Emotion, Ethics, and Rhetorical Action

Laura Micciche

Recent composition scholarship has articulated ethics through a postmodern framework. Scholars have challenged readings that conceptualize ethics as foundational, static, and objective criteria for “good” actions. They have done so by recognizing ethics as a contingent set of practices that are always in process, localized, and based on principles of difference. The value of this work for our field lies in its efforts to re-attach ethics to rhetoric, underscoring the situated nature of ethics and its capacity to question what counts as right and good in shifting political, cultural, and institutional contexts.

Efforts to show the rhetorical and political dimensions of ethics seem a natural outgrowth of composition’s focus on concepts of difference. Difference—especially as articulated by feminists and postcolonial theorists—has been central to contemporary understandings and critiques of pedagogy, theory, and professional life. Implicit in the turn to difference is the idea that we have an ethical responsibility to account for the way otherness might or should transform our teaching practices, theoretical models, and sense of professionalism. James Porter has been instrumental in developing this line of thought, especially when speaking of the relation between ethics and difference. For instance, he writes, “[P]ostmodern ethics not only listens to alternate voices, but it also works actively to uncover those voices. Recognition not of ‘The Other’ but of Others (plural) is a critical principle that emerges from postmodern ethics” (58). Using postmodernism to help him articulate the contingent nature of ethics, its relation to difference, and its rootedness in localized practices (50), Porter forwards a notion of “rhetorical ethics” that addresses “the plurality and contingency of choices” available in any given situation and that also “take[s] a firm stand when it is necessary to do so” (133). In other words, while he recognizes the changing, situated

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nature of ethics, Porter at the same time argues that standards and principles are necessary for ethical action. He articulates the importance of a careful balance between radical postmodern situatedness—which threatens to obliterate standards and thwart action—and rhetorical ethics, which seeks an appropriate and ethical response to a specific situation.

Building on Porter’s postmodern conception of ethics, Sheryl Fontaine and Susan Hunter’s 1998 edited collection, *Foregrounding Ethical Awareness in Composition and English Studies*, examines ethics in relation to writing instruction, writing program administration, research practices, English doctoral programs, intellectual property debates, and the evaluation of student writing. The collection argues for creating an environment characterized by ethical awareness, rather than one in which ethical judgment is applied to situations, a move that they argue would falsely posit objective, static ethical principles as applicable across situations. They reject notions of ethics as hard-and-fast principles, as a kind of checklist of what counts a “good” or “bad.” Instead, they argue “for an ethical habit of thought and relationship that is not universalizing “an ethical system that is always in process” (7; see Spigelman for a challenge to postmodern ethics).

Efforts to uproot static, universalizing conceptions of ethics have also figured in discussions of research practices. By raising questions about how to present and represent the words and ideas of research participants in qualitative research, for instance, Gesa Kirsch has noted that the line between presenting and appropriating others’ words is a slippery one that requires careful handling. In *Ethical Dilemmas in Feminist Research*, Kirsch argues that postmodern thought, especially its emphasis on local narratives and shifting identities, provides a useful framework through which to grapple with the hard task of representing others’ words and actions in ethical ways. She endorses collaboration between researcher and participant so that “those who once were ‘others’ will become researchers and scholars themselves” (xiv; see also Mortensen and Kirsch).

Gary Olson moves the discussion of ethics and difference into the realm of postcolonial theory in his 1999 essay, “Encountering the Other,” perhaps the key essay in composition studies addressing links between ethics, difference, and postmodernism. Deploying postcolonial theory as a means of conceptualizing difference and reinvigorating contact zone theory—the central pedagogical model of difference in the field—Olson borrows from Emmanuel Levinas and Luce Irigaray to define ethics as “the encounter with the Other” (92). Because wishes and desires are
constantly negotiated between people who often occupy unequal locations of status and power, Olson contends that "how we interact with an Other—how we balance our own needs, desires, and obligations with those of the Other—is precisely what ethics is about" (92). Olson goes on to explore the implications of postcolonial theory for pedagogy—emphasizing its capability to tell us something about "how power operates in our classrooms on both political and psychological levels"—and raises challenging questions about the "deeply ethical content of our work as teachers" (98, 99). In particular, he finds that postcolonial theory encourages us to interrogate the extent to which teachers

may use difference as a tool of control; the extent to which we may then ignore difference and retreat to the comfort of our own perspectives; and the extent to which we as teachers derive affective pleasure from our positions of authority over students, constructing our identity, at least in part, from our position as master over the uncivilized. (99)

In his comments, Olson implicitly underscores the gap between theory and practice in identity-based pedagogies, the gap between what we say we do and what we actually do. I think Olson is saying that in our zeal to embrace the virtues of contact zone theory—and cultural difference pedagogy in general—we have "diluted" and made abstract the real difficulties and challenges such commitments inescapably entail. In doing so, we have obscured the complex ethical questions inherent to teaching strategies that validate what is frequently despised, denigrated, and feared in the wider culture.

