so forth. I think that is an adaptive sense of presence that occurs

when you get used to communicating in an environment with people. So I feel like I'm

seeing them, I still feel like I am able to read them, I'm able to communicate with them,

I'm able to express feelings of understanding of – man that's really good I hadn't thought

about that like you do in a class room. And they can see that you smile, and they can see

that you can lean forward, and they can see that you connected with them and that I think

is how you end up in that space together because you are making those connections.

Whether you went in to the (environment), and you were in that environment and as I've

adapted to it then I feel like actually I'm in the presence of these people, and that they are

actually sitting next to me, rather than in California or Oklahoma or Florida. That's

exciting for me.

Participant 8 reported she also feels the sensation she is physically in the same space with others. She responded, "there are some times [when] it feels like we are in the same space, especially towards the end of the semester" (Participant 8). This response seems to suggest that, at least for her, the more time an educator spends in the online teaching environment (i.e. the more experience the educator has teaching in online courses), the more opportunities there are for sensing presence (*Being There* and *Being Together*). The response may also suggest that more time an educator spends with students in the online teaching environment, the more opportunities there are for sensing presence (*Being There* and *Being Together*).

Two participants provided insight into the length and frequency of the sensation of being physically present with others. Participant 4 stated, "It's as if we were in a room together. It (the sensation) doesn't last two hours for sure, but for periods of time". Another participant reported, "It's not like being there with the student by any means, but I guess I would say if you get very into conversation and things like that, you kind of forget for a few moments that you are distanced from each other" (Participant 1). While only two participants verbalized their experiences of *Being There* as intermittent, no participants reported they sensed being with others for the entire online teaching experience. These findings are consisted with all previous studies on presence; no one experiences the sense of presence 100% of the time while in these mediated environments (Ijsselsteijn, et al., 2000; Inkso, 2003; Slater, Usoh, & Steed, 1997; Witmer & Singer, 1998).

Two participants (8%) reported that they never fully feel the sensation they are physically in the same space with others when teaching online (the sense of *Being Together*) because they were relatively new to online teaching and the use of computer technology teaching online requires. Participant 12 believed the reasons she is unable to fully sense *Being Together* with

others is related to her challenge with the computer technology, and the resulting lack of connection with her students. She reported:

No, I don't [feel the sensation I am physically in the same space with others]. Maybe just because I am not as techy oriented. But, [we're] all in our learning spaces and we are connecting together the same as if we were at [the research site]…we [won't be physically all together], but we're all in our own little bits of space—I guess I said that everybody is in their own little bits of space. I think what the thing behind that is that whenever I am with students in a [virtual] classroom, I don't feel like we all, you know, [feel] the love all together in one [space]. I feel that I'm now [while participating in this interview] in my [own] little space...No, there's not that amount of connection.

Participant 5 experiences difficulty sensing *Being Together* with others due to what she perceived as the large number of participants (typically 10-12 students) in the online classroom. She found it much easier to experience the sense of *Being Together* when she is one-on-one with a student. She reported:

But, I think when you got 10 people and they're all in different locations, you know, I don't tend to feel as much that way [feel the sensation that I am physically in the same space with others]. Especially when you know, you get a group of several students. I will say when I have one-on-one meetings with students it feels much more like I'm sitting in my office, or sitting in their living room or whatever.

These two cases (Participants 5 and 12) raise the question of whether the degree of familiarity with online education, both teaching and using computer technology, influences the experiences of these participants. Their responses support the possibility that the participants'

opportunity to sense presence is greater if they have experience teaching in online environments, and are comfortable using the computer technology.

While participants 5 and 12 rated their effectiveness as an instructor when teaching online as highly effective, and just as effective as teaching face-to-face, they still reported difficulty in sensing *Being Together* in the online courses they teach. Table 4-3 illustrates the demographic data of these two participants showing they had less experience teaching online than the average participant in the study. Age did not appear to be a contributing factor. An interesting, but not surprising find, Participant 12 reported also being unable to feel the sensation she is physically in another location when teaching online (the sensation of *Being There*). One piece of demographic information not included in this study, the number of courses thought in the institution's current online environment, should be considered as a contributing factor in future in future studies.

