Engaging a "Pedagogy of Discomfort": Emotion as Critical Inquiry in Community-Based Writing Courses

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Abstract: This article revisits the scholarship on emotion in composition studies and extends this work through a consideration of emotion in community-based writing courses. With examples from student reflection essays from one such course, Writing With the Community, I explore emotion as a generative aspect of the students' semester writing projects for community organizations. In particular, I examine students' emotional responses to their community work, which include empathy, shame, anger, and unease, as I argue that students' emotions were an effective means of attaining their writing goals and a necessary component of their desire for social action and justice. I also offer three concepts from education theorists—emotional scaffolding, encouraging students to inhabit an ambiguous self, and emotion as a mode of critical inquiry—which I develop as strategies for achieving common goals in community-based writing courses.

Introduction: Writing with Emotion

I begin with quotations from the final reflection essays of two students in my community-based learning course, Writing With the Community. In their essays, students were to reflect on the writing project they produced in collaboration with their assigned community partner. I highlight these reflections because each student connected their writing projects to their emotional experiences.{1} Julia, assigned by the community organization to write a newsletter story about an innovative literacy program for socially isolated immigrant families, explained how "writing with emotion" was both a conscious aim in communicating with her audience and potentially in conflict with the "truth" of her story:

> In writing this piece, I considered my audience and felt as if it was most important to try and engage the pathos of the audience, to tug at their heartstrings. Writing this story was an emotional experience for me, too. I felt as though I really connected with the families I observed and talked with, and I wanted to do more for them. I tried to balance this writing with emotion with trying to stick to the truth of what I was trying to report so the story might be received and understood in a more honest way. (Julia 2015)

Lucas, too, articulated "conflicting" emotional experiences while writing his profile story of Dolores, a Central American immigrant and single mother supporting three small children while attending school for her education certificate:

> One of the biggest challenges I had in completing my profile story about Dolores was coping with and understanding the emotions that came out when writing about our conversations. I felt conflicting emotions while writing this story, as both an "outsider" (an ethnographer) and an "insider" (the person of an immigrant household). It bothered me that I felt as though I was hiding my identity and my emotional responses for the purposes of being an "academic." I am uneasy about the story I have written because it evoked such strong emotions. (Lucas 2015)

These student reflections suggest much to unpack and consider, as the students articulate concerns I will return to throughout this article. Briefly, though, their essays reveal two key points worth underscoring: first, both students draw a clear connection between their writing and their emotional experiences; second, both articulate their sense of discomfort or uncertainty about what to *do* with that emotion in writing their piece.

In this article, I propose that we take up Megan Boler's call for a "pedagogy of discomfort": a purposeful way of examining uncomfortable emotions we (and our students) might otherwise resist or deflect, such as "defensive anger, fear of change, fears of losing our personal and cultural identities," as well as guilt and the discomfort produced when we are forced to question our beliefs and assumptions (Boler 176). To this list, I would add other emotions experienced and expressed by the students in Writing With the Community, including embarrassment or shame, unease, and empathy—emotions that students often experience in community-engagement courses. Instead of understanding student emotion as something to suppress or redirect, I make a case for emotion as a pedagogical strategy by outlining three ways we might enact a pedagogy of discomfort in community-based writing courses: scaffolding emotions to support students' experiences with community partners; encouraging students to inhabit what Boler calls a more "ambiguous self"—one that breaks with inscribed habits and beliefs; and foregrounding an understanding of emotion as a form of critical inquiry.

In the last two decades community service learning in college-level composition has been hailed as revolutionary for both faculty and students and as transformative for composition studies; yet while this work has provided us with models and strategies for rethinking our pedagogies as opportunities to connect the classroom and the community, emotion has not figured prominently in this scholarship either as a practical element of consideration or a rhetorical strategy.{2} There has been excellent scholarship recently on teaching and writing in collaboration with community partnerships, and on a wide range of topics including literacy development, service learning and social change, diversity dialogues, and writing transfer. However, community-based writing theory and pedagogy, like our broader field of composition studies, has yet to consider emotion as a powerful medium for critical inquiry and action in community-engaged writing courses.{3} In this essay, I bring together these two threads—emotion in composition and community engagement—as I further connect emotion in community-based writing to social justice theory.

