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## Unraveling Interior and Exterior Circumstances

### *Interrogating Missed Emotion Cues in Emotional Research on Political Subjects*

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**ABSTRACT** The role of emotions in leadership and policy research is often ignored, indicating the need for an investigation of how researchers' emotions and the interpretation of emotion in research impact the research process itself. Although at times contradictory and controversial, emotion is the *one* terrain that unites us in personhood; yet how emotions are understood is said to be defined and controlled by politics. Inspired by critical theories, especially those concerning emotion, this essay aims to theoretically interrogate missed emotion cues when conducting emotional research. This investigation grew out of two research stories of antiracist pedagogy that are laden with emotions. Contemporary observations indicate that the experience of researching emotions (un)consciously alters a researcher's emotions and thus radically impacts how one ultimately researches emotion. This suggests that emotions in leadership research on political subjects have serious and profound impacts on researchers in ways that are often misunderstood. Concluding remarks note the significant role that research guided by critical theory plays in understanding how scholars' emotions impact their leadership and policy research on political subjects. **KEYWORDS** Emotion; Politics; Narrative; Race; Leadership; Policy; Research; Critical theory

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Oliver's *The Colonization of Psychic Space* (2004) states that a psychoanalytic social theory of oppression involves "making politics ethical—requires accounting for the unconscious" (p. xxii). Accounting for the unconscious includes emotions as (un)conscious matters. Emotions are known to be interactive and to traverse among groups; therefore, it is *politics* that define and control how emotional interactions are interpreted (Ahmed, 2004; Zembylas, 2007). The research process itself, especially studies on political matters in educational leadership and policy rooted in critical theories, also needs to account for the unconscious, and this includes emotions. Leadership and policy research make emotional well-being of utmost importance for researchers, as the social topics we study are rooted in emotions and spark emotions that often go under-analyzed.

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Leadership exists in all spaces, and since we all have leadership qualities in our lives, we must make “a commitment to holding multiple truths, troubling common-sense assumptions, living the inquiries and sitting in the ambiguities of complex ideas” (The UnLeading Project at York University, 2022, para. 3). Called UnLeading, this stance of leadership “asks us to engage in the praxis of leadership, a continual interplay of action towards systemic change and deep, inner reflection . . . a process of becoming” (The UnLeading Project at York University, 2022, para. 3). This interplay is exactly what I do in this novel essay on emotion. Inspired by missed emotion cues, I take up critical theory, especially critical theory concerning emotion, to conduct a theoretical interrogation of missed emotion cues when conducting emotional research.

This theoretical essay grew out of two research stories of antiracist pedagogy that are laden with emotions. Contemporary observations of these stories indicate that researching emotions (un)consciously alters scholars’ emotions and thus radically impacts how one ultimately researches emotion. These observations suggest that the role of emotions in leadership research on political subjects impacts researchers in serious and profound ways that are often misunderstood. This essay contributes to what is (un)known about the role of emotions for researchers in themselves as they study political topics, as political topics are often deemed emotional. Ultimately, this essay also helps improve the emotional lives of researchers who are committed to critically examining political topics and improving communities and the lives of those most marginalized. Emotional matters in research are a critical issue, but one that is all too often overlooked in research—particularly in educational leadership and policy studies that engage critical theories—yet it has significant implications for advancing justice in the politics of education. Therefore, the guiding question for this essay is *How does a researcher’s emotion, and interpretation of emotions in research, impact the research process itself?*

This essay grew out of an inquiry that originally had a different purpose. My initial inquiry intended to investigate what happens in a classroom when race and racism are topics of study: Emotion was a result. That inquiry centered around a graduate-level classroom in a brick-and-mortar college of education located in a large midwestern city. I was a visitor (*not* a student) in the course and my goal was to inquire (dissertate). As part of this exercise, I took research notes about my emotional experiences. That inquiry and my subsequent research notes led to several autobiographical stories that were never interrogated—until now. Hence, this essay has a new goal: to interrogate missed emotion cues in two emotional stories of research on emotion.