Table 4-3

Demographic Data for Participants 5 and 12

Participant ID	Length of Interview (min:sec)	Age	Years Teaching Online Nursing Courses
Overall Average	N/A	52	4.5
5	42.00	37	2
12	36:30	55	0.5

Conclusion

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to increase our knowledge and understanding of how graduate nursing faculty members experience the sense of presence in

the online courses they teach. This chapter presented the key findings obtained from 13 in-depth participant interviews conducted with educators of online graduate nursing courses. Section one described the basic participant demographic information including gender, age, and length of experience teaching online. Section 2 presented the findings and interpretations of the deductive inquiry using the Being There for the Online Learner Model, The Modes of Presence, Illusion of Nonmediation, and participant experiences sensing presence in the online courses they teach.

The Modes of Presence include 1) *Realism* – the extent to which participants perceive teaching online as being less real than their experiences teaching in a traditional face-to-face classroom environment. 2) *Immersion* - the extent to which the participants immerse themselves into the virtual classroom environment; 3) *Involvement* - the extent to which participants involve themselves in interactive engagement activities with their students; and the 4) *Willing Suspension of Disbelief* – the extent to which the participants can let go of reality and completely accept what they see, read, and hear in the online teaching environment. The findings related to the *Illusion of Nonmediation* – the extent to which participants forget about, or fails to notice, the computer technology – suggest that not all participants were fully able to forget about the computer technology while teaching online.

Section three presented findings related to the development of two major themes related to the sense of presence: 1) *Being There* and 2) *Being Together*. *Being There* is the sensation that, for varying periods of length and frequency, educators perceive when they feel or sense they are physically in another location when teaching online. In this study, participants experienced both subjective (perceiving one is being transported to another location) and objective (perceiving one is in another location) experiences of *Being There.* Conversely, six participants also felt at times the sensation that others come to them in their real world physical

space. *Being Together* is the sensation that, for varying periods of length and frequency, when teaching online, educators are physically in the same space with others (i.e. their students), when they are actually separated by distance. All but two participants were able to fully experience the sense of *Being Together*.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to increase our knowledge and understanding of how graduate nursing faculty members experience the sense of presence in the online courses they teach. This study sought to answer the research question, "In what ways do graduate nursing faculty experience the sense of presence in online teaching environments?" For purposes of this study, presence is defined as the sensation of "being there and being together with others" in the online education environment (Lehman & Conceição, 2010, p.3).

This chapter is organized into five main sections. The first section presents the study's main conclusions and their implications for The Being There for the Online Learner Model. Section two describes the study's limitations and the operational techniques I employed to ensure trustworthiness. Section three lists potential future research initiatives. Section four discusses online nursing education, decision-making about taking nursing programs online, and strategies for creating a sense of presence in online environments. The final section includes my thoughts on the study, and final reflections.

Study Conclusions and Implications for
The Being There for the Online Learner Model

The findings of the study, and their interpretation, revealed three main conclusions:

1. Not all participants experience the sense of presence in the same way

2. *Being There* may also include the sensation of "Coming Here"

3. The Illusion of Nonmediation, as described in the Model, should become a fifth Mode of Presence.

In this section, I discuss each of the three conclusions I drew from the study and provide support for them through explication and interpretation of the findings. I then compare each conclusion to The Being There for the Online Learner Model. In some instances, comparison to

the Model reveals the need for broader understanding of, or perhaps consideration for change in, the Model.

Conclusion #1: Not all Participants Experience the Sense of Presence in the Same Way

The study findings, based on the deductive inquiry, confirm that nursing faculty can experience the sense of presence, as described in the Modes of Presence above, in the online graduate courses they teach. However, the findings also suggest that *not all participants experience the sense of presence in the same way*. For example, some participants did not experience teaching online to be *as real as* teaching in a traditional face-to-face environment. Other participants found it challenging to be easily and fully immersed into the online learning environment. Still others could not completely forget about the computer technology they used when teaching in the online environment. The analysis and interpretation of findings related to realism, immersion, and illusion of nonmediation, described below, supports this conclusion. This conclusion was unexpected because I believed, based on the Model and review of the literature, that all participants would report feeling the sense of presence in precisely the same way.

Realism. Realism is the degree to which participants experience teaching online to be *as real as* teaching in a traditional face-to-face classroom. In this study, the majority of participants did not experience a sense of realism. Of the 13 participants, only five reported that teaching online was just as real as teaching in a face-to-face environment. Of those who believed that *teaching online was less real* than teaching in a traditional face-to-face environment, four participants reported the reason for this was their inability to experience others in the same physical space. They believed their experience (sensation) of realism (and subsequently the sense

of presence) would be enhanced if, in addition to video teleconferencing and asynchronous learning materials, they could also spend time with students in the same real-time physical space.

