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# Grading Rage in the Pastoral Care Classroom: Tension, Trust, and Possibilities of Creative Transformation

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ABSTRACT

Do you have a story about grading and frustration, anger, or even rage? Assessment and grading can elicit rage for both learners and teachers. The author was surprised in a semester where rage both made the learning environment precarious and also contributed to learning. What is the role of rage in teaching and learning? Is it possible to assess rage? Can rage lead to creative transformation of classroom cultures and support students in achieving learning goals? Can rage sharpen pedagogical commitments? The author reviews a critical incident of unexpected grading rage that emerged in her three-hour, once-a-week master's level introductory pastoral care classroom, what she did about it during the semester, how three strategies she employed could be helpful for teaching and learning religion and theology more broadly, and lessons she is still learning from it. When grading rage emerges in and beyond the pastoral care classroom, teaching and learning misunderstanding stories, facilitated by neutral questions in charged contexts, can make room for creative transformation when supported by third voices.

KEYWORDS

pastoral care, rage, grading, class participation, misunderstanding stories, neutral question, tension, trust, creative transformation, theological education

## Introduction

Do you have a story about grading and frustration, anger, or even rage?[1] Many complain about grading in general, with increased voracity at midterm and finals. While grading, moments of deep insight revealed in student work can appear alongside assignments that demonstrate little evidence of learning. Professors may exclaim that they

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1 The author thanks the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning Theology and Religion writing the scholarship of teaching and learning cohort

won't spend more time grading an assignment than it seemed students spent working on it. Grading can also be frustrating for students when professors complain about having to grade the very assignments we designed. Students ask what a grade means: what is its purpose? Students know that grades have financial and vocational implications. When it comes to grading, brilliant work can spark new connections and insights for students and teachers. Yet, professors can look at a stack to be assessed and know that they will likely receive the same compensation for hours spent crafting personalized thoughtful feedback as colleagues who seem to spend much less time and energy on the daunting task or who can assign grading to teaching assistants. This is particularly poignant for adjunct professors. Grading well is often unacknowledged labor unincorporated into job performance markers or course evaluations, adding additional layers of invisible and often gendered labor to an academic vocation (Muhs et al. 2012; Chronical Review 2018). Grading can be enraging.

Grading frustrations can lead to anger and/or apathy for students and for teachers. Various stakeholders in theological education, and higher education more broadly, argue about the meaning of grades, how grades do and don't work to measure learning, how grades can and do discriminate and assume normative standards that aren't accessible to every student or teacher. Should course design support any and all students to thrive with an equitable opportunity to earn excellent grades or is a bell-curve a better standard? Some argue for eliminating grades all together (Nilson 2013, 91; Nilson 2016). Once grades are submitted, petitions for grade changes can come in quickly, often with accompanying pressure from administration, coaches, or colleagues. Claims of grade inflation are raised against schools, departments, course formats, disciplines of study, and/or faculty members. I once had a professor who told the class that they had simply run out of time and decided to give everyone who turned in the final assignment a 100 percent without reading any submissions, which was both grace-filled and infuriating. Grades earned can vary widely in a class or school, sometimes leading to resentment over a grade from one course that simmers and seethes into subsequent semesters.

There are many ways that grading and rage intersect from rage about grading, rage of professors, rage of students, rage at injustice in systems and structures, grading rage itself. In this paper, I use the doubleness of the phrase "grading rage" to address *both* rage about grading and the possibility of grading rage. During the Fall term of 2016, rage emerged in my introductory pastoral care classroom. It started as rage about grading, but over the semester sparked my reflections on the role of rage in learning. In retrospect, its presence was not shocking given the context of the U.S. Presidential election during the semester (Gambino and Pankhania 2016). But rage connected to the increasingly disrespectful tone of the 2016 Presidential campaign wasn't the only thing that was going on.[2] The class and political climate exacerbated a rage that was already there. Rage preceded and shaped the context and content of this course. Why?

Most students in the course had entered seminary alongside a major curriculum revision that foregrounded interdisciplinarity, calling faculty to teach and think together across disciplinary lines throughout the curriculum rather than only occasionally by elective. Innovation required faculty to stretch pedagogies, to place disciplinary expertise in constant conversation with curiosity and challenge, to partner with colleagues in creating something new. For faculty, this required trust, assessment, ongoing innovation, relational investment. Behind the scenes, the best innovation is also a precarious experiment, unmasking methodological divergences, pedagogical differences, vulnerabilities across rank, and embodied differences— exposing tensions that can be less evident when each teaches their own solo classes.[3] But, we were teaching faith leaders for a diverse and complex landscape and wanted a curriculum that valued collaboration over solo performance.