Olson's discussion highlights the affective component of doing ethics (though, it should be noted, this naming is my language, not Olson's). He suggests that teaching difference is an ethical practice necessitating questions about how to project oneself affectively in the classroom, admitting the possibility that teachers may "derive affective pleasure from our positions of authority over students." Olson provides a suggestive place from which to explore the emotional content of ethical questions, a focus that remains largely absent from discussions of ethics in composition studies. As the above outline of recent work indicates, attention to ethics in the field has foregrounded rhetorical issues, but this emphasis has not included pathos as a component of ethical theory and practice. Reasons for this exclusion are not mysterious given the general inattention to emotion as a rhetorical concept, an integral dimension of all meaning-making and judgment formation. Only recently has the field
initiated efforts to understand the role of emotion in the work we do, attempts that I briefly describe in the first section below. The exclusion of emotion from theories of ethics effectively perpetuates representations of ethics as a discourse and practice driven solely by reason, despite the fact that what counts as ethical hinges on understanding how to act and feel in ways appropriate to a situation.

After outlining composition's engagement with emotion, the remainder of this essay turns to two examples that demonstrate ethics and emotion as intertwined motives in the context of professional discourse. It's my belief that conceiving ethics outside the context of emotion furthers a distorted view of how decisions about a "good" take form and come to have a grip on community, culture, and habits of thought. Moreover, the exclusion of emotion positions reason as the grounds of rhetorical action, ultimately failing to acknowledge the complex claims and desires necessary to incite and achieve action. Political theorist George Marcus articulates the importance of emotion for political action as follows: "[T]he environmental movement, the AIDS movement, the pro-choice and pro-life movements, and many others recognize not only that claims of justice must be advanced but also that people get angry, that people get attentive, that people get hopeful, and that they can be moved to action by emotions evoked by well-crafted campaigns" (45; emphasis added). Marcus's insight calls to mind that change movements are invested with both emotion and ethics, for activism constitutes a commitment to an ethical vision of the world based on some belief in what is good and just. And to become the foundation of action this belief requires emotional force. As I discuss in the next section, it is this understanding of how ethics and emotion are always intertwined and connected to rhetorical action that has gone largely under-explored in the rhetoric of composition studies.

**Emotion in Rhetoric and Composition Studies**

The place of emotion in rhetorical studies has been overshadowed by persistent desires to view rational deliberation and argumentation as the central functions of rhetoric. This is seen, for instance, in the rhetoric of inquiry movement, which explores "how reason is rhetorical and how recognizing that fact should alter research" (Nelson et al. ix). Despite the movement's undertaking to critique objectivism and reject "the conventional split between inquiry and advocacy," scant attention has been paid to the role of pathos in this exceedingly logos-centered conception of rhetoric (Simons 4). In fact, in his description of the rhetoric of inquiry...
as an intellectual movement, Herbert Simons goes out of his way to say that the "situated, contextual, contingent" nature of this rhetoric need not be conceived as unreasonable, indecisive, or, I intuit, "soft" and emotional:

However open-ended [the rhetoric of inquiry] may be, it need not be unreasonable or unempirical. However capable it may be of conceiving plausible arguments for opposing claims, it need not leave us in a state of indecision. If it cannot lay claim to fixed and immutable standards of judgment, or to formal devices by which to compel assent, it can nevertheless provide ways of engaging one’s hearers, of clarifying ideas and also of rendering them plausible or probable. (17)

Emotion—or, more precisely, its absence—is central to this defense of what might sound too much like a squishy rhetoric of non-commitment and indecision. Emotion, in the rhetoric of inquiry movement, represents a dangerous ground of unreason, chaos, and blurred judgment. The rhetoric of reason is, above all else, reasonable in method and content, uncontaminated by the prowling indecision and irrationality of emotion. Likewise, politics, ideology, and judgment in the rhetoric of inquiry get articulated as products and producers of reason, accessible through argument analysis and construction, also beyond the reaches of emotion and its often-associated feminine wiles.

Similar to the rhetoric of inquiry movement, dominant conceptions of rhetoric in composition studies have largely undervalued emotion’s place in rhetorical theory and practice. Gretchen Moon makes this point in her reading of the abandonment of emotion in rhetoric-based textbooks. From her survey of such texts, she finds that none explicitly engage any theory of the emotions, or of the relationship between the emotions and other intellectual processes, or between emotions and ethics, or the implication of emotions in history, language, culture. . . . When they do discuss emotional appeals, they take the emotions for granted—as essential—and offer suggestions about how to excite them or, more frequently, simply allow that writers will find it useful to excite them. (40)

She notes that none of the textbooks she reviewed position pathos as central to writing or rhetoric, amounting to a decidedly reductive application of Aristotle’s appeals. Moon’s study of popular textbooks provides a useful gauge for assessing the field’s engagement with emotion
as a whole, for textbooks represent efforts to transform theory into practice, putting into practice dominant, assimilated ideas about writing and rhetoric that animate current scholarship.

