

‘Teaching Naked’ in Late Capitalism: Instructors’ Personal Narratives and Classroom Self-disclosure as Pedagogical Tools

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If we ask academics to hold students in a space of vulnerability and uncertainty in which they can embrace their own beings, it is necessary that we create the kind of environment where academics can explore their own vulnerability and uncertainty.

—Blackie et al. (2010: 643)

Author’s Reflexive Statement

I am a first-generation college graduate from a very impoverished background. I spent all of my school-age years eating ‘free lunch.’ Both of my parents and all of my siblings are permanently disabled from either physical or psychiatric illnesses, or some combination of both. Access to housing, healthcare, nutrition, safety, and bodily autonomy have often been precarious or elusive for my loved ones and myself. Additionally, I am a product of the Midwestern rust-belt (my hometown is Kenosha, Wisconsin—a small city known for its infamous Chrysler factory closure), and during my teenage years, punitive “welfare-to-work” reform policies were first pioneered in my home state before introduction on a national scale. While my Ph.D. has afforded me a measure of upward social mobility, I nevertheless occupy a class-liminal position, as most of my biological and chosen family members remain underneath the poverty line. The debts I accumulated to finance my degree will follow me throughout my career, and swimming ‘against the tide’ has impacted my health in a number of negative ways (as it has for many others with similar life histories—see Miller et al. 2015).

I read as “white,” which affords me a good amount of privilege in a variety of circumstances, not least of which is the classroom. In particular, I am granted analytic and other liberties by my students while teaching them about race and

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whiteness, yet that's always crosscut by my relatively young age (mid-30s); the visual, embodied markers of my class origins; and my feminine body. I am not able-bodied, I am not Christian, I identify as queer, and I am openly committed to radical, socialist, and feminist ideals. Marxism and historical materialism occupy an important space in my analytic toolkit, and my belief in the moral imperative of fully redistributive justice informs my research, activism, and teaching in a number of ways.

I am especially committed to sharing my own personal narratives and life experiences with students where appropriate, because I feel it is especially important for historically underrepresented scholars to demonstrate to students who themselves occupy marginalized social locations that a successful, professional, intellectual career is not out of their grasp if they do not fit the normative ideal for professor or researcher. For privileged students, I think it is important for them to experience authority from a member of a marginalized group. Further, many of my own undergraduate mentors were members of historically marginalized groups. My mentors were vocal and open about their experiences, with the objective of modeling for me what it might look like to pursue a career in higher education. Because I experience teaching and learning as liberating, revolutionary, and joyful acts that sometimes forge deep intellectual and emotional connections between students and teachers, I maintain my most memorable mentors' commitments to transparency and vulnerability in the classroom.

On the Use of Instructor's Personal Narratives in the Classroom

A growing literature on the use of narrative in the classroom suggests a number of pedagogical benefits: among them, aiding students in building empathy for the 'other' (Bal and Veltkamp 2013); rethinking social myths and stereotypes (Van Rooj 2012); processing the ways in which marginalization is both an interactional and embodied experience (Sy 2013); challenging the ideological hegemony of neoliberal logics (Jones and Calafell 2012); and making visible the "matrix of domination" (Collins 1990; Hooks 1994, 2003). Nowakowski and Sumerau (2015) find that "personalizing the sociology curriculum" via the specific inclusion of emotional/life experiences of the instructor may increase critical sociological awareness, knowledge of patterned disparities, and student engagement. Additionally, both authors reflect that such practices are consistently met with gratitude from students, firm instructor-student rapport, and efficacy in achieving learning outcomes. In the chapter that follows, I argue that my own use of personal narratives, emotional history, and corresponding life experiences via self-disclosure in the classroom together constitute an especially effective pedagogical strategy for teaching students about social class inequality—as well as intersecting oppressions—as they operate

under late capitalism. I review student survey data to demonstrate the potential costs and benefits of such an approach.