Immersion. Participants were asked, "When teaching in the online learning environment, how aware are you of your real-world surroundings?" While seven (53%) reported they experienced the sensation of being fully immersed in the virtual classroom environment, not all participants experienced a diminished awareness of their real-world surroundings, nor were they able to fully immerse themselves in the virtual classroom environment. One participant believed she could easily and effectively integrate the two environments (i.e., real world and virtual world) because she found her office more familiar and she felt more comfortable there than in the virtual classroom environment. Another participant implied the same ability to integrate the two environments when she described her real-world environment. She stated that in addition to teaching in the online environment, she simultaneously had to care for her baby and elderly mother-in-law. Because of these responsibilities, she believed that it was challenging for her to fully immerse in the virtual learning environment.

A possible explanation for the participants' reported inability to fully immerse in the virtual learning environment rests within our understanding that sensing presence (in this case through immersion) is the result of an interconnection between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). This notion suggests that it is possible the participants found it challenging to connect their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in a manner sufficient enough to fully immerse in the virtual classroom environment.

Model implications. The Modes of Presence outlined in the Being There for the Online Learner Model, and described above, explicate well the experiences of graduate nursing faculty (i.e. participants) who teach online in an asynchronous and synchronous learning environment at

the research site. Some participants experienced all four Modes of Presence, others experienced one or some, and two found it difficult to experience any. The findings and conclusions of this study seem to suggest that while the Model addresses online learners, the Modes of Presence may also apply to teachers, in this case, graduate nursing faculty who teach online in (hybrid) asynchronous and synchronous environments. However, in light of the conclusion that not all participants experience the sense of presence in the same way, the authors of the Model may consider adding new language that describes experiencing the modes of presence as possible, not a given. Specifically, the authors could consider adding language that explains that not all participants experience each Mode of Presence, and not all Modes of Presence may be experienced in the same way.

Conclusion #2: *Being There* May Also Include the Sensation of "Coming Here"

Participants experience the sensation of *Being There* when they 1) teach online and 2) feel (or sense) they are physically in another location. Eleven participants (85%) reported they felt a sensation that they were physically in another location while teaching online. Participants were able to describe experiences of being transported (i.e., subjective experience), and sensing they are in another space (i.e., objective experience). Some of the participants also experienced the sensation that *others come to them* and their (i.e., the participants) physical space. Approximately half of the 13 participants (6/46%) reported they feel the sensation that students come to their physical space, even though they are separated by distance.

As Chapter 4 details, the philosophy of hermeneutics supports this argument. Heidegger (1962) believed that everything in the world "belongs somewhere" (p.171), including human beings. Being-in-the-world means that humans are spatially situated, something he calls "the there" (Heidegger, 1962, p.171). This aligns well with the concept and theme of *Being There.*

Heidegger also believed, "from the position of 'the there' the person is always either bringing something close to them ('here'), or experiencing it as remote ('yonder')" (Mackey, 2005, p.184). By asking the participants if they sense that their students come to them in their physical space when teaching online, despite being separated by (physical) distance, represents Heidegger's concept of "here." Bringing someone close to them (bringing them here) is more than just physical distance, it is also about a person's closeness to, or what matters to the person about, that something (Mackey, 2005), such as an educator's relationship with students.

Lombard and Ditton's (1997) concept of *Presence in Transportation* also supports the notion that experiencing the sense of presence may bring the learners to the instructor's physical environment. An element of Presence in Transportation is *It is Here*. In this instance, Lombard and Ditton (1997) argue that, rather than transporting the user to another place, experiencing the sense of presence may bring an object, another user, or environment to the media user's (in this case, the educator's) physical environment.

Why participants sense that *others come to them* is unclear, and requires more study. Future studies should consider if "Coming Here" is an experience unique to the participants in this study only. Perhaps, "Coming Here" is a naturally occurring variant within the concept of *Being There*. Participants may, at any given time, switch between multitudes of psychologically perceived locations. For example, participants may begin their online teaching experience sensing that they are in their physical space. Once they begin interacting with students in meaningful ways, they may sense they are being transported to another location (*Being There*). A small group discussion after class may provide an opportunity for participants (i.e. the instructors) to sense the students have come to them in their physical space. The variety and number of sensing experiences may be limitless. This conclusion, based upon inductive thematic

analysis, is particularly noteworthy because "Coming Here" is not explicitly addressed in the Model, although it is supported in the research literature. Thus, it was not entirely unexpected.