Although it's true that emotion has been under-explored as a rhetorical and theoretical concept in composition, emotion has not been wholly excluded from the field's discourse. For instance, when searching CompPile, an internet research tool focused on post-secondary writing from 1939 to 1999, I discovered 193 entries related to the key word "emotion." While few of these sources explicate a theory of emotion or posit a rhetorical view of emotion, they do illustrate an ongoing interest in emotion as a concept relevant to teaching writing and studying language. Examining a group of students and their responses to a series of writing assignments, for instance, Susan McLeod, in *Notes on the Heart* (1997), reveals the affective elements that influence student writing. *Writing and Healing* (2000), edited by Charles Anderson and Marian MacCurdy, builds on this effort by gathering together essays that explore teaching and writing as activities that involve the whole person, activities that combine emotional and intellectual work. Though this book tends to conflate the personal and the emotional, neglecting the rhetorical content of emotion, *Writing and Healing* does urge us to attend to emotion as a way of knowing that influences teaching and learning. And, of course, Alice Brand's research has been the catalyst for developing emotion as a category of analysis in composition studies. Over the past fifteen years or so, she has pioneered a line of inquiry focused on intersections between language, cognition, and emotion.

Alongside work that has carved out a context for theorizing emotion, we have the commonplace, and therefore overlooked, presence of emotion in the very discourse of composition studies—in the ways we talk about what we do and why we do it. Composition discourse offers a strikingly explicit use of the rhetoric of emotion as a source for ethical claims about teaching practices and working conditions, making the absence of emotion theory especially strange and notable. As perhaps the most obvious example of composition's emotioned discourse about itself, we might consider representations of the field's disciplinary identity. Though the status of the field as a field is no longer in question, credibility issues still haunt the way we think about ourselves. Lynn Worsham pinpoints this nagging legitimacy problem when she writes that "[i]n spite of all the signs of ongoing intellectual and professional activity—thriving journals and book series, successful graduate programs, and distinguished scholars—composition still must contend with
its wording as a service organization and struggle to achieve recognition and legitimacy as an intellectual field" ( "Critical" 2). Composition's struggle for intellectual legitimacy always comes face-to-face with the low status, service aspect of "The Course" and the emotionality it seems to generate among teachers, students, and administrators. Teaching composition has always evoked powerful emotional responses from teacher-scholars, as undocumented departmental lore tends to confirm. Among published accounts, William Riley Parker memorably remarked in 1967 that teaching composition is "slave labor" and that student writing is a "dismal, unflowering desert" (11, 13). More recently, literary critic Sharon O’Dair refers to teaching composition as a "horrifying situation," a fate that "isn’t fun or challenging or respected or rewarded" (51).

While these comments convey dread and fear, reports from inside the field have sought to understand the forces that make composition a site of such ambivalent status and (though not often stated this way) corresponding emotional conflict. One of the factors influencing composition's ambivalent status is its role as the "socializer," as a space where teachers help students acculturate to the university, introducing them to the library, reviewing basic study methods, creating an intimate classroom space where the teacher actually knows her students' names, and familiarizing students with the resources available on campus (student counseling, community outreach programs, diversity initiatives, career-planning programs, and so on). Reflecting on composition classrooms' unique "intellectual space" in the university, Derek Owens articulates this socializing role within the newly emerging area of ecocomposition. In "Sustainable Composition" he writes, "Those of us who teach composition and design writing programs have perhaps more responsibility than other faculty to promote sustainable thinking throughout the curriculum" (29). In addition to teaching students how to write, composition teachers are often expected to care about their students in ways that other teachers are not. This caring has sometimes been coded as feminine because it draws on nurturing, accepting, and supporting practices associated with mothering (see Miller; Schell, "Feminization").

In addition to the "caring space" of composition classrooms, composition's distinctive identity also emerges from the field's historically marginalized location within English studies. For example, practitioners have constructed analogies that equate disciplinary status in the academy with social status in the culture at large. For example, practitioners have constructed analogies that equate disciplinary status in the academy with social status in the culture at large. In his contribution to The Politics of Writing Instruction (1991), Robert Connors identifies composition teachers as members of the "permanent underclass" who are
“oppressed, ill-used, and secretly despised” (55). In the same collection, Charles Schuster describes workers in composition as part of the “expendable lower class” consisting of “laborers, factory workers, piece workers,” drawing an analogy between the work of composition specialists and the exploited labor of the proletariat (89). And, in a striking overstatement of composition’s low status, Katherine Gottschalk compares composition teachers to occupants of an “underdeveloped nation”:

Geographically isolated or marginalized, the composition offices are placed by administrative powers in the poorest accommodations (not infrequently in basements). Members of an underdeveloped nation, staff (often adjuncts—not even citizens) are paid at substandard rates designed to suit the needs of the colonizing nations who can’t afford to treat them better, and who won’t locate the classes in their own countries, using their own citizens to teach them. (60)

Accounts of the field’s subordinate location have been reinforced by analyses revealing its feminized identity. Feminization, for Susan Miller, “calls to mind both positive new moves in composition to gender-balance research and teaching and negative associations with the actual ‘feminization’ of a field that collects, like bugs in a web, women whose persistently marginalized status demands political action” (39; see also Enos; Flynn 1995; Holbrook; Reichert). Amplifying Miller’s observation that underpaid female teachers overwhelmingly populate composition classrooms, Frances Ruhlen McConnel chronicles the patch-work employment of “freeway flyers,” and Eileen Schell makes visible the deplorable working conditions of “gypsy academics” and “contingent laborers” (Gypsy). This line of analysis makes the point that it’s no accident that composition is “oppressed, ill-used, and secretly despised,” as Robert Connors contends (55). Not when we consider that composition is also an embodiment of “lower-status female identity” (Miller 40).