This project began as an outgrowth of an exchange on the "Teaching with a Sociological Lens" Facebook group, where sociology instructors with a variety of backgrounds exchange resources, ideas, and consider pedagogical questions. At one point, a group member posed the question of exactly how much information other instructors shared about their personal lives in the classroom, and whether or not this was an appropriate or useful practice. I am an instructor trained in feminist pedagogy and, given my committed belief that the "personal is political" (as well as attached to the structural), I came down hard on the side of extolling the benefits of sharing with students, though in limited doses, only when relevant and appropriate, and for very limited amounts of overall classroom time. I argued that such practices are useful in achieving stated learning objectives (especially those related to teaching inequalities), aiding in concept comprehension and application, and building classroom rapport (both between students and the instructor, as well as among students who typically choose to model their instructor and share their own experiences). However, many of the other participating members in the forum were vehemently opposed to the practice as they felt it broke norms of professionalism, compromised classroom authority, revealed instructor bias, and introduced a problematic lack of instructor objectivity. Despite these objections, and perhaps because of my belief in the impossibility of an 'impartial' or 'unbiased' social science, I held firm to my commitments that personal narratives and the life experiences of a sociology instructor can occupy a useful and productive space in the classroom. I came away from this online debate with a resolve to answer the questions posed in the group by gathering and analyzing empirical data on the topic. Subsequently, I set out to test my assumptions at the end of the Spring 2016 semester.

The most recent work on the topic of instructor use of personal narratives in the classroom is likely Nowakowski and Sumerau's "Should We Talk about the Pain? Personalizing Sociology in the Medical Sociology Classroom" (2015). Specifically, the authors consider "biographic incorporation techniques," such as telling the stories of their own experiences with chronic illness/diagnosis/coping strategies, recalling stigmatizing encounters with medical institutions and professionals, sharing the emotional effects these experiences generated, and inviting students to do the same—while always providing the option to opt-out, in order to maintain student consent and trust.

Nowakowski and Sumerau (2015) also provide a thorough overview of existing literature on the topic of the costs and benefits of instructor self-disclosure. Potential benefits of instructors' personal sharing include greater student engagement, the development and honing of students' political/sociological consciousness, facilitating deeper understanding of course content, validation of students' own similar life experiences, and the forging of analytic connections that point to the larger structural causes of disparity and inequality (Adams 2010; Freire 1968; Greenfield

2006; Hooks 1994; Lucal 2015). Despite these benefits, however, a number of graduate programs, pedagogical conference workshops, and existing teacher-training curricula across the discipline of sociology (and in higher education in general) continue to encourage ‘distance’ from students in teaching—and, from subjects in research—in order to encourage greater ‘objectivity’ via analytic and emotional remove (Blouin and Moss 2015). However, some scholars argue that the cultivation of such ‘distance’ can be alienating for students, and indeed that alienation may be amplified for minority students in particular, especially in predominantly white institutions (Gusa 2010).

Research Questions

Data collection was guided by one main research question: Do students perceive instructor self-disclosure (defined as the sharing of narratives rooted in personal experience) as helpful or problematic in fostering their comprehension of concepts, the building of classroom rapport, and learning how to practice radical empathy? Other associated questions I attempted to address via data collection from students included: Which of my personal stories did students recall as especially memorable, and why? Are there additional, unanticipated pedagogical benefits that follow from the practice of instructor self-disclosure? If so, what are they? Are there additional, unanticipated detriments or drawbacks that follow from the practice of instructor self-disclosure? If so, what are they? Do the perceived benefits and detriments of instructor self-disclosure bear any relationship to one another? For example, did students believe that any of the benefits they listed came at the explicitly associated cost of specific detriments? Does deeper learning, validation, rapport, or empathetic capacities for some students (and their identities) come at the expense of detriments for other students, and vice versa?

