

## An Unnecessary Divorce: Integrating the Study of Affect and Emotion in New Media



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**Abstract:** Rhetoric and composition scholars' almost exclusive reliance on Brian Massumi's definition of affect has spurred a theoretical and practical divorce between "affect" and "emotion" in our field. This article returns to Lynn Worsham's "Going Postal" and argues that to fully scrutinize and respond to what she calls "pedagogic violence," affects and emotions must be theorized in tandem, especially as violent rhetorics increasingly spread through new media. Through a close reading of Massumi's work, consideration of alternate affect theories, and discussion of Aristotle's systematic theory of emotions, I illustrate how inseparable affects are from emotions. I examine the affects and emotions at work in a contemporary example of pedagogic violence—police brutality toward African Americans—and suggest new media not just contributes to but also disrupts violent rhetorics, damaging emotional educations, and negative affective relations, which I explore through a brief analysis of Twitter.

Following the murder of nine people during a Bible study in Charleston, SC, President Obama, repeating Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "we must be concerned not merely with who murdered them, but about the system, the way of life, the philosophy which produced the murderers." Nearly two decades ago, Lynn Worsham called this system "pedagogic violence"<sup>{1}</sup> and described how our schooling in emotion contributes to an increase in seemingly random violence, through the "hidden curriculum" of emotions like grief, bitterness, rage, apathy, and shame that are embedded in our social, economic, and familial structures (216). It is this system and philosophy that produces someone like Dylann Roof, the man who, after nearly an hour of Bible study in the basement of a historic Black church, killed three men and six women during a moment of prayer. His alleged online manifesto<sup>{2}</sup> asserted he had "no choice." The manifesto details Roof's education in white supremacy, and the "event that truly awakened" him: the Trayvon Martin case. After reading the Wikipedia article about the case, Roof googled "black on White crime," and he wrote, "I have never been the same since that day," since he found the website of a prominent white supremacist group. Eventually he realized, "Someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me." Roof's manifesto reveals a deranged logic for justifying his killing spree but also a grim journey from everyday Internet searches to racist ideologies to violence.

Since Worsham's "Going Postal" was published, pedagogic violence seems to have only proliferated. "[S]eemingly random acts of unmotivated savagery" continue across the U.S., but the role that media play in schooling us in emotion has changed the way we learn about, participate in, and respond to these acts of savagery (Worsham 214). Today in the U.S., nearly two-thirds of people own smartphones and even more use social networking sites—an almost tenfold increase in the last decade.<sup>{3}</sup> Citizen-reporters who share cell phone videos and instantaneous Twitter reporting have changed the way we encounter "going postal." The result seems to encourage a more collective way of national grieving, yet rapidly updating media, with posts often expressed and consumed in isolation, can make emotions seem "free-floating and impersonal," as Fredric Jameson has called feeling in the postmodern age (16). In these digital platforms, condemnations of violence and prayers for the dead circulate, though seemingly detached from their producers and recipients. Rhetoric and composition scholars have worked hard to respond to Worsham's claim that "our most urgent political and pedagogical task remains the fundamental reeducation of emotion" (216). Following the work of a burgeoning interdisciplinary study of emotion,<sup>{4}</sup> scholars have redefined emotion's role in our field (Brand; McLeod; Jacobs and Micciche), studied the impacts of specific emotions (Schell; Jacobs; Lynch; Bouson), and reread emotions in classical/historical texts (Gross; Engbers; Walker), but the mediation of emotions and its role in shaping our affective relations and (re)education has not been adequately

addressed.

When affect theory became popular in the field in the early 2000s, it seemed to promise a better way of explaining feelings and emotions in new media because, as Byron Hawk claims, “affect moves us toward relations among bodies, which is critical to understanding (discourse in) network culture. Like language, new media make new affections and new relations possible” (843). However, despite great hopes for affect theory’s contributions to rhetoric and composition, it was never fully absorbed and it is still often considered “impractical theory talk,” which Jenny Edbauer Rice has detailed (“Metaphysical” 135). This lack of integration, I contend, stems from scholars in the field defining affect primarily as precognitive, impersonal, and unstructured. This definition, which is often attributed to Brian Massumi, would seem to have little to offer a discipline chiefly concerned with intentional communication and persuasion. In this article, I argue that scholars’ almost exclusive reliance on Massumi’s definition of affect has propelled a theoretical and practical divorce between “affect” and “emotion,” creating two rich but disconnected bodies of scholarship in our field. If we are concerned with “the system, the way of life, the philosophy” that produced someone like Roof, we need a better understanding of how pedagogic violence is perpetuated in new media. Theorizing affects and emotions in tandem elucidates how these violent rhetorics circulate and reproduce. After reviewing how affect has been defined in rhetoric and composition and conducting a close reading of Massumi’s writing on affect, I consider additional renderings of affect that make its rhetorical work more visible, including its cyclical relationship with emotion. Through analysis of police brutality and African American schooling in fear, I argue that affective theories of accumulation, contagion, and rearticulation, combined with Aristotle’s systematic theory of fear, provide a fuller, more complex explication of a contemporary example of pedagogic violence. Despite being distinct concepts with unique capacities, “affect” and “emotion” are both central in the way media shape our feelings, experiences, and worldviews. Finally, I turn to what has been called “Black Twitter” to discuss how new media—with its own affects and potentials—can function as a way to disrupt pedagogic violence.

## The Affective Turn in Rhetoric and Composition

Starting in the ‘80s and extending to the turn of the century, many rhetoric and composition scholars used “affect” and “emotion” in tandem or interchangeably (Brand; McLeod; Fulkerson; Hariman and Lucaites; Johnson). When Worsham defined emotion in 1998, she wrote, “In the view I develop here, *emotion* will refer to the tight braid of affect and judgment, socially and historically constructed and bodily lived, through which the symbolic takes hold of and binds the individual, in complex and contradictory ways, to the social order and its structure of meanings” (216). Worsham’s definition reflects prevailing cognitive and social perspectives on emotion at the time, which work against longstanding, simplified notions of emotion as irrational, primitive, bodily, feminine, or uncontrollable. But more interestingly, given work on emotion in the field today, Worsham uses “affect” in defining emotion—a move that while common at the time certainly has not been in the last decade.