There has been an increase in recent work (mainly from the field of organizational psychology) connecting social justice theory to emotion, with scholars arguing for a more sustained integration of justice and emotion through a focus on the interplay of affect and cognition. Perhaps because this scholarship is not concerned with theoretical models for writing studies, this connection between emotion and social justice has been underexamined by composition scholars. One exception is Shari Stenberg who, following the work of feminist scholars in composition-pedagogy such as Lutz (1988) and Worsham (1998), reexamines emotion as a source for social change and argues that "emotion serves as a key site of investigation for those of us interested in connections between pedagogy and social change" (349). While I find Stenberg's link between emotion and social change a helpful starting point, her focus is on how students respond with emotion *to* texts in the composition classroom, rather than how they write with emotion. I push Stenberg's claims a step further, as I contend that this call to reconsider emotion as a central part of how students experience themselves and the world holds particular relevance for community-based writing classes, where students' emotion is often inseparable from their desire to help change unfair and inequitable social conditions. Using my course as an example, I show that emotion was part of how students gained knowledge about the community organization, the individuals they were interviewing and writing about for the organization, and the larger social issues and structures these individuals and organizations were navigating. In so doing, I argue that emotional experiences are more than just a significant feature of the students' education process in community-based writing courses; emotions reflect students' identities within social situations and provide a means through which students might analyze social discourses and power relations.{4}

Bridging Divides: Emotion and Critical Pedagogy

In their comprehensive study of emotion as a social phenomenon, psychology scholars Parkinson, Fischer, and Manstead revisit prevailing views of emotions as "antithetical to logical thinking" and reactive or "impulsive and intuitive" (46). In this positivist view of emotions as subjective and unreasonable, emotions tend to be involuntary and associated with the state of being uncivilized, evidence of "primitive and uncontrollable forces" (47). In contrast to this perspective, Parkinson et al. propose that emotions are not "hard-wired" to our biology but are instead inseparable from our cultural systems and beliefs, and develop meaning through the social interactions in which emotion is "experienced, enacted, regulated, and represented" (52). In this view, emotion is socially constructed and concomitant with actions and experiences.

This social turn in studies of emotion has resonated with composition scholars, as shown in Lynn Worsham's groundbreaking work in which she disputed the "distinction between public and private and between reason and emotion" (220). Worsham argues for emotion as a critical category and links emotion to a "commitment for social change" (234). Notably, in making this argument, Worsham breaks with the discourse of critical pedagogy, a popular approach to composition that places emphasis on teaching students to analyze "the unequal power relations that produce and are produced by cultural practices and institutions" (George 92). We often apply this approach in the

composition classroom by helping students "develop the tools that will enable them to challenge" the inequalities they come to recognize in the academic and social worlds around them (92). A critical pedagogical approach recognizes writing as a political process through which students gain knowledge and strategies to become more critical of pervasive, dominant ideologies and oppressive (academic and social) structures. However, Worsham and other scholars believe this pedagogies of critique approach minimizes and often even dismisses the affective dimensions or emotional contexts that shape the experiences and work of students in the writing classroom (Lindquist; Micciche). Worsham argues that in the context of critical pedagogy emotion is often seen as disempowering, claiming that the discourse of critical pedagogy lacks nuance and "fails to be sufficiently critical" because it "does not apprehend its own limitation of the discourse of emotion" (235). In Worsham's view, critical pedagogy "does not make emotion and affective life the crucial stakes in the political struggle" (235). For Worsham, critical pedagogy overlooks the fact that emotion is not only a fundamental aspect of our political lives, but is also a critical means of sociopolitical empowerment.

I highlight this tension between critical pedagogy and emotion in part because critical pedagogical approaches have shaped the evolution of community writing in composition studies. Evidence of the critical pedagogical approach can be seen in early scholarship on community writing courses, which emphasized the benefits of "service-learning courses" as a means of moving students "toward greater consciousness of their connected places in larger social systems"—a claim that resonates with the consciousness-raising aspects of critical pedagogy (Adler-Kassner et al. 7). This scholarship, which I have found influential in designing my community-based writing course, underscores the importance of the social in student writing, but (similar to the limitations of critical pedagogy) does not quite address the emotional dimensions of what are often the central aims of community-engagement courses: students' enhanced critical knowledge (of themselves and the world around them) and social reflection. Emotion thus remains excised from the expectations (even our own) of what we should accomplish in the community-based writing classroom.

Laura Micciche's work examining emotion in the writing classroom offers one way to bridge this divide between critical pedagogy and emotion as a form of critical inquiry in community-based writing courses. Micciche disputes the idea that emotion is or should be restricted to the personal reactions of individual bodies, and instead claims provocatively that emotion emerges "relationally, in encounters between people, so that emotion takes form *between* bodies rather than residing *in* them" (13). Here, Micciche not only breaks the inside-outside dichotomy that characterizes the dominant pedagogy and theory of emotion, but she also offers a way to understand emotion as a crucial aspect of community-based writing courses, which are often founded on encounters between individuals: between students and the community organization staff, and especially between students and the individuals they observe, interview, and write about.