Telling Personal Stories

Ultimately, I argue the use of instructors’ personal narratives, and relating corresponding life experiences via self-disclosure in the classroom, are especially effective pedagogical strategies for teaching students about social class inequality, as well as intersecting oppressions, as they operate under late capitalism. Instructional strategies that include recounting the instructor’s significant life experiences may, for example, focus on perspective shifts (such as from color-blindness to racial literacy), the onset of sociological consciousness, or especially telling encounters between the body and oppressive structures.

Speaking specifically about my own practices, there are a wide range of stories I tell my students, when my life experiences speak directly to themes in the course content or the larger structural, institutional, or statistical trends we’re examining in

class. On a 'normal' day, I generally approach the classroom with plans for a limited lecture (generally, no more than 15–20 min worth), and then as a group we transition into either direct engagement with the text, analysis of a related current event or especially telling media/pop culture artifact, or guided discussion of student-submitted critical discussion questions on the day's material. In general, the classes I teach are small (ranging from 8 to 35 students, with around 20 being most common, though I have deployed similar strategies in classes as large as 80), and the feel of the environment leans towards the informal and conversational. At the time of data collection, generally my classes were roughly 30% students of color (about double the population in the university at large), approximately 1/3 working class or first-generation, 60–70% female, and included a small handful of openly queer students.

When teaching specifically about socioeconomic inequality in the US, the stories I use most frequently in the classroom involve my experiences growing up "dependent" on public aid for my childhood survival after medical crises and disability forced both of my parents out of regular labor market participation. Such stories of navigating social welfare bureaucracies and the stigma that accompanied receipt of public aid are especially relevant as I'm teaching about the welfare state, when debates about 'deservingness' and the merits of cash and food assistance arise. I have explicit recollection of the physical, embodied experience of food insecurity and a deep feeling of shamefulness regarding my family's poverty that dates back as far as elementary school, and I speak of these experiences openly when the discussion turns in that direction.

When addressing the topic of poverty in general, I'll relate to students what it was like to spend a decade in graduate school at a Big 10, research-one university—an environment that often demanded that I learn to study and speak about poverty in "objective," abstract, dispassionately removed, and theoretical terms. This created a jarring disconnect with my personal life, as I continued to live below the poverty line, and members of my immediate family transitioned in and out of homelessness.

When addressing questions about class stratification, class mobility, and cultural capital in the classroom, I'll recount for students what it was like as a first generation student from a highly marginalized socioeconomic background, attending a private liberal arts undergrad institution alongside wealthy and/or economically secure classmates. I'll recall the radical 'code-switching' that was required of me, and the biting humiliation that resulted when I struggled with 'imposter syndrome,' due to the lack of cultural knowledge that would have otherwise allowed me to fully integrate into my new environment.

Additional related subjects I sometimes teach include the social construction of illness, mental health and medicalizing processes, and the institutional intersections of class inequality and disability. When doing so, I'll sometimes tell stories about my experiences growing up with two schizophrenic parents, and what it was like helping them navigate the broken US mental healthcare system in an era of increasing privatization. The ground constantly shifted under our feet due to the neoliberal agenda to dissolve universal state entitlements, and I use my history to help students place an emotional reality to policies, figures, and disembodied claims.

When teaching students about the intersections between class and contemporary racial inequality, I'll relate the difficulties I personally faced in shifting from a color-blind perspective to one of racial literacy, and how that was complicated, and at times, stalled by my experiences of class marginality (as it was sometimes difficult for me to grasp that I was indeed "privileged"). Such conversations are often especially productive for other students who read as white, yet might not yet have 'outed' themselves as class marginal (and often do so eventually, either in class or in private conversation with me), and are struggling to understand the benefits and moral responsibilities of whiteness in the context of their otherwise difficult lives.

Additionally, I'll often push my students to examine the ways in which gender informs race and class, and will then relate to students a variety of instances in my own life and the lives of my friends when biological explanations for gender difference fell short or proved contradictory. It also bears mention that while not all of the items I've chosen to cite are directly or initially 'about' income inequality under late capitalism, they do illuminate the import of considering the ways in which understandings of and experiences with socioeconomic inequality are always cross-cut with gender, race, sexuality, and experiences with living in a differently-abled body.

