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Author(s): Sue Campbell

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Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression

SUE CAMPBELL

My intent is to bring a key group of critical terms associated with the emotions—bitterness, sentimentality, and emotionality—to greater feminist attention. These terms are used to characterize emoters on the basis of how we express ourselves, and they characterize us in ways that we need no longer be taken seriously. I analyze the ways in which these terms of emotional dismissal can be put to powerful political use.

It was my experience that when confronted with a feminist complaint that I did not agree with (typically because I did not understand it) I attempted to disprove the validity of the complaint. . . . I would contend that offense required two conditions: one being an event of potential offense and the other being a sensitivity to the event. This, in fact, seems to be true. My argument was made faulty, however, through a belief that women (especially feminists) were drastically oversensitive. (student—from an exam answer)

I. INTRODUCTION

The intent of this paper is to bring a key group of critical terms associated with the emotions—bitterness, sentimentality, and emotionality—to greater feminist attention. In order to give a context to my analysis, I first briefly sketch the progress of feminist work on theory of emotions. Then, using bitterness as a focus, I outline a theory of emotions that has many continuities with other feminist accounts and that makes promising sense of the political use of the terms just mentioned. I place sentimentality and emotionality, which are more clearly gendered in their use than bitterness, within this account.

Although any of the three terms in which I have an interest can characterize a single expressive act, they are more often used as trait words that characterize

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emoters on the basis of how we express ourselves, and they often characterize us in ways that imply that we need no longer be taken seriously. To indicate their use, I call bitterness, sentimentality, and emotionality “diseases of the affections.” They suggest that on the basis of the way someone expresses her feelings, her emotional nature is unhealthy and not, for instance, that she’s simply acted or overreacted in inappropriate ways on some occasions. Perhaps sometimes an individual deserves the disregard that comes with being characterized as bitter or sentimental; my concern, however, is in isolating the strategic political use of these terms.

II. FEMINIST ACCOUNTS OF EMOTION

Feminist analyses of emotion have contained, it seems to me, a quartet of themes that address a common and obvious concern, the dismissability of women, which is also my concern in what follows. I locate my interest in a particular type of dismissability by situating myself with respect to other feminist theorists. The four themes are as follows:

1. Feminist philosophers, like most contemporary theorists, reject a clear separation between emotion and cognition as types of informative environmental responses. This rejection is a premise rather than a conclusion to their theories. Its status as a premise has seemed warranted by the identification of women as the devalued partner of a historical dichotomy whose terms have helped to mold the feminine and masculine as unequal complements. With other philosophers, then, feminists propose an exploratory rejection of the emotion/reason dichotomy and affirm “the rehabilitation of the emotions, taking for granted that emotions are not irrational feelings, disturbances or responses to disturbances” (Rorty 1980, 5). Exactly what the role of feelings is in our psychological ontology is not settled by the rejection of the dogma that emotional response is irrational. I shall offer a proposal for the role of emotions in the next section (“Bitterness and the Politics of Expression”) that I believe captures the full political force of emotional dismissal.

2. There have been many articles that advocate the right of women to claim anger with its specific judgments of injustice, judgments that carry the power of moral authority. Audre Lorde has written powerfully of the necessity of facing the anger of women of Color and of all women facing their own angers (Lorde 1984). Elizabeth Spelman, in “Anger and Insubordination,” translates Aristotle as saying that “[anyone] who does not get angry when there is reason to be angry, or does not get angry in the right way at the right time and with the right people, is a dolt” (Spelman 1989, 263). I shall suggest that anger is a more politically fragile achievement than many theorists suppose.

3. Naomi Scheman (1980), Alison Jaggar (1989), and Marilyn Frye (1983), among others, have attacked the myths that our emotional experience is private and that it is epistemically privileged. These myths encourage the false

view that we could maintain a well-defined emotional life independent of the power of others to interpret our expressive behavior. Marilyn Frye, in "A Note on Anger," refers to the importance of social "uptake" to the success of emotions. To illustrate uptake, a concept I adopt in this paper, Frye relates the story of a woman who snapped at a gas station attendant who was monkeying with a carburetor the woman had gone to some trouble to adjust: "He became very agitated and yelled at her, calling her a crazy bitch. . . . He changed the subject—from the matter of his actions and the carburetor to the matter of her character and sanity. He did not give her anger uptake" (Frye 1983, 89). One rather strong way of redescribing this incident is to say that the woman was not allowed to be angry rather than nutty. Do our interpreters have this much power? I will display a certain mechanism that interpreters use to block the success of expression.