Rhetoric and composition scholars started theoretically divorcing “affect” from “emotion” with the growing influence of Massumi’s theory of affect put forth first in “The Autonomy of Affect” (1995) and the subsequent *Parables for the Virtual* (2002). Many scholars (Albrecht-Crane; Holding; Falzetti; Edbauer Rice; Hawk) who introduced our field to the “affective turn”<sup>[5]</sup> used Massumi’s definition, especially leaning on affect’s distinction from emotion, since “emotion and affect follow different logics and pertain to different orders” (27). According to Massumi, emotion is qualified affect; emotion is stuck in the realm of signification while affect—most simply understood as intensity—exceeds it. Even though Massumi spends just a few paragraphs detailing the difference between “affect” and “emotion,” it has arguably become his most prominent contribution to the study of affect (cited or presumed), as those passages are widely referenced across disciplines.<sup>[6]</sup> In those passages, Massumi makes one of the most direct and urgent claims to come out of his often circuitous writing: “It is crucial to theorize the difference between affect and emotion. If some have the impression that affect has waned, it is because affect is unqualified. As such, it is not ownable or recognizable and thus resistant to critique” (28). Referencing Jameson’s claim about the “waning of affect” in our time, Massumi points out the paradox inherent in theorizing affect<sup>[7]</sup>: We ought to study affect, but when we bring it into consciousness and language, we qualify it, and through this process, affect is brought into the realm of emotion.

“It is crucial to theorize the difference” is often read and applied as a claim that we should theorize affect over or against—or at least in addition to but separately from—emotion. We can see this reflected in most recent scholarship on affect in our field, which either almost solely pursues “affect” or, after making the theoretical distinction between the concepts, discontinues discussion of “emotion” (Edbauer Rice; Smith; Reidner; Pruchnic; Pruchnic and Lacey; Chaput). Similarly, those currently studying emotion in rhetoric and composition are often careful to distance themselves from affect theory (Jacobs and Micciche; Micciche; Gross). However, a closer look at Massumi’s writing reveals that he sees the difference between affect and emotion as one of degree and not value. While affect exceeds symbolic structures of emotion that are already laden with meaning, “[e]motion is the most intense (most contracted) expression of that capture” (28). Thus, we are dependent to some extent on emotion’s vocabulary and qualification to

explicate affect.

Massumi describes the interrelation of affect and emotion more extensively in his 2005 article “Fear (The Spectrum Said).” In it Massumi details how the color-coded terror alert system introduced by George W. Bush’s administration following 9/11 modulated fear in the American public. Massumi draws on William James’ famous example of fear in which a body reacts to fear before conscious awareness of it, describing how affect transitions into emotion. When one encounters a bear, the body begins running, and fear is experienced only on the affective level. Bodily intensity increases, still without conscious awareness, and fear is “wrapped in action, before it unfurls from it and is felt as itself, in its distinction from the action with which it arose” (36). It is only when the action ceases, the moment Massumi calls the “stop-beat,” that fear is recognized as an emotion; prior to that moment, fear exists only as bodily intensity and action, but as Massumi quotes James, “our feeling of bodily changes as they occur *is* the emotion” (40). In the stop-beat, affect and emotion are almost indistinguishable, as the mind and body experience fear separately. <sup>[8]</sup> But emotion quickly becomes distinct, when the immediate bodily action stops and reflection takes place. In this moment, fear turns from intensity to magnitude, and it is no longer lived just through a body but is now compared to other experiences with fear: “The separation between direct activation and controlled ideation, or affect in its bodily dimension and emotion as rationalizable subjective content, is a reflective wonderland that does not work this side of the mirror” (40). While many have interpreted Massumi’s call to “theorize the difference between affect and emotion” as a call to separate and pull those concepts apart, we could read it as a call to theorize the point of difference itself.

To study the relationship between affect and emotion rhetorically, it is important to understand their unique characteristics and their interrelation. With “irreducibly bodily and autonomic” qualities and “no cultural-theoretical vocabulary,” affect is difficult to analyze (*Parables* 27-8). However, Massumi suggests that while “it is not entirely containable in knowledge,” affect is “analyzable in effect, as effect” (*Parables* 260). Massumi defines affect not just as a bodily intensity but also a capacity or effect (highlighting Spinoza’s distinction between *affectio* and *affectus*, which I discuss in the following section). In contrast, emotions are the “sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal” (*Parables* 28). Emotions are cognitive and social phenomena that carry meaning and reflect investment. According to Massumi, emotion begins with the perception of affect, after which emotion is processed through reflection and eventually becomes a part of memory. But emotions are not just the result of affect; they can have affects themselves—unqualified bodily intensities and effects. In describing our contemporary culture of fear, Massumi claims fear becomes its own “quasicause.” Beyond responding to a “fear sign,” like a bear, the body also responds to “thought-signs” which are simply ideas. Like awareness of the color-coded alert level, the idea of being fearful is enough to evoke fear, making a “self-propelling” cycle, which creates an “affective tone or mood.” The body can react just in anticipation of experiencing an emotion: “Now, fear can potentially self-cause even in the absence of an external sign to trigger it” (“Fear” 41). In this self-propelling cycle, affects and emotions fuel each other.

