“OUTLAW EMOTIONS” AND THE OTHER: EXAMINING THE POLITICAL ROLE AND POTENTIAL OF EMOTIONS IN THE COLLEGE WRITING CLASSROOM

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Before my classes when students will be talking about race, sex, or gender, I can feel it. Anticipation comes, a panic, a wondering what will happen next. Although I know I am in charge of the class, the human element often determines the way discussions will flow (or not flow). In composition classes where we try to discover where injustice lies in our country,[1] where we encourage students to pull away from what they have been socialized to believe and take a critical look, we are bound to introduce emotionally charged topics to the class either through reading or writing assignments. These topics often relate to racism or sexism, subjects that are political, personal, and have the potential to be highly emotional.

Although teachers and students uncover many facets of our conversations, the emotional undercurrent that runs through our discussions is often left untouched and hidden. We provoke buried experiences to come to life and rattle the very belief systems of our students as we try to have them reflect upon the world. However, the students are not the only ones left to grapple with these subjects. Teachers, too, engage in inquiry that we know may dredge up our own experiences, often emotional, and yet we know that we are the responsible ones, the ones who must navigate and manage the responses of our students. These emotions, like unseen ghosts, are there with discussions that revolve around race, gender, and sex. In addition, there is something about the nature of writing classes themselves that even when the most benign subject matter is introduced writing may lead students to emotional places.

Complicating matters even more, American culture has long split emotion from reason, originating, but not ending with, Cartesian dualism. Furthermore, emotion is often associated with the female gender and logic or reason with the male gender. Emotion can be considered just biological or physiological, yet in rhetoric and composition, cultural studies, and other fields many have argued that emotion is intertwined with language use and meaning.[2] Given women's historically limited power in shaping our cultural views, it is no surprise that women are associated with the less powerful of the two. These associations with women's emotion have broadened to include anyone who is oppressed by dominant ideology and who happens to react on an emotional level.

It is only logical that people should emote when they feel real pain. Universities offer opportunities for having discussions that attempt to counteract oppression, but they also have codes, rules, and expectations about emotion that dictate the way it can be expressed. There is a real stigma to the display of emotions in academic spaces. Although it is clear that the subjects discussed in the humanities may provoke emotion, there are many levels of anxiety surrounding this aspect of humanities classes. Teachers fear their classes will turn into chaotic emotional free-for-alls, administrators worry emotional expression in classes mean teachers aren't doing "real work," compositionists say they don't want their classes to be "touchy-feely."[3]

What happens is that the very people or reactions that are necessary to make changes in the way we discuss oppression are either silenced or further oppressed by expectations that they be objective, balanced and rational or that they fall along familiar, codified lines, and common narratives about the subject. Do our language and the limited ways we talk about emotion re-inscribe oppression?

In composition classes, instructors introduce emotionally-charged subject matter, but there is not a forged path or continuing discussions about how instructors should proceed, and how they can use these moments to further learning. When we introduce subjects such as racism or sexism, we are stirring up topics that have the potential to challenge the prescribed rhetoric of the academic institution. On the one hand, we want to discuss these topics. It is our job to do so. On the other hand, teachers fear the emotional reaction that may ensue. As bell hooks writes, "Often teachers want to ignore emotional feeling in the classroom because they fear the conflict that may arise" ("Community" 34). This fear of emotion may hinder deep interrogation of a subject and one major consequence of this is that we never leave the prescribed "way" of thinking and speaking about these topics. And since the topics that produce the most tension and fear in the classroom are the ones that connect to oppressed people, the oppression remains. Either our discussions fall along familiar lines or silence ensues. Both avenues allow injustice to remain and the status quo to continue.

Through the analysis of two classroom examples of displayed emotion, I hope to reveal how these teaching moments can further our understanding of emotion in the classroom, so that instructors can see the value in them. One aspect of this discussion I'd like to stress is that I am in no way encouraging teachers to manipulate their classrooms solely for the purposes of increased emotional expression. The comfort levels of both teacher and student are of the upmost importance in deciding where to navigate discussion. Each classroom, student, teacher, and topic is situated within a space and a moment and should be taken into account. Instead, I want to analyze and understand the moments of emotion that already exist and find ways to make them productive ones.