These descriptions tell us something about the emotional dispositions that accompany compositionists’ real and metaphoric work locations in basements, on freeways, in the underclass, in the lower class, and, quite improbably, in an “underdeveloped nation.” More than that, though, these descriptions give some sense of the grounds from which field-specific claims are made, including ethical claims concerning what we do or ought to do in our classrooms, our knowledge-building, and our workplaces. That is to say, emotion is part of the grounds of ethical and rhetorical action, a claim that insists that action requires more than reason and rational deliberation. Ethical and rhetorical action is motivated by a
sense of what is “right” and “good” in a given situation, a judgment that not only emerges from reasoned deliberation but also from experience and belief and feeling about what is right, what is just.

Ellen Quandahl highlights the interconnectedness of emotion and ethics in her reading of Aristotle’s views on the subject. She argues that, for Aristotle, “emotions motivate actions that involve a moral component,” and she describes emotion as “a complex phenomenon of attention, body, belief, and judgment that can both contribute to argument and deliberation and be influenced by them” (17). In her account, derived from Aristotle and subsequent readings of his work, emotion, persuasion, and ethics form an inseparable weave that is central to rhetorical practice. Similarly, in his recent book The Sentimental Citizen: Emotion in Democratic Politics, George Marcus describes the role of emotion in political change as the grounds that move people to act. “Politics often begins with the pursuit of some local interest or grievance, such as resistance to busing, zoning changes, or tax increases, which to become political demands specific emotional support, courage to confront those often more powerful whom one decides to oppose, or sympathy that attracts one to join someone else’s fight” (45).

Emotion is crucial to how people form judgments about what constitutes appropriate action or inaction in a given situation—precisely the realm of ethics. The idea here is that emotions, like reasons, move people to judge, decide, and act in certain ways, and that, consequently, emotion is central to rhetorical action. By asserting the place of emotion in persuasion, in the formation of judgments, and in motives for civic discourse, we see a much more dynamic picture of the realms of rhetoric. In addition, we begin to see how impoverished is our view and teaching of rhetoric when we insist on relegating emotion to one of Aristotle’s appeals. By suggesting that pathos can be singled out and understood separately from ethos and logos, and in opposition to rationality, we underestimate its role in the process of forming judgments that become the basis for the beliefs and values through which our lives have meaning and our actions gain force.

**Ethics, Emotion, and Professionalism**

My argument so far is that emotion and ethics are intertwined and that when ethical theory fails to acknowledge the emotioned positions from which assumptions about ethics emerge, a narrow and inaccurate representation of rhetorical action and judgment formation results. In order to explore the implications these claims might have in how we read
composition's discourse, I focus here on how the study of emotion figures into professional ethics. My analysis begins by examining "Students' Right to Their Own Language," a position statement issued by the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the primary professional organization representing the interests of college writing teachers and scholars. I then turn to a recent College Composition and Communication (CCC) article, "Bi, Butch, and Bar Dyke: Pedagogical Performances of Class, Gender, and Sexuality," which addresses identity and representation in faculty reappointment materials (Gibson et al.). My aim is to highlight the way ethical motivations and emotion discourse merge in these professional documents and to illustrate how ethical beliefs and emotionality converge.

The CCCC Position Statements and Guidelines are professionally sanctioned documents intended to guide practice and to support faculty and administrators as they construct arguments for reducing class sizes in writing classes, assigning value to online publications at tenure time, and developing meaningful teacher preparation programs, among other things (see http://www.ncte.org/groups/cccc/positions). By establishing guidelines for good actions in the profession, these documents model an ethics of academic practice that projects an identity of the field, of what "Composition and Rhetoric" stands for. When reading over these statements, it's clear that they emerge from complex rhetorical situations combining reason—as manifest in the careful research and historicizing that often forms the basis of the policies—and ethical and emotional commitment to a way of seeing the world and the profession.

The influential "Students' Right to Their Own Language" statement functions as an ethical guide for treating student writing. The original resolution, passed by the CCCC Executive Committee in 1972, reads as follows:

We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language. (CCCC)
In his “Explanation of the Adoption,” preceding the printed version of the resolution and complete statement in CCC, 1974 Chair of CCCC Richard Larson notes that the Executive Committee anticipated the resolution would be “controversial.” Thus, they appointed a Language Statement Committee to write an explanatory background text; the resolution and background statement were subsequently adopted as policy by CCCC in 1974.