4. Finally, in recent work by Sandra Bartky (1990) on shame (foreshadowed, to some extent, by Frye's work on the patterns of anger), there is a more sustained examination of the link between emotion and cognition, at present usually established by the inclusion of a judgment in the emotional experience. The judgment that someone has wronged you, for example, gives the experience of anger its information content, and the judgment, hence the emotion, is assessable for its rationality. Bartky argues instead, using the example of women's shame characterized as a "pervasive sense of personal inadequacy," that the judgment or belief that one is inferior need be no part of gendered shame which is rather a response to the "condition of dishonor" "which is women's lot in a sexist society" (Bartky 1990, 85). She argues that emotions can directly disclose "how one is doing and how one is faring" in the world (Heidegger as quoted in Bartky 1990, 83), and can uncloak a pattern to our experience that is not captured by our judgments, and may even conflict with them. By implication, she calls into question whether the language of rationality, applied to the emotions, is not at least an impoverished, at most a politically loaded, level of normative assessment. If I, with others in my position, enact shame in many of my encounters, while judging sincerely that I have nothing of which to be ashamed, this mixed response may indicate something important about the duplicitous nature of my social environment. My shame may be subtly encouraged by those who overtly deny that I have any reason for it. In addition to feeling shame, I may then as well be held responsible for inconsistent attitudes toward myself when, in fact, I am being sent a double message about my worth. I will share this concern about rationality as it intersects with concerns about individual accountability for the kind of emotional ill health suggested by such characterizations as sentimental or bitter.

What is at the core of the feminist interests outlined and what accounts for their concentration on authority—the potential authority of our anger, the authority of others to interpret us, and the authority of our own judgments and

experience—is that the association of the feminine with feeling has been a long-standing historical ground on which to dismiss women. But dismiss in what way? I choose the term ‘being dismissed’ to capture the nuance of being told to leave the room before a conversation starts or being treated like a piece of furniture while it is going on. I shall regard being dismissed as when what we do or say, as assessed by what we would have described as our intentions in that situation, is either not taken seriously or not regarded at all in the context in which it is meant to have its effect. This definition is a counterfactual roughing-in of a kind of situation where the power of interpreters to help determine the situation may render our intentions unrecoverable and opaque. Put more simply, if no one takes my anger seriously by making any attempt to account for his or her behavior or to change it, but, instead, characterizes me as upset and oversensitive, I may be unsure, in retrospect, of how best to describe my behavior. I am interested in a particularly duplicitous kind of dismissal that does not dismiss women for having emotions, but characterizes our emotional lives as unhealthy, attempting to limit our ways of acting in the world, and, consequently, our effects on the world.

I now wish, through an examination of bitterness, to draw out some of the political consequences of a theory of feelings which I have defended in detail elsewhere (Campbell 1992). This theory has continuities with the feminist work described and is similarly motivated by a concern with mechanisms of dismissal. It has, however, a much stronger focus on the concept of expression. I define expression as the public articulation or discrimination of our psychological lives through language and behavior. Expression, on this definition, helps form or individuate our psychological states and does not just reveal or disclose them to others. The contrast between forming and revealing will become clearer in the section following. If, in expressing anger or bitterness to you, I were simply revealing my attitudes, your responses would make no difference to whether I was angry or bitter. I shall argue that for bitterness, this is not the case, hoping that a generalization of the point will then seem plausible. I believe that attention to expression can give us insight into some prominent mechanisms of dismissal, for a process account of expression raises questions about the conditions under which our psychological states can be successfully formed or discriminated and how much control we can exercise over these circumstances.¹

III. BITTERNESS AND THE POLITICS OF EXPRESSION

The accusation of bitterness implicitly acknowledges that a great many people have never been granted the social goods likely to lead to the luxury of cultivating sympathetic emotional lives. Bitterness does not always involve gender as one of salient determinants of who is most likely to be accused. The angry disadvantaged of a society—visible minorities, aboriginals, the working

class, the disabled, the ill, the divorced, and the old—are all targets of this critique. I wish to discuss bitterness to focus the role of uptake in emotional experience and the relation of uptake to accountability for expressive failure. I use, as counterpoint, Audre Lorde's speeches on anger and Lynne McFall's "What's Wrong With Bitterness?" (1991), a so far lonely contribution to this particular diagnosis of emotional ill health.