When affect is studied only as an unnamable force or ungraspable excess, it is useful only in demarcating a dimension we can never access, except very indirectly or after the fact. Invoking just these definitions of affect prevents us from studying it rhetorically, continuing what Edbauer Rice has called a “persistent misunderstanding among certain rhetoric and composition scholars” which “creates a false binary between signification and affect, wrongfully claiming that these theories advocate affect ‘over’ discourse and meaning” (“(Meta)Physical” 135). This false binary has contributed to almost exclusive bodies of affect and emotion scholarship in rhetoric and composition. While it makes rhetorical sense that scholars used a familiar concept like “emotion” as a foil to introduce affect theory to the field, the unintended consequence may be our disciplinary reluctance to engage with both concepts or to use affect theory to extend studies of emotion or *pathos*.

## The Rhetorical Work of Affect

In the introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg assert there is no unified theory of affect and “[i]f anything, it is more tempting to imagine that there can only ever be infinitely multiple iterations of affect and theories of affect” (3-4). The very nature of affect invites diversity in describing the more visceral, embodied, and sensorial aspects of life. Before turning to other contemporary theories of affect, it is worth considering more carefully how the affect theory discussed thus far works rhetorically. If we look back to Massumi’s theoretical lineage, Baruch Spinoza describes the first widely accepted definition of affect. He writes, “By affect I understand the affections of the body, by which the power of acting of the body itself is increased, diminished, helped, or hindered, together with the ideas of these affections” (106). Affect, then, calls our attention to bodies’ changing capacities to engage or respond, given their relations. Spinoza defines bodies by their affects rather than their form or substance; <sup>[9]</sup> “body” means any gathering of human or nonhuman parts, including objects, ideas, environments, media, etc. In this way, affects can be understood as the possible or actual effects of any body. Gilles

Deleuze and Felix Guattari develop this theory further to suggest that the power associated with the composing and decomposing of bodies (or “assemblages”) makes affects “becomings” (256). Their focus, which profoundly influenced Massumi, is on new possibilities given new relations. We can see, then, why affect has often been discussed in our field most closely in relation to the rhetorical canon of invention.<sup>[10]</sup> As a rhetor interacts with other bodies (e.g., audiences, constraints, emotions, environments, memories), the rhetor’s capacities and possibilities for invention are created and diminished. Beyond invention, though, affect has a number of other rhetorical functions.

The most significant contribution of affect theory to our field is its focus on change, movement, and relation but also, I want to suggest, in pushing us toward a more complex understanding of emotion or *pathos*. Despite excellent work by scholars like Laura Micciche, who emphasizes the *doing* of emotion, emotion is still often discussed in terms of singular, or at least momentarily fixed, states represented in texts, discourses, or audiences. Affect, however, marks change, always from one state, gathering, or body into another. Three metaphors in particular offer renderings of affect useful for rhetorical study in new media: accumulation, contagion, and rearticulation. While these metaphors show affect working beyond its manifestation as bodily intensity, they also reveal how closely related affect is to emotion.

Affects play an important role in creating dispositions and, relatedly, ways of seeing and interacting with the world. Because, as Megan Watkins asserts, scholars have focused almost exclusively on affect as a short-lived, ephemeral force, we overlook the “capacity of affect to be retained, to accumulate, to form dispositions and thus shape subjectivities” (269). Scholars, Watkins suggests, have often conflated the distinction Spinoza makes between *affectus* and *affectio*, defining affect primarily as a force (*affectus*) rather than a capacity (*affectio*). While *affectus* describes the fleeting, ephemeral nature of affect, *affectio* acknowledges affect’s residual effects and ability to accumulate into dispositions. For example, Watkins claims that when students have repeated experiences of recognition from teachers (explicit and implicit), these experiences accumulate in creating self-worth. Thus, the teacher’s available affects to recognize a student (through language, gesture, facial expression, etc.) create feelings and sensations that accumulate into a way of being that “predispose one to act and react in particular ways” (278). The repeated experience with similar affects grow together to create an underlying disposition and, in turn, our own affective capacities. Repetition, then, is a way to create expectations and patterns of response, to help people learn and unlearn affective dispositions that work for or against them and their goals. Rhetorically, through style and arrangement, repetition can be used to maintain or disrupt dispositions toward ideas, objects, events, etc.

Repetition similarly contributes to the contagious nature of affect, which we can see through mimesis and synchrony in communication. Anna Gibbs asserts, “[a]t the heart of mimesis is affect contagion, the bioneurological means by which particular affects are transmitted from body to body” (191). Following the work of Silvan Tomkins, Gibbs suggests these affects are transmitted through face and voice;<sup>[11]</sup> affects are facial responses that “communicate and motivate” the people around an individual but also the individual herself (191). Affect contagion extends also into media, where Gibbs asserts that company logos and signatures, for example, “generate feelings that mobilize the body’s capacity for synesthesia, in which affect seems to act as a switchboard through which all sensory signals are passed” (192). Internet memes and their subsequent replication and extension of particular feelings, ideas, or arguments work in a similar way. Memes, retweets, and re-posts are not random duplications but a form of identification, a way of using someone’s language “by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his,” as Kenneth Burke describes (55). To consciously identify is an emotional move, since it reflects a valuation of, investment in, or empathy for some one or thing. Yet identification can also occur in the realm of the affective, when the body responds to affect before or without conscious qualification (e.g., involuntary mimicking of facial expressions, yawning, following crowd behavior, etc.). We identify affectively and emotionally, and contagion works on both levels. While “affect contagion” sounds like a phenomenon beyond our control, we can (re)produce advantageous affects and emotions through mimesis in our bodies or media.

Through mimesis, we express value in what we affect and are affected by. As Sara Ahmed suggests, “[t]o be affected by something is to evaluate that thing. Evaluations are expressed in how bodies turn toward things. To give value to things is to shape what is near us” (31). Evaluation recognizes a kind of agency in our turning toward and against. We turn to things that give us pleasure or to avoid pain. And so a pattern emerges among bodies, a process that Ahmed describes as stickiness: “Feelings can get stuck to certain bodies in the very way we describe spaces, situations, dramas. And bodies can get stuck depending on what feelings they get associated with” (39). What is important to note about this rhetorically is the ability to “unstuck” these feelings. Edbauer Rice has called this a process of “disarticulation” and “rearticulation”—“a new way of linking together images and representations that is less oppressive” (“The New” 210). She writes about how AIDS activists changed the public discourse surrounding AIDS away from death and disgust toward life and celebration through campaigns and advertisements. This process of rearticulating (in this case, making images of happy, lively people with AIDS the focal point of public discourse) creates new affects for AIDS rhetoric, changing the public’s evaluation of people with AIDS. Through connecting new or counter relationships among feelings, images, and representations, we can actively respond to harmful discourses

and pedagogies of violence.