The Schooling of Emotion

One other level of emotion and thought at work during discussions in composition classes appears in the form of our language use. That is, how the actual language choices teachers and students make within these discussions carve out the way we understand the world and our emotions. Worsham examines how our usage of these terms naturalize them. She writes "that if our commitment is to real individual and social change"—I believe that the field of composition leans towards the understanding that it is—then "the work of decolonization must occur at the affective level" (233). She adds, ". . . our most urgent political and pedagogical task remains the fundamental reeducation of emotion" (233). According to Worsham, we are "schooled" in emotion, taught through education how to have "an affective relation to the world, to oneself, and to others" (236). That is, if our understanding of emotion is socially constructed, then school teaches cultural understandings and expectations regarding emotion. If left unanalyzed, these expectations will continue to be structured in such a way as to support dominant ideology. Furthermore, this education on emotion is conveyed through discourse. Worsham argues that perhaps this is the most powerful way that we learn how to relate to the world, and without reflecting on emotion and the way it is operating, we are essentially taught affective relations that "support the legitimacy of dominant interests . . . especially appropriate to gender, race, and class locations" (240). Therefore, by failing to examine emotion and pedagogy, dominant interests and power differentials prevail. In a certain way, Worsham's argument makes it clear why many may dismiss the importance of emotion in the classroom. Simply, it is not in their benefit to do so. Also, educators with any authority have been emotionally "schooled" in the dominant educational system for many years. By the time Teaching Assistants become instructors and professors, they have already been indoctrinated into a system that both proliferates a certain emotional agenda (repressed emotion) and denies any other.

We can observe this comment in action in our classes when teachers or students introduce subjects that provoke emotional responses. The most important social issues of our time—racism, sexism, any deeply embedded notion of otherness—have a hold on us on an affective level. And yet, the most emotionally charged materials are the most urgent topics that need to be discussed for social or individual transformation. Within the field of education and within a class that focuses on language we are left with an agenda of either cultivating or deconstructing the way language supports dominant ideology.

In "Love and Knowledge," Jaggar writes that any emotion that goes against the dominant culture's codes is often viewed as an "outlaw emotion." These "outlaw emotions" are often connected to feminism and the anger that women (or any marginalized group) feel because they are oppressed. By focusing on the "outlaw emotion," as opposed to the existing injustice, the injustice is allowed to take precedence over the *reaction* to it. Controlling this type of emotion is not that difficult considering the fact that our culture has been socialized to dismiss emotion, especially when emotions are imbued with anger.

According to Susan Campbell, strong emotions are often dismissed because they are marked as gendered female and suggest connotations of the stereotype of a crazy, irrational woman (48). Groups who are oppressed are more likely to display emotions in arenas that are designated as "rational zones" by dominant ideology. Classrooms are often categorized as "rational zones." The question is: How do we change the way we talk about subjects when the emotional components of them are pushed aside or difficult to decipher?

In order to create the kind of composition classrooms we want—full of risk, creativity, critical thinking, and passionate writers—we need to begin to acknowledge the emotions of our students and as students and teachers look at them critically. Teachers are sometimes unaware of the ways that subject matter can evoke emotions in our students and how these emotions can eventually affect the learning that will follow, or, if we are aware, we try to ignore or dismiss the mounting emotions of students for fear that the class will become “out of control.” Mary Ann Cain writes in her article, “Moved by ‘Their’ Words: Emotion and the Participant Observer,” that “discussions about the emotional that do not fall into ‘specific, severely encoded ways’ are rare. Such discussions tend to enfold the emotional within the question of ‘the personal’ as something to either embrace or ignore but not to critically engage” (43). One problem with this stance is the denial that the personal matters, that the personal is linked with the political and social. Another problem with our reactions to emotion is our lack of understanding of the critical opportunities that they often bring to light. At the very least, emotion can act as a guidepost showing instructors places where critical thinking can deepen and highlighting the aspects of discussions that matter to students and to our culture. In these times of widespread violence and potential apathy, it is critical that teachers interrogate the emotions in their classrooms, both visible and vocal and invisible and silent.

And yet, there is a fine line between honoring the personal source of our writing passions, and allowing the class to disintegrate into a group therapy session of emotional mush. Where do we draw that line? I don’t know if anyone can tell us for sure, but certainly denying emotion entirely is not the answer while examining and talking about emotions might be.

Emotion and Gender and Race

Any writing or discussion subject that holds passion will be personal and emotional to students. I’ve encountered several experiences that made me contemplate how powerful emotions are in the classroom, but also saw how I pretended that they were secondary to the critical thinking that happened. One strong example in particular occurred in a graduate class called “Women Writing Culture.” Although I was a student in the class rather than a teacher, the incident brought to light not only our fear of the emotional in the classroom, but how these same emotions can unleash the energy needed for a liberatory classroom.