McFall initially defines bitterness as "a refusal to forgive and forget. It is to maintain a vivid sense of the wrongs one has been done, to recite one's angry litany of loss long past the time others may care to listen or sympathize. 'You're so bitter' is condemnation, never praise . . . designed to silence the sufferer" (McFall 1991, 146). In "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" (1984a) and "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred, and Anger" (1984b), Audre Lorde does not mention bitterness. She does, however, recite a litany of angers fueled by racist incidents neither forgotten nor forgiven. She speaks of "a symphony of anger" (1984a, 129), "a molten pond" and "[a] net of rage" (1984b, 145), the weight of her anger, her fear of it, her "sisters of Color who . . . tremble their rage under harness" (1984a, 127), the energy of her anger, her use of it, and the reasons for it: "Something's going on here I do not understand, but I will never forget it. Her eyes. The flared nostrils. The hate" (Lorde 1984b, 148). "I will never forget" is a commitment, a declaration of intent, and sometimes a threat—never simply a prediction.

Is Lorde angry or bitter? What makes the difference? Who has the authority to make the designation? And what might their motives be? I shall assume, I hope uncontentiously, that an expression of bitterness begins its life at some point as intended anger. I am interested in how bitterness distorts intended anger, how it fossilizes this anger. McFall's definition of bitterness contains a strong focus on the communicative nature of the encounter. Bitterness seems to be a particular mode of expression—the recounting of incidents of injury—only in a certain context of interpretation—one in which people no longer care to listen. Both the mode of expression and the failure of uptake combine to form bitterness. We do not typically call people holding bombs bitter. They are expressing their anger so forcefully that we cannot afford not to give them our attention. Further, people whose anger receives uptake are not, on that occasion at least, bitter. They are, instead, angry or even righteous.

The collaboration of a certain mode of expression (recounting of injury) with a certain mode of response (failure to listen) forms bitterness. Although if we encounter this mode of response often enough, we may call ourselves bitter, even privately and silently bitter, it is, at least, not easy to define bitterness apart from the public conditions of its formation: the performance of actions received in a particular way. However, "You're just bitter" is not a designation that characterizes mutual failure in a communicative situation. It is rather a condemnation of one of the people in that situation, the person who

expresses what they had, at some point, intended as anger through a recounting of incidents to those who no longer care to listen.

In assessing the potential political force of an accusation of bitterness, then, we must keep in mind the collaboration of interpreters at some point in the formation of bitterness. Bitterness is more often publicly formed rather than privately formed before being revealed to others. One way to characterize this collaboration is that the refusal to forgive and forget is often related to the failure of others to listen and act. The failure of others to listen may actually determine that the form of the expression counts as a refusal, as, for example, my intended reluctance to do something may be read as a form of stubbornness in any situation where people are unwilling to understand the reasons for my nonparticipation. And having noted the collaboration of interpreters in the public formation of bitterness, we must also understand the strategy of calling someone bitter, and how, in particular, this criticism works against those most likely to be accused.

By placing responsibility on the expresser for the failure of a communicative encounter, the challenge of bitterness both ignores the collaboration of the interpreter and, significantly, lessens her responsibility for continuing the encounter. The not caring or no longer caring to listen, which helps determine what is a case of bitterness, becomes a reason or excuse for not listening through a critique of the mode of expression: "I speak out of direct and particular anger at an academic conference, and a white woman says, 'Tell me how you feel but don't say it too harshly or I cannot hear you.' But is it my manner that keeps her from hearing, or the threat of a message that her life may change?" (Lorde 1984a, 125) The interpreter may, as Lorde's critic does, defend her withdrawal by suggesting that the same feelings could be formed in quite a different manner, that Lorde could express anger while doing nothing harsh, and that this is a reasonable condition of the interpreter's continued participation. But certain modes of expression may, of course, be necessary for something to count as anger.

