Academic culture receives strong emotional responses from those who participate in it. Rare is the academic that is not deeply emotionally invested in some aspect of academic culture. Increasingly, the emotional responses of students and faculty to academe are coming to be recognized as rich sources of insight into academic culture and identity—one can learn a lot about academe solely on the basis of the emotional responses of academics. While the formal and systematic study of academic emotion is a largely neglected area of inquiry, there are a number of excellent outlets for gaining insight into academic emotions. One of the more important is the personal account of life in academe. From such accounts, academic emotions can be seen as playing a significant role in shaping the identity of academics and determining the culture of academe. Personal accounts of life in academe also reveal how emotions can be connected with academic success and failure as well as professional power and a lack thereof.

In this essay, I will briefly comment on a recent and noteworthy contribution to the literature of academic emotion that draws heavily on personal accounts of life in academe. In the process, I will as well provide some general observations on the subject of academic emotion. J. Brooks Bouson's "True Confessions: Uncovering the Hidden Culture of Shame in English Studies," is a bold effort to address a major a metaprofessional topic. Bouson's article is intriguing not only for its suggestive thesis and competent review of recent interventions by our colleagues concerning the experience of shame, but also because it raises some very important questions about the role of emotions in the academy. Such questions are urgent ones that have been asked and investigated far too little. Even if one is not in complete agreement with every dimension of Bouson's contribution, one cannot help but admire
the way in which it brings to the fore key issues concerning academic emotion and identity—two of the more important topics facing academics and metaprofessional studies today.

Emotional Narratives

From the anxiety of test-taking to the joy of graduation, a student’s educational life is marked by a wide range of emotional highs and lows. Recently, there has been some interest by educational and developmental psychologists in conducting research on academic emotions, particularly with regard to the emotional life of undergraduate students (Schutz and Lanehart 67). These empirical inquiries of undergraduate emotions are primarily concerned with the connection among learning, achievement and emotion, and promise eventually to bring about for our students more successful learning outcomes and higher achievement levels.

There does not, however, seem to be the same level of interest in faculty emotion among educational psychologists as there is in student emotion. This is unfortunate because one suspects that such inquiry would probably for faculty, just as it should for students, lead to improved success and achievement levels. Yet, despite the lack of systematic research on faculty emotions, there has been a flurry of narratives and memoirs published of late that provide rich insight into emotional life in the academy. From James Phelan’s Beyond the Tenure Track: Fifteen Months in the Life of an English Professor to Michael Dubson’s Ghosts in the Classroom: Stories of College Adjunct Faculty—and the Price We All Pay, accounts of life in academia are in no short supply.

Until about twenty years ago, it seemed as though publishing an account of one’s life in the academy was something generally reserved for only the most well-known and extraordinary figures in our profession. Moreover, such accounts tended to appear toward the close of an esteemed person’s career as opposed to mid-, let alone early-career, and their publication would be momentous, eagerly anticipated events. They would also be a type of farewell:
a time to put one's life in order for a multitude of admiring peers and lay readers. While Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre would clearly qualify for such an undertaking, graduate students, adjunct faculty, and associate professors of philosophy and English most certainly would not. Few were interested in reading or publishing the reminiscences of ordinary academics, so they were rarely written. However, the rise of cultural studies and metaprofessional discourse in the 1990s seems to have changed this.

Currently, memoirs by ordinary academics about everyday life in the academy are a hot commodity. While books like Jane Tompkins' *A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned* (1996) and Terry Caesar's *Traveling through the Boondocks: In and Out of Academic Hierarchy* (2000) are both excellent accounts of academic life, one doubts that they would have raised very much interest twenty-five years ago. Events related to the daily emotional life of academics—seemingly almost *any* academic—are fair game for publication. Venues such as *Inside Higher Education* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* run a continuous stream of articles by academics who openly share details of their life in the academy. Major presses publish memoirs of life in the academy of not just Nobel laureates at the end of their careers, but of professors who have yet to establish their contribution to their chosen fields. In fact, the narrative of the trials and tribulations of their life in the academy sometimes even *becomes* their contribution to the field. Stories of bitterness over being rejected for publication, of panic concerning the job market, and of fear regarding tenure have become commonplace and sought after commodities. An entire bibliography of discourse about life in the academy has sprouted up seemingly overnight, and there appears to be no end to the interest in this type of writing in sight. Nonetheless, opinion is divided over the value of these narratives, which often foreground and dwell on academic emotions.

