

Archival workers co-create knowledge and value with the collections, subjects, creators, donors, users, and communities with which they work. Archival labor thus becomes a tool in people's historical "process of ongoing change, be it incremental or structural."<sup>41</sup> Once the baggage of professionalism is released, I believe we can advance the methods and ideas that make archives a crucial apparatus of democracy, public history, and public memory, and attend to the importance of archival labor and archival workers within processes of knowledge creation.

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## Feeling What We Teach: Mitigating the Emotional Labor Slide in Affect-Based Instruction

by Anastasia Armendariz

One of my major and most cherished responsibilities in my work with rare books, community archives, and other facets of special collections is teaching primary-source-centered classes for undergraduate students. This piece centers the emotional needs of special collections practitioners who serve as instructors with primary sources, especially as we work to support affective learner responses to the historic materials in our care. To ground us in our terms, "affect theory" as defined by Marika Cifor is a relational "force" that supports fully felt reactions to materials, ideas, or experiences.<sup>42</sup> This is prioritized in the context of the tendency to frame intellectual mastery of content as the primary metric for learning.

Cifor applied affect theory to archival practice. I initially explored how affect theory might serve primary source instruction in a spring 2022 poster session, "The Personal is Primary: Affect Theory in Primary Source Instruction." I found that "the perspectives and positions represented in primary sources are ideal entry points to the relationship building that affect theory invites."<sup>43</sup> Primary source instruction through the lens of affect theory lends itself to reflective practice. Special collections instructors are ready to adapt classroom activities or connect their examples in response to student interests and projects.<sup>44</sup> From planning to presentations to shepherding direct

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41. Grele, "Whose Public?," 47.

42. Marika Cifor, "Affecting Relations: Introducing Affect theory to Archival Discourse," *Archival Science* 16 (2016): 8. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9261-5>.

43. Anastasia Armendariz, "The Personal is Primary: Affect Theory in Primary Source Instruction" (Poster, Innovations in Teaching and Learning Conference, University of Maryland, College Park, May 11, 2022).

44. Elizabeth Galoozis, "Affective Aspects of Instruction Librarians' Decisions to Adopt New Teaching Practices: Laying the Groundwork for Incremental Change," *C&RL* 80, no. 7 (2019): 1042. <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.80.7.1036>.

engagement with materials to follow-up meetings with students, we often provide just as much, if not more, space for varied feelings and reactions (affect) as we do for content learned (knowledge).<sup>45</sup>

I taught primary-source-literacy-focused classes for first-year undergraduate students as a graduate assistant during my MLIS, and assisted with special collections instruction sessions as an undergraduate and then graduate student. The full-time role I began in summer 2022 marked my first opportunity to introduce undergraduate students to primary historic collections as lead instructor. As instructors in special collections classrooms curate historic primary source materials for these sessions, we relate materials to each other, to course learning outcomes, and to the people who encounter them.<sup>46</sup> We also bring our own personal and intellectual contexts into relationship with our collections. Extending beyond job descriptions that may include the preservation and security of collections materials, instructors assume affective labor as we become responsible for the curation and stewardship of the wide array of responses these materials may elicit in learners.<sup>47</sup> Not just the materials themselves. Collections originating from underrepresented or marginalized communities, outdated and actively harmful language, and even personal materials deserve both contextualization and crafted space for emotional processing and even separation. This preparation goes well beyond a crash course in best practices for handling archival materials as physical objects.

While I thoroughly enjoy instruction and outreach and often find sessions energizing, the number and type of instruction sessions requested do not always positively correlate to capacity for them. Given this, affective labor can turn to emotional labor as library instructors experience dissonance between stewardship of the sessions and our own internal and even physical states.<sup>48</sup> I use “emotional labor” to refer to managing the emotions of others, as well as one’s own emotional state, as part of one’s professional work.<sup>49</sup> This involves active adaptation of one’s emotional state to serve others and/or to suit the given professional context.