The resulting document provides an impressively detailed context for the statement, including an overview of research on language development skills and a list of relevant sources. But what we see in the resolution, and throughout the entire statement, is not merely an intellectualized discussion of the matter at hand. We see an ethical stance that deploys emotional discourse to establish a set of principles that might guide writing instruction. This comes through in language choices describing a standard dialect as that which “exert[s] its dominance over another” and leads to “immoral advice for humans.” Also, an ethical/emotional stance is conveyed as the statement argues that teachers require training “to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language.”

In fact, the Introduction to the background statement touches on the emotionality of the issues taken up in the statement. When considering if schools should “try to uphold language variety, or to modify it, or to eradicate it,” the committee notes that “[t]he emotional nature of the controversy has obscured the complexities of the problem and hidden some of the assumptions that must be examined before any kind of rational policy can be adopted” (CCCC). The reference to the “emotional nature of the controversy” is used here to call attention to the way strong feelings obscure issues, essentially obstructing rational thought. Yet, the “Students’ Right” document weaves emotioned discourse throughout its discussion of language diversity, suggesting that emotion is indeed part of the deliberation process leading to the formation of “rational policy.”

The statement includes a number of rhetorical questions that seem designed to encourage the audience to affirm the goodness and rightness of a stance that embraces language diversity. The following examples illustrate this point:

The English profession, then, faces a dilemma: until public attitudes can be changed—and it is worth remembering that the past teaching in English classes has been largely responsible for those attitudes—shall we place our emphasis on what the vocal elements of the public think it wants or on what the actual available linguistic evidence indicates we should emphasize?
Should we, on the one hand, urge creativity and individuality in the arts and the sciences, take pride in the diversity of our historical development, and, on the other hand, try to obliterate all the differences in the way Americans speak and write? Our major emphasis has been on uniformity, in both speech and writing; would we accomplish more, both educationally and ethically, if we shifted that emphasis to precise, effective, and appropriate communication in diverse ways, whatever the dialect?

Rhetorical questions are assertions in disguise; they function as a means for demonstrating authority because they are not in search of answers but are engaged in the exercise of power. The emotional force of the rhetorical question often seems to derive from its shaming power. A rhetorical question seems to ask, "Could you really believe that $X$ is true given that you know ...?" To answer affirmatively is to admit at best that your thinking is flawed and, at worst, that you, not just your thinking, are seriously compromised and unethical. By contrasting available choices that are unequally weighted, as do the questions above, rhetorical questions pass judgment on an audience, edging them further and further into a Socratic corner. Sharon Crowley notes that asking a rhetorical question "actually provides an opportunity to say more damning things about the traitors" (192). In asserting ethical guidelines for granting students rights to their own language, the committee makes clear that the choices presented in these rhetorical questions are not really choices, then. The impact of the questions is to highlight the ethically troubling consequence of choosing, for instance, to "obliterate" student language differences by emphasizing "uniformity." The questions, and their implied answers, make visible the powerful emotional investments informing this argument for language diversity.

The use of the imperative mood is another way that the statement reveals the emotional force of the argument. The imperative expresses a clear intention to influence the audience's attention by delivering a command or direct call to action. Its power derives from the righteous force of the direct command, presenting a definitive course of action toward which one should not waver or hesitate:

We need to discover whether our attitudes toward "educated English" are based on some inherent superiority of the dialect itself or on the social prestige of those who use it.

As English teachers, we are responsible for what our teaching does to the self-image and the self-esteem of our students. We must decide what
elements of our discipline are really important to us, whether we want to share with our students the richness of all varieties of language, encourage linguistic virtuosity, and say with Langston Hughes:

I play it cool and dig all jive
That's the reason I stay alive
My motto as I live and learn
Is to dig and be dug in return.

The injunction that we "need" to and "must" choose which side we're on establishes a disingenuous choice: either we are on the side of privilege and prestige, or we are on the side of egalitarian language use, a side that understands the hobbling consequences of upholding language superiority on students' self-esteem. And we must decide if we are with Langston Hughes, who functions as the minority representative of language variety and diversity, or against him. Clearly, there is only one choice to be made, and we come to understand this through the emotional power of the imperative urging us to do the right thing, to see how unethical choosing to support a standard dialect is because it amounts to supporting uniformity and a hierarchy of social privilege. There is a sense of uncompromising urgency expressed through the imperative, tying definitive action to an emotional-ethical appeal.

What I want to emphasize here is not that the content of the statement is problematic but that accepted guidelines and policies emerge as much from our sense of what is appropriate and just as they do from the emotioned basis that informs these very ideas. To suggest that emotional impulses obscure rational thought is to ignore the way in which these impulses often motivate and intertwine with "rational" policy-making, a merging that resists bracketing the emotional from the ethical and rational. Martha Nussbaum, in *Upheavals of Thought*, makes a similar point when she argues for seeing emotion as integral to ethical reasoning: "Emotions are not just the fuel that powers the psychological mechanism of a reasoning creature," she writes, "they are parts, highly complex and messy parts, of this creature's reasoning itself" (3).

