
INTRODUCTION

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Each fall, the *Journal of Religious Leadership* (JRL) publishes papers presented at the spring conference of the Academy of Religious Leadership. In April 2014, scholars, pastors, denominational leaders, and graduate students gathered in Decatur, Georgia, to exchange theories, practical applications, and questions on the theme of “The Role of Emotions in Religious Leadership and Community.” It was a zesty meeting.

Most writings and teachings in the field of leadership studies focus on what individuals think and how they behave. When emotions are discussed, the conversation frequently centers on how to overcome, transform, or minimize the influence of feelings. Emotions are rarely viewed as the positive key for unlocking stalemates or the catalyst for freeing up “stuck” communities. Over the last two decades of consulting in congregations, teaching in the academy, and leading antiracism/multicultural workshops, I have witnessed the power of paying attention to my own emotions, naming them aloud, and inviting others to do the same. My experience is that, with well-articulated guidelines for engaging differences that include paying attention to different feelings, even individuals who are most unable to hear one another usually welcome the opportunity to bring all of who they are to the table: their cognitive, behavioral, and affective selves.

Over time, I have begun to see this movement of being fully present as consisting of three types of transparency. Systems psychologist, organizational consultant, and clinical researcher David Kantor in *Reading the Room: Group Dynamics for Coaches and Leaders* (Jossey-Bass, 2012) discusses three communication domains: meaning, power, and affect. Usually, when people indicate the desire for more transparent leadership, they mean that leaders should not have hidden goals or motives. This conversation is often focused on making explicit any underlying, hidden assumptions and the value of such clarity for all parties. I would label this desire for openness *cognitive transparency*—that is, openness about what people are thinking and planning.

A second type of clarity and candor that healthy communities need might be called *power transparency*. Power transparency is achieved by making decisions publicly and as collaboratively as possible. It occurs when people know who is making decisions that affect them and how those decisions are being made. Ideally, members of the community also participate in making those decisions that have an impact on them.

Rarely do people express a desire to include the clear and open communication of emotions or “affect” in conversations about transparency. And yet, it has been my experience that when leaders do not recognize their own feelings or hide their feelings from other staff members, coworkers, volunteers, parishioners, or clients, the waters get even murkier than when assumptions, goals, and rationales are hidden or unexplained. In fact, confusion or obstruction happens more rapidly when feelings are hidden or opaque than when cognitive assumptions are concealed or ideas are unclear. Furthermore, the theory and practices that most groups employ in exposing assumptions and goals is much more developed and accessible than the theory and practice of articulating emotions and examining how they impact our relationships and our work. Being open about one’s emotions and inviting others to do the same fosters *affective transparency*.

The articles that follow offer different inroads to affective transparency and *affective competence* (using one’s feelings to learn about ourselves and others and to name and navigate complex relational interactions).

Leanna K. Fuller argues that “anxiety triggered by encounters with difference” lies at the root of conflict in communities. In reflecting theologically on conflict and the emotions that accompany it, she posits that acknowledged vulnerability is the key to creating healthy communities, because vulnerability “fosters connection rather than reactive needs for sameness or emotional distancing.” She goes on to suggest that leaders should acknowledge the differences of thought and feelings within a group and “stay in touch” with all parts of the community, all the while acknowledging their own feelings and thoughts. She concludes by proposing concrete strategies for

leaders and congregations that struggle to navigate anxiety and difference in their midst.

Sara Shisler Goff articulates a specifically spiritual component of the work of affective competence. She discusses the benefits for churches that explore the relationship between feelings and spirituality, and the dangers in that investigation. Goff suggests that churches are “uniquely situated and equipped to teach affective competence in their particular communities and in the wider communities of which they are a part.”

Carson E. Reed reviews the contributions of pioneers in the study of emotions and leadership such as Claire E. Ashton-James and Neal M. Ashkanasy (Affective Events Theory), as well as Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, and their predecessors, Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer (emotional intelligence). He then brings transformational leadership theory into conversation with homiletic theory to reflect on preaching as an act of affective leadership. He cites the Apostle Paul and Augustine to illustrate how affective rhetoric transforms an audience or a congregation. “The attentive pastor,” he asserts “embraces his or her emotion, practices an awareness of the systemic nature of emotional dynamics, and seeks greater facility in managing both negative and positive affect within the community. Such leadership fosters transformation in the community.”

Sandra F. Selby addresses compassion fatigue in professionals who work with trauma survivors, whose affective responses include demoralization, depression, and despair. Building on her own research and that of Laura Pearlman, Kayla Saakvitne, and others, Selby argues that resilience is “relationship-based” and centers on meaning-making, which is at the core of most religious belief systems. She posits that a belief system per se does not lead to increased compassion satisfaction and reduced compassion fatigue. Rather, concrete spiritual practices, such as meditation and storytelling, especially when engaged in community, lead to resilience. She highlights the importance of Holy Saturday as a place to dwell between the death of Good Friday and the resurrection/new life of Easter, and as a time to bear witness to, as-yet, unresolved suffering.

Lynda Z. Tyson begins with two provocative questions: What might we be missing by overlooking human emotions in Scripture interpretation? and How might the feelings of biblical characters be employed to teach affective competence in contexts of religious leadership? Using the story of Ruth, she argues that human feelings are integral to matters of theology, identity, and leadership decision-making. Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, she believes, are compelled by a range of feelings “to make the decisions and take the leadership actions they do.” For this reason, studying the portrayal of feelings in biblical narratives “can be used effectively in religious leadership education to draw out students’ feelings through theological reflection.” After demonstrating this process of leadership education using the story of Ruth, Tyson offers four other biblical passages for teaching leadership.

As you read the articles in this edition of the journal, I hope you will notice your own feelings as you encounter these authors, accepting the challenge to see the ways emotions are an integral part of understanding the world and bringing about change. As leaders, and people who influence and teach others to lead, the authors of this volume invite you to give equal value to the affective, cognitive, and power dimensions of interactions between individuals and within groups. With this goal in mind, you will grow in your overall capacity as a leader and have the opportunity to be more transparent and collaborative in the ways you lead.

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