For some, these stories are nothing more than academic gossip and of peripheral concern. Their position is that providing accounts of one's life in the academy is not a serious intellectual endeavor and rises to a level of intellectual significance no higher
than a Hollywood star's latest romance or exploit. Some even find
such accounts embarrassing because they reveal aspects of the
academy that were hitherto not for public consumption. Accounts
of academic's anxieties, apathies, and angers reveal higher edu-
cation to be an emotionally unstable world. Our flaws as individuals
and a profession are detailed in micro-narratives that reveal
academia to be less a world of the pursuit of ideas than a world of
shattered ideals.

However, for others, an intellectual sharing his or her emotional
experiences in academe is a vitally significant intellectual act.
Accounts of our emotional responses to our conditions of employ-
ment, interactions with our colleagues and students, and the future
of our profession bring us to a more nuanced description of
academic culture in toto. These accounts provide us with an
anthropology of our profession and bring us closer to both reveal-
ing the general conditions of its existence and ways to improve
those conditions in the future. Also, individuals recounting the
emotional ups and downs of participating in higher education help
us to understand, if nothing else, the complex and changing nature
of identity in academic culture.

While it is true that some accounts of emotional life in academia
are unduly vindictive and self-serving, many more are empowering
and progressive. Together these accounts form a mosaic that
reveals the commonplaces of academic emotion. This mosaic can
and should be used to improve the lives of those who participate
in academic culture. Regarded as such, accounts of the emotions
of academics are not merely a weak and peripheral aspect of
academic publishing, but a potentially rejuvenating and progres-
sive one.

One of the simple lessons confirmed time and again in ac-
counts of academic emotions is that life in the academy is no less
rich and complex than life outside of it. Academics are not au-
tomata that dispassionately disseminate knowledge and evaluate
students, but rather are individuals who engage in a wide range of
feelings in the performance of their chosen profession. Moreover,
these feelings have a strong bearing on their job performance and
lend insight into the structures of power present in the academy. The emotional lives of other academics are important to us not because of who they are, but rather because of what they reveal about the overall state and logic of higher education. They provide signposts of both our successes and failures as an institution, and they continuously point to future states of the academy that are within our control to determine. Whereas once we tended to look to larger than life figures such as Russell and Sartre to tell us where we are and what we should be as an institution, today we look to (dare I say “ordinary”?) colleagues such as Tompkins and Caesar. Ultimately, through reading accounts of life in the academy, such as theirs, we come to a greater self-knowledge of our own academic self.

**Shameful Confessions**

One of the major challenges that confronts the academic who is writing an account of the emotional ups and downs of life in the academy is bringing it to bear on larger structures or patterns within the academy. Individual accounts of life in the academy are significant to a broader audience only insofar as they provide us with a better understanding of the state of our profession or the academy as a whole. While the life of someone like Bertrand Russell or Jean-Paul Sartre is interesting in and of itself because of Russell and Sartre’s intellectual contribution to their profession, the average academic life is usually not. Because Russell and Sartre were two of the most dominant and influential figures in twentieth-century intellectual history, it is not necessary or even expected for their memoirs of intellectual life to speak to their profession as a whole. However, when a contemporary philosophy or English professor recounts his or her life in the academy, one is generally interested in it not because of who they are (though it might be, for example, because they are our friend or colleague), but rather because of what their account tells us about who we—the readers—are or should be. The most significant accounts of
ordinary lives in the academy establish a metadiscourse concerning academia. Moreover, it is this metadiscourse that one seeks when reading tales of life in the academy, not the minutiae of an ordinary life in academia.

The significance of accounts of life in the academy should therefore be evaluated based on their ability to provide insight into the academic condition or academic conditions. They should bring one toward an awareness of the larger, more generic, and persistent issues confronting the academy. The best accounts of an individual life in the academy are able to do this, and this ability makes them more relevant and significant than mere narrations of academic events and their writer’s emotional response to them. The dialectic between the particulars of an individual life in the academy and more general characteristics of academia is perhaps the most powerful current form of professional metadiscourse. Some of the masters of this form in contemporary English studies are Jane Tompkins, Jeffrey Williams, James Phelan, Lauren Berlant, James Sosnoski, Terry Caesar, Joseph Urgo, and Michael Bérubé. Each has the ability to tell us about ourselves and our profession through accounts of their own life in the academy.