We heard mounting anxieties and frustration from some students that faculty seemed more vulnerable, less certain than students expected or desired. Yet, engaged in practicing something new well, the faculty improved and made tweaks and changes through the first few years. As a faculty member experiencing significant curricular revision for the first time, I learned that it invites students into both the excitement and the uncertainty that accompanies innovative collaboration. As a faculty collegium, it is not possible to work out *everything* in practice ahead of time even when guided by thoughtful

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2  Others have interrogated challenges to teaching during the Fall 2016 election and ensuing Trump presidency, which exceeds the scope of this paper.
3  Joe Bessler's (2008) metaphor of theological school faculty as an orchestra influenced both the curricular innovations and my subsequent thinking of faculty collaboration.

planning, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and shared values. We were trying to create something new while modeling appropriate levels of vulnerability required to do so. Within the school, experimenting with possibilities of creative transformation required trust but also elicited tensions.[4]

By the time graduating students reached the end of their course of study, many were ready for something that felt more certain, more stable. At least three factors contributed to the increased stress present even before my Fall 2016 course. First, students were taking a pastoral care course that I had been teaching and improving over ten iterations of the course. While I was always assessing and reshaping the course design, it was not the kind of major pedagogical experiment I might attempt in a new elective or that we were all trying in new required courses. However, the subject matter of the course and a large part of its content were the very skills that had been required in all of the more experimental co-taught classes; skills that were both exciting and frustrating for students: listening, humanizing embodied differences, exercising appropriate vulnerability, paying attention to interrelationships of theory and practice, and studying ministerial trust, risk, boundaries, and burnout.

Second, the faculty had decided to all use faculty titles (Dr. McGarrah Sharp versus Mindy in my case) so that we were addressed similarly across the curriculum and in co-teaching environments. Prior to this, there had been an uneven, yet often cherished, practice of a first name culture. Ironically, faculty titles are a way of naming classroom authority (such as denoting scholarly training, naming power differentials in grading, and claiming shared responsibility for curricular decisions), yet a major student complaint was faculty vulnerability. This cultural shift revealed different understandings of vulnerability, creativity, and leadership.

Third, the intercultural national climate during the summer before the Fall semester class was increasingly tense; public discourse in the last six months before the 2016 presidential election included increasingly divisive rhetoric. It pitted Christians against Muslims, heterosexual purity against LGBTQI+ solidarity, and seemed to justify identity-based violence against women. This context required faith leaders competent in listening, assessing, and responding to personal and communal risks.

## Surprised by Rage

Even with school and national tensions in the air, I was still surprised by rage in a course that I knew to have a solid design with fewer challenges than other newer areas of the curriculum. Over the course of the semester, even more surprising than the presence of rage in the classroom (which I describe below), were its unexpected benefits: student ability to reflect on their learning through rage, the relevance of my research to understand what was happening, and how every student not only finished the term, but also that rage became a point of reflection for me and for students long after the class ended. It made me wonder how rage might serve teaching and learning.

Could course design and assessment with room for rage contribute to learning outcomes? How would or could one grade rage? Trained in practical and pastoral theology and ethics, I believe rage is a useful, healthy moral emotion (Swinton 2007; Moon 2017), especially when teaching theology and religion in precarious times. What would it look like to recast rage not only as reactionary but also as an intelligence to be cultivated and assessed?

## Tension

Even though I teach pastoral care practices and regularly invite students to take a deep breath and pay attention to their breathing, I don't often think about the air in the room until it becomes thick with tension. While no classroom is or should be a counseling session, there are always parallel processes at play. Every class session about listening well is also a

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4   It is also important to place the school in the larger context of an ecology of theological schools specifically and higher education more broadly also facing multiple forms of challenges around trust, tension, and transformation.

listening exercise. Every reading assignment is an invitation to read not only the assigned text, but also the individual student self and group dynamics in the class. Whatever happens in class is itself a case study; class participation creates additional class content.

Therefore, it is particularly important to include class participation in the final grade earned for a pastoral care class. I anticipate that student class participation can and will include moments of deep insight as well as confusion and conflict, but I don't typically think of including rage on participation assessment rubrics. I think carefully about the rubric since I give the class participation grade more weight than some of my colleagues in other fields. There is significant disagreement in the scholarship of teaching and learning about whether to grade participation, how to grade participation, and how to clearly communicate the process for grading participation.[5] Since class participation assessment factors prominently into the final course grade earned, I communicate and discuss participation in the syllabus and during class time throughout the semester.

I spent the summer prior to Fall 2016 working on my pedagogy as part of curricular assessment and innovation mentioned above. I decided to be more specific in the participation assessment grading rubric and ask students to use it to self-access their own participation. (See Figure 1.) With under fifteen students in the residential class, I could expect some contribution from all voices every week of the three-hour, once a week, semester-long course. This seminar-sized group also had greater potential to discern the participation of the whole than might be the case in a much larger class.