The class examined women's rhetoric and we discussed authors including Trinh T. Min-Ha, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldua, and several others. Throughout the semester we discussed how women's voices were heard or silenced. In addition, we read Ruth Behar's *Translated Woman*, an ethnography about a Mexican peasant, Esperanza, her experiences as a woman in an oppressive society, and Behar's reaction to and relationship to these experiences. As a class, we kept returning to the ethics of ethnography and whether or not researchers abided by methods that coincided with feminist principles. The instructor had explained that she created the course to foster the principles of community, the decentralizing of teacher authority, and collaboration among graduate students. Much of the subject matter of the course dealt with power differentials and how women could empower other women and themselves. Furthermore, since everyone in the class was female, our readings and discussions touched upon topics that related to our lives and experiences in some way.

From the first day, it was apparent that in a room full of female graduate students, discussions about feminist issues could become extremely personal and intense. There was a constant cross-over between public issues and personal experience. However, even though our discussions seemed to be full of angst-ridden vocal tones, anger, and responses deeply wedded to personal identities, the students in the class seemed to ignore how personal each discussion felt. The class was a cross-section of graduate students in different places in life. Some were young single women, others were mothers and married; various classes, religions, and regions (both Southern and Northern) were represented. The class was mostly Caucasian, but included one African American and one Native American. Because the class was all-female and geared towards women's rhetoric, it seemed as if students felt much more comfortable sharing their opinions and feelings (compared to other classes). Throughout graduate courses, students are aware of expectations and academic performances; therefore, it was an unusual space to find ourselves in, whereby each class ended with final words from each student as we passed around a talking stick (which happened to be a small statue of a naked woman) in the spirit of Native American talking circles. The instructor encouraged students to share what they thought and felt about the texts and topics.

One discussion on the ethics of ethnography centered on a documentary called *Stranger with a Camera*, about the 1967 murder of journalist Hugh O'Connor by a local Appalachian resident. Although O'Connor was commissioned by the government to document the poor living conditions of Kentucky at the time, community insiders felt critiqued, stereotyped, and exploited by the photographer and vulnerable to the judgments of those outside of their town. The film illustrates how tensions erupted in a moment when a landowner, furious at O'Connor's perceived trespassing, shoots him. The film explores the complexities of this event and pushes the viewer to think about the responsibilities of a researcher or journalist when infiltrating a community to study. Although I understood the research subjects' anger, I couldn't understand how that anger led to murder. However, I hailed from the North and had no connection to Appalachia. There were students in that class, however, who were much more tied to the region and sided much more with the Appalachian community. I was certainly surprised at this reaction, but experience (and emotion) turned out to be a major factor in how we analyzed the documentary. These students understood how the anger of the town could lead to violence while I couldn't conceive of it.

One major assignment for this course was a paper on a women's issue. The paper topic was open-ended, but a mini-ethnography was one of the choices for a topic. Another student and I thought that a meta-ethnography, an ethnography on the class, would be an interesting paper topic. Since the assignment had just been given out and we were not yet committed to the project, we hadn't officially requested permission from the instructor or the class. Instead, we began to observe the way people acted in class and what they said just to see if the class was even worth writing about. As this student and I observed, we noticed certain social and political camps in the class. Not every student took part in these discussions, but we noticed an atmosphere of competition, which indicated a lack of community among groups. When the teacher randomly put together work groups, one group requested to be together because they knew each other. Although this decision seemed innocuous enough, it detracted from the philosophy behind group work. Then, when it was time for groups to choose a woman's theorist from a list of authors, this group sought out the professor ahead of time because they wanted to get first choice. Again, these instances are minor, but they worked to establish an environment that was less than communal. In addition, this separatist attitude became clear during class discussion based on who listened to whom and the reactions that followed. In a class that was supposed to be about collaboration, community, and female support, it seemed to function just as any competitive academic course. Perhaps it was even *more* competitive. Perhaps it was an example of the oppressed becoming the oppressor. Students in the class were already trained to function in the hierarchal world of the academy and weren't adapting well to the implementation of feminist principles to the class. Needless to say, my peer and I looked down at our notes and saw evidence of these emotional tensions.