Emotion as Empathetic Connection

In Writing With the Community, students often experience emotion through the relational, personal connections they make with the people they work with onsite at the community partner organizations. In writing about these interactions, many students describe feelings of empathy, a sense of personal connection to the individuals participating in or benefiting from the programs or work of the community partners. For example, two students, Ray and Beth, described their affective, empathetic responses to their work onsite at organizations dedicated to client advocacy and tenant activism for safe, affordable housing. Ray explained how being onsite at the nonprofit organization (NPO), listening to clients tell their stories, and then writing about the tenants' experiences prompted his sense of empathy for them:

> After the tenants' rights clinic, where I got to see an important part of what the organization does and had the chance to listen to and write about the stories of the people who came in for counsel from a [housing rights'] lawyer, I had a sense of the pain and suffering experienced by tenants. (Ray 2015)

Similarly, Beth connected her experience talking to residents and writing about their experiences to her gaining critical insight into issues with which she was previously unfamiliar:

> The experience of walking through this space [low-income housing units in Skid Row] and talking to the residents, and then of writing about it and the people impacted by unfair housing practices … brought me to new realizations. My engagement with the community and writing about it had the effect of opening my eyes and helping me gain a better understanding of the issues. I also found I could not help but feel at least some of what they did in terms of anger and pain at how they were treated. (Beth 2014)

Notably, as was also the case for Ray, Beth's knowledge acquisition, or how she gained "new realizations" through her work and writing, was linked to her emotion—her sense of empathy.

These students express emotional experiences that resonate with the notion of rhetorical empathy as theorized by composition-rhetoric scholar Lisa Blankenship. Blankenship defines rhetorical empathy as "appeals to emotion and personal connection based on shared experience" (2). In Writing With the Community, students do not necessarily "share" an experience with the individuals they interview, observe, and interact with at the NPO. In fact, students most often have very different life experiences than the individuals with whom they interact. However, as shown in the reflections from Beth and Ray, the students do nonetheless often experience emotion in the form of empathy based on the connection they make with others onsite, even if these connections are brief, fleeting, and developed through an appointed liaison (such as an attorney or case manager, as is often required to protect and support the NPO client).

Blankenship's concept of rhetorical empathy helps to contextualize the empathetic responses of the students, even in the limited hours of contact they have with other people through their community work. Blankenship explains that rhetorical empathy can be both "a conscious choice to connect with an Other, and also … an unconscious, often emotional response to the experience of others" (2). This latter aspect of rhetorical empathy seems especially relevant to Writing With the Community and other community-based writing courses. Students may not make "conscious" decisions to connect with "Others," but Blankenship proposes rhetorical empathy as a "recursive process that may involve both cognition (conscious choice) and affect (which may be unconscious)" (2). Beth and Ray articulate a form of rhetorical empathy with individuals at the community organization that comes about through observing, "listen[ing] to stories," and writing; as such, their empathy has an impact on both their affect and their cognition or reasoning (or, as Beth says, a "better understanding of the issues"). Rhetorical empathy thus offers another way to bridge the emotion-reason divide by proposing a means to understand how students make empathetic connections that bring about new forms of knowledge and meaning especially through their writing.

Moreover, as seen in the reflections by Ray and Beth, students' empathetic emotional responses suggest their development of what Jane Addams in the early decades of the twentieth century termed "sympathetic knowledge," a form of knowledge gained about people and specific social concerns or issues through deliberate interactions between an individual and others.{5} Addams's concept of sympathetic knowledge resonates with contemporary definitions of empathy by scholars such as Blankenship and Eric Leake; the latter argues that the "rhetorics of empathy" provide a "way to put … the lived daily experiences of people back in the center of rhetoric and education" (39). While community-based writing pedagogy does not figure centrally in either Blankenship's or Leake's theories of rhetorical empathy, their similar conceptualizations of empathy as a means to make the lived experiences of others more immediate or known is a useful way to explain both the rationale of many community-based learning courses and the emotional experiences of students in my course. Ray and Beth both articulate a sense of empathetic connection with an "Other" through their work with a community partner as well as a greater understanding of the social issues affecting the individuals they interviewed and wrote about for their profile stories. In this way, the students enacted the promises of Addams's sympathetic knowledge as well as gained rhetorical empathy.

Student self-reflection is likely a key component of many community-based learning and writing courses, and thus a useful way for us to track student success or satisfaction with the course as well as the achievement of our course learning outcomes. Often, what students seek to gain from the course and the outcomes we seek to achieve focus on effecting some form of social action or social change, and students' reflections of their enhanced empathetic responses are one way of seeing or measuring progress towards that change. Moreover, reflection discourse in a range of genres (journals, reflection logs, and other exploratory forms of reflective writing) can encourage students to make connections "between academic coursework and the immediate social, political, and interpersonal experiences of community-based activities," as Chris Anson notes (167). Reflection writing offers students a "rhetorical space to express their feelings and write about their new experiences," yet such writing in service learning classes is best approached with a commitment to *critical* reflection that goes beyond "passive recording of feelings, moods, or new experiences," as we prompt students to not only explore "difficult problems," as Anson says, but also, I would add, difficult modes of feeling (Anson 170-172).