**Figure 1:** *Class Participation Assessment Rubric*

| Class Participation Assessment Rubric | Always | Often | Occasional | Rarely | Never |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Has the student consistently participated in the class discussion in an attentive, thoughtful way? Have more talkative students done the hard work of listening? Have quieter students done the hard work of speaking? Have all students paid attention to how much space they are taking up in the conversation and how that affects others? | 20 | 18 | 15 | 10 | 0 |
| 2. Do the student's comments show that they have completed and thought about the reading in advance of the class? | 20 | 18 | 15 | 10 | 0 |
| 3. Does the student show up on time, attentive, and prepared to participate? | 10 | 9 | 7.5 | 5 | 0 |
| 4. Have the student's comments stayed on topic? Has the student refrained from devoting too much class time to issues that do not contribute to group learning? | 10 | 9 | 7.5 | 5 | 0 |
| 5. Has the student's energy level (body language, eye contact, avoidance of creating distractions) enhanced the energy level of the class as a whole? | 10 | 9 | 7.5 | 5 | 0 |
| 6. Has the student refrained entirely from actions that could be interpreted as disrespectful, rude, offensive, dismissive or abusive? | 10 | 9 | 7.5 | 5 | 0 |
| 7. Have the student's comments been cordial, charitable, and collegial? Has the student taken care to refer other students' comments in a gracious way, and to listen to critique when it is offered? | 10 | 9 | 7.5 | 5 | 0 |
| 8. Has the student stayed on task during small group exercises? | 10 | 9 | 7.5 | 5 | 0 |

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5  In the professor teaching tactics blogosphere, for example, one can find a range of practices and cautions around grading participation (see for example Taylor [2018], Croxall [2010], Weimer [2014]). See also Blodgett (2017).

| | Total points available per semester | 100 | 90 | 75 | 50 | 0 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

When I adapted this class participation grading rubric for this and other classes, I wasn't thinking about its usefulness in evaluating rage. I wasn't thinking about rage at all. But, from the first day of the course, rage was in the air with particular strength as my students discerned their callings to serve religious communities in a complex world of tensions and possibilities.

Tension was in the room when I arrived on the first day of class. I had taught every student previously, although this particular student configuration had never to my knowledge existed before. When we started basic introductions and I invited someone to go first, no one said a word. When we went over the syllabus, as I mentioned one assignment's title, a student loudly proclaimed, "I hate this assignment!" Throughout the three hours, body language was defensive with arms crossed and little eye contact. Opening listening exercises in small groups failed to change the energy in the room. What was happening?

Reviewing the participation rubric proved awkward. Were we being thoughtful with each other and doing the hard work of listening well? Already, not much. Were we reading well, or at all, before commenting? As evidenced by the "I hate this assignment" comment before reviewing the assignment, resistance to reading well was already voiced. Were folks ready to participate as a collective learning community? I couldn't say yes with confidence. Was student engagement building the energy in the room? No, energy was depleted. Had class members refrained from actions that could be interpreted as disrespectful, rude, offensive, dismissive, or abusive? Not only was the course design being dismissed, but students were dismissing each other. Had students' comments been cordial, charitable, and collegial? Had the students taken care to refer to other students' comments in a gracious way, and to listen to critique when it was offered? No and no. There were moments of laughter and relief and it wasn't entirely awful, but that first class session unfolded awkwardly and strangely. I know that anxiety can be high during the first three weeks of a course until it settles into a more predictable rhythm (Sharp and Morris 2014), so I hoped that we would regroup the next week. However, the second week was about the same—tense with palpable resistance. I tried various teaching strategies that had worked well in the past, mixing up the time with different learning activities, but to no avail. Was it the assigned classroom space or time? Tensions in the school? The tense national climate? I started to wonder if we would be able to learn together.

After the second week (and earlier into the semester than my usual practice), I facilitated a participation self-assessment and conversation using an unusual means: email. Clearly, participation had been strained so far, with some students seemingly uninterested and others holding back their own participation, sensing their peers were checked out. Outside of class, several students had already shared privately that they didn't owe their vulnerabilities to peers who didn't care. I had received unsolicited emails about the class with various grievances and suggestions. Between the second and third class, I sent an initial evaluation of how I thought we were doing, and asked students to reply with their self-assessments using the participation rubric. I noted that we had a lot of room for improvement; the class as a group was operating closer to the "never" side of the spectrum than the "always" side. Sending this by email between classes was likely a mistake, but pre-zoom, I had few options given that the commuter students only gathered in shared time and space once a week. At the time, I felt that I couldn't wait a whole week to invite reflection on participation and hoped reflection could help us shift into a more generative mode of learning.

By the next class, almost every student had replied with their self-assessment, and almost every self-assessment was seething. More than one student had copied administrators. Half of the students didn't come back from the ten-minute break halfway through the third class meeting—they were in an administrative office. Students who had already been intentionally withholding their voices retracted to near silence. Questions came like darts: How dare I reduce perceptions of body language to a number on a seemingly arbitrary scale? The rubric points were perceived as diminishing student effort and disrespecting student diversities. How dare I grade participation, trying to measure quality of attention with metrics?