Altogether, my experiences in the classroom have led me to believe that the limited, yet strategic use of brief personal narratives can serve as powerful antidotes to students' subscription to toxic meritocratic ideologies, tendencies to criminalize the poor, and the mystification of the causes of contemporary inequality. However, I'll also emphasize that the recounting of instructors' personal experience in the sociological classroom must *always* be contextualized with data on larger institutional patterns, else one risks substituting the anecdotal for the empirical (and perhaps fostering an environment where students feel entitled to do so, as well—a situation which proves antithetical to sociological learning). Including instructors' personal experiences in the sociological classroom always risks "the danger of a single story" that threatens to flatten complex lives into stereotype (Adichie 2009). Additionally, I argue that existing scholarship points to the possibility of unique benefits for instructor self-disclosure from teachers with marginalized backgrounds due to the sharpness of their vision "from below" (Sandoval 2000). It warrants emphasis that the personal must *always* be contextualized within the structural, and I'll revisit this matter in the discussion of results and conclusion to the chapter.

Data and Discussion

My data (see Table 1) was gathered in the Spring semester of 2016, when I was teaching at a small, primarily undergraduate-serving, blended liberal arts/professional studies institution (enrolling slightly under 3000 students) just outside of Columbus, Ohio. Students were surveyed across one mid-level seminar on gender titled *Sociology of Gender*, one mid-level seminar on social problems and

policy solutions titled *Social Problems* (both courses were cross-listed as electives within the Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies major program), as well as an upper-level practicum on sociological praxis and intersectionality titled *Human and Community Services: Organizing Across Race, Class, Gender, and Age* (which met general education requirements for interdisciplinary learning when taken by students alongside a course in organizational leadership). All three classes were open to majors and non-majors and had no curricular prerequisites. Roughly 75% of the students surveyed were sociology majors, and the remainder were non-majors, only some of whom minored in sociology. Surveyed students were spread across class rank, with slightly lower amounts of first-years (roughly, 15% of respondents) than sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Fifty-three (53) total students participated, giving me a response rate of 91% (some of my enrolled students were absent on survey day, though all who were present participated voluntarily). When administering the survey for each course, I always exited the room while students took the survey to minimize discomfort or self-censorship. Surveys were distributed in all courses on the second to last day of class for the semester (Table 1).

Overall, the quantitative data is quite compelling, and builds a strong case for the myriad benefits of instructors' sharing their personal experiences in the classroom. Questions two through eight document the students' feelings about the value of such an approach. The average across the seven measures for student *agreement* with the merits of this very personal pedagogical approach is 91%, while an average of 2.3% of students voiced *disagreement* with the merits of such an approach.

Questions nine through 11 document student concerns about three potential *detriments* of such an approach. Overall, an average of 83% of students *disagreed* that such detrimental circumstances were reproduced in our learning community, while 5.7% of students *agreed* that such detrimental classroom outcomes were possible. Significantly, an average of 22% of students elected that they had "no opinion" on the statements representing the detriments of instructors' inclusion of personal narratives in the classroom, whereas only 6.7% of students felt they had "no opinion" on the merits of such sharing on the part of their instructor.

The remaining three questions in the survey were open-ended. Briefly, I'll recap the main themes that emerged. The student-named benefits of instructor self-disclosure and personal narrative fell largely into five clusters. Students cited:

- (1) valuing the validation of their own similar experiences via comparison;
- (2) feeling invited to share their own life experience through a sociological lens (which some said enhanced a sense of the classroom as a "democratic" space);
- (3) enhancing their capacity to make analytic moves from the abstract to the concrete (which some claimed aided in their theory/concept comprehension and application);
- (4) understanding and empathizing with the human and embodied consequences of inequality; and
- (5) building greater trust and rapport with their instructor.