Using my autobiographical examples for praxis, in this theoretical essay I use critical theories of emotions to revisit these stories and document my contemporary observations. My documentation reveals that, indeed, a researcher's emotions have a *profound impact* on researching emotions.

The political subjects of race and racism are the topics of the two autobiographical stories that I am theoretically interrogating. Since emotions are often palpable when race and racism are studied in classrooms (Grosland, 2019; Matias et al., 2016; Shim, 2017), it is no surprise that the stories discussed in this essay are laden with emotions. Emotional accounts of race and racism in classrooms are poignant reminders of the need for an increased theoretical focus on the stresses of researching these political topics. Transgressing the exterior circumstances of these inherently emotional research situations requires excavating the interior emotional lives of researchers. Open questions about the impact of emotions on the researcher set the stage for interrogating the researcher's own missed emotion cues as a way to unravel emotion in emotional research. In this essay, I accomplish this first by addressing my theoretical underpinnings, including a brief on matters of emotion in critical theory, followed by a narrative section called "Contemporary Observations: Emotion, a Cautionary Tale." This tale is about two research stories of antiracist pedagogy inquiry that are laden with emotions. I conclude this essay with a discussion on the significant role that research guided by critical theory plays in understanding how a researcher's emotions impact their leadership and policy research on political subjects.

#### **CRITICAL THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS: INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR EMOTION CUES**

A discussion of critical theory and its connections to conflict theory writ large, as an endeavor, is beyond the scope of this essay. However, one can look at Giroux's 1983 work that examines critical theory in educational practice. Written in 1983, the text (Giroux, 2009) describes critical theory as a legacy of incomplete theoretical work including self-conscious critique that "does not cling dogmatically to its own doctrinal assumptions," a school of thought and critique (p. 27). In the context of a theory that is incomplete itself, logically emotion is so too complete. While emotion is taken up and defined in many different ways in different contexts, for the purposes of this essay, emotion is understood as a circumstantial conscious/unconscious and voluntary/involuntary response to thoughts. There is no one theory in critical

theory that defines what emotion is or is not, thus that is not the purpose of this essay. For this reason, my school of thought about emotion is rooted in the broad range of scholarship on the intersection of emotion and critical theory. More important than defining what is or is not an emotion, the purpose of this essay is to address emotion as a function of political life—power struggles. Below is a commentary on critical theories of emotion.

Furthermore, for this essay I am concerned about the lives of researchers who are committed to advancing critical theory, so an overview of critical theories of emotion is apt. This is a theoretical essay, not an empirical study, thus a traditional empirical extensive literature review in the same area is inappropriate. Appropriately, I offer a brief selection of scholarly claims relevant to this essay. This overview is in no way comprehensive; it is only a snapshot of critical theories of emotions relevant to this essay on emotions and emotional research on political subjects.

## CRITICAL THEORIES OF EMOTIONS

Although at times contradictory and controversial, emotion is the *one* terrain that unites us in personhood. Unraveling this involves taking up an amalgamation of theories about the function of (un)conscious emotion in politics. Take, for example, how certain emotions, particularly those that privilege whiteness, lead to battles that all too often become deadly fights over feelings (Wanzo, 2015, p. 277). Similarly, society—lacking the structure or vocabulary to address certain types of wrongs—makes certain emotions like empathy scarce, which is an empathic fallacy (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). These political dynamics make it even more important to focus on the critical nature of emotions in schools and classrooms.