In these additional renderings of affect theory, emotion lies just beyond mention. Affect is a precursor to the emergence of and potentials for emotion; affective dispositions prime us for particular emotions; and emotions, too, spread through bodily and mediated mimesis. If we take the difference between affect and emotion to be cognition, we can see how affect accumulation, contagion, and rearticulation lead right up to and spill over into the realm of emotion. Because evaluation is cognitive, Ahmed's discussion of the evaluative qualities of affect closely mirrors theories of emotion.<sup>[12]</sup> The disarticulation and rearticulation of affects similarly require conscious awareness and qualification. While these affect theories work largely on the level of bodily intensity, when scholars discuss human agency in shaping affects they often (if even only implicitly) work in the realm of emotion.

## Beginning with Emotion

"Affect" and "emotion" were first conceptually divorced in psychoanalysis to distinguish between first-person and third-person feelings; the patient has emotions and the analyst describes the patient's affects (Ngai 24). Massumi and Lawrence Grossberg extended this distinction, suggesting that while emotion is the narrativized feeling of the subject, affect exceeds the subject's cognition. Sianna Ngai claims this "subjective-objective problematic" has been the "uber-question of recent theoretical writing on feeling in particular" (24). In her work, Ngai avoids choosing one concept over the other and recognizes their relationship as a "modal difference of intensity or degree" instead of a "formal difference of quality and kind" (27). So while emotions are more structured and formed, affects do not lack structure and form entirely. Focusing on this modal difference allows "an analysis of the *transitions* from one pole to the other: the *passages* whereby affects acquire the semantic density and narrative complexity of emotions, and emotions conversely denature into affects" (27). In this way, we can imagine affect and emotion on a continuum, with a (sliding) point of cognition, acknowledgment, or articulation marking their difference. This continuum aligns with Massumi's description of emotion emerging from affect; however, too often in application, we begin with affect and move linearly to emotion—overlooking a cyclical relationship between the two. If we begin, instead, with emotion, we can theorize affect both as the bodily intensity that precedes it and the affective capacities and potentials that grow out of it.

To consider emotions' affective capacities and potentials, we must study emotion as both cognitive and social. While many have written about Aristotle's tripartite analysis of the emotions in Book II of the *Rhetoric*, Craig Smith and Michael Hyde's Heideggerian reading astutely emphasizes the role of the emotions in creating publics: "it is by way of our emotions and the 'moods' that they sustain that we come to see, interpret, and involve ourselves with the world" (448). Shared emotions structure our publics and orient us toward them. But our experiences with emotions relate to our social power and positioning. For example, confidence, the opposite of fear, comes more easily to those with social and economic capital, to those who have more resources to keep objects of fear at bay. Similarly, through repeated experience with a particular emotion, we begin to anticipate and expect it, creating an emotional pattern of interacting with the world. These patterns are, in part, shaped by the emotional expectations attached to particular social positions and identities. For example, expressions of anger are often deemed more socially appropriate for those in power, rather than those marginalized by their race, gender, class, etc.<sup>[13]</sup> One's power to affect and be affected by emotions, then, is closely related to one's visible and hidden identities, as they exist in particular contexts. Through a social lens, we can conceptualize how the affects (bodily intensities and capacities) of living in a particular culture give rise to an emotion but also how that emotion can have affects that are contagious and that accumulate in expectations for emotional expression.

The advantage of studying emotions is that they always have directions and objects, and understanding these reveals the affects available to respond to damaging emotional pedagogies. For example, the direction of an emotion can focus at one person (anger), extend broadly outward (anxiety), or turn inward toward oneself (embarrassment). These directions and objects also reflect social relationships; for example, spite reflects inferiority, pride shows superiority, and love expresses equality. An often overlooked aspect of Aristotle's work on emotions, which Smith and Hyde emphasize, is that he describes them in terms of seven sets of continua: anger-calm, friendship-enmity, fear-confidence, shame-shamelessness, kindness-cruelty, pity-indignation, and envy-emulation. A median state of rest or unaffectedness sits in the middle of each continuum, and the rhetor's job is to move audiences along various continua (often simultaneously). In order to do this, a rhetor must understand how each set of emotions is structured but also how each is interrelated to other sets. Emotions, according to Aristotle, intensify and dissipate based on spatial and temporal proximity. Thus, the closer the object of our fear (in terms of its imminence or physical closeness to us or those we care for), the more scared we feel. A pedagogy of violence relies on keeping the objects of particular emotions present—if not tangibly, at least as viable threats in our imaginations.

With advances in technology, pedagogies of emotion spread globally. Jane Kenway and Johannah Fahey call these

“emoscapes”<sup>{14}</sup> and describe how emotions move globally through media. For example, they suggest emotions like greed, selfishness, disgust, doubt, and shame fueled the emoscape of the global financial crisis. Through new media, these emotions were “communicable, transmittable and infectious, even viral,” creating a complex emotional milieu that could be felt around the world (170). Similar to Jameson’s theorizing of an era or Raymond Williams’ “structures of feeling,” the concept of emoscape describes the sustaining and broadly felt emotions that define a period and place in time. Still, Kenway and Fahey assert that discourses of opposing emotions can disrupt harmful emoscapes; they offer examples of viral videos and films circulated during the financial crisis that inspired hope or happiness. Knowing how a particular emotion works helps produce and share emotional discourses (and thereby exercise our affective capacities) that counteract harmful pedagogies, especially as new media offer opportunities for global communication and (re)education. In the following section, I analyze a contemporary example of pedagogic violence using the language of affect and emotion theories discussed thus far. My explication aims to show the distinct but interrelated work of affect and emotion as we attempt to better understand and dismantle pedagogies of violence.