Here's a few of the students' direct responses about the benefits of personal narratives from their instructor:

Table 1 Data from student surveys on instructors' use of personal narratives (N = 53)

1. I can recall specific times in the classroom when my instructor shared narratives/stories from her life and personal experience		
YES: 98% (N = 2)	NO: 2% (N = 1)	
2. When my instructor shares narratives/stories from her life and personal experience, it helps me better understand concepts and theories from the course material		
STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE: 96%	NO OPINION: 4%	DISAGREE/STRONGLY DISAGREE: 0%
3. When my instructor shares narratives/stories from her life and personal experience, it helps me better understand the human and embodied consequences of inequality		
STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE: 91%	NO OPINION: 8%	DISAGREE/STRONGLY DISAGREE: 2%
4. When my instructor shares narratives/stories from her life and personal experience, it helps me establish rapport and a relationship of trust with her as a person		
STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE: 94%	NO OPINION: 4%	DISAGREE/STRONGLY DISAGREE: 2%
5. When my instructor shares narratives/stories from her life and personal experience, it helps me build empathy for ‘others’ who are somehow different from me		
STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE: 92%	NO OPINION: 6%	DISAGREE/STRONGLY DISAGREE: 2%
6. When my instructor shares narratives/stories from her life and personal experience, it helps me to rethink stereotypes and other social myths		
STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE: 96%	NO OPINION: 4%	DISAGREE/STRONGLY DISAGREE: 0%
7. When my instructor shares narratives/stories from her life and personal experience, it helps me to see my own similar experiences as validated, “real,” or legitimate by comparison		
STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE: 91%	NO OPINION: 8%	DISAGREE/STRONGLY DISAGREE: 2%
8. When my instructor shares narratives/stories from her life and personal experience, I feel invited to share my own life experiences in the classroom		
STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE: 80%	NO OPINION: 13%	DISAGREE/STRONGLY DISAGREE: 8%
9. When my instructor shares narratives/stories from her life and personal experience, I am sometimes concerned that the course content is “biased” in a problematic way		
STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE: 11%	NO OPINION: 11%	DISAGREE/STRONGLY DISAGREE: 77%
10. When my instructor shares narratives/stories from her life and personal experience, I feel my own experiences are silenced or undervalued		
STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE: 0%	NO OPINION: 4%	DISAGREE/STRONGLY DISAGREE: 97%
11. When my instructor shares narratives/stories from her life and personal experience, I feel it encourages a “PC culture” in the classroom that silences unpopular yet necessary opinions		
STRONGLY AGREE/AGREE: 6%	NO OPINION: 21%	DISAGREE/STRONGLY DISAGREE: 74%

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

12. Please recount below any significant examples you can recall from your classroom experiences this semester that involve your instructor sharing stories from her life and personal experience. What sticks out in your mind and why? If you cannot recall examples, please leave this question blank
13. Can you think of any additional assets or benefits to your learning/classroom/overall college experience that are created by having an instructor who openly shares narratives/stories from her life and personal experience? If so, please describe them below. If not, please leave this question blank
14. Can you think of any additional problems, detriments, or hindrances to your learning/classroom/overall college experience that are created by having an instructor who openly shares narratives/stories from her life and personal experience? Please describe them below. If not, please leave this question blank