The further obvious strategic force to "You're so bitter" is to block the strategy of anger by both shifting attention away from blameworthy behavior to the mode of expressing blame and by shifting the responsibility from the people who could do something about the blameworthy behavior to the expresser herself, who is now meant to account for *her* behavior. The expresser cannot account for or defend her intended anger, however, because her interpreters are no longer listening. "You're so bitter" is meant to be not challenging but silencing.

We are left with the following problem: Should we ever, for ourselves or others, accept the shift in accusation or responsibility that comes with the critique of bitterness, given both the collaboration of interpreters in the formation of this response, and the mechanism of silencing that is the goal of the critique? We can only generalize so far; we all know individuals in positions

of exceptional privilege who are angry at their lot, and it is the rightful burden of the privileged to make a strong case that their dissatisfactions are worth the time and energy of others. I think, however, that for most people, there is good reason to resist the shift. My concern diverges here from McFall's and does so over our different assessments of the appropriateness of the language of rationality to emotional response.

While recognizing that accusations of bitterness are designed to silence and ought, often, to be politically resisted, McFall's focus is not on whether the criticism of bitterness is itself justified. Her question is rather: In what circumstances are we justified in being and staying bitter? McFall sets two questions about an emotional attitude: "What are the facts to which it is a response?" and "Is this attitude a rational response to those facts?" (McFall 1991, 146) My concern, phrased in a general way, is that calculating rationality may put responsibility on the individual for her attitudes or actions without offering ways of assessing that individual's situation against the political options of others. If, as I believe to be the case, assessments of rationality are connected most deeply to questions of intelligible agency, what is not within my power to affect may not provide a rational ground for my actions or responses. That others have different powers will not provide a rationale for my acting in a certain way in my situation.

What can a woman of Color in america legitimately hope for?

Women of Color in america have grown up within a symphony of anger, at being silenced, at being unchosen, at knowing that when we survive, it is in spite of a world that takes for granted our lack of humanness, and which hates our very existence outside of its service. (Lorde 1984a, 129)

McFall considers bitterness a rational response to the frustration of important and legitimate hopes where a hope is not legitimate if it is patently false, that is, extremely unlikely to be realized. Once the critique of bitterness is given legitimacy—once we say we are tired of this angry litany and you are bitter, it shifts the burden of proof onto you to defend the legitimacy of your hopes. But is it legitimate for you to hope for a sort of treatment you realize you will never get, and who has the authority to decide which hopes are legitimate? If the legitimacy of a hope is connected to the likelihood of its realization, then many of the frustrated hopes that lead to the intended anger characterized as bitterness may get categorized as illegitimate hopes. For this reason, we are better off in blocking the criticism than in internalizing this description of our attitude and trying to defend our bitterness, and we should block this especially for people most susceptible to the criticism of bitterness, for this is where it does its most pernicious work.

The criticism of bitterness is most powerful against people whose resources for expressing anger are limited to recounting injury in the hope that others

will listen, people who are not in a position to influence politicians, bring lawsuits, make threats, or otherwise express anger irresistibly. The criticism works to maintain this impoverishment of resources because once a group is dismissed as bitter, others feel under little obligation to work for their empowerment. The particulars of the critique also have their greatest efficacy against the most disempowered. The refusal to forgive is the refusal to break the chain of consequences instituted by another's actions. The bitter are accused of blocking the goodwill that would be exercised toward them if they were not bitter, and thus of further disadvantaging the group to which they belong: "When women of Color speak out of the anger that laces so many of our contacts with white women, we are often told that we are 'creating a mood of hopelessness,' 'preventing white women from getting past guilt' or 'standing in the way of trusting communication and action'" (Lorde 1984a, 131-32). Both judgment and motives in bringing complaint are thus called into question, and this may lead to a state of paralyzing political doubt. Finally, the accusation of bitterness not only refuses to grant authority to judgments of wrongdoing but also refuses to grant authority to what counts for others as significant memory. Those most likely to be called bitter, moreover, belong to groups that already have the least support and validation for their personal memories and group history, groups for whom actively not forgetting may be the only way to establish a sense of history. The accusation of bitterness may further undermine the struggle for group memory by failing again to provide the uptake that leaves the recounting of incidents established as public record.