## Pedagogies of Fear

Referencing growing concerns about terrorist networks, climate change, and economic disparities, Obama’s final State of the Union Address challenged Americans’ fears. He asked, “Will we respond to the changes of our time with fear, turning inward as a nation, and turning against each other as a people? Or will we face the future with confidence in who we are, what we stand for, and the incredible things we can do together?” While Obama is not the first president to describe the affective milieu of the U.S. in terms of fear, it is interesting that he offers confidence as its opposition, mirroring Aristotle’s continuum. American fear is a recurring trope in politics, yet some instances of fear—though they carry forward longstanding plights—nonetheless express a unique moment, a gathering of particular bodies. One of the most troubling contemporary pedagogies of fear emerges from police brutality, which teaches African Americans that interactions with law enforcement can lead to serious injury or death. Following increasing reports of police brutality against African Americans and the corresponding lack of indictments of officers involved, it is no wonder that, as a 2015 sociological study reports, 50 percent of adolescent African Americans fear they will not live beyond age 35 (Warner and Swisher).

Because affects and emotions work together in pedagogies of fear, one of our challenges is to figure out their interrelated personal and cultural impacts—namely, how the lived bodily intensity of fear interacts with its cultural manifestations. While some affect and emotion theories focus on subjective, momentary states (e.g., Massumi; James; Aristotle), others consider the state of an era or culture (e.g., Williams; Jameson; Kenway and Fahey); it is the interaction between the instantaneous feeling of fear and the underlying sense of fear in our culture that makes it such a complicated pedagogy. To begin analyzing this interaction in pedagogies of fear related to police brutality, I consider (1) the transition from affect to fear, (2) the structure of fear as an emotion, and (3) the perpetuation of fear on the cultural level, through affect contagion, accumulation, and the social construction of fear. Though I just begin to consider a few facets of this pedagogy, I hope to elucidate some examples of how fear emerges and what it feels like in the body; how it reflects and is determined by social position and cultural context; and how it is increasingly perpetuated through media.

Narratives following incidents of police brutality often reference the precognitive bodily intensity that fuels action before emotion is recognized. Constance Rice, a civil rights attorney who interviewed over 900 police officers in 18 months, uncovered deep-rooted fear of Black men in American society: “Cops can get into a state of mind where they’re scared to death. When they’re in that really, really frightened place they panic and they act out on that panic” (“Civil”). Given the lawful and armed power that police officers have in the U.S., this may seem surprising, but emotional dynamics are never as simple as the confident officer versus the fearful citizen. In her interviews, Rice discovered profound and regretful feelings of racism; for example, she reports police officers saying things like, “Ms. Rice I’m scared of black men. Black men terrify me. I’m really scared of them. Ms. Rice, you know black men who come out of prison, they’ve got great hulk strength and I’m afraid they’re going to kill me. Ms. Rice, can you teach me how not to be afraid of black men?” (“Civil”). The transition between affect and emotion becomes clear in these narratives. The officer and citizen encounter a fear sign—an African American man in a hoodie, a hand moving toward a pocket, police lights, a demand to put your hands up, etc.—and bodies move into action. As the affective intensity builds, bodies act before conscious awareness. In the stop-beat, when action ceases, fear is named, owned, and recognized as an emotion, but it may be too late. Because of repeated real or imagined experiences with danger, bodies “act out on that panic,” as Rice describes. These narratives reflect the desired result of a pedagogy of fear: the fear sign (whether or not legitimate) appears and bodies go into action, sometimes resulting in tragedy. As retellings of police brutality circulate through news and social media, both officer and unarmed citizen are cast as worthy objects of fear, implying violence may have been inevitable. These accounts do not adequately capture the affective complexities of incidents of police brutality, yet their conclusions often bolster educations in fear and violence.

Fear, as an emotion, is structured to flourish among the marginalized. Fear is experienced as negative anticipation, a sense of helplessness or inferiority, and an urge to protect oneself. Because fear motivates a person to distance oneself from the object of fear, Robert Solomon describes it as a kind of “negative desire,” a desire that often requires a certain amount of cultural agency or privilege to fulfill (253). Fear is a complicated emotion because it has any number of specific or general objects, for example, a bear or fear itself, as already discussed. For African Americans, with increasing reports of police brutality, the objects of fear get closer, intensifying the (even if only imagined) possibility of recurrence. The objects of fear in this case could be many: personal harm, harm of a loved one, racist legislation, wrongful imprisonment, etc. To inspire fear in an audience, Aristotle suggests a rhetor “should make them realize that they are liable to suffering” (1383a15). A rhetor can do this by saying that “others even greater than they have suffered, and he should show that there are others like them suffering now (or who have suffered) and at the hands of those from whom they did not expect it and suffering things they did not expect and at a time when they were not thinking of the possibility” (1383a15). Fear combines imagined suffering with the unexpected, the belief that suffering could happen at an unexpected time at the hands of the unexpected. *Unexpected* was the murder of 12-year-old Tamir Rice, the unlawful arrest and neglect of Sandra Bland, the fatal chokehold of Eric Garner, the breaking of Freddie Gray’s neck, and the point-blank shooting of Alton Sterling. The 24-hour news cycle’s reports of these killings reinforce that African Americans should expect the unexpected, the physical toll of which is exhausting. At its most successful, fear is immobilizing, yet to feel it, one must also have hope for and belief in the possibility of a better outcome. One who has resigned or lost hope, fears nothing, since the worst has already happened. Because it “makes people inclined to deliberation,” fear can also be motivating and reveal one’s investments and relations (1383a14). Thus, our challenge in opposing pedagogies of fear is to tap into the urge to build investments and relations, a task that may be facilitated through new media.