It is important to consider if the sensation that *others come to them* (i.e. "Coming Here") is a consequence of more traditional, often-used, behaviorist teaching-learning strategies. In a behaviorist education model, instruction is teacher-centered, and student learning is passive. It is possible the participants in this study considered themselves in that important teacher-centered role, and believe that students come to them for instruction. In an environment where "being the sage on the stage" feels comfortable and 'right,' the sensation of *Being There* may be altered.

Model implications. The Being There for the Online Learner Model relies heavily on the understanding of presence as "being there and being together with others" in the online education environment (Lehman & Conceição, 2010, p.3). While my conclusions do not support a change in the model, they do support a recommendation to modify the definition of presence to include a broader understanding of *Being There*, the switch between multitudes of psychologically perceived locations, and the concept of "Coming Here."

Conclusion #3: The Illusion of Nonmediation, as described in the Model, should become a Fifth Mode of Presence

Lehman and Conceição (2010) describe the illusion of nonmediation as a sensation felt by learners when they experience each of the modes of presence, and not itself a mode of presence. When I asked participants if they ever forgot they were actually using the computer technology during class, approximately half (7/53%) responded they did forget, or failed to notice, at times. For those who could not forget they were using computer technology during class, the most common responses focused on worry about computer technology breakdown, lack of mastery of the computer technology, and inexperience in teaching online. Participants

were able to experience the illusion of nonmediation only to the extent to which they felt comfortable teaching online and possessed a mastery of the computer technology.

The study's findings regarding the Illusion of Nonmediation, based on deductive inquiry, suggest that at least for graduate nursing faculty, the overall illusion of nonmediation may not be essential to experiencing a sense of presence through the Modes of Realism, Immersion, Involvement, and/or Suspension of Disbelief. Participants were able to experience the illusion of nonmediation only to the extent they felt comfortable teaching online, and possessed the requisite mastery of the computer technology. If this finding holds true in future studies, the Being There for the Online Learner Model should be amended to include five Modes of Presence, this time including the Illusion of Nonmediation.

Study Limitations

Limitations are conditions that may weaken a study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The most notable limitations of this study include potential researcher bias, the lack of prior studies using The Being There for the Online Learner Model as conceptual framework, the homogeneity of participants, and incomplete demographic information. I fully acknowledge my affiliation with the institution, participants, and online learning environments that I studied; as well as my own experiences sensing presence. The second study limitation is the lack of prior studies that utilized the Being There for the Online Learner Model. The lack of prior studies using this Model meant that my research question, the interview questions, and assumptions about the Model could not be based upon the work of researchers before me. Rather, I relied heavily on The Being There for the Online Learner Model. This may ultimately limit my perspective on the analysis and interpretation of data.

I believe the homogeneity of the participant population, the fact that the participants came from one institution, is also a study limitation.   Findings cannot be taken to represent the experiences of all nursing faculty teaching in online graduate programs at the institution. Lastly, the collection of demographic information is incomplete, and therefore limits the findings and conclusions of this study. Given the small sample size, and the fact all participants were from a single institution, I limited the number of demographic variables to less then five to further insure protection of participant privacy and confidentiality. Investigators in future studies that involve larger sample sizes and/or multiple institutions should consider collecting additional demographic data such as: gender; race/ethnicity; number of courses taught by each participant in the online environment; history of online teaching; and quantity and quality of training in the use of the medium.

Future Research Initiatives

The study findings and conclusions lay the foundation for future research initiatives aimed at how faculty members and learners experience a sense of presence in virtual learning environments. The following recommended research initiatives reflect identified gaps in the literature and an interest in developing further the utility of the Being There for the Online Learner Model. What we know and understand about how faculty and learners experience the sense of presence can be expanded by:

- Studying the sense of presence in learners and faculty using subjective post-experience questionnaires immediately after being in the virtual classroom environment, integrating objective measures such as postural responses and non-verbal communication techniques, and observing physiological measures such as skin temperature, heart rate

- Exploring other ways to continually assess the learner or educator's sense of presence in virtual classroom environments

- Exploring the dimensions of the individual faculty member

- Exploring the relationship between presence, course content, and course design

- Exploring and measuring all four Types of Presence (Objective, Subjective, Social, and Environmental) as defined in The Being There for the Online Learner Model (Lehman & Conceição, 2010)