J. Brooks Bouson’s recent JAC article, “True Confessions: Uncovering the Hidden Culture of Shame in English Studies,” attempts an interesting and potentially very significant endeavor with the work of these particular writers and some others. By utilizing the specific comments of these writers and others concerning their emotional response to events in the academy, Bouson seeks to extrapolate a metadiscourse concerning shame in the academy: a metadiscourse that none of the authors she utilizes explicitly defends or even notices.

Bouson’s article is decidedly not a first-person narrative concerning her experiences in the academy. In lieu of sharing her own experiences with shame in the academy, Bouson introduces us to a variety of authors that do—at least to some extent. In this regard, the method she employs to make her case is very different from that of the writers she utilizes and discusses. While Williams, Urgo and Caesar, for example, build cases for their metadiscourse(s)
through first person accounts of their life in the academy, Bouson does not. Rather, she builds her argument regarding shame from the observations of others. Moreover, Bouson’s personal stake in her metaprofessional discourse, unlike that of the authors she discusses, is vague. In the end, one wonders if her case for the role of shame in the academy would have been more compelling should she have chosen to invest it with her own observations regarding shame in the academy. Nevertheless, while Bouson’s personal stake or investment in the topic is unclear, her aim in this article is not.

Bouson tells us that she “aims to uncover, in the larger public conversation concerning the profession in recent years, the hidden shaming that goes on in academic culture and thus to expose the high human and emotional price exacted by our overly competitive and adversarial, and increasingly stratified, profession” (626). While Bouson is quite successful in accumulating many sites of shaming in our profession and is obviously right in maintaining that shame often comes with a high emotional cost, she is not as successful in convincing one that this shaming is “hidden” in academic culture or even that it must necessarily be overcome. Ironically, quite the opposite is the case.

The fact that Bouson collects so many excellent passages from so many prominent members of the English profession attesting to the numerous dimensions of shame and shaming in our profession makes it difficult to believe that she is “uncovering” a hidden dimension of our profession. If Linda Hutcheon, Jane Tompkins, Herbert Lindenberger, Jeffrey Williams, James Phelan, Lauren Berlant, James Sosnoski, Terry Caesar, Joseph Urgo, and Michael Bérubé are directly sharing with us various dimensions of shame and shaming in our profession in their writing, then given the scope of their readership, it is hard to believe that shame is a hidden dimension of our profession. Indeed, from the evidence Bouson provides, shame is nothing less than a prominent, persistent, and dominant aspect of contemporary English studies culture. Moreover, one is confident that if expanded to other disciplines, further investigation would conclude shame and shaming is not unique to
English studies, and is an integral part of contemporary academic culture in general. Consider, for example, the discipline of philosophy—one that I happen to know very well.

In the discipline of philosophy, public ridicule and scorn has long been an integral component of the public presentation. Historically, the best reference points are Socrates' aggressively rational and logical responses to his interlocutors, most of whom have their beliefs and arguments completely dismantled by him in public. Socrates' practice of publicly and fiercely critiquing the arguments of others continues today in philosophy. At job talks, candidates are more often than not mercilessly grilled by their audience; at conferences, any paper by anyone is fair game for harsh critique. Shaming is arguably the modus operandi of the public presentation in philosophy—and everyone knows it. Harsh critique is viewed not only as a right-of-passage, but also a fixed cultural practice of the professional philosopher. It is justified by the claim that public shaming in argumentation is all in the pursuit of philosophical truth or perfectionism. As such, philosophers tend to have pretty thick skin about such matters. If not, they either leave the profession or don't present their ideas in public very often.

Philosophy, like English studies, can be quite brutal. Public shaming is a result of very high standards of excellence in argumentation coupled with a highly competitive attitude toward "winning" an argument. The aim in the practice of philosophy and English studies is to defend one's argument successfully against all objections as well as to object to the arguments of others, if and when possible. However, when the attacks are directed at persons and not premises, the reasonable degree of decorum and acceptable level of logic has been broached. Attacking the person or the ad hominem attack is one of the worst and lowest of forms of argumentation both in philosophy and English studies. It is a cheap shot and sign of weakness in the objector and should never reflect negatively upon the person who is being verbally attacked.