Emotions can provide valuable information about the curriculum and power in classrooms (Boler, 1999; Knight-Diop & Oesterreich, 2009). Working to understand emotions means that confronting injustice in curricular matters, if confronted at all, is influenced by the intersection of emotions, power, and pedagogy (Knight-Diop & Oesterreich, 2009). Classroom emotions in response to issues like race and racism can take the form of tears, frustration, and irritation (Wagner & Shahjahan, 2015). The intentional use of jokes and humor is an example of when emotion is purposefully engaged to open the door of understanding the seriousness of addressing race and racism subjects in the classroom (Meddaugh & Richards, 2011). Emotions, displayed as laughter, can *unsilence* and challenge power in those

considered to be serious classroom spaces (Hansen, 2015). “Love” is even used in educational leadership research to challenge oppressive research (Laible, 2000). Clearly, emotions related to political subjects can run the gamut. It is no wonder, then, that many critical pedagogues desire to learn how to teach controversial and upsetting topics to students without disengaging them (Kumashiro, 2000). When educators pay more attention to feeling matters in classrooms, the feeling matter itself becomes a site of force (Niccolini, 2016). Inquiry is not exempt from this. Emotional states certainly impact how critical research is practiced—which actions they take, or not. Consequently, unraveling interior and exterior emotional stories becomes pivotal in advancing critical theories.

### EXPERIENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on my own experiences, including the experience detailed in this essay, I make claims concerning the role of emotion in research and missed emotion cues. Again, these accounts stem from my own research notes while conducting research in a 2009 higher education course focusing on race and racism. The impetus for documenting my emotional experiences during research, at the time, was to investigate how my own thinking impacted what I saw or did not see or notice, as well as to have a record of my own personal/professional growth. Though I am not the same person I was at the time of the initial inquiry, this current essay is a *single* contribution to a larger conversation of how researching political matters, such as race and racism, impacts a researcher’s emotions and, therefore, their thoughts and actions. These matters are of profound importance to me, a Black/African American/African and European descendant and cisgender woman who is committed to fair and just social policy, especially as such policies concern traditionally marginalized intersectional identities. That is why, in my scholarship as a political theorist in educational leadership and policy studies, I acknowledge both my marginalized and my privileged identities as they played out in these stories and as they continue to play out and evolve today.

With the passing of time and my own growth, I am able to interrogate the researcher and person I was, as I am no longer this person and my research has evolved. For example, since documenting the original research notes used in this interrogation, I have submitted to a deep reflection of how political matters in the United States, and globally, have impacted me personally and professionally: for example, the racial injustices of government-sanctioned

(police) brutality; worldwide protests against police brutality sparked by the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota; protests concerning the coronavirus vaccines; the 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol; false claims of national and widespread, so-called, rigged election results. This list is in no way exhaustive but provides just a few contemporary examples that shape my perspective of political topics. The plethora of political matters and atrocities in the United States and around the world can never be captured in one essay alone, and an expectation of such is unrealistic. Yet time, growing wisdom, and intentional thoughts have given me the perspective I need to take up this interrogation.

### CONTEMPORARY OBSERVATIONS: EMOTION, A CAUTIONARY TALE

Interrogating one's own research practices reveals the emotional world that is involved with researching political and emotional subjects. Again, this essay is not an empirical endeavor of political matters; thus I do not take up writing conventions used in empiricism. It is inspired by what Elbaz-Luwisch's (1997) describes as narrative analysis, whereby the inquirer studies a case (people or bounded system) by collecting materials and forming these into a storied account. This approach to a narrative inquiry has long traditions in the sciences (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997). I use information from my research notes to form a meaningful and storied account of researching emotional matters to develop a story of emotions. To arrive at my analysis, I first conducted a close reading of my documented field notes and then built categories using inductive analysis. Finally, I related the bounded narratives to critical theoretical perspectives on emotions. The results address emotion narratives as documented in this analysis.

This bounded narrative is from autobiographical accounts and is used to interrogate emotions in the context of one specific political concern as it is presented: research emotions. Using these, I critically and theoretically investigate emotion cues to address the emotional nuances in the story. To advance research in critical theory, researcher emotions that occur during emotional research need rigorous interpretation. Therefore, the following includes two stories: the first story is an account I call "Haunting Melancholy," and the second is called "Feelin' Some Type of Way." These accounts convey how the act of conducting emotional research on political subjects can influence specific emotions like discomfort and fear, which influences not only the research process but also the well-being of the researcher.