For instance, there may be external, as well as internal, pressure to adapt a cheery sort of teacher persona, or to put extra energy into efforts to “spark curiosity” in

45. Melissa Wong, “The Emotional Labor of Teaching,” LIS Pedagogy Chat, December 2, 2022, [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rM\\_Tc3JCqR33mp\\_9bfXaXdB6\\_9B6qOBFp5PwxJ9Un-w/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rM_Tc3JCqR33mp_9bfXaXdB6_9B6qOBFp5PwxJ9Un-w/edit).

46. Todd Samuelson and Cait Coker, “Mind the Gap: Integrating Special Collections Teaching,” *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 14, no. 1 (January 2014): 58., <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2013.0041>.

47. Magia Krause, “Learning in the Archives: A Report on Instructional Practices,” *Journal of Archival Organization* 14, no. 1 (2008): 253, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332740802533263>.

48. Wong, “The Emotional Labor of Teaching.”

49. Wong, “The Emotional Labor of Teaching.”

undergraduate learners.<sup>50</sup> Even if one is on the final instruction session of a long day, is in an understaffed department, or is having a difficult time personally. In special collections settings, these efforts can be compounded with external or even internal motivation to “inculcate wonder” and “make history real” for students. In libraries where one-shot instruction sessions reign, all of this might be expected in less than an hour. Reflective practice hinges on making as much space for reactions—ranging from concern, to celebration, to indifference (affect)—as for course-related content learned (knowledge).<sup>51</sup> It is a disservice to our students, our profession, and ultimately ourselves if we do not fight for that same space for ourselves.

To discuss strategies to support this effort, I acknowledge that the contexts that produce the challenges to this effort also make boundary-setting extraordinarily difficult. This established, I identified five areas of focus to mitigate the emotional labor slide in special collections primary source instruction. They are: setting policy, saying no, being your own best advisor, honesty, and community.

Formulating and sharing instruction policies builds or maintains momentum in an instruction program, regardless of the age or size of the program. While requiring an initial lift in terms of compiling and sharing content, documentation provides essential boundaries I reference and enforce to limit instruction sessions. Or, to put it another way, to ensure instruction requests are manageable within limits I and any colleagues have set. And, that instruction is high quality without sacrificing the quality of our working lives. Such policies ensure that instruction remains high quality without sacrificing the quality of our working lives. Policies might include requirements for two weeks’ notice for instruction sessions, or requiring input from disciplinary faculty on materials to be pulled for a new special collections class visit.<sup>52</sup> Documentation might live in a LibGuide or on your repository’s website so that it can be readily referenced, updated, and shared amongst library colleagues and professors requesting instruction sessions.

Documentation will assist with the next action area, “Saying no.” I find that it is easier for me to reference a headway policy as a reason for holding off on a session with a distinguished visiting professor until later in the academic year. As the information profession and affective labor are both historically feminized, this is by no means

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50. Amy Gore and Glen Koelling, “Embodied Learning in a Digital Age: Collaborative Undergraduate Instruction in Material Archives and Special Collections.” *Pedagogy* 20 no. 3 (October 2020): 456, <https://doi.org/10.1215/15314200-8544521>.

51. Armendariz, “The Personal is Primary: Affect Theory in Primary Source Instruction.”

52. In acknowledgement that special collections practitioners hold teaching and even faculty status, I follow the phrasing of “disciplinary faculty” from McCartin and Wright-Mair’s “Manifestations of Deference Behavior in Teaching-focused Academic Librarians” *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 48, no. 6 (November 2022): 2 to refer to non-special collections academics.

easy.<sup>53</sup> This is all too often compounded by lived factors including minimal disability accommodations, racism, and toxic work environments.

Given external and even internal pressures to take on an extra class, to accommodate a last-minute schedule date, to make an extra run to off-site storage for materials, I find perspective from community archivist and filmmaker C. Diaz helpful when a straight-up “no” feels extra difficult. Diaz encourages framing “no’s” as ones for a day, a week, even a few months.<sup>54</sup> Not only will such a “no” allow reclamation of your necessary time and energy, but it can also align with broader intent: to engage learners in critical and even creative consideration of primary source materials, with the potential for broader personal and scholarly reflective application.