On the day of the most contentious incident, we were discussing *Translated Woman* by Ruth Behar, an ethnography about sisterhood and Esperanza's experiences, when my peer (the one writing the paper with me who had taken some notes on her observations) accused the class of failing to put into practice their own feminist theories. In the section that we were discussing, Esperanza encountered backbiting and gossip from her peers, and a lack of emotional support from them when dealing with difficulties stemming from male oppressors. In an outburst that seemed accusatory and tense this student said, "There is backbiting going on in this class right now." Several students appeared shocked and replied that all discussions were in the context of a spirited debate. Many students in the class perceived this outburst as a purely personal act. However, the reverberations of this comment lasted a week. Many students contacted the professor privately, convinced that she (each person) had been the guilty, backbiting person. Students were upset and took the comment personally. Many of them discussed the incident with students outside of the class, asking for commentary and analysis. When this student spoke in class, I remember cringing and thinking, "Yes, this class has some issues among us, but please stop forcing them out into the atmosphere of the class. We'd all be much more comfortable ignoring the tension."

In essence, the reaction to the student's comment became more interesting and worthy of discussion than the incident itself. The responses were dramatic to say the least. There were students who voiced distress over the student and my note taking. Needless to say, we dropped the idea of the ethnography paper immediately. The heightened emotion of the class and the student's comment exposing it shows that even when emotion pushes its way to the surface, we still try to ignore it or bury it in part because we do not have the language to discuss it.

Even though responses during that week became emotional, intense, personal, and biased, the teacher and the student who spoke, along with the other students in the class, decided to take a critical, reflective look at the statement, our own reactions, and how they fit into the subject matter and aim of the course. In truth, our responses in class had been much more emotional than we first admitted, inevitable when talking about subjects such as rape, abuse, race, and the exploitation of minorities.

The student took a look at her own behavior and the reaction from the class. In addition, we were asked to briefly discuss and think about what had happened. To be honest, I was afraid that the class would never recover, and be drawn with battle lines of alliances and enemies that would ultimately affect our learning. But by reflecting on our emotional attachment and by becoming aware of how this was affecting our intellectual engagement, the class made a turn, changed in some slight way. Students began to really listen to each other. Participants consciously tried to proceed in the spirit of feminism, listening and looking for change. I know that before the incident I would shut down when certain members spoke, already mentally dismissing their ideas because I knew they would come from a side I disagreed with. Because of the incident and the subsequent reflection, I found myself trying to keep my mind consciously open and tried to truly listen to what my peers were saying. The act of listening had become important to the content of the class, the topic of feminism, and the issue of creating power and support for women in the world. The incident pointed to the very subject that we were supposed to be exploring—feminism, culture, and women's expression.

Now, when I look back on the event, I'm concerned that we didn't spend enough time reflecting on the incident in class. Really, we could have taken an entire class to parse out the layers exposed by the student's comment and the responses to it. And yet, our denouement to the anger was all too brief. The question should have been, "how do we transform our anger to wonder?" Sara Ahmed suggests "feminist pedagogy . . . is bound up with wonder, with engendering a sense of surprise about how it is that the world has come to take the shape that it has. Feminist teaching . . . begins with this opening, this pause or hesitation, which refuses to allow the taken-for-granted to be granted" (182). The "outburst" could be expanded to examine the ways in which there are certain codes of behavior in a classroom, especially in a graduate class, and analyze if these codes are always appropriate for the subject, and how these codes allow certain people to speak, perhaps the people who are least invested, or who can control their emotions. Later on, when I met a few of the students privately, one said, "Why is it such a big deal that the class had formed cliques? All classes are that way." Her comments could have been an opportunity to think about why many graduate classes formulate factions, and how it needs to be changed.

It is apparent that we need to give emotions a space in our classrooms. Teachers spend time assuming the reactions of students, but what if emotions about the class were addressed through writing and/or a discussion forum? Perhaps students' emotions will stay the same, but perhaps opening a dialogue will allow both students and teachers to adjust their perceptions and actions accordingly. For example, the feminist classroom incident, whether or not the student was appropriate or offensive, opened up discussion about the way we perceived each other's behavior in the class. Our awareness became somewhat heightened over the issue of how we were reacting to each other's comments and attitudes. I know the incident caused me to make a conscious decision to remain emotionally and academically open and to listen.