Perhaps the melding of ethics and emotion is more intimately displayed by the way we choose to represent ourselves in our scholarship, in our teaching, and in professional materials related to tenure and promotion. In my final example, I focus on an instance in which a departmental reappointment process is used as a means for performing identity in order to honor a personal and professional ethic that happens to collide with conventional professional ethics. In their *CCC* article, "Bi,
Butch, and Bar Dyke: Pedagogical Performances of Class, Gender, and Sexuality,” Michelle Gibson, Martha Marinara, and Deborah Meem narrate their stories in order to “critique both the academy’s tendency to neutralize the political aspects of identity performance and the essentialist identity politics that still inform many academic discussions of gender, class, and sexuality” (70). Each writer presents examples of the complicated ways that identity signifies both within and beyond the academy. One of their goals is to disrupt the largely stable category of “professor,” often assumed to signify a set of normative characteristics that mysteriously persist despite cultural background and/or family history. The authors explain that their stories challenge the following academic assumptions:

... the assumption that the university represents a set of attributes that can be acquired by various Others that will enable them to realize a stereotyped dream of success, the assumption that the process of acquiring such attributes involves jettisoning undesirable traits and associations that the Other has brought with her, the assumption that power in the academy is consistently associated with a predictable and unchanging set of personal characteristics, and the assumption that professor self-presentation must reflect only those “power” characteristics and no other. (70)

The authors provide telling accounts of what happens to cultural difference as it travels through the machinery of higher education. The final narrative, in particular, highlights a struggle between the author’s choice in tenure review documents to represent her nontraditional path to professorship, and university administrators’ reading of her disclosures as “artless” and anti-intellectual. For clarity, I shall call this writer Author #3, since the authors of the separate narratives are not identified, emphasizing identity as performance rather than as sign of ownership or authenticity.

Author #3 uses her reappointment dossier as a site for describing the links she feels to her students, all of whom are enrolled in an open admissions college at the University of Cincinnati. As she tells us, faculty and administrators are sensitive about representations of the college, for students’ “underprepared” identities often give the college a “bad rap” (89). In an attempt to identify with her students and to complicate her identity as a professional in the academy, Author #3 includes passages in her dossier like the following:

I do not have a traditional academic background, and I believe that is one of my greatest strengths as a University College faculty member. I just
barely graduated from high school; then I muddled around working as a cocktail waitress, selling cars, peddling insurance door-to-door, and living what could be called an aimless existence before I met someone who suggested that I attend college. (86)

She goes on to describe her movement through two-year and four-year institutions as equally random and based on advice from others rather than her own initiative. The lack of intention, the aimlessness that characterized her life before becoming an academic, was for her a fact that bound her with her students, who are not conceived to be “college material.” Author #3 uses her identity formation strategically: to acknowledge the ways in which she recognizes herself in her students and to invite her institution to recognize her students’ potential. She tells us, “I wanted to perform for those administrators an identity they usually associate with students they characterize as ‘not college material’ and then complicate it with an identity they usually associate with professionals they characterize as ‘successful’” (90).

This process of recognition, particularly Author #3’s effort to link her experiences with those of her students, is especially threatening to the institution, for it unsettles notions about one’s appropriate place as a professional, including the way we are supposed to feel about our students. For example, she tells us that the readers of her dossier were “extremely troubled by my admission that I feel such intense connection to my students” (90). Existing boundaries between the professional-self and the student-other are put under pressure in her narrative, uncomfortably disrupting the university’s system of privilege that depends on the fiction of unchanging identities—according to which teachers don’t randomly arrive at their career decisions or work as cocktail waitresses prior to entering the profession.

In her reappointment narrative, Author #3 expresses what Arlie Hochschild has called “inappropriate emotion” as an ethical strategy aimed at challenging conventional beliefs about professionalism. Hochschild describes appropriate and inappropriate emotions in terms of “feeling rules” and “expression rules.” Feeling rules “define what we imagine we should and shouldn’t feel and would like to feel over a range of circumstances; they show how we judge feeling. Feeling rules differ from expression rules. A feeling rule governs how we feel whereas an expression rule governs how we express feeling” (82). Author #3’s narrative confronts both kinds of rules by asserting that her feelings of connection to her students are not only proper but are a valuable asset in
University College and by expressing these feelings in her reappointment file, a site where feelings, especially feelings about students, are typically considered irrelevant and unprofessional. In the process, Author #3 demonstrates that professional documents can and perhaps should be used to assert ethical and emotional discourse in an effort to subvert and problematize pre-fab categories of professional identity that effectively demonize difference and reward sameness.