While we might encourage our students to actively engage their empathy by writing about it, Boler (similarly to Anson) cautions us to be aware of the risks of "passive empathy," an emotional response that "reduces the other to a mirror-identification of oneself, a means of rendering the discomforting other familiar and nonthreatening" (177). Boler finds evidence of passive empathy in the self-reflection writing tasks we often assign students, especially in community-engagement courses. She argues self-reflection can be a "deceptive 'ah-ha'" moment, an uncritical "confessional reading" of the interaction between (student) self and other (177). While Boler does not examine community-based learning or composition specifically, her cautions are worth noting as we may easily slip into developing a pedagogy that encourages what she terms an "oversimplified version of self-reflection" or passive empathetic emotional experience (178). In fact, Boler's skepticism of passive empathy and uncritical self-reflection as a means to achieve collective social change resonates with the skepticism of some scholars of critical pedagogy as an inadequate form of critical inquiry. Ellen Cushman questions what she calls the "slippery discourse" of critical

pedagogy, which she claims tosses around terms such as "social change, empowerment, and critical consciousness" without attention to the "complex ways power is negotiated at micro levels of interactions between people" ("The Rhetorician as an Agent" 239). What I take from Boler and Cushman is an emphasis (although in different contexts) on the importance of moving beyond a simplified version of liberatory classroom practices by developing a pedagogy that encourages such micro-level interactions between students and other individuals: the sort of interactions that *can* often occur in community partnerships, and often through emotional responses prompted by engaged and sympathetic listening.

Pain and Progress: The "Intimate Process of Listening"

My Writing With the Community course was unique among others with a community-based learning component at my college; while other classes placed students in collaboration with a range of community partners, in these courses students most often conducted archival research at arts institutions (museums especially) or interned at local area schools through K-12 literacy programs. My class, instead, was designed to use writing and rhetorical tools as a means to gain knowledge about local cultural and social concerns representing the interests of our community partners, and the central goal of the class was "to connect what often seem to be separate aspects of our students' lives—the scholarly and the personal, the academy and the community" (as described in the course proposal).

Writing With the Community may be singular at my institution, but it resonates with the curricular design and practices in composition-rhetoric to bridge academic and nonacademic writing, and it enacts pedagogical or methodological aims and learning outcomes similar to those defined in previous scholarship. For example, Nora Bacon describes the emergence of Stanford's Community Service Writing program in 1989, which aimed to respond to local community organizations that needed help with writing tasks. Bacon notes that the Stanford program, like others nationally, is a form of community service writing that emerged after composition theory took its "social turn" and shifted its focus "from the cognitive processes of individual writers to the relationship between texts and their social context" (39). The main purpose of "writing for a community agency" in such courses, reminds Bacon, "is to advance the agency's work" (45). Like the Stanford program and others, Writing With the Community responds to community organizations that need help with writing tasks, whatever those tasks may be. Although Thomas Deans insists on a distinction between writing *for* community nonprofit agencies and writing in collaboration *with* community organizations, the writing projects and professional documents my students produce blur the lines between the "workplace writing" genres outlined by Deans (339).{6}

In the past three iterations of the course, forty-five students have worked with an NPO in the Los Angeles area dedicated to providing education, healthy housing, and social and economic justice to individuals and families experiencing poverty and isolation. These students—from a wide range of academic majors—have engaged a number of writing projects for the NPOs including the following: one-pagers and flyers providing information to tenants in low-income housing units about their rights; profile stories on women, children, and families benefiting from two-generation education programs; oral histories to create timelines tracing an organization's achievements for fundraising use; profile stories on survivors of domestic abuse highlighting the successes of an organization's legal aid; critical ethnographies of students' interactions and involvement in workshops and programs at a community partner; and profile stories of individuals who sought the help of an organization to fight a range of socioeconomic injustices.

Given the content and topics of their writing in all of these projects, students developed empathetic connections with their liaisons, story subjects, and interlocutors, primarily through the numerous hours of observation and listening their work entailed. In fact, most students worked on projects that required a significant amount of listening on their part, through several interview sessions and transcription of interviews, in-person observations and discussions onsite, and training or information sessions with organization staff members. In explaining her theory of rhetorical listening, Krista Ratcliffe argues that there is a cultural and disciplinary bias reified in composition-rhetoric studies in the subordination of listening to writing and speaking. She claims we have "appropriated Western rhetorical theories to theorize writing and the teaching of writing," and in this focus on "written discourse" as a field "we have been slow to imagine how listening might inform our discipline" (19). Ratcliffe's focus on and theorization of listening is provocative and relevant to the work of students in Writing With the Community and offers another way to expand our understanding of the function of emotion in community-engagement composition classes. In this class, students' written discourse was more than just informed by listening; their acts or actions of listening were fundamental to their writing—and to their emotion-empathy experiences. As Ratcliffe defines, rhetorical listening as a "trope for interpretive invention" makes identifications between people possible (19); I would add that this concept of rhetorical listening also explains students' *emotional* identification with others.