- Exploring the influence of computer technology and online teaching experience as antecedents to the graduate nursing faculty member's ability to fully sense *Being Together*

- Examining the variety of modes of presence, attempting to explain how, why, and when they are experienced by learners and instructors

- Focusing on the Illusion of Nonmediation as a Mode of Presence

- Identifying antecedents to sensing presence, including studies that focus on comfortableness with computer technology and past experience teaching online

- Designing studies in which a sense of presence is an indicator of online instructor success

- Creating an evaluation tool that includes presence in the measurement of online instructor success

Implications for Online Nursing Education Science

These conclusions collectively have important implications for online nursing education and for nursing education science. Because of the overlapping nature of the conclusions, these implications are inclusive of all of them. In this section I described two broad implications for

online nursing education science that derive from this study: Strategies for creating a sense of presence in online educational environments; and evaluating online educational programs.

Strategies for Creating a Sense of Presence: Social Presence and Beyond

In this section I begin with a discussion of the use of best practices to increase social presence in online courses. In the second part of the section, I use the findings and conclusions of this study to present strategies that may enhance the faculty members' experience sensing presence in the online courses they teach.

Increasing social presence in online courses. Virtually all of the best-practice literature on creating a sense of presence focuses on social presence. For those instructors who wish to increase social presence (the sense of *Being Together*) in their online courses, they should incorporate strategies as outlined by Lahaie (2007). Lahaie recommends that instructors participate in activities that enhance the feeling of closeness including 1) creating smaller discussion groups, 2) providing timely feedback to students, 3) being active participants in online discussions, 4) praising students, and 5) using text-based expressions of emotion (Lahaie, 2007). Similar to Laheie (2007), Cobb (2011) offered the following recommendations to faculty who wish to create a sense of social presence in online courses (pp. 118-119):

- Provide discussion forums for introduction
- Take an active role in facilitating class discussions
- Ensure students' viewpoints are acknowledged
- Provide instructors with information on best practices in online education

Lehman and Conceição (2010) stressed the importance of online course design and developed instructor activities that can help them create a sense of presence for their students in the classroom. These strategies not only apply to creating social presence, but the other types of

presence as well. They include objective, subjective, and environmental types of presence in suggesting activities like sending a welcome letter, creating a scavenger hunt (a strategy that orients students to the online course by asking them to 'search' for various course destinations such as the assignment section or discussion board), and providing a course orientation prior to beginning the course (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). As strategies to be utilized during the course, Lehman and Conceição recommend sending announcements, providing feedback, conducting real-time video conferencing, and incorporating case studies (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). End of course strategies include having students present final projects, provide feedback, and elicit feedback through course evaluations (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). Table 5-1 describes the activities, as they relate to each type of presence. Future studies are necessary to fully understand which strategies outlined in this section apply equally to the faculty member who wishes to experience the sense of presence in the virtual classroom environment.

Based upon the findings and conclusions of this study, I offer the following recommendations for nursing education administrators who wish to create opportunities for faculty members to experience the sense of presence in the online courses they teach:

- Offer on-campus opportunities for faculty and students to meet in the same real-time, physical space (this may enhance the experience of *Realism*).

- Encourage faculty members to create a physical environment (i.e., their office or work space) that minimizes emotional and cognitive distractions as much as possible (this may enhance the experience of *Immersion*).

- Provide comprehensive computer software and hardware training (this may enhance the experience of the illusion of nonmediation and *Being Together*).

- Provide a comprehensive orientation to online education, and the opportunity for the faculty member to audit or observe an online course before teaching (this may enhance the experience of the illusion of nonmediation and the sensation of *Being Together*).

Table 5-1

Incorporating a Sense of Presence in the Online Course

	Type of Activity	Type of Interaction	Type of Presence
Before The Course	Welcome Letter	Instructor-Learners	Objective/Subjective
	Orientation	Learner-Leaner	Social and Environmental
	Scavenger hunt Introductions Logistics Self-Assessment Learning Styles Electronic office hours	Leaner-Instructor	Objective/Subjective
During The Course	Announcements	Instructor-Learners	Objective/Subjective
	Feedback	Instructor-Learners	Objective
	Real-time Web Conferencing	All	Social
	Team Projects	Learner-Learner	Social/Objective
	Logistics	All	Objective/Subjective
	Simulations	All	Subjective
	Case Studies	All	Objective/Subjective
	Electronic Office Hours	Learner-Instructor	Objective/Subjective
End of Course	Announcements	Leaner-Instructor	Objective/Subjective
	Feedback	Leaner-Instructor	Objective
	Final Project Presentations	Leaner-Instructor	Social
	Course Evaluation	Leaner-Instructor	Objective
	Electronic Office Hours	Leaner-Instructor	Objective/Subjective