Since the first class, I had also met with administrators and been transparent about the class. I had called upon mentors and found support in Nancy Lynne Westfield's Wabash blog contributions, particularly her naming challenges and gifts of teaching students where they are (2015). In addition to palpable tension, something stunning also happened. I received

the angriest, but also some of the deepest student learning reflections I had ever seen. Students articulated that the rubric didn't work for them because they learn by . . . [several paragraph-long explanations of learning successes, challenges, efforts, systemic barriers, and access points]. Somehow rage had opened a floodgate of deeper reflections on learning. I had an "aha!" moment and did something I'd never done before in my teaching—I set aside my course plan for the day and instead used my scholarly research on intercultural conflict to reflect on what might be going on in the class in the moment.

When students came back late from the break, I shared my research on misunderstanding stories. I had just published a book on the generative role of tension in intercultural pastoral care (Sharp 2013), but I had not planned to use it for class because it builds on concepts that students were still learning in this introductory course. But, why not try it now?
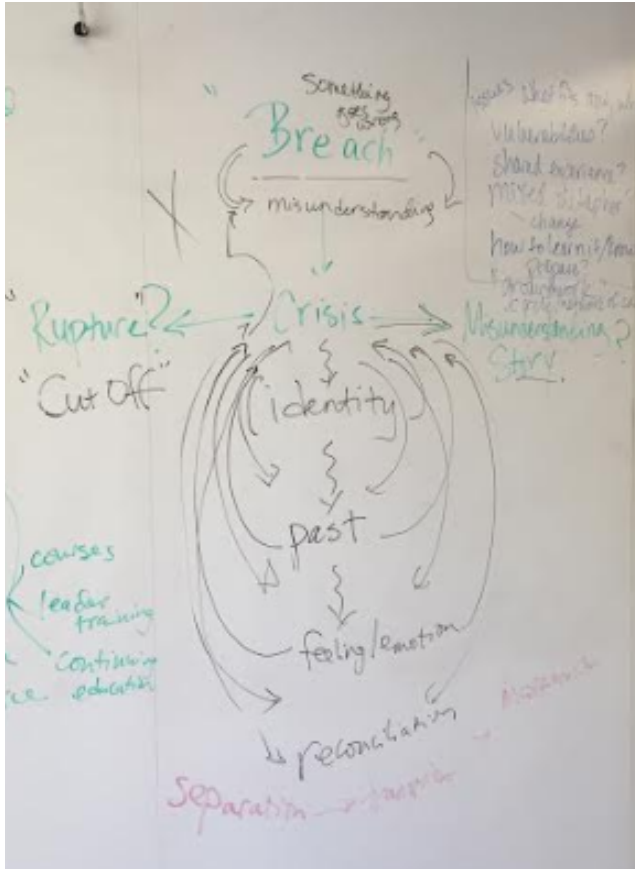
## Misunderstanding Stories

I developed a theory of misunderstanding stories to inform pastoral theology's movement toward a more postcolonial paradigm (2013). I had not planned to teach my own book but was going to mention my research at end of the semester alongside other advancements in the field beyond the introductory level. However, I found my research on misunderstanding stories a useful way to honor and engage rage and its resultant tension. The class was expressing rage about grading participation, but this was not the only issue. If I had thought that the rage was simply acting out, my pedagogical instincts would have been to wait until after class to address students privately and not to change my lesson plan. Since parallel process was part of class content and the collective rage was accompanied by collective deeper reflections on learning, I saw a unique opportunity for developing a misunderstanding story in the moment. Rather than teaching about how other people might develop misunderstanding stories, we could practice it in real time.

What is a misunderstanding story? A misunderstanding story is a developmental achievement in a relationship in which some presenting conflict or breech in the relationship leads, through discrete (yet not necessarily linear) stages, to a renewed relationship in which all parties can claim the misunderstanding as one of the many stories that describe the life of this relationship. I developed the theory of misunderstanding stories from my experience of being amazed at how intercultural friendships can be sustained, and even grow, in the face of deep cultural disagreements. In the relational contexts of teacher and students in a course, could we also achieve a misunderstanding story where rage induced by the participation rubric was a presenting conflict?

I mapped out the misunderstanding stories theory on the board (see Figure 2), naming class dynamics that were alive in the room and in which I was also a participant. Something goes wrong in a relationship (breach) that leads to a crisis around the relationship's future (crisis) and willing parties then have an opportunity to navigate between ending the relationship (cut off or rupture) or moving toward a continued relationship that works to incorporate the breach into a shared misunderstanding story. I could see all of these elements in the class.