I personally am much more ready to support colleagues in honoring their boundaries, whether a “no” or a “later,” than I do for myself. The next strategy centers on this: “Being your own best advisor.” It demands we grant ourselves the care we prioritize practicing on behalf of others. Following that advice, taking that space for ourselves, that we remind others is good and necessary demands that we not only trust our own instincts but allow them to apply to ourselves.

Another area hinges on honesty. Honesty relates to collections content, and acknowledgement of anything from limited and exclusionary collecting scopes to biased descriptions that shape interactions with the alternately challenging and thrilling materials we share. Honesty involves sharing about our own contexts as well. With some discernment about audiences, with students honesty might look like: “I am feeling this 8:00 a.m. session, and you may be, too. I appreciate your being here, we’re in this together, and I hope the line for the coffee shop isn’t too long after this.” With disciplinary faculty, an honest statement such as, “Hello, we are still short an instructor this semester. Thank you in advance for getting your special collections teaching requests in early,” invites professors to understand your limitations, as well as allows the opportunity to support each other. This might be especially effective if you are also able to reference the instruction scheduling policies you have worked to set. This vulnerability, framed around your continued ability to support teaching and learning, can even develop advocates for you and special collections in other areas of the university.

To turn to the final area, personal communities and priorities might help with perspective on professional contexts. Connecting with professional communities, where

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53. Johanna Oksala. “Affective Labor and Feminist Politics,” *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 41, no. 2 (2016): 285; Lisa Sloniowski. “Affective Labor, Resistance, and the Academic Librarian,” *Library Trends* 64, no. 4 (Spring 2016): 655, 659, <http://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2016.0013>.

54. C. Diaz, “Intentional Partnerships & Collaborations.” (Workshop, Safeguarding LA Community Histories, CSU Northridge University Library, May 11, 2023).

there may be individuals on the other side of the situation you find yourself in, can also help you ideate tactical ways forward, back, or even sideways. The RBMS annual conference is one avenue for this. A more informal and regular community such as TPS (Teaching with Primary Sources) Collective is another avenue for idea-sharing and connection. Building supportive environments for affective learner responses to the materials in our care can provide frameworks for—but should never come at the cost of—our own needs as people, not simply as primary source instructors.

These five areas of communication and reflexive practice could bring a few different results. One powerful outcome is greater ability to forge the very senses of supported connection for ourselves as special collections instructors that we seek to establish for students encountering primary source materials. Such practice could also serve as a model for students to incorporate affective lenses to their own research and learning. Another possibility that might emerge is a clear recognition of one's own need to step back from the work as it stands. If the answer to the question of the work being sustainable as-is, is a "no," follow-up focuses might include finding, reestablishing, or connecting with much-needed support networks.

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## Artists' Books and Critical Literacy Pedagogy: Kara Walker's *Freedom: a Fable*

by Sam Regal

### Introduction

Centered within library instruction, Kara Walker's *Freedom: a Fable: A Curious Interpretation of the Wit of a Negress in Troubled Times* (*Freedom: a Fable*) activates students' interdisciplinary engagement and deeply enriches their understanding and appreciation of Black American identity through an art historical lens. The artwork engages with the history of the silhouette form in America and its complex relationship to racial identity and expression, recalling the works of Auguste Edouart (1789–1861) and formerly enslaved silhouette artist Moses Williams (1777–c.1852), and functions as challenging indictment of racism, human subjugation, and flattening by intervening upon the slave narrative tradition through the work's formal elements.<sup>55</sup> In instruction, *Freedom: a Fable* encourages students toward critical engagement with the visual narrative form and challenges held notions about Black American history, identity, and representation.

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55. The author acknowledges the work of Elissa Watters; while it ostensibly covers the same subjects, this essay predates Watters' publication on *Freedom: a Fable*. See *Abstracts 2024: CAA 112th Annual Conference*. New York: College Art Association, 2024: 88.