## “Haunting Melancholy”: Anecdotes

*Introduction* The following research chronicle is an autobiographical account of my race story in the classroom. In my research notes, I document how I emotionally experienced the race story and the subsequent research practices as a result of misunderstood emotions. This contemporary close reading shows that missed emotion cues can impact the documentation of emotions, the research process, and the well-being of the researcher well after the research concludes. I title these persisting emotions *Haunting Melancholy*.

*Haunting Melancholy* This story recounts an episode where part of the welcoming process, as established by the professor, everyone was given a chance to introduce themselves. The introduction was to include race stories by answering questions like:

What were your ancestors doing in 1850? 1900? 1950? 2000?

How do you define your race and ethnicity? How do these relate to privilege and oppression in your life?

In what ways, if at all, did your identification with those constructs have to do with you being [in this class] at this time?

Reading these questions conjured up varied emotional responses for me, and in my notes I wrote, “I started to get nervous and could feel the physical effects of my nervousness like ‘my face getting a little warm’” knowing my turn to share was approaching, I documented how “once I started to talk, my [race] story flowed effortlessly and I enjoyed the experience.” Quickly shifting between the emotions I experienced inside myself and those I noticed in my surroundings—nervous and joy—demonstrates the speed of emotion states that can occur while researching emotions and the need for researchers to be acutely aware of how these emotions are traversing within themselves.

After this introduction, I wrote about my reflections on emotions. This interwovenness of researcher emotions and emotional research is clear in that: “what kind of impression I had made about myself to the other African Americans in the room.” An impression is a strong feeling and is a signifier based on little evidence of a feeling about something or someone. My, what I call in the story, *impression* feelings impacted the research process because once the impression was felt from within, my research shifted to using others’ emotions as a way to make sense of and validate my own feelings. After I told my story, I made sense of it by *gaze[ing]* for emotional cues like head shaking

and laughter from the Black students. In other words, I (un)consciously deploy my own *inner* impression about emotions onto others. In this story, an impression is important because my research emotions were intuitive and I was not fully conscious of them at that moment in the research process. Also, it is clear that my own feelings about emotions triggered me to search *outside of myself* for emotion cues. After telling my story, I looked to Black students to see what their reaction was in order to validate my emotions. In other words, I sought outside validation for my own feelings. This exemplifies how emotions within a researcher impact the emotions that researchers start to notice outside themselves in their research.

After I told my race story and noted my impression, I scribed my feelings of *joy*. Yet, subsequently, I noted that I felt *troubled*: “as soon as I finished sharing, I was troubled by what I said and did not say” in my race story (ironically, I was unsure of what I had actually said at the time). Being troubled is anxiety—in this case, unfounded anxiety—that ultimately unfolds into an emotional rabbit hole. In my research notes, I stated, “Due to all of my baggage, I felt terribly embarrassed [ . . . so . . . ] wanted to distance myself from what I said.” Stating in my notes that I was embarrassed (although, ironically, I still did not remember exactly what I had said), I mentioned how I avoided comparing my notes to what I thought happened in the classroom: “I did not want to re-live my mistake. . . . These feelings haunted me for several days.” For a scholar researching emotional political subjects, such as race and racism, revisiting a seemingly unpleasant emotional experience takes an emotional toll on one’s psyche in ways that might make one feel *troubled*. In this scenario, my emotions about researching emotions take the form of what I titled “feelings haunted.” In this work, I take haunting to mean an emotional fear of the unknown and an incident that is difficult to ignore or forget. I did not know what happened and felt so much trouble and anxiety about my internal research storylines that I was emotionally haunted.