Anna, a student tasked with writing a profile story on a man unlawfully evicted and living in transitional housing,

describes precisely these connections between rhetorical listening and emotional or empathetic identification as foundational to her writing:

> At first, it seemed as though my assignment was not as emotional or "touchy" as some of the other stories assigned to members of my group. My story seemed more straightforward: the story of an older man losing his home. I have never gone through this process before of listening to and telling another's story. It was surprisingly intimate. I had to engage in this intimate process of listening to someone tell me a story about something that devastated their life. I couldn't just see it from the outside. I had to dig into this process to find what could be "attention grabbing" or important for [an audience] reading a website or a grant request created by [the organization] to help them enact social justice. Through this process, I listened to a lot of intimate details and found myself experiencing a lot of pain. (2014)

Anna connects "listening" and "telling" through a process of shared empathy and emotion, as she describes her own process of listening rhetorically and writing with sympathetic knowledge. Anna's experiences working with the community partner and writing a story illustrate many of the key concepts explored in this article: the connections between writing for/with the community, emotion, and social justice; and the individual and social dimensions of emotion, rhetorical empathy, and rhetorical listening. Ratcliffe proposes rhetorical listening as an important interpretive trope, as important as writing or speaking as communicative acts that establish points of identification between people. However, as seen through Anna's reflection, rhetorical listening is more than an interpretive trope in a community-based writing course: listening takes on a greater dimension when intersecting with emotion, not only resulting in a student's empathetic response but also motivating the student to write, even compelling the writing itself. In short, building from Ratcliffe's theory, the empathetic connections students in community-based writing courses often make through listening are inseparable from their composing processes.

Resistance and the Regulation of Emotion

In her above reflection, Anna does not describe resisting her emotion or empathy—she worried, in fact, that she did not write with enough emotion. She quite purposefully had to "dig into this process" of experiencing pain as a way to create a written piece that might help the organization fight for justice on behalf of the client. Other students, though, were uncertain about or resistant to the emotions that they experienced while listening to and telling another person's story. Instead of seeing their emotions as generative, a way to motivate their writing or compel their story, as was the case for Anna, many students avoided using emotion in their writing and some even believed their final documents to be "failures" because of this. In his reflection essay, for example, Chris expressed his belief that his work lacked importance or significance, and viewed his project for the community partner as "simply a piece of writing that is not applicable to their [tenants in a low-income housing unit] situations and struggles" (Chris 2014). Chris believed his project was ineffective because, as he said, "the flyer lacks emotional substance, which does not sympathize with the tenant's struggle. I reiterated facts [in this case, about the dangers of lead poisoning often present in low-income housing units] and provided information for services for the tenant, yet my diction and approach did not communicate a sense of emotional or sympathetic connection" (Chris 2014). Chris's articulate and intuitive reflection in many ways highlights the interplay between emotion and meaning in community-based writing, while underscoring the potential of emotion to establish a "sympathetic connection" between student writer and tenant-community member. Chris's project—creating a flyer or brochure with information for tenants—may have called more for "facts" than pathos, but in his recognition that his work "lacks emotional substance" Chris unintentionally makes a strong case for an understanding of the deliberate and even conscious connections between writing, emotion, and "success" in community-based writing courses.

I am especially interested in students' resistance to emotion, as I outline above in introducing reflections by Julia and Lucas, and how we—as composition scholars in writing and community engagement—might marshal emotion and student resistance to emotion as a means to empower students as they become more confident writers. Julia's and Lucas's end-of-semester comments reflect similar experiences articulated by most students about the rhetoric of their emotion: how emotion was a conscious aspect of their writing and shaped the appeal to their audiences. Students reported feeling a range of emotions while drafting and revising their semester-long writing projects, projects that required them to work onsite at their assigned community organization several times in the semester as they learned about the organization, gathered information, conducted interviews, participated in events or activities of the NPO, and interacted both with individuals working at the NPO and those benefiting from the organization's efforts and programs.