First, there was a presenting conflict or relational breech in the rage over the grading of participation in a pastoral care class. Second, there was an ensuing crisis which characterized the moment—would we be able to learn? Third, we needed to make a choice. We could choose to cut off the relationship. Options included students dropping the class, me requesting to be removed from the class (even though I was the only one who taught it at the time at my school), or reformatting the class by pedagogical principles other than what I valued in my discipline, such as removing participation as a category of assessment or shifting to more lecture and less small group work. Alternatively, we could try to stay in relationship and work collaboratively to achieve a misunderstanding story. The process of developing a misunderstanding story could take the rest of the semester if not longer, I explained, because engaging the process raises deep and difficult questions about identities, the past, feelings and emotions, reconciliation, accountabilities, and the need for clear communication moving forward.  Further, we would need even more forthright reflection on individual and group participation to move toward a misunderstanding story.

*Figure 2: Class Map of Misunderstanding Stories Theory*



Even without reviewing the psychological, theological, and postcolonial conversation partners behind my theory of misunderstanding stories in depth, introducing the concept when I needed it was surprisingly effective. It named tensions in the room and invited the learning community to contemplate our collective desire to learn. I reiterated my commitment to engage the process of misunderstanding stories while continuing to teach the class (with the full support of and regular debriefing with my administration). As a class, we acquired some language to describe the process in the room. I decided to keep the rubric, but instead of points, left the questions open for students to locate evidence of their participation in the range from intentional engagement to opting out. Each week, in every learning activity, we negotiated the process of moving toward a misunderstanding story. After this intervention, the class continued and all students completed the course. It wasn't easy, but it was possible. I found that I needed to add support both inside and outside of the classroom.

## Neutral Questions in Charged Contexts

Spontaneously drawing on misunderstanding stories to process rage in a pastoral care class, I learned something new about my research: neutral questions can facilitate the process of moving from breach through ensuing crisis toward developing a misunderstanding story. I had used neutral questions in writing and teaching for years, but I had not connected neutral questions to my research on the relational negotiations involved in developing intercultural misunderstanding stories. A neutral question is a question that is intended to assist another person to speak, trusting that the person has something to say and can sharpen and deepen their unique contribution. As choreographer Liz Lerman outlined in her *Critical Response Process*, a neutral question is a question that invites "the artist to think more reflectively than [they] might if the opinion or solution were directly stated" (2003, 21). Neutral questions, though they can be difficult to formulate at first, focus feedback on what the author is aiming to create and communicate to an audience. Lerman suggests using food as an analogy to teach students about neutral questions.

To introduce neutral questions, I distribute food, such as small baggies of homemade granola (Lerman is known to use cupcakes). Non-neutral comments (what Lerman calls "permissioned opinions") include comments to me (the maker) like "the granola is good," or "the granola is not salty enough," or "I don't like granola." A neutral question, in contrast, is offered to the maker for the purposes of deepening their creative process, so that the maker will be motivated to go back to work and create more in their distinct voice. Neutral questions activate a desire to learn. In the granola exercise, examples of neutral questions could include being asked what stories the granola evoke for me (I could share about my grandmother's homemade granola) or what I might add to a future batch (pecans, obviously, though I kept it nut free on purpose). Neutral questions are helpful tools in peer editing because they direct students toward eliciting the next best thought, sentence, title, or connection in the author's own words about what they are uniquely equipped to offer through their creation. The question isn't "here's how I would write your paper" but rather "how would you expand on what you are writing?"

Given tension and fragile trust in the class, peer review could be risky. If we were going to be able to learn together as a class, we would need to ask and respond to neutral questions. When I suggested this to the class a student exclaimed, "There is no such thing as a neutral question!" They remarked that any and every question implies a judgment. Untangling neutral questions and permissioned opinions helped to distinguish the quality of attention to the misunderstanding story process, but students were not convinced.

When discussing rage, instead of saying "You are [fill in the blank]," which shares an opinion about another's tone and intention (often offered without permission), a neutral question demonstrates curiosity, inviting another person to voice what they want to share. For example, neutral questions in the context of rage could include: "Who shares your passion and rage?" "Who in your family or among your trusted mentors called you into ministry?" "What is your six-word memoir and what role does rage play in it?" "Who supports your thriving?" When asking about the past, neutral questions might sound like, "When in the past did you address your rage faithfully?" "Where have you had permission to practice listening to rage?" In a classroom setting with high tension and low trust, I offered such neutral questions as free writing assignments.

We practiced neutral questions both for peer review to support individual writing assignments and to help craft a misunderstanding story in the aftermath of the collective grading rage. As the professor, I tried to place rage into a range of emotions being held in the class and taught neutral questions as a strategy for increasing trustworthiness among the learning community. Still, we needed an additional layer of support to help the class weather our learning experience.