This theoretical close reading of a scholar’s emotions while researching classroom emotions highlights the emotional interplay of interior life and exterior circumstance. Not understanding the interplay, for example, the emotional aspects of impressions and validation, one may inadvertently bury emotional cues (data) when researching political subjects. To start, again, researchers take up research matters for emotional reasons. Emotions are the reason we do anything, so research matters naturally have emotional roots. This story corroborates the impact of emotions when conducting emotional research, whereby researcher emotions like trouble, joy, nervousness, and



haunting ultimately impact research actions. Emotions such as these are also powerful indicators of the role they have on researchers' (un)conscious reality and storylines about the research itself. Take, for example, the role of an *impression* as written in this research story. An impression is a result of one's emotional longing based on little evidence. This longing led to more emotions and to seeking external emotional validation, although unconsciously. But, as indicated in this story, at times during the research I started to realize that my emotions connected to the research and my subsequent efforts to seek external emotional validation were impacting my research actions. Taking up an interrogation of researcher emotion, especially of one's own, pinpoints how these emotions actually impact the research endeavor.

This endeavor concludes with "after I put myself [through] all of the mental agony [of feeling like I misrepresented myself in my race story], I finally decided to actually [look back into my research notes]" to figure out what I had said. In that autobiography, I review my research notes, and upon this review, I note how indeed I did not talk about my race in my race story at all. Once I realized this, I noted how "this was a very subconscious and unintentional move and I felt very silly about [not following protocol]." Rather than the actual words that were said, what is important for this essay are the researcher's emotions and my *feelings* about *feelings*. The emotional storyline in my autobiographical notes is about the emotional story I told myself about my research self. Based on Bell's (2002) work about narrative, individuals are unaware of the deep implications and assumptions that inform the stories we construct about ourselves, these stories ultimately support how we see ourselves. These stories are basically a roadmap of people's unknown beliefs and experiences (Bell, 2002).

Emotional stories about oneself when researching emotions provide a glimpse into one's emotional self that usually goes unrealized. Think about it: Without a scholarly interrogation such as this, these emotional stories remain unknown and their serious and profound effects continue to be misunderstood. This emotional narrative is a story of a researcher emotionally tormenting herself, with mental agony and silliness. Unraveling the interior and exterior circumstances of emotional research in this story makes it clear that the research experience may spark strong and powerful emotions that are at times painful to the researcher, including those of researcher melancholy and of missed emotion cues in oneself.

To conclude, contemporary observations of this anecdote document the interwovenness of interior emotions, like troubled and haunting, and the

exterior circumstance of race stories in classroom research. Researcher reflexivity when taking up critical theories and then the act of data collection in a classroom that takes up race as a subject of study, for example, inform each other in ways that create profound emotional experiences inside researchers that often go unexplored. As an autobiographical example, I note how this happens to me as the researcher in this narrative. Using this story for an example, in the process what is discovered unearthed the deep assumptions of one's own race stories that ultimately impact how reflexivity unfolds in the context of emotion as data on the politics of race.

### "Feelin' Some Type of Way": Anecdotes

*Introduction* The significance of the following narrative is connected to an episode of a research participant crying in the classroom and how I reacted to those tears while researching race and racism subjects. In other words, the story centers on feelings about feelings; colloquially, *feelin' some type of way* about emotions that are difficult to describe. The particular emotional incident under investigation in this story is crying. The person who was crying in this story is a self-identified White female named "Diane" (all names as pseudonyms). Generally, crying may be understood in a myriad of ways (connected to being happy, sad, surprised, a biological response, etc.); however, in the context of power, crying incites a research reaction that is linked to power relations. In this contemporary close reading of the crying story, I encounter a series of researcher emotions in response to the experience of researching emotions. One contemporary observation is that research decisions become emotionally conflictive. Although I am not arguing about a particular emotion consequence in this essay, conflicting emotions do influence other emotional responses. In the context of emotional responses in emotional research, my emotions are (un)consciously altered and impact the act of researching emotions itself.

*Feelin' Some Type of Way* In the story, the crying incident occurs following an in-classroom viewing of the documentary *The Color of Fear* by Lee Mun Wah. This documentary features a multiracial/multicultural group of men participating in a retreat, facilitated by Lee Mun Wah, related to their personal experiences with race and racism (Stirfry Seminars & Consulting, 2020). After viewing the film, the classroom participants took turns debriefing it. The students sat in a circle, and upon her turn, Diane cried as she explained how she saw her own struggles with white racism reflected in the film.