Bouson quotes Tompkins noting that scholarly attacks are evidence of a "decline of civility" and Lindenberger stating that the "warlike atmosphere" of English studies is lamentable (627).
These quotes raise excellent questions about what is and is not the aim of public presentations of scholarship. Is the scholarly attack really a sign of a decline in academic civility? Or is it a sign of something else, such as a respect for strong argumentation even at the cost of emotionally disrupting others? Tompkins and Lindenberger's comments are thought provoking and well worth dwelling over in detail at some future point—perhaps even in the pages of *JAC*. What are the guidelines of professional civility when it comes to publicly disagreeing with another? When does public disagreement and criticism cross over into incivility? Bouson notes that “shame sufferers may feel inhibited, inferior, incompetent, or defective as they internalize the other’s scorn” (629). Is this really a problem with the criticizer or is it more a problem with the criticized? While such public criticism is intimidating and takes some time emotionally to adjust to, once the adjustment is made, might such criticism not be taken personally? Why shouldn't practitioners of English studies believe like professional philosophers that it is the “argument” that is being attacked, not the person? Why shouldn't students of English studies be made more aware of the standard philosophical guidelines for public scholarly discourse?

Questions of our professional practices and their effects on the emotions of members of our profession are important ones. They are questions that we have probably not adequately addressed. Regardless of whether one agrees with the claim that public presentations in our profession should be “warlike,” it is nevertheless certain that the professional practices that we utilize have emotional consequences. If we are indeed increasingly “uncivil” and “warlike” in English studies, then at least two modes of response should be seriously considered: we either need to prepare ourselves and our students for the emotional effects of such practices or work to change those practices. If English studies is increasing becoming a site of “shaming” practices, then might not responding to such practices in Stoic fashion—that is, refusing to be emotionally responsive to them—be a reasonable and healthy response to them? Or is the specter of a highly critical and
highly argumentative profession so distasteful and repulsive that we need to work to overcome this environment?

Regardless of how we view the emotional landscape of the future of our profession, Bouson is certainly right to observe that today there is quite an amount of shame and shaming. However, again, it is not entirely evident that this shaming is a hidden part of the culture of English studies. If one is looking for shame and shaming in English studies, then one will find it at all levels of our profession. From the graduate student who is shamed in a classroom by a professor for poorly responding to a question and the junior professor whose conference presentation is mercilessly critiqued in a public forum to the established scholar whose latest book is raked over the coals in a book review, there are scores of events in contemporary academic culture where shame and shaming can and do play a central role. Simply put, shame is a key part of academic culture.

The question then seems to be not whether shame is a dominant part of our profession (for it seems obvious that it is), but rather why this should be of interest to us. Individuals in our profession experience in the academic workplace the entire range of emotions and have increasingly come to write about them. Why is shame of more interest to us than emotions such as fear, disgust, and bitterness? Why, of all the emotions that can be located in the academic culture of English studies, is shame particularly noteworthy? Bouson’s response seems to be that it is because of the particular—if not unique—connection between shame and power.

Drawing on the work of shame theorist Gershen Kaufman, Bouson links our emotional responses to acts in the profession to our status in the profession. Writes Kaufman, “There is an inverse relation between shame and power: to the degree that one is powerless in any work environment, one is most vulnerable to shame” (638–39). According to Bouson, for Kaufman, “shame will inevitably ensue” when individuals are not “valued and respected.” Following upon the work of Kaufman, Bouson encourages us to see the academy as a class-shame system. Bouson contends that
“there is no remedy for our plight in the deeply entrenched class-shame system of the academy, where those with power and authority who benefit from the current system have a vested—and affective—interest in maintaining the status quo” (639). While this is an intriguing claim, it seems to me to be unsubstantiated.

