

Theorizing the Emotions in Contemporary U.S. Literature and Culture

English 63, section 1 Spring Term 2007
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The seminar meets in 8 Steele Hall on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the 10A hour (10:00 – 11:50) with X-hour on Wednesdays 3:00 – 3:50. Note that we will use the X-hour to screen films and hold extra classes if we fall behind.

Course Description:

What do our emotions of shame, grief, anger, and trauma tell us about our social differences and the cultures in which we live? Is there a way to understand what it means to be a racial or ethnic minority, an immigrant, a gay man or a lesbian, or a working-class person in America by the feelings these people express? This course examines human feelings as a theory for understanding the expression and formation of social identities and cultures. By watching films and reading novels, essays, and personal narratives by women, people of color, sexual minorities, and immigrants, we will examine the relationship between the emotions and formations of social and cultural identities. We'll focus on issues of race, gender, sexuality, and class as they pertain to theories of emotions and, in particular, negative structures of feeling. Throughout the course, we'll consider a way to interpret human feelings as a theory for critiquing culture, politics, and society. In particular, we'll focus on the emotions of shame, grief, anger, and trauma to discern their importance in formations of identities and cultures. We'll read various accounts of feelings in philosophy, psychology, literary criticism, and sociology, and place these readings in the context of understanding how the emotions might not only express and structure identities, but also how feelings in popular media can shape and construct American public cultures. We'll be attentive, in other words, to how cultural theories might connect individual affective experience to communities and public spaces that, in turn, represent historical events, movements, and experiences.

The course encompasses four thematic units:

1. Negative Structures of Feeling: Immigrant Shame and Sexual Shame

In this first unit, we'll read Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* and watch the documentary *Southern Comfort*, focusing on the novels' and the film's depictions of immigrant shame and sexual shame respectively. We'll also theorize how the negative emotions might structure racial, national, sexual, and gender identities. Lahiri's novel is deeply attuned to feelings of shame and ethnic identity as they pertain to intergenerational differences between South Asian immigrant parents and their American-born children. In *Stone Butch Blues* and in *Southern Comfort*, we'll look closely at the ways in which shame and other feelings express gender and construct meanings of masculinity and femininity, especially as they pertain to social injustice and transgender people.

2. A Melancholia of Race: Mourning, Assimilation, and Asian American Subjectivity

Next we'll examine two films, *First Person Plural* and *Flower Drum Song*, and read a novel, *Country of Origin*, which are concerned with, among other things, feelings of loss and displacement in relation to transnational movement, the native homeland, and assimilation. Informed by recent Freudian (psychoanalytic) theories of racial melancholia, we'll compare and contrast the films' and the novel's depictions of grief in order to understand how these feelings of loss structure Asian American subjectivity and transnational subject formation.

3. Emotions and Economics: Anger, Alienation, and the Commercialization of Human Feeling

In this third unit, we'll read cultural theories that focus on political economy (capitalism) and its impact on the expression of human feeling. Barbara Ehrenreich, the author of *Nickel and Dime*, narrates her experience of trying to survive on minimum-wage jobs. She concludes that it is impossible to "get by" in present-day America on low-wage labor. We'll examine Ehrenreich's expressions of anger and alienation, as well as the objectification of feelings ("emotional labor") in her book. Also, we'll look closely at emotional labor and alienation as they pertain to race and class in Han Ong's *Fixer Chao* and in the recent Hollywood film *Crash*. Ultimately, this unit will offer us a way to understand how the anxieties in and about our economy influence the expression of emotions in our capitalist society.

4. Cultural Emotions: Trauma, Affect, and the Formation of an American Minority Culture

In this last unit, we will examine how trauma informs and shapes contemporary American queer cultures. We'll explore the ways affective experiences of trauma, resulting from sexual and gender violence, can provide the basis for redefining a minority culture that is American queer culture (lesbian and gay). In particular, we'll look at how recent lesbian (Allison's memoir) and gay (*Brokeback Mountain*) cultural productions depict sexual traumas that structure a history and public memory of gay and lesbian people. We will read chapters from Ann Cvetkovich's book, *An Archive of Feelings*, and recent criticism of *Brokeback Mountain* to understand how artistic works about sexual trauma both condition and create contemporary expressions of American queer cultures.