Lehman & Conceição (2010, p. 39)

Evaluating Online Programs

While surveys and post-immersion questionnaires can be found in the literature (Brownrigg, 2005; Garrison et al., 2000; Ijsselsteijn, et al., 2000; Nordahl et al., 2012; Witmer & Singer, 1998), there is limited literature about evaluating online programs, and about use of presence as a marker of online instructor, course, or programmatic success. Using presence as a marker of success is appropriate because of its connection to a positive learner-instructor relationship (Lehman & Conceiçåo, June, 2011; Palloff & Pratt, 2007). It is also necessary because the effort "produces a richer social atmosphere, develops a climate for high level inquiry and critical thinking, and generates a sense of the learners and instructor being together in the online classroom" (Lehman & Conceiçåo, June, 2011, p. 1).

Given the rapid and extensive proliferation on online nursing education programs, primarily graduate programs, it is imperative that they be evidence-based. In order for this to be possible, there must be expanded, rigorous evaluation of these programs. In order to ensure evidence-based online nursing education, I recommend significant expansion of rigorous evaluations of these programs, including consideration of the Being There for the Online Learner Model, as adapted as a result of this study, and specifically including the use of presence as an indicator of online education outcomes.

<div align="center">

Final Reflections

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Since Minky's (1980) visionary essay first describing the concept of telepresence, researchers in disciplines such as computer science, education, and nursing have sought to understand and define the concept of presence. In the 1980s and 1990s, researchers began to measure a user's sense of presence in order to identify the factors that best contributed to experiencing the sense of presence, and ultimately enhance the experience of the user

(Ijsselsteijn, et al., 2000). Scholars also measured a user's sense of presence by utilizing subjective post-immersion questionnaires, continuous presence assessments, behavioral measures, and physiological measures. The impact of nursing science on the understanding of presence in online education environments has been minimal and limited to the study of only one type of presence – social presence.

I sought to increase our understanding of the sense of presence through exploring the lived experience of graduate nursing faculty as they experience the sense of presence in the online courses they teach. By using the Being There for the Online Learner Model, I was able to help move the science from the limited scope of presence studied by nurse researchers to date, toward an understanding of presence based in the scholarship across many disciplines.

The findings of the study, and their interpretation, revealed three main conclusions:

1. Not all participants experience the sense of presence in the same way

2. *Being There* may also include the sensation of "Coming Here"

3. The Illusion of Nonmediation, as described in the Model, should become a fifth Mode of Presence.

These interesting findings and conclusions revealed how important The Being There for the Online Learner Model is for online nursing education. From them, I was able to recommend strategies for creating a sense of presence in online environments, identify future research initiatives, and argue for more expansive evaluation of online nursing education program, including the use of presence as an indicator of online education outcomes.

Lastly, as I reflect upon the magnitude of this effort, I am struck by the many valuable lessons I learned. Completing this dissertation taught me the value of time management, patience perseverance, and commitment. Completing a PhD program while working full-time as

a professor and part-time as a family nurse practitioner required time management unlike any I possessed prior to starting the program. Patience and understanding of the process, and the realization I would not finish as quickly as I once hoped, was the reality check I needed to persevere and commit to completing my dissertation.

The dissertation process also taught me the importance of being comprehensive, reflective, and rigorous in my pursuit of new knowledge. Conducting this research project, over the course of the last few years, provided me the opportunity to collaborate in meaningful and constructive ways with my faculty - my present and future colleagues. I am most grateful for their contribution to my success. I am very passionate about nursing and distance education. This study furthers my passion, and inspires me to move forward in developing an arc of research in these content areas. I look forward to publishing my results, and beginning my next research project.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Subj:

Dear Colleagues,

You are cordially invited to participate in my dissertation research study entitled, "The Lived Experiences of How Graduate Nursing Faculty Experience the Sense of Presence in the Online Programs They Teach".

As a study participant, you will be asked to participate in a one-time confidential interview that seeks to gather information about your experiences teaching online in the Nursing@Georgetown initiative including your interaction with students, and utilization of 2GU and Adobe Connect.