Lorde's speeches are angry and not bitter, but I hope my discussion has given some indication of the political fragility of this collaborative achievement. The criticism of bitterness is a powerful political tool that can be used to persuade people that the importance of how they view their lives, as marked by what is recalled and recounted as significant, is of dismissable interest to others. Anyone who speaks from and for an oppressed group can expect to encounter the criticism at its most brutally political. Emma LaRoque, in the preface to an anthology of Native Canadian women's writings, speaks of being a Native author before the days when what Natives had to say about their own lives secured any uptake:

The interplay between audience reception and publishing cannot be minimized. As one of those earlier Native writers, I experienced and studied what might be called the Native-voice/white-audience dynamic. The interactions were often poignant. On another level, we were again rendered voiceless no matter how articulate we were. Apparently, unable to understand or accept the truth of our experience and perceptions, many white audiences, journalists, and critics resorted to racist techniques of psychologically labelling and blaming us. We

were psychologized as “bitter,” which was equated with emotional incapacitation, and once thus dismissed we did not have to be taken seriously. (LaRoque 1990, xvi-xvii)

Whether the members of subordinate groups can reclaim anger, whether, in particular, they can get angry in the right way at the right time to the right people so that what they are expressing is anger, does not depend solely on the actions of these individuals. Viewing the feminist fight for anger in the light of feminist insights about the crucial role of uptake in emotional encounters suggests that in the fight for situations in which our responses are taken seriously and have efficacy, we must deal with the techniques of interpretive dismissal as much as with our own reluctance to get angry. We may try to be angry through our actions and simply not succeed. The very same actions may succeed as angry actions in a different interpretive context.

We require a theory of affect that has a strong focus on the communicative nature of emotional encounters, one that does not regard the failures and achievements of expression as independent of an interpretive requirement. We further require a theory that has something to say about how resources for securing uptake can be unequally distributed so as to reinforce existing patterns of oppression, and how particular emotive criticisms can also serve this political goal.

I propose the following framework for understanding the public formation of feelings:

1. The expression of feeling has an important public role. When someone does something that we call “expressing a feeling,” she is attempting to articulate or communicate the significance of some occasion or set of occasions within the context of how she views her life.² And when we take someone to be expressing a feeling, this is exactly what we take her to be doing. If the role feelings play in our group life is that of conveying what’s important to someone, emotive criticism can be seen to be as effective and devastating as it usually, in fact, is.

2. The articulation of significance is possible, and only possible, through some use of such socially acquired resources as language, action, and gesture, and various feelings may involve all or any of these. Our resources for expressing feelings are remarkably diverse. I can express my affection for you by calling you a daisy, buying you beer, stroking your knee, or in any manner of more idiosyncratic ways. I can express my anger by recounting injuries or setting off a bomb.

3. The importance of locating the role of feelings as the attempt to articulate, form, or individuate a certain kind of *meaning* or *significance* is that such an account requires that our expressions of feeling be interpretable, thus, (a) that we have an adequate range of resources to make clear the significance of things to us and (b) that we secure uptake or response frequently enough that this

meaning can actually be formed or individuated, even for ourselves, in ways that neither distort our intentions nor leave them opaque. Frye concludes her discussion of uptake by saying that all that is left of the anger is an individual expression, although she does not say of what. But "Of what?" is an important question. On my view, if someone consistently fails to secure uptake for the feelings that get formed only through acts of expression, it cannot be clear even to that person what she or he is feeling, and many people's emotional lives are, in fact, dominated by a confusion that is an inevitable consequence of persistent lack of uptake. Is the bitter person still angry? Given the power of an interpretive component, I do not believe this question has an easy or, perhaps, even a precise answer. A way to summarize this commitment to uptake is to say that the individuation of feeling is collaborative.