Texts:

The Namesake. Jhumpa Lahiri

Stone Butch Blues. Leslie Feinberg

Country of Origin. Don Lee

Nickel and Dime: On (Not) Getting By in America. Barbara Ehrenreich

Fixer Chao. Han Ong

Two or Three Things I Know for Sure. Dorothy Allison

An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures. Ann Cvetkovich

Articles and essays available in pdf format in course website on Blackboard

Films to be viewed outside of class in Carson Hall L02:

Southern Comfort (2001), directed by Kate Davis

Flower Drum Song (1961), directed by Henry Koster (clips to be viewed in class)

First Person Plural (2000), written, directed, and produced by Deann Borshay Liem

Crash (2004), directed by Paul Haggis

Brokeback Mountain (2005), directed by Ang Lee

The books are available at Wheelock Books, which is located southwest from the intersection of Wheelock St. and Main St. in Hanover.

Course website:

I will post the syllabus and reading materials (articles and essays) in our course website on Blackboard. On occasion, I may include in our course website any visual materials or images for discussion in class.

You are also required to post your question in our course website in advance of our class meetings. See below.

The website for this class is located at:
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~blackboard>

Requirements.

Regular attendance and participation in class: 10%

Class attendance and film viewings outside of class are mandatory. Your daily preparation and willingness to participate in class discussion is central to the quality of the course. Come prepared to discuss the issues covered that day. If you do not actively participate in class discussion, or if you miss three or more classes, your final grade will be lowered.

Leading class discussion with a posted question in our course website on Blackboard: 10%

We will begin discussion of each new text, essay, or film with questions presented by two members of the class. In the class that comes before we begin discussing a new text, essay, or film, two class members will each formulate a detailed question about the new reading or film. We will use these questions to initiate and lead class discussion. Be sure that your question refers to specific passages in the readings and scenes in the films. In your question, you are required to comment on the reading or film in a way that expresses your critical response to it. You can pose a question about a passage in the reading or scene in the film, examine the language in the reading or dialogue in the film closely, compare it to other readings or films in the class, and/or note what you find most intense, meaningful, or puzzling about it.

Your question must be posted in the course website on Blackboard in advance of the class meeting. I will screen your question in class on the day you are to present it. Students will take turns formulating and posting their question throughout the term based on the alphabetical order of first names. I'll take into account the quality and effort you put into your question when factoring your grade.

Analytical essay on one of the texts or films (5-6 pages): 20%

Write a critical essay of close analysis on any text or film in the course. I'm not assigning specific paper topics; however, your analysis of the text or film must include some focus on the emotions (e.g., on some aspect of shame). You may use any of the posted questions in our course website to formulate your essay's analysis and argument (thesis).

Essay format. All writing assignments, including the prospectus and the written plan for your presentation, must be typed and double-spaced on an 8-1/2" x 11" paper. Use MLA style format. Your paper should be typed and double-spaced (except for block quotations of passages or dialogue from films). Number your pages and use 12-point Times New Roman font.

Late paper policy. All papers must be turned in by the due date. I'll make exceptions in cases of medical or family emergency, but in general I'm going to hold fast to this rule. If you anticipate a problem, I need to hear about potential lateness before the due date. See the Style Guide for English Papers in the course reader.

Portfolio and 10-minute presentation in class of 1-2 images or depictions: 25%

Throughout the term, you will keep and update a portfolio of current news clippings, articles, images, signs, etc. that reflect images or depictions about the emotions in relation to any aspect of identity and culture (race, gender, sexuality, immigration, class, religion, etc.) Consider, for example, the immense public uproar expressed when Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake performed their song, "Rock Your Body," at the 2004 Superbowl. Think about the Jackson-Timberlake incident and the public uproar it generated as a media example that you can include in your portfolio. You might also include images in recent advertisements, photos of a war memorial, stills or a clip from a popular film, and the lyrics to a hip-hop or pop song (and also play the song in class) as other examples to include in your portfolio. This is your chance to be creative!