With tears running down her face, she proclaimed that she thought all White people should watch the film. Diane's crying left a significant emotional impression on me and after the class, I wrote:

When she started crying, I felt shocked because I do not remember ever witnessing anyone cry . . . in response to pedagogy or content of a course. I watched *The Color of Fear* . . . several times before in groups but never witnessed anyone [react] so strongly.

I felt *shocked* when she cried and I subsequently reflected on how I changed my research approach: "Once Diane started crying, several thoughts raced through my mind. Initially, I felt like [I] needed to give her my attention." In this contemporary theoretical analysis, I identify that giving her *my attention* indicates that once she started crying, I was emotionally shocked and felt that I needed to demonstrate my emotions by offering attention or care. In short, this becomes an act of giving emotional attention to emotional research. These researcher's feelings impacted the research, so much so that I *stopped* the research: "I paused with my note-taking, looked at her in her eyes, and matched her [emotional] body language." At this point of the research story, I felt unsettled and actually ceased the research, stating that "I did not want her to think that I did not care" because I was conducting research on *her* emotions. This story snippet indicates the role of emotions while conducting research on emotions and, thus, underscores their impact on the research itself.

I went on in the story that "I wanted to be in the moment with her emotions." Looking at her, I was

trying not to stare at her, but not ignore her at the same time, so I gently looked to the side. In my attempt to balance my staring/ignoring looks and return to note-taking, I decided to carefully and cautiously write as she talked.

This essay on the contemporary observation of these emotional matters uncovers emotional conflict and confusion that show up in behaviors like moving my eyes in different directions, staring/ignoring, and shifting from side to side. Eye movement, stopping of the notes, and so on indicates that such actions are emotional research decisions. The participant's tears altered both my own emotions as a researcher and the subsequent research process. On one hand, in my emotions, I felt the *desire* to show concern. Research is a relational dilemma and unconscious desire, particularly as it relates to researcher positionality and unconscious desire for social justice

(Sonu, 2016). Surely, the interaction of research positionality and an unconscious desire for social justice is happening in this story; yet under analysis, something else painful is happening too. In the research story, I stuff my emotions, writing that “I did not cry, but I had strong emotions inside me that I suppressed.” In later reflections, I note how this stuffing did not serve me well and ultimately negatively impacted my physical well-being.

Similar to what happened in the previous story, I was again haunted by my thoughts about emotion: “After Diane cried in class, I thought about her for many more weeks. I worried as to whether she felt I was there for her.” I went on in my story to document that “I wanted her to not feel like I was consuming her heartfelt emotions, taking away from her for the sake of research, or that I did not care for her as a person.” In this excerpt, emotions are positioned as a resource, something to be consumed from the heart—*heartfelt*.

These *heartfelt*, as written in my journal, research moments and my response to the tears exemplify how the experience of researching emotion (un)consciously alters a researcher’s emotions and practices. In other words, this is a clear case of “misalignment between conscious intent and unconscious desire” (Shim, 2014, p. 1). In my research story, the text reflects an emotional astuteness to emotions, feelings about feelings: particularly *Diane’s feelings*. Despite my misalignment, incorrect positioning of my intent for social justice, and my desire to show concern for Diane, close readings show a divergent logic—a logic that subconsciously promotes adapting emotional behavior and shifting perspectives. The result of this contemporary reading points to a more aligned logic that is not set in a dichotomy and includes a practice of researching emotions ethically. It is an ethic that is graceful toward emotions in oneself as the researcher as well as to their research participants. Yet, the story, as it was presented in my autobiographical notes, is a story about what a researcher can emotionally do to herself when researching emotions.