Author #3’s account also makes clear that learning appropriate and inappropriate emotional display involves an education in power relations. How people position themselves and are positioned by their culture is largely an effect of emotional training consisting of both overt and implicit pedagogies of social relations (see Worsham, “Going”). The content of this training focuses on how we are supposed to feel in a given circumstance, express what we feel, and internalize and make sense of it. Emotion theorists argue that this intimate cultural work on one’s sense of self and on one’s perception of others is central to understanding the dynamics of domination and subordination, for certainly emotional training is a key component in learning who to objectify, respect, fear, love. Peter Lyman, in “The Politics of Anger,” points out that such dynamics are often obscured by claims that emotions are personal, not political—that they do not have a collective or social character, only a personal character, which is finally idiosyncratic to each individual. Yoking emotion to psychological symptoms, argues Lyman, “serves the interests of hegemony when it strips human experience of its collective and active character, and conceals oppression by blaming the victims for their symptoms” (59). When we see that emotions do in fact have a social character, we begin to understand why they might be seen as dangerous, for this insight suggests that emotions function as a resource to create change, to which any political protest attests, and that emotions cannot be contained within the private realm where collective experience is obscured and depoliticized. Adrienne Rich points out that change is always tied up with feelings: “A movement for change lives in feelings, actions, and words. Whatever circumscribes or mutilates our feelings makes it more difficult to act, keeps our actions reactive, repetitive: abstract thinking, narrow tribal loyalties, every kind of self-righteousness, the arrogance of believing ourselves at the center” (223).

Tendencies to think of emotions as personally experienced and felt are simply not adequate to describe how emotions take form and are coded as appropriate or inappropriate within communities. Binding emotion to the personal ignores its potential to contribute to knowledge-
making and to create change; it also diminishes the place of emotion in the rhetorical tradition and in contemporary rhetorical studies. Catherine Lutz, in "Engendered Emotion," argues that "[a]s both an analytic and an everyday concept in the West, emotion, like the female, has typically been viewed as something natural rather than cultural, irrational rather than rational, chaotic rather than ordered, subjective rather than universal, physical rather than mental or intellectual, unintended and uncontrol­lable, and hence often dangerous" (69). By challenging this view and theorizing emotion as a central part of persuasion and judgment, I believe we create new understandings of emotion as a rhetorical concept that belongs in political and ethical spheres associated with communicative action.

**Emotion and Ethics Making a Difference**

Considering emotion to be part of the grounds of ethical and rhetorical action encourages us to ask new and different questions about the motives driving pedagogical methods. I’m thinking here of motives that go beyond “what works” as a driving force for pedagogy and that intersect with epistemological, political, and, my particular interest here, emotioned positions. We might ask, for instance, how emotional appeals underwrite service-learning projects. Why are writing classrooms appropriate sites for such projects? In addition to creating opportunities for community involvement and action, service-learning projects operate at the nexus of ethics and emotion. They do so by implicitly (and perhaps explicitly, in some cases) positioning community-based projects as an ethical form of civic participation and by educating students’ emotions in a way that values empathic connections with others.

Or, to take another example, pedagogies of cultural critique reveal to us ethical-emotional motives. Asking students to read popular culture critically, by questioning assumptions and producing cultural analyses, does more than sharpen students’ capacity to be critical consumers of the worlds they inhabit. It encourages a resistant affective stance to the way things are, guiding students to see how the media and other cultural discourses operate on people’s lives in intimate, often invisible, ways. Such pedagogical methods, it might be fair to say, reflect a teacher’s desire to examine coercive, repressive structures that seek to reproduce thoughtless compliance with unquestioned norms. This desire emerges, I would argue, from an array of positions and feelings, not the least of which is politicized emotion, or emotion ignited and given purpose by political reality.
While analyses of composition’s focus on collaboration, cultural critique, and other principles informing writing instruction have gone under the banner of ideology or political critique, I want to suggest that, by acknowledging the interlocking nature of emotions and ethics, such principles can be read as efforts to construct students’ affective stances. Coming to terms with the work and consequences of pedagogy provides a vocabulary for naming the ways in which teachers of writing do not simply work on student writing; we work on student subjectivity, on students as cultural workers, on the production of good citizens, however variously these things might be defined. In short, we work on producing students who feel certain ways about writing and its significance, function, effect.

To put this another way, efforts to produce critical thinkers, cultural workers, or enfranchised citizens—all of which are by now commonplace goals regularly articulated in composition scholarship—are most certainly efforts to construct an emotional culture in the classroom. Following respectively from these examples, students are encouraged to be sensitive and responsive to inflammatory rhetoric about cultural differences, empathic toward those whose experiences differ radically from one’s own, and emotionally and intellectually invested in their own education. I’m not suggesting that we reduce the complexity and variation of pedagogical models to emotional motives, but rather that we acknowledge how emotion and ethics together function as an exigence for pedagogical theory.

Thinking about ethics and emotion as threads in the same weave might also lead to different ways of conceiving composition’s investment in cultural difference as an ethical investment. As I mentioned at the beginning of this essay, composition scholarship on ethics tends to emphasize the close relationship between practicing ethics and valuing cultural difference. James Porter, as previously noted, argues that a “critical principle that emerges from postmodern ethics” is recognition of Others (58), and Gary Olson claims that the very grounds of ethics has to do with “how we balance our own needs, desires, and obligations with those of the Other” (92). I want to build on these claims by suggesting that otherness raises ethical issues that are intimately intertwined with emotional ones. Because identity differences and the means by which we perform and/or recognize them inevitably arouse impassioned, emotioned responses, I briefly describe here a theory of ethical recognition and response that acknowledges pathos as that which structures desires to recognize and grapple with cultural differences. This practice is based on
the concept of intersubjectivity, a theory of identity formation that acknowledges the mutual recognition process between self and other. Intersubjectivity is a dialogic model of social relations that views selfhood as always tied up with recognition (as opposed to refutation or obliteration) of others. Rather than listening for and responding only to sameness—for confirmation of what one already thinks or believes—ethical recognition and response acknowledges difference as a means of recognizing others and of being recognized.