There are, as I hope to have indicated through analyzing bitterness, important political consequences to the account I have sketched. As feelings are formed through expression, people can exercise restrictive control over our feelings through controlling our acts of expression and thus dismiss or diminish the possibilities for finding or creating significance in our lives. They can do so in at least two ways, corresponding to the conditions for successful expression in point 3 above: (a) There may be an unequal distribution of the social resources that we use to give form to our feelings. It's important to remember that opportunities for action are such a resource. For example, if I am so moved by the plight of the Tin Man that I wish to leave for Oz immediately, and I do not have the opportunity to take this action, my compassion cannot take a particular form. It may become a kind of mere sentimental wishfulness; b) people have considerable power as interpreters of our acts of expression and may interpret these acts restrictively.

Diagnoses of bitterness—and, as I shall argue below, sentimentality and emotionality—as a sort of persistent critical uptake to emotional expression seem to serve both of the above purposes at once. They are complex attributions that both depend on and encourage a gendered and/or otherwise unequal distribution of expressive resources. They are used to interpret our expressions narrowly and critically as always either being on the edge of excess, or already excessive; they are attempts to limit the range of our expressive acts and to destroy our confidence in the possible success of those acts. Further, bitterness, sentimentality, and emotionality disguise their own operation by suggesting that expressive failure lies with the individual. If the individuation of feeling, however, is a collaborative undertaking, the hypothesis that expressive failure is the responsibility of the person who is trying to express herself ought to be made to bear the burden of proof.

IV. CO-OPTING GENDER: SENTIMENTALITY AND EMOTIONALITY

Kant described the women of his time as creatures of “many sympathetic sensations, good-heartedness and compassion,” as well as “very delicate feelings in regard to the least offence” (Kant as quoted in Mahowald 1983, 194). This assessment captures perfectly the sense that to have an emotional life as a woman, to be an ideal woman, in fact, is always already to be edging the excessive sensitivity that is a ground for dismissability. But many women have never been regarded as fit for the ideal which I will characterize as “the Kantian feminine,” an ideal of a woman formed by white race and upper-class privilege and applicable mainly to such women. I will refer to these women as “Kantian women.” As bitterness may be used to dismiss those who fall outside the Kantian feminine, diagnoses of sentimentality and emotionality may corset those who fall within it. I used bitterness to discuss the public, collaborative nature of individuating feeling and noted that bitterness has its greatest efficacy as criticism against those who have the fewest resources for expressing anger. Using the framework derived from this discussion, I will use sentimentality and emotionality to further show how strategies of interpretive dismissal can both play on and promote restrictions in the range of resources that we have for communicating and acting on what, for us, is of significance.

I begin by making some uncontentious remarks about gender, expressive resource distribution, and the link between expressive resources and diseases of the affections. My remark on gender is brief. Women are encouraged to express their gender partly through various forms of women’s work: for those of us under the sign of the Kantian feminine, this work is primarily nurturance that involves finding the lives of those close to us of great significance and thus, feeling for others. Men are encouraged to express their gender through men’s work, whatever form this may take. Among the many types of things we can express, we can express our gender.

Expression is the articulation of our psychological lives through various resources. I phrase it this way in order to raise questions of access. I have pointed out that feelings involve a wide range of resources for articulation. We can express the same kind of feeling in many ways. Arguably, the successful expression of feeling also requires a wide range of resources. For example, the successful expression of anger may require resources that can move others to effect change, and what resources are efficacious may vary with circumstances. The presence or absence of kinds of expressive resources also corresponds to gendered diseases of the affections, sentimentality and emotionality. That expressive resources are differentially distributed between women and men suggests that diseases of the affections are primarily a political category of criticism.

We can see this connection between resources and gender and expressive criticism if we limit ourselves, quite crudely, to involuntary but controllable

response,³ action, and language, as three broad categories of potentially expressive behavior and inquire into their historical relation to gender. We can see that Kantian women have been encouraged not to suppress involuntary response, but have, instead, been licensed and encouraged to express themselves by blushing, crying, smiling, and through a range of refined bodily and facial gesture. Their range of public action, however, has been limited, as has their access to public institutions that offer sophisticated expressive resources in the form both of participation within the institution (e.g., the art world) and in the powerful metaphorical discourse associated with the institution (e.g., the law, the military, athletics). Men have not been encouraged toward involuntary response, and many have been granted the access to actions and institutions denied to women.