## Third Voices

In Fall 2016, rather than just being able to name what transformation could look like in a hypothetical care situation that we practice in class and students demonstrate on the final exam, the class itself needed to experience creative transformation to make learning possible. Every pastoral care theology or theory implies a theory of change or transformation where transformation is the lived experience of healing, liberation, or other pastoral goal (Reyes 2016, 107; Graham 1996). One of my learning outcomes is for students to be able to identify the theory of change or vision of transformation in the variety of pastoral theologies we study throughout the semester. Some pastoral theologies are geared more toward individual healing and others more toward systemic restoration or revolution. Post-colonializing pastoral theology, which is at the heart of my own research and one example of many pastoral theologies in the introductory class, involves creative transformation (Lartey 2013; Lartey 2018; Sharp 2019). For pastoral care to be transformational rather than merely transactional, long-term efforts are needed over an extended period, a lifetime even. We had three months. What kind of pedagogical intervention could help sustain the possibility of teaching and learning?

A challenge with grading rage as a valid form of participation is that it is so unwelcome and often felt to be threatening. Was rage diagnosing with precision a potentially toxic environment and/or was rage contributing to a toxic environment? The feeling of being "under attack," or carrying the expectation of being "vulnerable to attack" as womanist pastoral theologian Chanequa Walker-Barnes describes as an embodied consequence of white racism, is toxic (2014, 81). Of course,

this complexifies across diversely racialized and othered identities so often held in contrast to white normativity. This underlying dynamic alone produces rage, illnesses, and oppressions. Toxicity is poisonous and does not support learning, but creative rage can—with support for teachers and students.

In addition to continued transparent debriefing with my administration, I invited third voices into the class both in class meetings and as homework. By third voice, I mean an invited guest in addition to professor and student. Students and I covenanted with ourselves and each other to increase our commitment to disciplines of self-care, spending time in every class session to report on our respective commitments. I added breathing and meditative exercises to already planned contemplative class session openings. I distributed resources for students, asked students to be in contact with trusted mentors outside the class, and stayed in contact with my own trusted mentors and friends to debrief and strategize pedagogical challenges and opportunities around rage in the classroom. This class weighed on me and I needed to and did bolster my support systems. The students and I needed to renew our spirits. Mentorship invites a third voice into support systems for individual participants in the learning environment.

Third voices can also support the collective learning space. After the third week of class, I invited a "pastoral consultant" to attend at least a portion of every remaining class. While some guests had already been scheduled, since I had neither a teaching assistant nor a co-teacher it was important to bring in other voices to cut the tension as the class and I discerned our ability to teach and learn together, to grade participation, but more than that, to care about participating well in a learning environment. Pastoral consultants listened to small group case study role plays and offered feedback on pastoral strategies.

These visits culminated in a planned exercise on pastoral care amid congregational conflict with a professional mediator. Interestingly, this class performed very well at role playing someone else's group conflict and seemed much more at ease with the exercise than any other semesters in which I had used the exercise. Throughout the class, pastoral consultants served as wisdom partners who engaged the class from their professional role. This rotating third voice buttressed mentorship in the class, provided multiple voices who valued learning practices of pastoral care well even and especially in the presence of challenging circumstances, and therefore supported collective learning.

## Going Deeper: Rage, Race, and Possibilities of Learning Trust

Misunderstanding stories, neutral questions, and third voices supported learning in the presence of rage.  With learning more possible, we could also go deeper with it, navigating anxieties and trust to think through the racialized dynamics of rage.  While we did some of this work in the three month course, I have continued to think about rage, race, and learning trust in the five years since it ended.

Learning can lead to deeper trust just as trust can make a way for deeper learning.  Trust in the face of anxieties is a basic concept, informed by developmental and other psychologies, in pastoral care. In the introductory course in pastoral care, I account for trust in the face of anxieties in my course design and classroom structure (Sharp and Morris 2014). Course content addresses trust and anxiety both in assigned texts and in supplemental lectures. For example, I introduce the importance of trust in pastoral care relationships, a basic human need according to the developmental psychologies that have influenced the field (Glaz and Stevenson-Moessner 1991; Erikson 1997) in important, but not unproblematic ways (Sharp 2013, 78-104). Across therapeutic, cultural, and theological modalities (Frank and Frank 1961), technically called "therapeutic alliance," the kind of trusting professional relationship that I was teaching my students is one that embodies a reliable quality, invites the appropriate vulnerability to be present in the face of someone disclosing suffering, and instills confidence in collective investment in good pastoral care responses. Without this kind of alliance, says psychologist Nancy McWilliams, any potential healing relationship is just an "empty ritual" (2011, 17).