Frequently throughout the stages of their community work and writing, students resisted or tried to minimize their emotions, which Julia described in her attempts to "balance" emotion and the "truth," and Lucas recognized as a necessary "hiding" of his emotional responses. Julia and Lucas expressed resistance to their emotions and emotional

experiences while working on their writing projects for their community partner organization, mainly because they viewed emotion as incompatible with dominant forms of academic or persuasive writing. In this sense, the students' reluctance to be emotional in favor of the "real" (or, as Julia says, "more honest") academic work produced in the classroom reflects the longstanding divide between emotion and rationality, a divide that composition scholars have recognized as artificial yet nonetheless pervasive in the institutional expectations of what we should accomplish in the writing classroom. Stenberg reminds us, for example, that the divide between emotion and rationality is especially evident in composition courses, as we are "expected to shape student subjectivity so as to prepare them for subsequent 'real' disciplinary work," and this shaping of subjectivity has "historically involved fostering self-regulation by removing or controlling irrationality/emotion" (350). Emotion has been viewed as an irrational response that should be restrained in the classroom and privatized in our individual lives, and some students, such as Julia and Lucas, recognized this regulatory effect and attempted to tamp down their feelings in order to produce what they thought might be stronger academic work.

Although some students like Julia and Lucas expressed feeling conflicted about the place and purpose of their emotions in their writing projects, work from this class suggests that students' emotions were in fact a useful and effective means of attaining their writing goals and a necessary component of their desire for social action and justice. If emotions are ways to "measure transgression and injustices," then resistance to or prohibitions against emotion might impede students' potential both to gain knowledge and to contribute to social action (Boler 192). By the end of the semester many students in Writing With the Community were able to see and describe how their emotional experiences had an ideological function; instead of resisting or discrediting emotion, even if they did so initially, students understood their emotions as part of a process of engaging and potentially disrupting social norms, discourses, values, and hierarchies.

In reflecting on their writing processes and outcomes, the students in Writing With the Community make a strong case for an understanding of the sustained and deliberate integration of justice and emotion. The student work suggests that experiences of justice or injustice are not merely cognitive in nature but are also emotional; the recognition of the demand for social action is as much emotional as cognitive, and provides an example of the connection proposed by Cropanzano et al. on the "influence of conscious affect on justice perception" (7). As shown through the student reflections on their writing projects, "justice is a type of cognitive evaluation"—we learn about, think through, and assess whether something is fair or unfair—but "thinking about justice (or injustice) also creates affect" (Cropanzano et al. 35). Chris and Anna both recognized, though in different ways, that making a difference for individuals or a community organization involves both cognizance of the issues at stake and a consciousness of— and perhaps a willingness to engage—their emotions. As such, the student reflections from this class provide us with examples of how working through resistance to emotion provides a way to move from theory to practice: a means to see the realization of theoretical connections between emotion and justice in the composing practices of community-based writing courses.

Conclusion: Discomfort and the Development of Writing/Social Consciousness

All of the students quoted in this article from my Writing With the Community course express ambivalence, unease, and discomfort with the emotions they experienced while listening to and writing about the lives and experiences of others. For many students, like Julia and Anna, their recognition of their emotional discomfort was a key moment in terms of helping them recognize their desire for social action and justice, and of calling into question their own beliefs, values, and views. For some students, this discomfort with their emotions took the form of guilt, embarrassment, or shame, and they either resisted emotion or interpreted their emotions as evidence of what Ellen Cushman describes as a "liberal savior" stance: a sort of "missionary ideology" often prompted when students work in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities ("The Public Intellectual" 514). For example, Greg writes in his reflection that he found his emotional experiences while working with an organization in LA's Skid Row "to be very uncomfortable" and that a "sense of shame washed over" him when he tried to "connect with the people in Skid Row" from his "perspective as a 'tourist'…of privilege" (2014). Greg's experiences resonate with many of the other students in the class who felt as though they were (re)enacting a dominant social and cultural discourse that infantilizes and colonizes the "other" or objectifies the "other as strange," a common experience in community service learning as Margaret Himley notes (421). While scholars such as Cushman and Himley suggest we might strategically redirect students' savior impulses by designing assignments and onsite interactions to produce a sense of solidarity or "mutuality of the process" between student ethnographer and informant, they do not consider how students' emotions —even feelings of shame and guilt—might be important to helping students tell a story that contributes to a community partner's aims of social action and justice (Himley 422). In courses such as the one described here, students' emotional experiences can aid them in developing a rhetorical awareness of the persuasive potential of

their writing, as they are keenly aware that their writing will often be used by NPOs for grants and fundraising, or in newsletters or press releases: genres and situations designed to educate and inform donors and the general public, and ideally to persuade these constituents to *act* (through financial giving or other means of supporting the organization). Even discomforting student emotion thus has a corollary in terms of enacting social change.