Another way to understand these emotional incidents is through a lens of what Laible (2000) called a “loving epistemology” in leadership research. Focusing on love is a way to show compassion to Self when it concerns emotions in the context of advancing justice and equity. Taking up a Higher Self ethos can help researchers committed to critical theories lean more into their own intuition rather than being overly focused on logic, especially when researching emotions concerning political matters like race and racism. Think about it: Emotions are instinctive, oftentimes mysterious, and not always

logical. For example, consider how when Diane sobbed, I felt *shocked* and therefore ceased note-taking. On the surface, it seems like my response privileged her emotions, but perhaps something entirely different was occurring. Instead of privileging certain emotions (such as Diane’s emotions), I stopped writing in order to soothe my own emotions and as a coping mechanism to emotional research. Emotional research experiences that occur when researching emotion can be seen as troublesome, but may actually be a way to alleviate the emotional pain of human suffering in the face of the horrors of oppression and injustice. In this research story, I nonetheless experienced regret, writing that “I never asked [Diane] if she noticed me taking notes during the time she cried and/or how she felt about it. I wish I had.” Regret is a feeling of loss and may be a sign of what can happen when researching emotional matters; hence, it is a researcher’s cautionary tale.

As documented in this narrative, emotions in oneself while conducting emotional research can be difficult to describe: *feelin’ some type of way*. It is not until after the conclusion of the research that I am able to make sense of how my emotions are altered in the field. Again, as Sonu (2016) reminds us, an emotion of research is *desire*. Emotions, like curiosity and eagerness, are the reasons we do research in the first place. The downfall and cautionary tale of not critically thinking about emotions as they are happening in the field—for example, emotions like Diane’s—is that the researcher misses the complexity of one’s inner emotion and contextual outer emotion in the research moment. This is not only for the sake of noticing emotion in the field as it happens, but how it impacts one’s inner emotional world as it relates to research acts. If one is not cued into their own emotions, the research endeavor, and how research decisions are made, matters like research positionality are left unmined.

## DISCUSSION

The goal of this essay, while not empirical, is to critically and theoretically interrogate emotions when conducting emotional research: unraveling the interior and exterior emotions of emotional research. Using two stories, I call “cautionary tales,” of my research experiences and emotions, this exploratory essay addresses how emotions may (un)consciously alter a researcher’s emotions and thus radically impact how one ultimately researches emotion. These stories—“A Haunting” and “Feelin’ Some Type of Way”—call attention to how a scholar’s emotions can have profound effects on the research, including

actually *stopping the* research, at least momentarily. This is important because when research action is stopped, documenting emotion cues is also stopped, which can result in data lapse.

Circumstances mentioned in this theoretical essay, such as stoppage and data lapse, suggest that the role of emotions in leadership and policy research on political subjects (which are inherently emotional) may have serious and profound effects on researchers in ways that are often misunderstood but that may significantly impact how one researches emotions that relate to political matters. In educational leadership and policy studies, emotional matters that are analyzed using critical theory lenses are often overlooked. This theoretical essay is just the beginning of inquiries on the role of emotion during critical theoretical emotional research. Due to the limitations of a journal article, this essay is inherently limited in scope and only scratches the surface. Further theoretical investigations related to these matters are needed in educational leadership and policy research because, even within these stories, deeper drawbacks can be culled that affect one's research. Therefore, advancing the field requires addressing how emotions are particularly important for critical theory researchers as a matter of ongoing praxis.

A way to address emotions in emotional research specifically involves emotion in pedagogy. The role of emotion in pedagogy is of particular concern in this essay because it is about researching emotions where race and racism are topics of study, and sometimes emotions can present as rage. Rage stems from the violence, pain, and anger of racialization, and in plain words says, “nah, we ain't sugarcoating our shit for you” (Johal, 2005, p. 279). Emotions, like rage, easily arise when researching political topics, especially race. Rage, or intense feelings, in this scenario often becomes noticeable—yet, rage can be reimagined as a form of pedagogy itself and can help a researcher. Borrowing from Black rage, a pedagogy of rage deconstructs how one is both privileged and oppressed, thus not only realizing their own individual pain but also experiencing pain as a collective and then taking responsibility for it (Johal, 2005). Since life against the pathological backdrop of white supremacy is frightening and results in madness for both the oppressed and the oppressor, rage in the pedagogy of rage is a productive emotion (Johal, 2005). For the purposes of examining researchers' emotions when conducting emotional research on political subjects, rage can be reimagined as an ethical expression for more just research: “a conscious and deliberative attempt to make rage synonymous with a sense of