Developing trust in a context of both predictable anxieties and unpredictable rage—was complicated. Rage is not necessarily considered a problem in pastoral care and theology, but its treatment in the field is not unproblematic either. My working definition of pastoral care is learning to ask the question, "what is going on?" and then believing what is heard and staying in relationship in the face of what is shared. This way of practicing care evokes vulnerability, risk, a range of emotions, and,

sometimes, rage. The *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling* defines "Rage and Hostility" together, with rage referring to "furious, uncontrolled anger," while hostility is "aimed at injuring or destroying." Rage is characterized as destructive, self-serving, and something that requires intervention (Patton 1990, 1038-1039). From the root word "rabies," rage is associated with "fury," "violent anger," "great violence," "unabated violence," "madness," "disease," and the opposite of "calm" (Dictionary.com 2018). However, there are other important ways to think about rage.

White feminist pastoral theologian Kathleen Greider observes that "sometimes aggressiveness," which can be a precursor to rage, "seems to provide us with the backbone to stand up to violence and do right by one another" (1997, 2, 29). In *Reckoning with Aggression: Theology, Violence, and Vitality*, Greider promotes developing a relationship with one's rage to direct action, support healthy confrontation, and counteract tendencies to retreat into guilt or shame in response to rage around unjust structures (1997, 96). In *Eloquent Rage*, black intellectual Brittney Cooper shares how she engaged a messy "process of . . . becoming okay with rage as a potential feminist superpower" when rage is focused with precision (2018). Pastoral theologian John Swinton likewise argues for meeting the moral emotion of rage with lament and thoughtfulness rather than revenge, spite, or uncareful criticism (2007). In my class, I wondered if rage could join with trust to serve the functions of pastoral care: healing, guiding, sustaining, encouraging, nurturing, reconciling, liberating, empowering, and resisting harm (Lartey 2006, 62-68).

Many minoritized scholars have written about rage as a constructive, creative resource while white-identified scholars have been more silent or considered rage to be detrimental to health and wholeness. Rage is certainly not a black-and-white issue, even while scholarship on rage identifies white supremacy as an ingredient of the righteous indignation of rage. As a white professor of pastoral care and theology, I choose to interrogate my whiteness with help from conversation partners and practices of accountability. This is ongoing work in which I have a lot to learn even while I attempt to shape justice-oriented practices informed by my ongoing learning (Sharp 2019).

Rage has many forms and decibels, can manifest in overt or subtle ways, and can contribute to destructive, as well as to creative transformation in groups of learners with different life experiences and perspectives. When some students report just waking up around issues of racism, patriarchy, and neocolonialism of many intersecting forms, rage can result for both awakening students and their classmates who have not had the same luxury of social slumber. Along with increasing divisiveness in the national fiber of Fall 2016, my class was also all over the map with respect to the drivers and objects of their rage. Rather than ask my students to write about rage instead of other assignments, I invited them to complete the semester's writing assignments in the presence of rage.

In the pastoral care classroom, we practice holding a variety of emotions, including anger. "Most of us have received little help in learning to use our anger to clarify and strengthen ourselves and our relationships. Instead, our lessons have encouraged us to fear anger excessively, to deny it entirely, to displace it onto inappropriate targets, or to turn it against ourselves," writes psychologist Harriet Lerner (2014, 10). Pastoral theologian Andy Lester argues that rage can be a form of love that compels Christians to act as change agents (2003). In the pastoral care classroom, we practice. We practice naming emotions imagined, witnessed, and felt, and invite others into these practices.

Casting rage as a tool for healing and transformation, pastoral theologian Lee Butler describes how African spirituality becomes a resource in pastoral care for "[transforming] our rage into a divine courage to stand against the destructive force of the enemy and declare that we are entitled to the same promises of the nation: of life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness" (2006, 173). Butler reclaims rage as a creative tool, coining the phrase "Rage/Creativity" to honor coping skills deeply embedded in communities who have survived and thrived with dignity in the face of soul-crushing conditions (2006, 161-166). "Rage develops," Butler writes, "when my humanity is denied and my existence is controlled by a force that seeks to diminish my identity. . . . The task, however, is not to deny the rage, but to transform its energy into a creative force" (2006, 165). Rage can be creative. Rage can be a form of deep care. Rage can be focused precisely on what needs changing, and now.

Trusting professional relationships need to be able to hold rage without letting it fuel destructive impulses toward the basic human dignity of anyone involved. Rage can characterize keen attention to pain that informs wise practice. Shouldn't I rage? Shouldn't rage be part of teaching and learning prophetic and pastoral care? I believe that what ethicist Emilie

Townes calls the radical truth telling of pastoral and prophetic pastoral responses is a key to joining rage and trust in pastoral care (1996, 150-156). In "Waking up to Privilege," psychology and women's studies professor Stephanie Shields writes about the labor of the whole class when some members with markers of race, gender, and other intersectional privileges have to be "push[ed] to acknowledge their unearned privilege and exercise the social responsibility that follows that acknowledgement" (2012, 39). I can relate as a teacher, observer, and in my own learning process.