However, all interpretations of the event didn't mirror mine. One peer told me that she was more confused about the comment than anything else. By that time in the semester she had shut down to any emotions that went along with feminism. When she witnessed the emotional outburst, she had already shut down and removed herself from the emotional dynamics of the class. This student perceived the event as a personal one caused by personality traits of certain individuals in the class. She wondered why many of the participants didn't just keep their emotions to themselves.

Many instructors say they shy away from any student responses that seem "too emotional." I agree that emotions are risky, unpredictable elements in a classroom, but whether we look at them critically or not, they are always there, simmering below the surface, and also can be fuel for the writing, thinking, and changing that we do in a composition classroom. The emotions of students are not just learning elements to be ignored, but possible places of opportunity, places to open up and look at critically. Deborah Chappel suggests that:

> The emotions beneath the surface in the classroom, those outlaw emotions that seem inappropriate in the learning environment, are the energy source for radical pedagogy. Productively tapping into these emotions requires a concentrated and sophisticated understanding of the emotions at play in the learning environment, and such

> awareness cannot be achieved without frank discussion among ourselves and our students (23).

Therefore, the more we ignore emotion, the less we will be able to utilize emotion in the classroom. According to Chappel, moments of emotion might be where real learning occurs, the kind of learning that transforms the way people think about themselves and the world.

One interesting (or problematic) aspect of thinking about emotion is that emotion can be invisible in the classroom. We cannot always know through external expression what our students are feeling. I am particularly concerned with the way we discuss race in our composition classes and how emotion plays an often ignored role in these discussions. In my experience, it is very easy for these discussions to fall into "encoded ways." As Megan Boler puts it, "Silence and omission are by no means neutral. One of the central manifestations of racism, sexism, and homophobia is 'erasure'" (184). The silence in the classroom might be because of emotional responses to subject matter. In the case of discussions about race, the ideas and beliefs we hold are connected to us on a deep emotional level. At this point of time in our culture we are at a dangerous place in terms of our open discussions about this topic, especially in the university. On many levels we have stunted our racial discussions because of fear.

If as hooks writes in *Teaching Community: Pedagogy of Hop*e, "Education is about healing and wholeness. It is about empowerment, liberation, and transcendence" (43), how are we to accomplish this liberation if we are having discussions about race that barely scratch the surface, that divide along racial lines, that are not as honest and real as they can possibly be? There is a "walking on eggshells feel" especially when it comes to race. No one wants to offend anyone else. We are not having honest discussions about race because we are ignoring and avoiding the heightened emotions that go along with this subject. There is always a possibility that the class will become "too emotional" and let's face it, we are not really trained to allow emotions into our academic, reason-filled classrooms. And, of course, there's always the fear that words will be taken out of context. Will the language police come and arrest us? I always have this underlying fear that one wrong step and one misplaced word will be blown out of proportion and someone will go home in tears, maybe even me. This fear circulates between teacher and student. And I've begun to wonder if this fear hinders our students and ourselves. Do students only say what they want us to hear? Are we, as teachers, so afraid of offending someone that we are not doing our jobs and pushing our students to uncomfortable pedagogical places?

In his preface to *Race, Rhetoric, and Composition*, Keith Gilyard implores composition instructors to begin to look at race critically. He states that discussion about race "has been emotive rather than analytic" (ix). He writes, "theorizing race has yet to catch up with all the personal, albeit necessary, reflections in classrooms and professional outlets" (ix). I agree with Gilyard that it seems as if emotive reactions to race are often places where discussions end. I agree that instructors need to theorize race. However, instructors also need to theorize emotion when it comes to race. Emotion is not just a category to get through in order to begin the "real work" of critical thinking. Rather, it is a part of critical thinking. Perhaps the only way to "render visible the implicit yet dominant discourses on race, racism, and identity" (ix) is to make visible the emotion that goes along with these discourses.

In one particular incident that occurred in my classroom a few years ago, I became aware of how we have failed to be as honest as we can be when discussing issues of race in the classroom. Here's what happened: During a speaking-intensive composition class, I asked the students to choose their own topics to present to the class and then facilitate class discussion on this topic. One group chose the topic of affirmative action. The group, made up of one African American female, one African American male, one white male, and one white female, introduced and explored different ways of thinking about affirmative action. The class had already prepared for the day by reading articles chosen by the group.

While the group prompted the class with questions, I began to notice an unsettling thing—the class became divided among race lines. The white students had much to say about the topic, but the African American students remained silent. This silence was obvious and overshadowed the whole presentation. At the time, the silence made me uneasy and I pointed out to the class that all the white students seemed to be giving their opinions. Was this the Southern cliché of white domination? How was it possible that there were no African American voices on the topic of affirmative action? Who was gaining from this discussion? I asked the class if any of the African American students wanted to comment on the issue. No one really wanted to comment.