At some point during the term, you will present in class 1-2 images or depictions from your portfolio. While you are free to include a range of depictions and themes in your portfolio, the material you show from it during your brief presentation must overlap with and address a unit that is covered in class. I will pass around a sign-up sheet in class for you to choose a day for your presentation. You will have access to the internet and screening projection for your presentation. You are to continue adding images or depictions to your portfolio after you give your presentation (unless your presentation is at the end of term.)

The goal of your portfolio is to demonstrate and critique the way we express and engage with the emotions in our contemporary society and culture, and to draw connections between theories we are discussing in class and images in media to inform our discourses about human feelings. The discussions that emerge as a result

of your presentation may help form the basis of your research paper. You will turn in your portfolio at the end of the term along with your research paper. For each image or item in your portfolio, provide a brief (3-4 sentences) explanation of your analysis and argument about the emotion that the image or depiction expresses. Connect your analysis and argument to any of the theories, discourses, or topics about the emotions that we discuss in class.

Term paper (12-13 pages) with prospectus (written plan) and annotated bibliography (3 pages): 35%

A term paper on any one text or film in the course, except for the text or film in your analytical essay. As with the analytical essay, I'm not assigning specific topics; however, your analysis of the text or film must include focus on the emotions (e.g., on some theoretical aspect of shame, anger, and melancholia). You are to refer to secondary material (i.e., articles, essays, book chapters) to support your analysis of the text or film. You are to include quotes from these secondary materials in your paper to help support your analysis and push your argument. However, do not subordinate your analysis of the text or film to the secondary material that you include in your paper. In other words, if you are writing your paper on anger in *Fixer Chao*, then the bulk of your writing should be analysis of Ong's novel with reference to secondary materials to support, push, and complicate your analysis of the text.

The prospectus (written plan) and annotated bibliography are due in class on Tuesday, Week 8. For the annotated bibliography, select at least four key sources, including the primary text or film you've chosen for analysis, and relate each to your research topic in a two to three sentence annotation. The research paper is due on Tuesday, Week 10 (the last day of class). See the sample annotated bibliography in our course website on Blackboard.

Academic honor:

All students must follow the Academic Honor principle outlined in the *Dartmouth Organization, Regulations and Courses, September, 2006*, pp. 44-47: "The Faculty of Dartmouth College, in recognizing the responsibility of students for their own education, assumes intellectual honesty and integrity in the performance of academic assignments, both in the classroom and outside ... Students who submit work which is not his or her own violates the purpose of the College and is subject to disciplinary actions, up to and including suspension and separation" (44).

Attendance:

Coming to class on time is mandatory and participation is required. More than 3 absences from class will lower your final grade. Coming to class late continually will also negatively affect your grade. If you miss class because of participation in extracurricular activities (athletics, musical performance, debate, etc.), then please inform me about it ahead of time. If you are absent from class, you are responsible for finding out from classmates about the content of discussion as well as upcoming reading and writing assignments (including changes in the syllabus). You do not need to email me after missing class to inform me of your absence.

Disability accommodation:

I encourage students with disabilities, including "invisible" disabilities like chronic diseases and learning disabilities, to discuss with me after class or during office hours appropriate accommodations that might be helpful to you.

Course etiquette:

If you have a laptop computer, you may bring it to class. We will want to draw on our course website, or other electronic resources, such as the readings that are on posted for you to download and print as hard copies. However, in-class computer use is restricted to materials and resources directly pertaining to our discussion. Class time is not to be used to catch up on email, surf the web, write papers for other courses, etc. Such activities distract you and your peers. Such distractions are strictly forbidden. Any violation of this policy will result in your losing the privilege to use the computer in the class, and will be counted against you when I calculate your course grade.

Tentative class schedule:

Note: we will read many articles and book chapters on theories and discourses of the emotions. Be ready to discuss all readings on the days they are listed below. If we fall behind, I may change some of these articles and chapters to recommended readings. I'll inform the class of these changes in advance.

All articles are available for you to download and print in pdf format in the course website on Blackboard. Look for "Articles, Essays, and Book Chapters in pdf Format" in the course website.