Pedagogically, then, the next step is to move past simply observing, investigating, and cataloging student emotion in my Writing With the Community course. The experience of teaching this particular class underscores points relevant to our work in community-based writing courses and emphasizes the need to develop specific strategies foregrounding emotion as a cultural discourse. In our pedagogy, we must help students consider how emotion is not merely an individual reaction but also an important aspect of the social and shared connections they make when working with community partners and writing about that work. How can emotion become a source of knowledge in community-based writing courses? How can we help students work with their emotion—and not past it—in a way that leads students to a deeper understanding of themselves and how their writing might have an impact in social justice work?

I believe three concepts offer promising strategies in response to these questions as we continue to develop our theories and pedagogies in community-based writing courses: emotion scaffolding, purposeful ambiguity (prompted by emotion), and emotion as critical inquiry. The first is drawn from work on scaffolding emotions in K-12 classroom environments and emphasizes the importance of "identifying and supporting students' emotions" as a way to achieve "classroom goals" and enhance student autonomy and skill "in a particular developmental competency" (Meyer and Turner 243-244). Scaffolding instruction is a common approach in K-12 pedagogy, as Meyer and Turner say, and relies on building student competency in a particular area by helping students move through different learning modes and functions, from a "position of shared responsibility to one in which the student takes ownership" (244). Meyer and Turner argue that this process of scaffolding can work also with emotions in classrooms: teachers can employ "pedagogical use of analogies, metaphors, and narratives to influence students' emotional response to specific aspects of subject matter in a way that promotes student learning" (244). Scaffolding strategies, in other words, work by supporting students' learning and "socio-emotional development" through stages or steps, as students come to understand how "language communicates emotions" (Meyer and Turner 245). Through this process of scaffolding as a "framework for studying emotions in classrooms," students gain a better sense of themselves in relation to their educational experiences and develop stronger "intersubjectivity," or an understanding of how emotion is part of building the "mutual trust, respect, and communication skills necessary" to work effectively with others (245). Emotional scaffolding, as described and applied by Meyer and Turner, may be somewhat unique to the K-12 setting, but it suggests an instructional discourse that I believe could be useful in postsecondary community-based writing courses.

Practically, emotional scaffolding works by modeling the emotional responses we might anticipate or expect from our students, coding those responses by recognizing and naming them, and supporting students when they do experience these emotions. For instance, in response to the above example of Greg's feelings of guilt and shame when working with a community organization and individuals living in Skid Row, students worked on a staged assignment that first asked them to describe only (with no analysis or self-reflection) a challenging moment working onsite with their community partner; then, in a second draft, students revisited this experience in response to Aristotle's notion that "shame may be defined as pain or disturbance to bad things, whether present, past, or future, which seem likely to involve us in discredit" (*Rhetoric* 1384a). Through this writing task, which foregrounded emotion as a rhetorical construct and response, students understood even their most discomforting feelings as "irreducibly social," Daniel M. Gross's term for Aristotle's direct link between shame and "a person's position in any given social situation" (Gross 42). Instead of seeing emotions as "motivational 'add-ons' or 'afterthoughts,'" in Meyer and Turner's terms, scaffolding emotions allow us to make emotion part of the lexicon of a community-based writing course and integral to the writing work designed to help students reach their learning goals.

Meyer and Turner recognize that scaffolding emotions to promote learning goals may not be easy or comfortable—for teachers or students—but they believe that an emphasis on emotion in the classroom is vital to student learning. In quite a different context, Boler would seem to agree: her concept of a "pedagogy of discomfort" encourages an emotion experience in the classroom that is more a discomforting process than a simple path towards knowledge. Instead of giving in to temptations to "dismiss views we don't want to hear" or having students' "assumptions and ideas" simply validated, we might purposefully encourage students to examine their discomfort—their uneasy or uncomfortable emotions—and in the process "unsettle learned modes" of feeling and knowledge (Boler 179). I find Boler's claims provocative here for our work in community-based writing courses, as the unlearning of emotion or the emphasis on lingering in the discomforting emotions holds potential for change—both individual and social. Moreover, by actively engaging a pedagogy of discomfort, students might be encouraged to "inhabit a more ambiguous self," one prompted by their emotional responses (Boler 192). Examining the places of emotional discomfort as students are writing for and with community organizations might help them see how emotion is located

in certain social and cultural values (the "rules" about which emotions to express and when—something students in Writing With the Community struggled with) and become more willing to see themselves and their writing differently. Rose articulates precisely this link between emotion as discomfort and an enhanced consciousness of herself as a writer:

> Creating this piece challenged me in many ways … I underwent emotional episodes while writing. I became angry and frustrated with the client's story. In many ways, my final version contains all of the emotion and information I was attempting to get across. As a writer, I feel I have grown more conscious of when and how my feelings show through my writing. The emotional aspect of writing this piece I think will also be beneficial to me in my future writing. (Rose 2015)

For Boler, a pedagogy of discomfort is both a pedagogical approach and a form of critical inquiry that "aims to invite students and educators to examine how our modes of seeing have been shaped" by the cultures, histories, and lived experiences around us (179). Rose's anger and frustration stemmed from her recognition of the social impediments that prevented the client (a survivor of domestic abuse, fighting eviction and the threat of losing her children) from navigating a confusing and alienating legal system—lived experiences quite different than Rose's.