Later that afternoon, I tried to figure out the cause. Was it a thoughtful pondering silence? Was it a folding of the arms and a refusal to engage? I imagined the students leaving the class and then talking about affirmative action with their friends in the cafeteria. Were they exchanging ideas only with people who shared their own beliefs? That day, I received an email from a student who said that she felt uncomfortable that I had called attention to the fact that none of the African American students were having a voice in the debate over affirmative action. She had a good point. Even though the discussion in the class became divided along racial lines, I felt extremely uncomfortable pointing this out to the class and even more worried when I asked the students who had been silent to speak. I felt my whiteness in that instant while I stood at the head of the class, and as I asked the African American students to participate, I instantly had the feeling that my request might be perceived as essentializing. In that moment, I had to make a choice. Although this was just one moment in a classroom, it was actually emotionally loaded for all of us. Not only was I afraid that my students would resent my probing into the subject, but I was concerned about my own vulnerability as a white instructor discussing a race-related issue. I was reminded of the interplay of emotions that are occurring in the classroom, and how they go far beyond the actual discussion that might be taking place.

I emailed the student back saying that I was sorry that my comments had caused her discomfort, but I thought that it was my responsibility to push the class for the sake of critical dialogue. I do feel like I have to be devil's advocate and find ways to have students talk about what they might not want to talk about. However, I was very upset about the email. I was concerned that I had done or said something wrong. (Looking back, I worry that this sounds like a dismissive answer to a complicated issue and a worthy, but reactive complaint.)

The next session I addressed the class and proposed that we have a discussion about our previous class. We conducted a meta-discussion about what had happened during our affirmative action class. And I thought going into it, this is really a problem. We have to have a whole class on why we couldn't talk about our last discussion.

I asked the class why we had had such a difficult time talking about affirmative action. The answers they gave were much more revealing than I thought they would be and not necessarily all that predictable. Many of the African American students said that they were tired of discussing race. One African American female student said that she really didn't believe in affirmative action, but she knew that some people would be angry at her for saying so. What a dichotomy. On the one hand, the subject was too emotionally explosive so no one wanted to say the wrong thing. On the other hand, the students are sick and tired of talking about the subject of racial discrimination. To me this sounds like a very dangerous problematic space—too emotional and yet too cliché all at the same time. Simultaneously, it's precisely the kind of space to dive in for real critical thinking, writing, and analysis.

Why were some of the students feeling like it was pointless to even have a conversation about this topic? How can fear and boredom go together? In our efforts to have frank discussions about race, have we become too focused on product over process? I think it is time to re-evaluate our own fear and that of our students, and take the risk that a subject that elicits personal and deep emotions, might not end up to be a direct route to a life-changing meeting of cultures and minds. In order for us to have the kinds of sharing of ideas and beliefs that we long for, we are going to need to admit that it could end up being painful, for us and the students. But in the reality that our students have become trapped between apathy and fear, we need to find ways to open up our discussion about race and risk discomfort, or else we will have fallen into a scary place where emotions are so intense that we turn away from even dealing with the subject and instead rely on rehashing our discussions about race in safe, clichéd ways that fail to disrupt the power structures of the university that are already in place. I don't want my students to become, as hooks writes, "pawns of those who invent the games and determine the rules" ("Community" 35). We need to start by evaluating the fear that exists during any discussion about race—fear of students from different races, fear of teachers who might offend someone, fear of the administration who relies on politically correct definitions of what we should talk about in the composition classroom.

Of course, it is difficult to analyze the silence of students. Several composition theorists, such as Cheryl Glenn and Anne Ruggles Gere, have explored the rhetoric of silence as a communication strategy for those who feel marginalized. Gere prompts her readers to become aware of instructors' tendencies to privilege speaking and discount the way students use silence, reminding us that "silence provides protection *from* as well as shelter *for* power" (208). She especially focuses on "personal writing" and the way certain writing environments can push students to expose themselves to the point of disempowerment, instead of the opposite. Other authors, such as Susan Sontag, write about the creative potential of silence, "an enriching emptiness" (367) she calls it. Indeed, silence can be another form of Berthoff's chaos, a place to pause and reflect, a moment of creative possibility. Certainly, silence can be an important way for students to assert their desire to resist the authority of the classroom. However, in the affirmative action discussion, I was more concerned that the silence was disempowering, a way for those who are the most comfortable and powerful to get themselves heard. I admit that I most likely privilege speech over silence in my composition classes, but in this case, I wanted to know the reason behind the silence. The reasons were much more complicated and emotion-filled than I had imagined them to be.