(R) Article is recommended reading only and is available in pdf format in the course website.

Week 1: Introduction: theorizing the emotions

Tu, 3/27 Course mechanics, questionnaire, and the politics of emotion
Sarah Ahmed, "Introduction: Feel Your Way" (from *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*)

Susan Bordo, "Men on Display" (from *The Male Body*)
Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake performance (scandal):
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOLbERWVR30>

Unit 1. Negative Structures of Feeling: Immigrant Shame and Sexual Shame

Th, 3/29 View posted questions

Silvan Tomkins, "Shame-Humiliation and Contempt-Disgust" (from *Shame and Its Sisters*)
Joseph Adamson and Hilary Clark, "Introduction: Shame, Affect, Writing" (from *Scenes of Shame*)

The Namesake (up to p. 71)

Week 2: Negative Structures of Feeling: Immigrant Shame and Sexual Shame

Tu, 4/3 **Rita Felski in class for first hour (have prepared questions and topics for discussion)**
Rita Felski, "Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class"

View posted questions

The Namesake (up to p. 187)
Elspeth Probyn, "Doing Shame" (from *Blush*)

Th, 4/5 View posted questions

Sarah Ahmed, "Shame Before Others"
The Namesake (have finished the book)

Elspeth Probyn, "Ancestral Shame" (R) and "The Shamer and the Shamed" (R)
J. Brooks Bouson, "'Quiet As It's Kept': Shame and Trauma in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*" (R)

Week 3: Negative Structures of Feeling: Immigrant Shame and Sexual Shame

Tu, 4/10 View posted questions

Arlene Stein, "A Brief History of (Sexual) Shame" (from *Shameless*)
Michael Warner, "The Ethics of Sexual Shame" (from *The Trouble with Normal*)

Stone Butch Blues (up to chapter 15)

Heather Love, "'Spoiled Identity': Stephen Gordon's Loneliness and the Difficulties of Queer History" (R)

Wednesday, April 11: screening of *Southern Comfort* at 7 pm in Carson Hall L02

Th, 1/12 Portfolio presentations (two at 10 minutes each)

View posted questions

Arlene Stein, "Shamed Again" (pp. 103-110)

Southern Comfort (have seen the film)

Stone Butch Blues (up to chapter 18)

Arlene Stein, "Revenge of the Shamed: The Christian Right's Emotional Culture War" (R)

Week 4: Negative Structures of Feeling: Immigrant Shame and Sexual Shame

Tu, 4/17 Portfolio presentations (two at 10 minutes each)

View posted questions

Arlene Stein, "Make Room for Daddy: Anxious Masculinity and Emergent Homophobias"

Stone Butch Blues (have finished the book)

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*" (from *Touching Feeling*) (R)

Th, 4/19 No class

Week 5: Unit 2. A Melancholia of Race: Mourning, Assimilation, and Asian American Identity

Tu, 4/24 **Analytical essay due**

Portfolio presentations (two at 10 minutes each)

View posted questions

Anne Cheng, "The Melancholy of Race" (from *The Melancholy of Race*)

Country of Origin (up to chapter 11)

Wednesday, April 25: screening of *First Person Plural* at 7 pm in Carson Hall L02

Th, 4/26 Portfolio presentations (two at 10 minutes each)

View posted questions

David Eng, "Melancholia in the Late Twentieth Century"

First Person Plural (have seen the film)

Country of Origin (up to chapter 17)

David Eng, "Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas" (R)

Week 6 A Melancholia of Race: Mourning, Assimilation, and Asian American Identity

Tu, 5/1 Portfolio presentations (two at 10 minutes each)

View posted questions

Anne Cheng, "Beauty and Ideal Citizenship"

Flower Drum Song (clips of film to be viewed in class for discussion of chapters in Cheng's book)

Country of Origin (have finished the novel)

Crystal Parikh, "Asian Hawaiian Cultural Production and Racial Melancholia" (R)

Unit 3. Emotions and Economics: Anger, Alienation, and the Commercialization of Human Feeling

Th, 5/3 Portfolio presentations (two at 10 minutes each)