As a white-identifying pastoral theologian, I connect rage silence with my ever-ready complicity in white supremacy even while I work against that complicity. This work is itself enraging given that rage from multiple sources across student, teacher, institution, and wider contexts can converge in mutually amplifying, and at times confusing, ways. Who gets to express rage? Who gets to evaluate and assess it? What kind of curriculum includes creative rage? Is there always a destructive edge or at least risk? Again, I wonder, is grading rage possible? Could it be part of a life-giving learning environment?

More than fifty years ago, novelist and social critic James Baldwin wrote that to be relatively conscious in the world is to be in rage almost all the time (1961, 205). Baldwin was talking specifically about the righteous rage black folks in the U.S. should and do feel with the relentless and cruel barrage of racism. Fifty years later, racialized violence remains relentless and cruel.  In contrast, as a southern white woman, I was raised to avoid or diffuse rage as inappropriate or necessarily destructive. My social location has muted my own desire to rage and connected embarrassment to the thought of ever doing so. "Imagine," writes bell hooks, "what it is like to be taught by a teacher who does not believe you are fully human [and therefore] really believes [you] are incapable of learning" (2010, 2). Is there room for rage in theological education? And if so, how does one teach and learn rage with such tension in the air?

Pedagogical awareness in course and classroom structure is one way I equip students to practice pastoral care well and to learn to establish trust in their pastoral encounters. While the classroom is not appropriate ground for therapeutic alliance, it is a fertile place for pedagogical alliance, a supportive relationship that encourages healing, growth, and thriving, and can maximize potential for listening, recognize misunderstandings, practice good boundaries, and learn to make room to hear and address trauma, suffering, and heartaches of life and love. These practices are difficult to teach; they are precarious even (Greider 2008, 52-58). If this is a larger pedagogical and vocational goal, course design and learning activities need to include practice. This may well require making room for rage: wrestling with identities, histories, accountabilities, futures, and hopes.

## Conclusion

Ethicist Keri Day writes, "Our culture is a culture right now that's being led by fear. You can feel the fear. It's in the air" (2018). When rage emerged in my class in a particularly surprising way, I wanted to face my own fears around it, to treat it with curiosity. In reflecting back on the semester to write this article, I revisited Audre Lorde's (1984) *Sister Outsider*, a book that has helped me in my own awakening around teaching while white. "I know the anger that lies inside me like I know the beat of my heart and the taste of my spit," writes Lorde in "Eye to Eye." "It is easier to be angry than to be hurt. . . It is easier to be furious than to be yearning. Easier to crucify myself in you than to take on the threatening universe of whiteness by admitting that we are worth wanting each other," Lorde continues (1984, 153). In my class, I wanted to believe in the possibility of learning not instead of, but rather in the presence of fear and rage as resources.

Fear, tension, rage, and pain are in the classroom in new ways, even though fear is not new in a country whose creation included chattel slavery (Douglas 2015) and the annihilation of indigenous communities (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014). There is a reason I start my introductory pastoral care classes with Howard Thurman's reminder that loving care is up against what he calls the three hounds of hell: fear, hate, and deception (1949). I teach listening skills in a context where many yearn to be heard and included. I teach in a field that prioritizes care and belief of survivors of domestic violence in a political context that often diminishes and normalizes domestic violence. I teach practices of family systems and family support in a country whose immigration policy has been to separate families, justifying, even celebrating caging and

medicating children without consent. I teach practices that affirm *imago dei* and demand human dignity in a country where Islamophobia, homophobia, white supremacist nationalism, patriarchy, neoliberal market-driven exploitation, and other fears of the other abound.

My school, city, and nation were tense going into the Fall 2016 semester; it was a fraught semester to be teaching about and assessing participating well in communal learning. In the class itself, I did three things, all unplanned, that helped us towards this goal: name the rage with my research on misunderstanding stories, emphasize neutral questions to support trustworthy peer review in course assignments, and add third voices in and around class sessions. Over the semester and beyond, I was surprised to find that rage, when named if not bidden, could serve the learning process. It was a difficult experience as rage also unmasks respectability politics that keep white supremacies and other unjust structures in place even by well-meaning, self-proclaimed, or aspiring antiracist allies among teachers and students, myself included.

Remarkably, well after the semester ended, every single student from the class shared an unsolicited reflection on their class participation, claimed forms of creative rage, and in some cases, offered an apology for forms of rage that contributed to harm. In the pastoral care classroom, teaching and learning misunderstanding stories, facilitated by neutral questions in charged contexts, can make room for creative rage. Room for rage in class participation can raise mutual awareness around crucial matters of identity, ethics, and justice, which can open pathways for pedagogical challenges and surprises. Learning and trust can deepen in mutually supportive ways. Sometimes, when they bend toward creative rage, the most difficult, enraging, stretching learning experiences can continue to inspire learning for teachers and students well beyond any one course of study.

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