Pedagogic violence works systemically to promote fear in (and of) African Americans. As Worsham reminds us, “violence also (and increasingly) arises from within the authority of existing social, political, and economic arrangements and serves quite effectively to reinforce their legitimacy” (215). Contemporary arrangements of systemic racism fuel disproportionate rates of incarceration, lack of African American economic recovery, access to quality education, and racial profiling. As African Americans interact with these systems, they are educated in what emotions are “appropriate” to express: avoid emotional extremes or you may be perceived as angry, arrogant, or aggressive; appear calm and well-mannered. This social education in emotion works to pacify African Americans and reinforce the legitimacy of white supremacy. [\[15\]](#) News and mass media supplement this curriculum with the well-documented dissemination of negative representations of African Americans, which work both as a warning to African Americans and a general education in fear, mistrust, and dislike. African Americans become both the subjects and objects of fear in this pedagogy.

As an individual interacts with a multi-layered education in what and how to fear, implicit and explicit opportunities for response emerge (for some individuals more than others, depending on one’s education, cultural capital, race, etc.). For example, when one encounters a digital image intended to cause fear, bodily intensities emerge that may be processed into emotions and available affects: one may share the image and spread fear; ignore the image (fear either dissipates or goes latent); invoke another emotion to oppose fear; or compose an affective relation to “unstick” the fear attached to the image. These potential affects determine the pedagogy’s next destination. Pedagogies of fear often circulate precognitively, as affect moves to other bodies (contagion), bolsters an existing disposition (accumulation), or dissipates. If affect is recognized as an emotion, bodies have a number of possible affects, what Ahmed might call “turning toward or against,” giving or refusing value. Though we all encounter a deluge of fear-inspiring discourses, once acknowledged, choices for response (affects) become available. As rhetoricians and composition teachers, our work is to make these choices more apparent for ourselves and for our students.

A combined analysis of affect and emotion reveals how fear feels, moves, accumulates, and gains real-world significance. While affect theories capture the rapid, contagious, and visceral feeling of fear, when affects emerge into the realm of emotion, affective capacities materialize as people turn toward or against an object, relation, or discourse—choices also tied up in the social and cultural construction of emotion. Rhetorics of pedagogic violence, Worsham claims, “will focus specifically on the way violence addresses and educates emotion and inculcates an affective relation to the world” (216). The many facets of pedagogies of fear—personal, systemic, bodily, cognitive, affective, emotional—simultaneously teach one how to interact with the world and determine her affective capacities, given her social positions and identities. It may seem we have little control over the bodily intensities that fuel incidents of police brutality, but these intensities arise from our contexts and emotional educations. To address these educations, we must consider their origins and how they spread, especially through new media. We need a better understanding of how people continue to create rhetorics of violence that, through contagion and accumulation, perpetuate fear in/of/for African Americans. Fear thrives on the feeling of impending danger circulated in news and mass media, yet we also have opportunities to use media to put forth opposing emotional pedagogies. In my final section, I turn to Twitter as an example of new media that can produce opposing emotional pedagogies through the

contagion of affects and emotions. When using “affects and emotions” together, I mean not to conflate the concepts but rather to carry forward their already discussed unique qualities.

## Affects and Emotions in New Media

With developments in new media in the nearly two decades since Worsham’s article, “going postal” has taken on new meaning. Digital media platforms have multiple purposes in pedagogic violence: recounting the details of the latest occurrence of mass violence; offering a space for collective feeling about loss of life and safety; but also extending an avenue for someone like Dylann Roof and countless others to connect to violent ideologies. To scrutinize how pedagogic violence moves through new media, it is best to theorize affects and emotions in tandem—given their cyclical nature—to illustrate how bodily intensities grow into significant ways of being and living in the world. While affect theories account for how intensities feel and move, emotion theories place those intensities into constellations of feeling, an accumulation of one’s sensations, emotional experiences, and memories. As these constellations become more robust, expectations for oneself and others merge into a way of seeing the world. But it is important to remember that these ways of seeing are not just imposed onto us by external forces. Through seizing the often-overlooked definition of affect as capacity, we have available potentials to, for example, take what we know about contagion and accumulation to counter and rearticulate violent rhetorics. Just as digital media platforms circulate violent rhetorics, they also offer opportunities to respond to them. The micro-blogging platform Twitter is one example I will discuss here.

The structure of Twitter is particularly conducive to the broad circulation of affects and emotions. Because any registered user can follow another, it creates overlapping, expansive networks of people, wherein users can connect with people they would not have access to on a platform that requires dual-approval for connection. Through follower/ing networks and hashtags, which gather and categorize tweets on the same topic, users form (even if only momentary) bodies with their own affective capacities. These bodies of users have been instrumental recently in organizing protests, giving organizers the ability to instantaneously communicate with any number of followers. Forging new connections<sup>[16]</sup> and creating new bodies of people has the potential to engage in what Worsham might call “decolonizing” oppressive affective relations (216).

The unique qualities of affects and emotions are central both to propelling viral trends and inciting the very motivation for users to participate. Consider the following scenario which has become increasingly common on Twitter and other social networks: a cell phone video of a police shooting of an unarmed Black man appears on a user’s Twitter feed. She sees altercation, escalation, physical force, gun, slumped body, blooming pool of blood, and last shutter of life; she hears yelling, gunshots, crying, and pleas for help. Simultaneously, she holds her breath, tenses her muscles, shivers, feels a weight or heaviness—affect, bodily intensity, has struck her. She may retweet the video immediately before those feelings emerge into emotions; affect moves. With time and reflection, any number of emotional responses may emerge (shock, sorrow, anger, fear, or some combination), and she may express them in words, images, or emojis in a tweet corresponding with the video; emotion moves. When a tweet is rapidly repeated and begins to trend, it is not the content itself that is viral or contagious but the affects and emotions the content produces. No one shares a tweet or post that makes her feel nothing. Affects and emotions are the vehicles through which tweets, images, and videos (and their corresponding messages) become widely shared. We share content that makes us feel—even if that feeling is precognitive. But when we bring intensities into consciousness, we then have the rhetorical opportunity (affective capacity) to make an argument, to try to effect change. Emotions, after all, are defined as “those things through which, by undergoing change, people come to differ in their judgments,” according to Aristotle (1378a8). Emotions are processes and judgments about the world around us, our experiences, and the cultures of which we are a part. Thus, when considering how to respond to pedagogies of violence in new media, we can use, inspire, and share emotions as avenues to instigate change, even if only a change in perspective.