There is a space between silencing and out-of-control emotional response. The only way to get there is to take the time to use emotional responses as a way to go deeper into the subject matter being discussed. These emotional places of discomfort can allow us opportunities for deeper learning. Boler defines a "pedagogy of discomfort" as a way to "engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs, and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others . . . [and] to recognize how emotions define how and what one chooses to see, and conversely not to see" (177). Thus, she encourages educators to re-think the way they view teaching moments that create tension. Instead of trying to move away from discomfort, we need to learn how to tolerate it, and perhaps examine it. The reasons behind our discomfort are often pivotal to what we are going to learn or what we need to learn. Boler describes emotion as acting in this way. In every emotion-laden discussion in a composition class, we are dealing with the language of emotion during this discussion, as well as the actual emotion that comes about because of the discussion. Although these two aren't separate entities, they are two factors shaping our discussions. Even though it may seem as if we are having a typical discussion, there are many subtle factors at work shaping the pathway of the discussion and what we learn from it.

Although the common reaction to emotion in the classroom is to dismiss it, how we think about emotion and our reaction to it is crucial to our understanding of it. If we believe that language is a means for social transformation, as Paulo Freire does, then how we name and contemplate emotion in the classroom becomes a task that we must take on. He writes, "To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it" (88). But instructors haven't even attempted to do this when it comes to emotion. Our beliefs about emotion are so embedded in our culture that we have trouble beginning to see how they are constructed and how they affect the teaching of writing.

Of course, this task seems to fall upon teachers because we are the leaders of the class. And yet allowing emotional moments in the classroom is a scary proposition. And so I do not want to suggest the “solution” to allowing emotion in the classroom should completely become an individual endeavor. In fact, I think the subject goes way beyond the individual instructor. One of the tricky things about emotion is that we tend to push it into the personal realm. We take what might be a public experience and put all of its burden on the individual’s private experience. Often this individual is perceived to be a female because of the gender’s association with emotion. Just like in the graduate class I described, emotional responses are attributed mostly to the individual and are expected to be “managed.”

And so this private/public split that is associated with emotion and gender is the way we tend to view emotions in the classroom. The feminist rhetoric class that I’ve described is an example of this. Not only did the students who were not directly involved in the class altercation label the emotions that surfaced a “personal” problem, but the students who were accused of backbiting spent a lot of time and effort blaming the student who accused instead of reflecting on why the student may have said what she said. They desperately wanted to put their attentions towards the one student, instead of looking at the larger implications of her behavior. Although this was a feminist rhetoric class and we would assume that most of the class was devoted to examining hierarchal situations, our beliefs about emotions were so ingrained that the instinct to silence the “emotional” student was still there. At one point in my conversations with one of the participants, she implied that she really didn’t see why backbiting was such a problem. She explained that it happened in every class, so why was it such a big deal? This woman, who would probably describe herself as a staunch feminist, could not view the personal and the emotional as signs that our class was fraught with issues concerning the distribution of power.

The above examples might help begin an examination of the ways in which our thinking and language on emotion shape the trajectories of our classroom discussions. Since views on emotion are embedded in our culture, it is difficult to evaluate and change our thinking about them, to see how wedded we are to views that may be outdated or unproductive to learning.

It is certainly difficult to analyze the epistemological consequences of every class discussion. In fact, it is impossible to do so. However, no one can deny that our overlying beliefs and thinking about class discussions, especially when discussing topics such as race, sexuality, and gender, affect pedagogical choices. Although emotion is just beginning to factor into these conscious choices, it is now time that, Worsham writes, "we are called on to center the weight of scholarly inquiry on emotion, to see that all education is sentimental, that all education is an education of sentiment" ("Way" 163).

If the field of composition is dedicated to changing the world through the re-evaluation of language use, we should be reminded that nothing changes unless it changes the emotions that go along with it. That is, while it is helpful to deliberate about social issues and subject matter, these deliberations are entrenched in emotions that are powerful, embedded, and can act as signals for problems that are more social than personal, more public than private.

