Being Heard but Not Listened To

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"You look and sound just like your Mother when you're upset!" my Father shouted. These words, cloaked in recollected histories of rage and contempt, named my emotions, and self when expressing, as "mentally deranged," "crazy," "evil," and so on. I learned from a young age that conveying my emotions compared me to a woman my father spoke negatively of almost daily — a woman he nicknamed "Psycho." My impression that voicing emotions — emotions frequently uptaken as merely discordant attitudes — situates one as destabilized and, in turn, damages, if not deteriorates, one's epistemic credibility, structured my conceptual framework; a norm also reinforced in the everydayness of attaining and maintaining a "knower" status in my public and professional life. One example, presently, is the norm of professional "collegiality" in philosophy, which has come under scrutiny as a regulatory discourse that limits or restricts dissenting voices — voices that are often marginalized within the field already.[1] From these examples, I concur with Barbara Applebaum's assertion that fearing interactions that might provoke anger prevents us from potentially utilizing and hearing anger in productive ways.

Applebaum's primary goal, in my opinion, is to understand the why and how behind white students' reactions to people of color's anger; that is, she asks, what reasoning guides white students' presumptions of blame — presumptions that deflect responsibility on to those who express anger? As Applebaum explains, white students' desire to maintain their white innocence disrupts the message behind systematically marginalized students' anger. Applebaum utilizes Allison Jaggar's idea of "outlaw emotions" — in simple terms, emotions that question the status quo — to underscore how dismissals of anger function discursively to maintain privileged persons' "goodness" by solely focusing on the way one expresses anger. Reducing marginalized persons' anger to expressions reinforces students' denials of complicity and absolves them from responsibility and not learning from the messages behind people of color's anger.

I agree with too much of Applebaum's argument to offer a conventional critical response. Instead, I would like to take this opportunity to present some queries for further consideration regarding outlaw emotions and epistemic violence. To clarify, I want to discuss who and what may *be heard, but not "listened" to* when anger is typified as an outlaw emotion; namely, when privileged students grant marginalized students epistemic authority, but only listen through their own racialization or *"white ears"* — listening beginning from the assumption that what people of color say is "not true or doesn't apply to you."[2] In conclusion, I propose an alternative to outlaw emotions — *tweening emotions* — with the intent to consider the transformative possibilities "critical emotional praxis" can offer social justice classrooms.[3]

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION *2014* | Michele S. Moses, editor

Loaded Words

Outlaw
1. any fugitive from the law, esp. a habitual transgressor.
2. a wild or untamed beast.[4]

Anger
1. a strong feeling of displeasure or belligerence aroused by a wrong; wrath; ire.
2. *Obsolete*. grief, trouble.[5]

Being an outlaw — an untamed habitual transgressor of the law — in a discourse of opposition implies there is a law-abiding, civilized counterpart. Feeling anger, even in the event of wrongdoing, is belligerent; anger creates trouble and grief. "Outlaw" and "anger" are loaded words. Greta Christina explains, "Loaded words are … well, loaded. They come with value and judgment attached, sometimes positive, sometimes negative and, very frequently, a muddled and weird combination of the two."[6] Does characterizing marginalized students' anger as "outlaw" reinforce dismissals of their anger by privileged students? If the dominant definition of outlaw is associated with negative judgment, using the word may strengthen privileged students' beliefs for dismissing students of color's anger as overreactions, playing the race card, and so on.

While loaded words attach judgments to the persons, places, and things associated with them, they also "are about danger."[7] Depending on who is speaking and listening, definitions of words create very real consequences with dangerous penalties. Think about the definition of family, for example. Family can be a loaded word, especially when interpreted in ways to exclude certain persons (for example, definitions of family have been utilized to exclude LGBT people from adopting children). Conveying outlaw anger in contexts where such emotions are not comprehended as valid or sane, then, can perpetuate credibility deficiencies already embedded in the status-quo epistemology. Discursively speaking, labeling marginalized people's anger as "outlaw" buttresses incorrect uptakes.

Epistemic Violence

Even though identifying students of color's anger as outlaw could enhance future dismissals of their anger, I insist we must consider potential reverberations of past instances of miscued uptake and how these experiences shape articulations of anger. To elaborate, the probability that marginalized students edit their anger may increase with every incident of "testimonial quieting" — a person not being identified as a knower.[8] Previous silencing increases the chance that marginalized students feel pressed to edit their anger to only include "content for which one's audience demonstrates testimonial competence."[9] Kristie Dotson calls this type of injustice "testimonial smothering." Does making space for students of color's outlaw anger, which might pressure them to share, intensify the probability of marginalized students being epistemically wounded? Creating room for outlaw anger might give students of color more "epistemic subjectivity," but being a knower or informant does not guarantee inquirer status — that is, the degree of epistemic authority for introducing "hypotheses, probing and questioning, assessing and interpreting opinions, and so forth."[10] Epistemic violence can be multilayered and, for this reason, we must always be cognizant of the shifts in epistemic power "depending on who is speaking and who is listening."[11]

doi: 10.47925/2014.141

Privileged students may recognize outlaw emotions and their white complicity and, simultaneously, employ distancing strategies camouflaging denials of their complicity. Adale Sholock explains that racial sedition — whites' "overconfident belief in their ability to reject systemic racism, including whiteness and its privileges" — is an impediment for privileged students who believe they have achieved racial awareness.[12] Listening, but only through "white ears," may promote a "colorblind double-blind … the ability of [w]hites to view their behavior in relation to 'others' positively regardless of what they are told … in order to affirm their own positive sense of self."[13] In this regard, voicing outlaw anger could unduly cause epistemic harm to marginalized students if white students uptake their anger as acts of violence.[14]

Tweening Emotions

As I noted earlier, outlaw emotions imply there are law-abiding emotions; proposing an inside/outside dichotomy that reinforces oppositional-affective politics and perpetuates the status quo. I concur with Applebaum, though, that we can learn from marginalized persons' anger; and, I would add, our own. Yet, how can we learn from our emotions if we do not acknowledge, question, and reflect on how they construct and maintain our material realities and identities?

Enacting a critical emotional praxis (that is, the practice of identifying and engaging with our socio-historical emotional patterns)[15] requires reflecting on the in-betweens — the emotional frames that add dimension and motion to our social, historical, and material realities. This critical-emotional process I call *tweening* necessitates understanding how our identities are interconnected with and dependent upon the identities of others. Tweening, which originates from digital animation techniques, involves identifying the different emotional layers and contexts that create our multidimensional identities and relationships with others. Instead of reinforcing oppositional viewpoints like outlaw emotions, tweening offers new story possibilities. The goal is not only to identify and critique our emotional beliefs, but also "to find ways to move beyond these attachments and establish new affective connections that are empowering for social change."[16] In connection with Applebaum's argument, tweening may assist both privileged and marginalized students to learn from the emotions of each other. While the everyday realities of injustice are extremely real, I agree with Michalinos Zembylas that we cannot "remain stuck in misery."[17]

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doi: 10.47925/2014.141

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doi: 10.47925/2014.141