The dangers posed by ethical recognition and response are detailed in Cherrié Moraga’s “La Güera,” where she addresses the complex ways in which “the oppressor” internalizes a fear of difference. Most interesting in her part-narrative, part-manifesto is her explanation of how fears of difference may actually be fears of sameness—fears, that is, of being “like” the other. The oppressor, she writes, “fears he will discover in himself the same aches, the same longings as those of the people he has shitted on. He fears the immobilization threatened by his own incipient guilt. He fears he will have to change his life once he has seen himself in the bodies of the people he has called different. He fears the hatred, anger, and vengeance of those he has hurt” (32). A recognition of similarity in difference is dangerous because it unsettles bounded notions of self and other. The absence of such recognition prevents us from developing empathy for others who, in their presumed difference, are conceived as utterly unreachable, as beings whose difference marks them so totally as to render them unrecognizable.

As Moraga indicates, to see similarity in difference is to begin a process of mutual recognition that throws fiercely maintained boundaries of self and other into question. She speaks not of an easy, reductive search for sameness, but of a recognition process that requires us to grasp the dynamic relationship between self and other, the fluidity of identity. Where there is an ability to see similarity, to make connections, there is the potential for empathy, an affective process that enables us to relate to others and care about their well-being. Recognition of similarity also necessitates an accountability to and responsibility for how social policy and individual decision-making, among other things, impact people’s lives. In contrast, a refusal to see how others are like us often emerges from and feeds self-righteousness. Self-righteousness might be thought of as a form of moralizing, of essentializing one’s own moral code as the only legitimate moral code. But self-righteousness is more than a function of morality. It is an emotioned expression of one’s refusal to accept multiple perspectives on the world; in this refusal, self-righteousness
becomes a secure position establishing one’s position as beyond question, void of self-reflection. Self-righteousness often functions as a rejection of difference, for the unknown is always more fearful to us than that which we know.

An intersubjective theory of identity formation offers a productive way of seeing the value of difference as a concept that is intrinsically tied to similarity and that enriches and complicates one’s sense of self. Feminist psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin offers a model of intersubjectivity that usefully theorizes the place of recognition in relationships between self and other. As she reworks psychoanalytic theories of power and domination, Benjamin constructs a theory of intersubjectivity that challenges psychoanalytic formulations of identity by positing a mutuality between self and other. For Benjamin, “intersubjective theory, even when describing the self alone, sees its aloneness as a particular point in the spectrum of relationships rather than as the original, ‘natural state’ of the individual” (20). The cornerstone of this theory is recognition, which “implies that we actually have a need to recognize the other as a separate person who is like us yet distinct,” a focus that moves us beyond the same/different dichotomy (23). In this model, mutual recognition between self and other means that both actively need one another in order to recognize similarities of the other and to be recognized by her (32). Benjamin clarifies this point: “Mutual recognition cannot be achieved through obedience, through identification with the other’s power, or through repression. It requires, finally, contact with the other” (40). Benjamin’s model of identity formation demonstrates that dominant and oppressed, self and other, are inextricably linked. This model also foregrounds the intimate connection between ethics and emotion, pressing us to deal with the significance of caring and not caring about differences in our classrooms and other sites where we engage in rhetorical action.

University of Cincinnati
Cincinnati, Ohio

Notes

1. In his Foreword to The Politics of Writing Instruction, Richard Ohmann tempers compositionists’ analogies that link our work to that of the proletariat. He writes, “Lots of overworked and underpaid people in endlessly deferred or dead-end careers help sustain the professional well-being that writers in this volume rightly associate with high theory, light teaching loads for stars, male and
older-generation privilege, the ideology of great literature, and so on. That writing proletariat also enables us, the contributors to this volume, does it not? Would we have the free time to theorize the politics of writing instruction, imagine our way toward liberatory composition, and excoriate the two-class system in our field if we were in the other class?" (xii). Ohmann's questions might be extended to ask how we could ethically compare adjunct teachers, who are university workers, to citizens of an underdeveloped nation. After all, these teachers are teaching in universities, a somewhat rarefied, exclusive domain structured by intellectual rather than physical labor.

2. In addition to being a reference point for empowering pedagogies that seek to affirm and acknowledge students' distinct voices, "Students' Right to Their Own Language" continues to figure into politicized examinations of language and power. See, for instance, Parks; Richardson and Smitherman.

3. Revising this essay was helped along by a number of thoughtful readers. I especially want to thank Lynn Worsham for her patience and her attentive comments on various drafts, jac reviewers for seeing and helping me to see possibility in here, and my colleagues and friends, Will Banks and Michelle Eble, for careful readings that energized my thinking. Gary Weissman's unbeatable editing skills and critical questions pushed me to be a better, clearer writer.

Works Cited