View posted questions

Archie Russell Hochschild, "Exploring the Managed Heart" (from *The Managed Heart*)

Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America (up to p. 49)

Week 7: Emotions and Economics: Anger, Alienation, and the Commercialization of Human Feeling

Monday, May 7: screening of *Crash* at 7 pm in 60 Carson Hall

Tu, 5/8 Portfolio presentations (two at 10 minutes each)

View posted questions

Archie Russell Hochschild, "Feeling Management: From Private to Commercial Uses" and "The Search for Authenticity" (from *The Managed Heart*)

Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger" (from *Sister Outsider*)

Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America (chapter 2: "Scrubbing Maine" and last two pages of the book, pp. 220-221, beginning with "Guilt")

Crash (have seen the film for discussion)

Naomi Scheman, "Anger and the Politics of Naming" (from *Engenderings*) (R)

Sue Campbell, "Bitterness and the Politics of Expression" (from *Interpreting the Personal*) (R)

Th, 5/10 Portfolio presentations (two at 10 minutes each)

Brenda Silver in class for discussion of anger and feminism (please have prepared questions and topics for discussion about Professor Silver's essay)

Brenda Silver, "The Authority of Anger: 'Three Guineas' as Case Study"

View posted questions

Fixer Chao (up to p. 57)

Henry Giroux, "Consuming Social Change: 'The United Colors of Benetton.'" "

Cultural Critique 26 (Winter 1993-94): 5-32. (R)

Week 8: Emotions and Economics: Anger, Alienation, and the Commercialization of Human Feeling

Tu, 5/15 **Prospectus and annotated bibliography due**

Portfolio presentations (two at 10 minutes each)

View posted questions

Sarah Ahmed, “The Affective Politics of Fear” and “Feminist Attachments” (pp. 172-179 on anger only)

Fixer Chao (up to p. 188)

Philip Fisher, “Anger and Diminution” (from *The Vehement Passions*) (R)

Arlie R. Hochschild, “The Capacity to Feel,” “Commodification of Feeling,” “Two Ways to See Love,” and “From the Frying Pan into the Fire” (from *The Commercialization of Intimate Life*) (all R)

Eleanor Ty, “Abjection, Masculinity, and Violence in Brian Ascalon Roley’s *American Son* and Han Ong’s *Fixer Chao*” (R)

Th, 5/17 Portfolio presentations (two at 10 minutes each)

View posted questions

Fixer Chao (up to p. 288)

J. K. Gibson-Graham, “Affects and Emotions for a Postcapitalist Politics” (from *A Postcapitalist Politics*) (R)

Rosemary Hennessy, “Identity, Need, and the Making of Revolutionary Love” (from *Profit and Pleasure*) (R)

Week 9: Unit 4. Cultural Emotions: Trauma, Affect, and the Formation of an American Minority Culture

Tu, 5/22 Portfolio presentations (two at 10 minutes each)

View posted questions

Fixer Chao (have finished the novel)

Ann Cvetkovich, “The Everyday Life of Queer Trauma” (in *An Archive of Feelings*)
Two or Three Things I Know for Sure (up to p. 67)

Wednesday, May 23: screening of *Brokeback Mountain* at 7 pm in Carson Hall L02

Th, 5/24 Portfolio presentations (two at 10 minutes each)

View posted questions

Brokeback Mountain (have seen the film)

“*Brokeback Mountain* Dossier” (short essays in *GLQ*): essays by Herring, McBride, Manalansan, and Luciano only

Ann Cvetkovich, “Sexual Trauma/Queer Memory: Incest, Lesbianism, and Therapeutic Culture” (in *An Archive of Feelings*)

Two or Three Things I Know for Sure (have finished the book)

Week 10: Cultural Emotions: Trauma, Affect, and the Formation of an American Minority Culture

Tu, 5/29 **Research paper due.** Last day of class.

Ann Cvetkovich, “In the Archive of Lesbian Feelings” and Epilogue (in *An Archive of Feelings*)

Finish discussion of *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* and topic of “public feelings” and trauma by Ann Cvetkovich

Portfolio presentations (three at 10 minutes each)