This interview will take up to 120 minutes to complete, and can be scheduled on a date and time that is convenient to you. We can conduct the interview over the phone, through Skype or Adobe Connect, or in-person at a venue that is comfortable to you. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

To participate in this study, you must:

- ✓ Be a current full-time or adjunct (part-time) faculty member.
- ✓ Have taught an online course/section in the Nursing@Georgetown initiative at least twice since the initiative's launch in 2011

Those who are unable to participate in this study include faculty members:

- ✓ Who teach (or have taught) in the online Nurse Educator Program
- ✓ Who currently hold the title of director or assistant director, or perform any other administrative or supervisory duties in the Nursing@Georgetown initiative

Thank you so much for considering your participation in this study. If you are interested in participating, please contact me by phone at (202-744-8882) at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

John Rosselli, MS, RN, FNP-BC, CNE
Director (Interim), Nurse Educator Program

Appendix B

Outline for Conducting Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research – From Orientation to Thematic Analysis as it relates to the

Study of Presence using the Being There for the Online Learner Model

Methodological Themes	Research Activities	Study-Specific Research Activities as they Relate to the Being There for the Online Learner Model
Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world	• Orient to the phenomenon • Formulate the phenomenological question • Explicate assumptions and pre-understandings	• Research orientation to phenomenon as a nurse educator with passion for online education, instructional technologies and design, and experience working in the same online educational environments as my participants (familiarity with phenomenon) • How do nursing faculty experience a sense of presence in online learning environments? • Participants will have experienced presence in online environments; participants experience presence similar to how the Being There for the Online Learner Model and other literature explain they might be; I hold assumptions about the experience of presence from understanding the literature, and from my own experience with experiencing presence in online environments.

(continued)

Methodological Themes	Research Activities	Study-Specific Research Activities as they Relate to the Being There for the Online Learner Model

Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it	• Generating data
	   o Use personal experience as a starting point
	   o Trace etymological sources
	   o Search idiomatic phrases
	   o Obtain experiential descriptions from participants using interview methods
	   o Consult phenomenological literature
	   o Initiate protocol writing
		• Record a detailed accounting of my experience with the phenomenon of presence in online educational environments using the Being There for the Online Learner Model and review of the literature as a foundation
		• Research further the origin of the words used to describe the sense of presence such as sensing, presence, experiencing presence, and creating presence.
		• Search for and identify idiomatic phrases most commonly associated with presence.
		• Obtain experiential descriptions from participants using the Experience of Presence and the Model of Presence elements of the Being There for the Online Learner Model.
		• Conduct a documents review of the online program and institution.
		• Update the literature review on phenomenology and presence.

Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon	• Conduct a thematic Analysis
	   o Uncover thematic aspects in lifeworld descriptions
	   o Isolate thematic statements
	   o Compose linguistic transformations
	   o Glean thematic descriptions from artistic sources
	   o Interpretation through conversation
	   o Undergo collaborative analysis
	   o Lifeworld Existentials as Guides to Reflection
	   o Determine incidental and essential themes
		• I utilized the qualitative software, Dedoose. I isolated thematic statement from the recorded texts of participant interviews.
		• I isolated thematic statements using the detailed, or line-by-line approach outline by van Manen.
		• I wrote notes about these thematic statements based upon the Being There for the Online Learner Model, and review of the literature
		• I explicated the themes while remaining true to the essence of the experience.
		• I engaged in conversation with participants, committee members, and colleagues to clarify responses, find deeper meaning, and aid in interpretation.
		• I shared with my committee members and professional colleagues drafts of my paper for review and comment.

Appendix C

Original IRB Approvals

Research Site Institutional Review Board

Date: 5/13/2013

To: John Rosselli

From: Institutional Review Board

IRB# 2013-0486

Title: The Lived Experiences of How Graduate Nursing Faculty Experience the Sense of Presence in the Online Courses They Teach

Action: Initial Review - Exempt

Document Version

Rosselli Interview Guide 0.01 Rosselli IRB Approval Letter 0.01 Rosselli Recruitment Email 0.01 Rosselli Approved Protocol 0.01 Rosselli Citi Training Refresh Cert 0.01 Rosselli GU Verbal Consent Form 0.02

The above referenced project was deemed to be Exempt from review by the Institutional Review Board on 5/9/2013 with the following category:

Category 2. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, or achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior.