- "It reaffirms that what we may be experiencing is not something unique to us. It helps for us to participate in the classroom and to know that such sharing is mutual".
- "Because of my experience in this class, and the narratives shared, I have come to realize that empathy is radical AND political. Knowing about how inequality manifests in a person's life—and a person whom I dearly respect—made learning about that pain a lot more accessible for me".
- "There are many benefits to professors sharing stories. I think it creates a better relationship with that professor. These are hard topics, so feeling comfortable about sharing them is critical. It also allows us to feel like Dr. F is more of a knowledgeable peer than a superior. I feel like I'm talking to someone who values my opinion and experiences".
- "You don't have to be a sociology major to be a caring, empathetic person... Stories make sociology a human experience, which is what it needs to be".
- "Before this course I had very little knowledge on oppression and the move towards social justice, nor did I feel invested in any issue. Hearing the stories and personal experiences made this more *real* to me and has ultimately made me more aware. This transformative experience may not have occurred had I simply read the stories of strangers out of a textbook".
- "...I think it is beneficial to hear personal stories because it can help the students have realizations about the way their own social location affects their views..."

And here are a few of their responses on the detriments associated with the approach (again, please recall, these commenters were outliers, though nevertheless important):

- "When your views on certain subjects are SO passionate, I think that people are afraid to share any differing opinions because of the fear of you disagreeing so strongly".
- "Some students may take the instructor's word as law and not formulate personal opinions".
- "May make the classroom feel too biased to one political side or the other".

- “The only problem is being too open which can cause some in the class to be uncomfortable”.

Overall, I argue, the benefits listed by students were myriad and represented significant, fairly widespread agreement. Therefore, the data clearly tilts in the direction of students reading such practices as a positive part of their learning experiences. Such data should be further interpreted in the context of relevant institutional circumstances. For example: in addition to enjoying small class sizes, many of my courses were populated by students I’d grown to know over the past three years I’d been teaching at the institution, as I began my full-time tenure track career there after finishing graduate school in 2013. For many students, I’d known them since their first or second year, and I had taught the majority of the courses they had taken in their major and/or minor due to the small size of the department and students’ tendency to gravitate towards taking multiple courses with me throughout their education. Despite these circumstances (which would be expected to produce favorable results), the amount of non-majors and students who had not yet taken a course with me were not altogether insignificant, representing at least one-third of survey respondents, if not more.

Furthermore, the amount of students who either felt unsure about the detriments or benefits of their instructor’s sharing personal experiences, or came down as clearly reporting *disagreement* with the proposed benefits, or even more problematically, *agreement* with the proposed detriments, must be considered when weighing the extent to which sharing life experiences constitutes sound or beneficial pedagogical practice.

First, regarding agreement with reported detriments: If students experience what they perceive to be a “silencing” of sociologically unpopular views—for example, colorblindness, unwavering belief that we are a society governed by meritocracy, individualism without moral responsibility, etc.—I’m not so sure I consider that a problem. Such opinions are not mere ideas, as they actively contribute to the oppression of marginalized communities, and may be experienced as insulting, triggering, or antagonistic by marginalized students in the classroom. Therefore, creating an environment where such voices and opinions proliferate without sanction may not only fail to further student learning, it may create a hostile environment for targeted students.

Furthermore, my recollection of the semester was such that it was clear in all three classes that these opinions were not entirely silenced as they were consistently debated (sometimes, to the frustration of majors, seniors, and those who occupied targeted identities). Far from being an infrequent subject of conversation, a small but vocal minority of students (some of whom openly identified as “conservative”) regularly felt emboldened to make claims and pose questions about, for example, the inherently violent nature of minority communities and individuals, the types of ‘pathological’ and/or lazy behaviors encouraged in the poor by ‘generous’ public assistance programs, and even the religiously ordained ‘nature’ of masculinity and femininity. As the United States is governed by a bipartisan system, the suggestion that such questions and debates were either implicitly or explicitly problematic or

counter-productive to learning the sociological perspective are nearly always read as either "Democrat" or "liberal." Though they may be both, or neither, students are nevertheless encouraged by popular culture and dominant ideology to define the world in oversimplified terms of left and right, when often social issues are complex and not reducible to such easy, binary distinctions (Schwalbe 2008). Additionally, despite my best efforts to get students to understand all knowledge, question-asking, and pursuit of scientific or empirical claims are inherently 'biased' (and to encourage them to instead reflect on the benefits of approaching contentious topics and social inquiry with a modicum of reflexivity), many students were either actively resistant to such critiques (which I made space for, respected, and acknowledged), or not present on the days such topics were dissected and discussed in class.