Although I've discussed the ways in which emotion is crucial to the work instructors do in composition classes, I'd like to pinpoint concrete methods for acknowledging and productively using emotions for critical thinking. (Even while I write this list, I need to acknowledge that it is problematic to state that emotions that occur in the classroom can actually be separated from critical thinking. My hope is not to reify the split between reason and emotion, but to value and understand emotion in composition.) The overall stance necessary to use emotion constructively comes from Sara Ahmed's concept of wonder in feminist pedagogy. She writes, "What is ordinary, familiar or usual often resists being perceived by consciousness . . . wonder, as an affective relation to the world, is about seeing the world that one faces and is faced with ‘as if’ for the first time” (179). Wonder leads to questioning; questioning leads to critical thinking, to uncovering what has been “taken for granted” (182). And so, it is helpful to conceive of both as a way to tap into the learning potential of emotions by examining their cultural sources and by using the affective stance of wonder as a means to do so.

Some Ways to Incorporate Emotion as Valuable and Academic (I think these can be especially useful for moments that do feel out-of-control and scarily un-academic):

1. Lesliee Antonette has created what she calls a “Multicultural Response Paradigm” to guide students in examining their emotional reactions to a text. Her paradigm was adapted from Kathleen McCormick and can be used for any discussion or response to a text, so that students can learn how to value their emotions for critical responses. In Antonette’s paradigm, she asks the listener or reader to write several paragraphs. These paragraphs consist of describing one’s emotional response and using this description to analyze the subject. The final section asks the student to bridge their emotional responses with critical responses. That is, what has affected students’ emotions to the subject/text? How do their reactions relate to personal relationships, memories, cultural attachments, or knowledge of American culture (119-120)?
2. In “Sideshadowing Teacher Response,” Nancy Welch introduces the learning tool of sideshadowing to document and explore how emotions surrounding writing can lead to possibilities for a text. Although this article focuses on responses from both teacher and student, this exercise can be used to get students to respond to the text (their own or otherwise) with questions, concerns, thinking and emotions that the text evokes. Through their own questions in the

margins about the different conflicts within the text and writer, students can contemplate "the competing discourses, cultural norms, conflicting intentions, and textual ideals that shape and unshape a draft" (377).

3. Instructors can ask students to pause in a freewriting session and then resume a guided class discussion to explore how emotion is related to embedded cultural narratives, stereotypes, experience, and subject identity.
4. In *Doing Emotion*, Laura Micciche discusses the possibility of enacting emotion in the composition classroom. Micciche suggests writing is a bodily experience and provides evidence of bodily metaphors her students have used to describe the writing process (52-53). (A writing comparison to vomit occurred frequently in my composition class this semester.) Micchiche encourages instructors to examine the way performance studies can help students understand the way emotion is lived. One particular exercise has students attempt to "'share the breath' of the writer or a character" (58). Through performing and tape-recording another's language and emotion that goes along with it, students can "scrutinize emotion as a rhetorical concept that appears on the surface of things only as a result of complex processes that operate out of sight" (55). Although this is a bold way of introducing the rhetoric of emotion to students, there are many pedagogical possibilities yet to be discovered.
5. Finally, it is important to continue discussions of the importance of emotions in composition, especially when others (e.g., administrators, other teachers) can plant seeds of doubt dismissing and labeling your writing class as touchy-feely.

The above is not meant to be a comprehensive list. Rather, it is a beginning and invitation to discover ways in which "outlaw emotions" in the classroom can be thought of not as a disaster, but as an opportunity for critical thought and discussion. Certainly, recent studies on emotion could have added to the two examples I've provided. Although both instances made attempts at acknowledging the moments of emotion as important, I believe both instances could have benefited from even more attention and examination. Hopefully, further discussion in emotion studies and composition will encourage just that.

Notes

[1] Although many theorists argue against the notion that composition's role is to counteract injustice, many rhetoricians, from Aristotle to Patricia Bizzell to Paulo Freire, have argued that language is inherently connected to ethics or power inequities, and so it is the responsibility of the composition instructor to address these topics.

[2] See Sara Ahmed for a discussion of metaphor and sticky emotions; Laura Micciche, Lynn Worsham, and Jenny Edbauer for further discussions on the cultural implications of emotion.

[3] The term "touchy-feely" is often used by those outside and inside the field of composition as a way to classify certain activities in the classroom. The use of this word, or the need to use it, reveals anxiety over emotions in class, but also the way these emotional moments can be easily categorized, generalized, and dismissed.

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