Rose's reflection of her community-engagement work and especially her writing shows a cognizance of emotional discomfort as a mode of inquiry—and potentially a form of change in the way Rose positioned herself as a writer. When Rose began drafting her story of the multiple and intersecting challenges this client experienced, her emotions were so overwhelming she had to stop writing. Rose asked to be taken off of the project and even to take an incomplete in the course, because (as she expressed) she did not believe she would be able to put her emotion aside, tell the client's story, and thus complete the work for the community partner. Ultimately, though, instead of sidestepping her emotional discomfort, Rose made the decision to stick with her project and came to see her emotions—even when especially heightened—as generative for her writing. As she said in her reflection essay,

> My emotions are all there in this piece, in my word choices, my phrasing, the parts of [the client's] story I chose to highlight. Instead of trying to play down my strong feelings about the injustices [the client] had to deal with, I faced all of this. I think writing this piece for [the community partner] has made me more aware of the type of social justice work I want to do. (Rose 2015)

Rose lingered in her discomfort (even when it might have been easier—for her and for me—to assign her a new project), and as a consequence she not only developed emotional literacy but she also gained an enhanced consciousness of herself both as a writer and as an advocate in social justice work.

In composition studies, we have started to give scholarly time and space to the question of how students might gain the expertise necessary for them to be writers in community settings. We have, though, given less attention to the emotional aspects of this work, especially the emotions our students experience and the impact of their feelings on their writing process. We have also not adequately explored how the development of sympathetic knowledge, through empathy and rhetorical listening, augments our students' cognitive and social development.

I have argued that emotion is part of the composition process and should be part of the composition instruction in a community-based writing course. Instead of redirecting student emotion, we might better prepare our students to enter into unfamiliar social spaces and writing genres by foregrounding emotion and not dismissing students' emotional experiences as insignificant "micro-moments," to borrow a phrase from Nancy Welch, that occur in one-to-one interactions in community work (260). Part of the way we prepare students to be socially engaged and active is to support them as they experience their emotions and to use their emotions as a way to motivate their writing.

Notes

1. I have fictionalized student names, the names of the community organizations and the individuals at the organizations, and have been purposefully vague about the exact locations of the organizations to protect the privacy of all involved. ([Return to text.](#))

2. See Adler-Kassner et al. (1997) at the start of this trend in composition and community engagement, and Deans et al. (2010) for more recent scholarship. While this work has been influential, theories of emotion and/or faculty-student experiences of emotion during community engagement remain underexamined. ([Return to text.](#))

3. See for example *Writing and Community Engagement: A Critical Sourcebook*, eds. Thomas Deans et al. I consider this an indispensable resource for developing pedagogy and theory for community-based writing

courses, yet aside from a few brief mentions of anger experienced by students and sometimes instructors in response to racism and other structural inequities encountered in engagement work, emotion is not a topic of critical consideration in this collection. (Return to text.)

4. My claims about how meaning, power, and identities are culturally produced and socially negotiated in the writing classroom have been influenced by the scholarship on the role writing plays in the construction of self for students. In particular, I find the recent scholarship on threshold concepts in writing studies especially relevant for scholarship and pedagogy in community engagement. For example, in *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* scholars assert that writing enacts and creates identities and ideologies—one of the central tenets about writing identified by the editors of the collection. While the contributors do not examine community-based writing or emotion, their arguments about the synergy between writing, identities, and ideologies have shaped my consideration of the interplay between writing, emotion, identity, and ideology in community-based composition work. (Return to text.)

5. Addams developed her concept of sympathetic knowledge beginning with her first book, *Democracy and Social Ethics*. For Addams, an individual might gain sympathetic knowledge about the life or experiences of others through deliberate interactions in concrete settings—such as her settlement project, Hull House. Addams believed that by gaining sympathetic knowledge and experiencing the plight of others, the principles of democracy were enacted. (Return to text.)

6. Deans describes writing for community organizations as writing documents nonprofit agencies in particular need but do not have time to produce, such as newsletter articles, brochures, and reports. When students write with nonprofit agencies, they tend to produce two types of writing, proposals and oral histories, which are used in an organization's community action efforts. My students produce a range of writing across both of the "genres" defined by Deans—and often an individual student project will be a blend of the kinds of writing outlined by Deans. (Return to text.)

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