While it is true that there is a deeply entrenched class-system in the academy, its connection with the emotional responses of its members is varied. The evidence that Bouson provides is not sufficient to establish that our stratified and prestige-driven academic culture is also shame driven. If anything, academic prestige works multifariously in connection with a complex array of emotions. Individual accounts of one’s status in the profession testify to this. Moreover, the conclusion that one should draw from individual accounts of one’s professional status concerning the relationship between power and emotion is absolutely uncertain—or, better yet, contingent. When individuals are not valued many emotions ensue (and likewise, when individuals are valued). Not being valued in the academy can lead to anger, apathy, bitterness, depression, disappointment, envy, frustration, grief, hate, humiliation, jealousy, self-pity in addition to shame. The pages of the Chronicle of Higher Education and Inside Higher Education daily contain evidence for this conclusion. With all due respect to Kaufman and Bouson, it is going to take quite a bit more evidence and arguing to establish the systemic and necessary connection between shame and prestige.

Nevertheless, one wonders if Bouson’s argument concerning the connection between shame and power would have been more convincing should she have followed the path the many members of English studies that she quotes follow—namely, build her case from personal experience and then move to general observations. The application of some general (albeit powerful) theoretical observations by Kaufman to the academic emotions of others puts this whole article at an uncomfortably remote distance from its author.

The method of argumentation in Bouson’s article is reminiscent of the application of a literary theory to a text—and the result
is similar. While Bouson’s article may be a clever reading of texts attesting to the presence of shame and shaming in the academy using shame theory, whether it is a true or good reading of the role of emotion in the academy and its connection with power is another matter. Interpreting fictional texts through theoretical lenses is a standard and acceptable practice because nothing more than the reading of the fictional text is at stake. However, when the “text” is the practices of our profession and the emotional well-being of others, it seems imperative that one be sure that the theory one applies produces an accurate and true account of the institutional and personal realities under scrutiny. In this case, the institutional and personal realities include a plurality of emotions regarding prestige and power present in the academy today—a plurality of emotions that Bouson’s argument fails to contend with adequately.

Master Emotions and Master Narratives

Academic emotion is a very important topic because it provides direct insight into feelings about academic culture and the practices of our profession. Moreover, it should not be solely left to educational and developmental psychologists as a topic of study. Members of our profession can contribute to this topic simply by continuing to do what they currently do: write accounts of their feelings about life in the academy. While the conclusions that individuals extrapolate from first-person experience may not always seem insightful, they can contribute to and become a piece of a much larger conversation about life in the academy.

In spite of its shortcomings, Bouson’s article brings one to ask a very important line of questions concerning academic culture: what is the role of the emotions in academic culture? Is there an emotion that dominates our profession? If so, of what significance is this? What are, for example, the economic, psychological, philosophical, and pedagogical implications of the dominance of this emotion? Moreover, if one finds that academics turn again and
again to particular emotions in the stories they share with others about the profession, is this because these emotions dominate the profession or because they are more “narratable,” accessible, or provoking than other emotions? Do some narratives about the profession dwell in unproductive emotional spaces? Should narratives about professional life occupy a particular emotional space?

Additionally, a better way is needed to theoretize the relationship between one's emotional life in the academy and the structures that dominate and organize the profession: economic, political, social, and pedagogical. Bouson's utilization of the work of Kaufman is laudable not because of the conclusions she reaches about shame in academic culture, but simply for the fact that she even attempts to provide a theoretical account of academic emotion. There has been too little written on this extremely important topic.

Finally, given that there is more opportunity than ever to share with others feelings about life in the academy, we need to take advantage of this opportunity to learn more about academic emotion. We need to discuss not just the commonplaces of academic emotion, but as broad a selection of our emotional life as possible. Discussions of academic emotion are significant when we build from our own experience and that of others to general accounts of what academic life is and should be. In identifying larger structures of emotional existence, we are not working toward a phenomenology of professional emotion, but rather toward a politics of emotion—that is, toward making academic existence more productive and progressive. Nevertheless, establishing a politics of emotion in academia begins with petit recits concerning academic life and emotion. In the final analysis, it will be these petit recits of academic emotion that determine the veracity of master narratives concerning academic emotion like Bouson's prestige- and shame-driven system.

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Immigrant Act

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Every discourse that breeds fault and guilt is a discourse of authority and arrogance. To say this, however, is not to say that all power discourses produce equal oppression or that those established are necessary.

—Trinh T. Minh-ha

Since academia fancies its business to be the measurement and management of reality, imagination usually gets a bad rap. In a