interconnectedness and self-love” (Johal, 2005, p. 271). Consider how at the conclusion of “Feelin’ Some Type of Way,” I was *shocked* by Diane’s tears and the experience impacted my emotional state and my research actions. As a result of this incident in this essay I call for researchers to practice research via their Higher Self, a Self that leans into a more spiritual or intuitive realm of (sub)consciousness including emotions; hence, self-love is important in a Higher Self ethos.

As a researcher, I believe that being and becoming increasingly aligned with Higher Self involves being aware of the role of emotions (in both the self and others) in research. This intuition means being comfortable with ambiguity. In the context of our current milieu, educational leadership and policy, writ large, is overly focused on control and compliance. Therefore, focusing on awareness of one’s Higher Self might feel like going against the grain. This research points to the need to develop a connection to the deep inner emotional world and to shift away from what is often concerned with research acts. Yet, often the common acts are what makes researchers feel soul-depleted—for example, writing and disregarding oneself out of the narrative—and something that is especially true for novice researchers. The experience may even feel emotionally violent as it strips scholars away from their creative research ideas. However, based on the narratives in this essay, I attest that investigating missed emotion cues holds promise to help heal this gap.

In addition to rage, another research promise involves asking quality questions of oneself about the act of investigating. While these questions do not need to be answered, posing them can nonetheless help ease stress and provide inner guidance. The power in simply asking the question guides the mind toward Higher Self ways of being and doing research. Quality contemplations may include: *Do I attend to my emotions? In what ways can I show up in the presence of emotions and not convince myself that I must, so call, control emotions? Who benefits and who is disadvantaged from certain emotional and, so-called, non-emotional responses, including my own? What political action can be taken to stop emotional oppression and violence in Self/Other, especially for those overwhelmingly marginalized? How can my political action be improved/modified? How can it evolve? How can I use my inquiry practices to do such/be a role model of interrogating my own interior and exterior emotions?* As scholars who focus on political subjects via critical theory, instead of grappling with missing emotion cues, we fine-tune our ability to interrogate emotions using our own research autobiographies. That way, as emotions

occur on the fly, as they will because they are unpredictable, we can better use emotion cues to alleviate emotional tolls instead of ruminating on feelings about feelings and haunting emotions.

## CONCLUSION

With all that happens when researching emotions, it is not surprising that emotion cues are often overlooked. Yet this area of study holds promise for scholars concerned with advancing critical theory, as such research is actually emotional research. As cited in the critical theories on emotions section of this essay, there are other scholars engaged in a similar inquiry on emotion. However, my claim that critical theory research is emotional research is absent in educational leadership and policy studies scholarship. This theoretical essay is focused on emotion as experience and decision-making. Thus, taking note of emotion as a matter, not as a dichotomy between individual or social, in critical and social theories is significant regardless of how one conceptualizes emotions. That being so and in light of these significant findings, it is clear that raw emotions incite the need for interrogations of emotional stories in research; this work will help change how we interact with the emotions that occur while conducting research. As this essay exemplifies, doing such interrogations has massive implications for how scholars ultimately research political topics via critical theory in educational leadership and policy. Although (un)conscious emotions are simply part of the human experience, explicitly analyzing emotions in leadership and policy research is a way to traverse and unravel the interior and exterior emotions of research for the researcher—again, emotions are truly why anyone does anything in the first place. Investigating researcher emotional accounts, as this essay does, helps scholars to think differently about the intense impact of emotions on themselves. Researcher emotions are not shameful or to be avoided but are simply human experiences that provide a compass pointing to what is next for researching politically emotional matters. ■

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