What has been called “Black Twitter”<sup>[17]</sup> has provoked this very kind of change through, in part, articulating emotions that oppose the pervasive pedagogies of fear targeting African Americans. Black Twitter is an ever-changing body of users, connecting through similar experiences and purposes. Hashtags like #Ferguson and #MikeBrown gave rise to the phenomenon, spurring international attention toward Brown’s death and starting the #BlackLivesMatter movement. When defining what constitutes Black Twitter, Sanjay Sharma makes an important distinction: It is not constituted by the race of people contributing to it but rather the “digital materialization of race” in online manifestations of African American identities and experiences. Through hashtags or so-called “Blacktags,”<sup>[18]</sup> users and topics connect and grow. Blacktags aggregate African American experience, so much so that they “have the capacity to interrupt the whiteness of the Twitter network” (48). Users take advantage of the medium’s capacities. While Sharma explains that Twitter’s trending algorithm is complex, it is mostly based on sheer velocity, so some Black Twitter users “game the system” by rapidly repeating hashtags or retweets to gain widespread attention. Through repeated tags and tweets, users exercise their affective capacities (e.g., recognizing, criticizing, supporting)



in evaluating the meaning of tags, and bodily intensities and emotions move from one body to another. Though users may not intentionally advance emotions that disrupt pedagogies of violence, many trending Blacktags do just that.

While objects of fear continue to persist, users can respond to fear-inspiring rhetorics with messages of confidence, bonding those with similar goals and resisting the often paralyzing feeling of fear. For example, #BlackExcellence and #BlackGirlMagic celebrate Black achievement and associate affirmative and positive emotions with Blackness. Hope also inspires confidence, which we can see in Blacktags that gather expressions of pride, honor, and remembrance (e.g., #MLK or #TubmanOn20), highlighting African American legacies of faith and transformation. Less favorable emotions like anger can also inspire confidence and a search for justice. Though African American anger is often socially censured, anger reveals a basic aspiration for equal and fair treatment, since, as Aristotle writes, “the angry person desires what is possible for him” (1378b2). Anger is fueled by a desire and hope to achieve those things within one’s potential: “those longing for something and not getting it—are irascible and easily stirred to anger, especially against those belittling their present condition” (1379a10). Many successful social movements are propelled by anger; it is productive, in catching on, gaining attention, and sometimes inspiring reform—for example, the Twitter movements that contributed to the removal of the confederate flag in the South Carolina capitol and prompted (some) presidential candidates to release policy plans to improve the lives of African Americans. Tweets that are motivated by anger need not explicitly mention it, yet they often inspire it through critique. For example, #IfTheyGunnedMeDown was a popular Blacktag used to criticize the way news media depict young Black men. With it, a user often posts two photos of himself—one that adheres to and one that defies a stereotypical image of young Black men—positing that the news media would choose to broadcast the stereotypical image if he were killed by police. Through visual contrast, users exposed the danger and absurdity of racism in news media.

More than fear, rhetorics of pedagogic violence thrive on enmity, which often circulates covertly. Aristotle asserts, “the greatest evils—injustice and thoughtlessness—are least perceived; for the presence of evil causes no pain” (1382a31). Whereas many emotions are directed at a specific person, Aristotle claims, hate is directed at “types” of people, and thus, it is especially productive in racist pedagogies. In contrast to angry people who want the object of their anger to suffer, hateful people just want the object of their hatred not to exist. The real goal is obsolescence, which is echoed in racist pedagogies that suggest the cause of disproportionate rates of school suspension, incarceration, poverty, joblessness, and death in police shootings are not systemic but somehow inherent to Blackness. Though hatred is so visible in racist acts of violence, its everyday cultivation is more latent, as it is taught and learned over a lifetime. Needless to say, moving people down the continuum to friendliness is no easy task, since friendship requires a kind of intimacy. However, invoking rhetorical strategies like identification and humor engages in that very task. Exposing examples of everyday racism can at best result in identification with African American experience and at least make racism widely visible in a way that was not possible without new media. For example, #OscarsSoWhite highlighted the racial disparity of nominations and led to changes in the nominating process. Another Blacktag, #LaughingWhileBlack, brought attention to the story of a book club of mostly African American women who were kicked off of a Napa Valley Wine Train for laughing and talking loudly (and who recently settled a lawsuit in their favor). The examples of racist policing of laughter that were attached to this tag and examples attached to other #\_\_\_WhileBlack tags show the daily costs of living as an African American. Although these Blacktags were not solely responsible for the attention given to and outcomes of these events, we should not overlook the impact they had in spreading shock, disgust, disbelief, etc. into dominant media and culture.