NOTE: Except as noted above, this exemption applies to all such research involving ADULT subjects unless BOTH of the following conditions apply:

(a) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects (NOTE: Codes constitute identifiers.); **AND** (b) Any disclosure of the subjects' responses outside of the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

NOTE: This exemption applies to research involving CHILDREN EXCEPT that (i) research involving survey or interview procedures with children is NOT EXEMPT, and (ii) research involving observation of the public behavior of children is NOT EXEMPT if the investigator(s) participate(s) in the actions being observed.

This exemption is in accordance with Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations Part 46.102 (d) "a systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" as well as Part 46.102 (f) "a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual or (2) identifiable private information".

Please refer to the above mentioned date and protocol number when making inquiries concerning this protocol.

Warning: If the reader of this message is not the intended recipient you are hereby notified that any dissemination, distribution or copying of this information is STRICTLY PROHIBITED.

UWM Department of University Safety & Assurances
Modification/Amendment Notice of IRB Exempt Status Date: May 13, 2013

To: Patricia Stevens, PhD Dept: College of Nursing

Cc: John Rosselli

IRB#: 13.358 Title: The Lived Experiences of How Graduate Nursing Faculty Experience the Sense of

Presence in the Online Courses They Teach

After review of your proposed changes to the research protocol by the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Institutional Review Board, your protocol still meets the criteria for Exempt Status under Category 1 as governed by 45 CFR 46.101 subpart b, and your protocol has received modification/amendment approval for:

• Change to verbal consent script

• Approval from Research Site IRB

Unless specifically where the change is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects, any proposed changes to the protocol must be reviewed by the Institutional Review Board before implementation.

Please note that it is the principal investigator's responsibility to adhere to the policies and guidelines set forth by the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee and its Institutional Review Board. It is the principal investigator's responsibility to maintain proper documentation of its records and promptly report to the Institutional Review Board any adverse events which require reporting.

Contact the IRB office if you have any further questions. Thank you for your cooperation and best wishes for a successful project.

Respectfully,

Melissa C. Spadanuda

IRB Manager

Appendix D

Consent to participate in research

Study Title: The Lived Experiences of How Graduate Nursing faculty Experience the Sense of Presence in the Online Courses They Teach

Person Responsible for Research: **John Rosselli, MS, RN, FNP-BC, CNE**
Doctoral Candidate, UWM-Milwaukee

Study Description: The purpose of this research study is to increase understanding of the lived experiences of how graduate nursing faculty experience the sense of presence in the online courses they teach. Approximately 10-20 subjects will participate in this study. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in one interview. This will take up to 120 minutes of your time.

Risks / Benefits: Risks that you may experience from participating are considered minimal. There are no costs for participating. There are no benefits to you other than to further research.

Confidentiality: Your information collected for this study is completely confidential, and no individual participant will ever be identified with his/her research information. Data from this study will be saved on password-protected computer for up to 3 years. Only the student and faculty principle investigators, and study staff designees, will have access to the information. However, the Institutional Review Board at UW-Milwaukee or appropriate federal agencies like the Office for Human Research Protections may review this study's records.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part in this study, or if you decide to take part, you can change your mind later and withdraw from the study. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, Georgetown University, or the doctoral candidate principle-investigator.

Who do I contact for questions about the study: For more information about the study or study procedures, contact John Rosselli at rossellj@georgetown.edu, or by phone at 202.744.8882.

Who do I contact for questions about my rights or complaints towards my treatment as a research subject? Contact the UWM IRB at 414-229-3173 or irbinfo@uwm.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must be 18 years of age or older. By signing the consent form, you are giving your consent to voluntarily participate in this research project.

_____
Printed Name of Subject/Legally Authorized Representative

_____   _____
Signature of Subject/Legally Authorized Representative   Date

Research Subject's Consent to Audio/Video/Photo Recording:

Your willingness to proceed to the interview also indicates that it is okay to audiotape and or videotape you while you are in this study, and use your audiotaped data in the research.

Printed Name of Subject/Legally Authorized Representative

_____   _____
Signature of Subject/Legally Authorized Representative   Date

Curriculum Vitae

John Rosselli

Place of Birth: Clearfield, PA

Education: **Georgetown University**
Washington, DC
1998-1999
BSN

Pennsylvania State University
State College, PA
1988-1992
BA, Criminal Justice

University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee
Health Professional Educational Certificate
2009-2011

Georgetown University
Washington, DC
2002-2004
MS, Family Nurse Practitioner Program

Dissertation Title: Exploring the Phenomenon of Presence in an Online Educational
Environment Through the Lived Experiences of Graduate Nursing Faculty