Furthermore, even if students reported sometimes feeling uncomfortable raising 'conservative,' colorblind, neoliberal, or negative views regarding the impoverished in the context of classroom discussion, this certainly did not prevent them from sharing such views in small group work, written work for the course, or in one-on-one office hours exchanges with me (or, for that matter, in end-of-semester teaching evaluations—though these were infrequent). It's also worth mention, though, that many such openly critical students did *not* develop an antagonistic relationship to the course material, or to me as their instructor. For example, in the days immediately following election night for the 2016 presidential election, I had a number of Trump-supporting students approach me during my office hours for emotional support. One white student even came to me with tears of frustration over being called a "racist" after gloating to her coworkers of color that "my guy won last night, so you need to get over it!" My point is that far from feeling alienated, such students felt quite comfortable seeking me out for emotional labor, and while the experience proved quite difficult for me, I would argue that part of the reason they felt comfortable in seeking me out (and providing me with the opportunity to offer my sociological insights) could be directly attributable to the rapport I'd built with them in the classroom via my own willingness to be open and vulnerable. Though not all instructors may see this as a desirable outcome given the weight of the students' requests, again, I'll emphasize that it presented both myself and my students a unique opportunity for teaching and learning that might not have materialized without actively cultivated emotional intimacy.

Perhaps most importantly, upon reflection, I've found that so much of teaching about inequality involves a tightrope walk between (1) creating the type of environment where marginalized students do not feel they're being attacked by their peers' reproduction of marginalizing discourses, and (2) providing a space where privileged students can work through their moral commitments to the logics that secure their continued privilege. Sometimes—though certainly not always—these two imperatives are mutually exclusive. In those instances, I favor the learning and encouragement of my marginalized students, as I see them in need of greater support due to the emotional labor required of them in such exchanges, as well as the circumstances they face in the world outside of my classroom. Ultimately, I would argue, if I'm not having moments in the classroom where this fundamental

tension comes to a head, I'm dodging my moral commitments as an educator committed to transformation and liberation.

Discretion in Disclosure?

In closing, I want to acknowledge that the practice of sharing personal narratives with students is not without risk given the potential demands of associated emotional labor, the opportunity for *major* compromise of classroom authority, and the impact of the well-documented possibility of race and gender bias in student evaluations of teaching (Boring et al. 2016). In deciding how much to disclose to students, individual instructors must also consider the political and institutional environments in which they teach.

When engaging in the aforementioned calculus, relevant questions to ask oneself include: Does the campus and/or the department have a more “progressive,” “liberal,” “radical,” “conservative,” or “status quo” reputation? Will the Chair and other colleagues ‘go to bat’ for you if a student or colleague questions your “scientific” or “professional” credentials? What is the student body like in terms of demographics and political leanings, and how do these realities impact the student/teacher relationship, as well as the feeling of classroom environments? How large are classes, how large is the department, how do other faculty in the department teach, and how do all of these factors together influence the norms of the classroom environment one walks into on the first day of each semester? To what extent do you have experiences in your personal history that are directly relevant to the course material? Do you have the protection of tenure or the tenure track, does your tenure status bring additional scrutiny, and are more experimental forms of pedagogy generally rewarded on your campus? Will you be penalized in your professional review for trying new ideas and approaches, or is some level of ‘trial and error’ expected from faculty in your institution as they learn and grow? Ultimately, how much professional ‘risk’ can one take, given social location, identity, and the campus environment? Ultimately, though I hope the cost/benefit analysis I’ve delineated above is helpful for other instructors in deciding the level of self-disclosure they intend to engage, all instructors inhabit different institutional realities, and must therefore decide for themselves what is most prudent, comfortable, and productive for themselves and their students.

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