Humor also encourages identification, which Black Twitter users commonly employ. Sharma asserts, “Blacktags are distinctive because they curate and virally propagate racially charged messages expressing social critique through a particular acerbic style of humour which has been associated with elements of African-American culture” (59). Humor connects people; to laugh at the same thing shows vulnerability and allegiance. We are friendly, Aristotle suggests, to those “ready to make or receive a joke” (1381a13). While the instantaneous spread of laughter moves on the level of bodily intensity (or affect), when humor is intentionally used on Twitter, users qualify the intensity (into emotions) and often pair it with critique. Blacktags often emerge to humorously censure people for racist slips, for example, following the news of Paula Deen’s use of the n-word (#PaulasBestDishes) or errors in Don Lemon’s reporting (#DonLemonLogic). Corresponding messages often mock, shame, or parody the subject, expressing emotions like disgust or anger. #ByeAnita was sardonically used to recognize the successful movement to unseat Cook County State’s Attorney Anita Alvarez who has been implicated in the mishandling of the Laquan McDonald case. The contagion of humor—its bodily intensities and evaluations—helps to interject socially-charged arguments into dominant media.

While these are just a few examples from the ever-expanding network of Black Twitter, they show new media’s capacities to put forth rhetorics that, in this case, rearticulate African American culture and identity, through contagious affects and emotions. Blacktags amass affective connections and emotions in a (albeit shifting) digital community that has proven to be instrumental in the development of the Black Lives Matter movement—one of the most prominent civil rights movements in decades. I do not mean to suggest, however, that Black Twitter or

Blacktags are a panacea for racism or that they do not also participate in pedagogic violence. As several in the news media have recently argued, Black Twitter is not a cohesive representation of African American life or culture; its users are diverse politically, racially, economically, religiously, geographically, etc. Rather, I see Black Twitter as one example of how new media can rearticulate affects and emotions in ways that respond to the fears and injustices of contemporary American life. Contagious affects and emotions in new media alone will not result in systemic change, but through their study we can better understand how violent and oppressive rhetorics thrive and how we can take advantage of the cyclical relationship of affect and emotion to produce rhetorics that empower people, transform perspectives, and change what we think is possible. While the pace, movement, and networks of feeling in new media may best be described in terms of affect, emotion theories better account for how these rapidly moving intensities transition into ways of being in the world. If “the discourse of emotion is our primary education,” it is a discourse that continues to transform itself, and our challenge is to find ways to recognize and respond to these complex, often disguised emotional educations (Worsham 216). As pedagogic violence becomes more and more mediated, theorizing affect and emotion together is crucial for identifying oppressive rhetorics and finding opportunities to intervene.

## Notes

1. As Worsham notes in “Going Postal,” this concept comes from Bordieu and Passeron’s *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, which examines the relationship between pedagogy and violence. In Worsham’s discussion of the concept, she is particularly interested in the role emotions play in pedagogic violence. ([Return to text.](#))
2. A number of news sites have reported on the recovery of Roof’s alleged manifesto. To my knowledge, it has not been officially verified as his. The portions I have quoted also appear in Frances Robles’s *New York Times* article, “Dylann Roof Photos and a Manifesto Are Posted on Website,” published 20 June 2015. ([Return to text.](#))
3. Statistics come from the following two Pew Studies: Ferrin’s “Social Media Usage: 2005-2015,” published 8 Oct. 2015; and Smith’s “U.S. Smartphone Use in 2015,” published 1 Apr. 2015. ([Return to text.](#))
4. See Damasio; Solomon; Nussbaum; Jaggar; Lutz; and Lutz and Abu-Lughod. ([Return to text.](#))
5. Clough coined this term in a collection of the same name, published in 2007. Most scholars identify two general strands of affect theory: the first grows out of Spinoza and Deleuze and continues through Massumi, and the second originates with Tomkins and is extended by Sedgwick and others. This article focuses on the former strand, though the latter has also appeared (to a lesser extent) in the field. Another related area not detailed in this article is the study of desire, which has roots in psychoanalysis. See, for example, Wells; Rickert; Alcorn; Albrecht-Crane; and Lundberg. ([Return to text.](#))
6. Grossberg makes a similar distinction between affect and emotion in his writing, though he is far less frequently cited in our field. ([Return to text.](#))
7. For critiques of Massumi’s affect theory, see Leys and Hemmings. ([Return to text.](#))
8. The simultaneous but distinct experience of affect in mind and body reflects Spinoza’s (by way of Deleuze) psychophysical parallelism, in which the mind and body are thought to have different experiences. Though the mind and body are inseparable, they have no causal interaction. ([Return to text.](#))
9. In Deleuze’s *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, he gives the following example: “there are greater differences between a plow horse or draft horse and a racehorse than between an ox and a plow horse. This is because the racehorse and the plow horse do not have the same affects nor the same capacity for being affected” (124). ([Return to text.](#))
10. Rickert, for example, explores affect’s role in invention through Plato’s concept of *chora*—what he considered “the matrix of all becoming.” Also, see Holding, Hawk, and Davis for discussions of affect’s inventive qualities. ([Return to text.](#))
11. For more about the biological transmission of affect, see Brennan. ([Return to text.](#))
12. See Nussbaum for her cognitive-evaluative theory of emotion. ([Return to text.](#))
13. See Jaggar for discussion of what she calls “outlaw emotions.” ([Return to text.](#))

14. Kenway and Fahey develop their theory from Appadurai's theorization of global "scapes," e.g., financescapes, ideoscapes, and mediascapes. ([Return to text.](#))
15. For more on the emotional educations of African Americans, see hooks and Harris-Perry. ([Return to text.](#))
16. New affective relations, of course, are not inherently positive, as demonstrated by users who connect with terrorist networks or hate groups on Twitter. ([Return to text.](#))
17. A number of reports have shown relatively high participation of African Americans on Twitter. See, for example, Smith's Pew Study, "African Americans and Technology Use: A Demographic Portrait," published 6 Jan. 2014. ([Return to text.](#))
18. Sharma explains that in Blacktags, either "the tag itself and/or its associated content appears to connote 'Black' vernacular expression in the form of humour and social commentary" (51). ([Return to text.](#))

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"An Unnecessary Divorce" from *Composition Forum* 34 (Summer 2016)

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*Composition Forum* is published by the Association of Teachers of Advanced Composition with the support and generous financial assistance of Penn State University. *Composition Forum* ISSN: 1522-7502.