The restriction of feminine resources has opened the way to criticisms of sentimentality and emotionality, both of which imply that a mode of expression is indicative of an unhealthy emotional life. *Emotionality* as an assessment of expression seems directly connected to involuntary response. Those women accused of it are thought to betray emotion through voice, gesture, or other bodily reactions, and the feminine behavior that is first encouraged is later interpreted as reactive and symptomatic rather than initiatory, deliberative, and significant. In addition, certain bodily responses, especially tears, can express a range of emotions from joy to rage. The difficulty will be in discovering which emotion is being expressed. I will discuss this in more detail below. *Sentimentality* seems directly connected to action as an expressive resource. Many feelings are expressed through action. Some feelings of great importance to the Kantian feminine—compassion and love, for example—arguably must be expressed through action to be taken as genuine. In a thoughtful article, Michael Tanner offers an analysis of sentimentality as involving action not appropriately governed by the nature of the occasion (Tanner 1976-77). To criticize someone, then, for sentimentality, should require that that person have the opportunity to act appropriately. I shall argue that the connection between sentimentality and the lack of occasion for appropriate action is very complex and affects precisely those emotions—compassion, for example—that require active expression to be genuine.

If the perception of bitterness dismisses what is of significance, accusations of sentimentality and emotionality control what can be of significance. I believe that sentimentality and emotionality require a slightly different framework of analysis than bitterness, which is more straightforwardly dismissive, requires. Like bitterness, sentimentality and emotionality may be used as criticisms of particular acts of expression or of the people who are expressing themselves. In general, like terms denoting virtues and vices (generous, courageous, licentious, etc.), they range both over acts and the character of the person performing these acts. Aristotle does not take up the virtues and vices of emotional expression, and, in the end, I think a virtue analysis is not

adequate for these terms, but it is helpful to regard them initially as something like virtue or vice terms. There are at least three advantages to regarding them in this way: (1) We may contemplate whether the use of these terms suggests that our ways of expression are excessive, defective, or just about right for meeting the objectives of our activities. In this case, the general description of the activity is the articulation of significance. (2) Terms for virtues and vices do not arise independently of what a community values, and so a virtue-based framework will encourage us to contemplate these terms in their critical political use. (3) The activity over which these terms range, expression, requires collaborative individuation for its success, but the terms are applied primarily to persons, and to the actions and moral characters of these persons. They are thus terms that can be easily used in the service of political manipulation. Like bitterness, they assign personal responsibility for the failures of public interaction and can be used to mystify the nature of this interaction and the social stake in its outcome. And, in fact, sentimentality and emotionality operate fairly duplicitously.

Consider:

It is generally agreed that there is something unwholesome about sentimentality: it would certainly be a mistake to think it is a virtue. But just what sentimentality is and why it is objectionable is somewhat of a mystery. (Jefferson 1983, 519)

It seems to be all but agreed that sentimentality is no virtue even if it is not, like cruelty or hypocrisy, intrinsically vicious. Something is wrong with sentimentality; the only question is, what is it that is wrong? . . . I will argue that there is nothing wrong with sentimentality. (Solomon 1990, 305)

These remarks call for some detective work about the nature of these critical terms. Sentimentality and emotionality are particularly interesting because of their doubled nature, their ambiguous status as critical terms. Robert Solomon refers to ‘sentimentality’ as a quasi-ethical term. Sentimentality is never a wholly positive characterization. Mark Jefferson is right that it is clearly not a virtue. Put into an Aristotelian framework, both sentimentality and emotionality are either on the mean or they are species of excess, but it is difficult to tell which. We are unsure whether it’s sufficient to criticize someone for being “sentimental,” or whether she has to be sentimental to a fault. Is it sufficient to criticize someone that we call her “emotional,” or does she have to be over-emotional?

The odd status of these terms, that they are critical terms that do not unambiguously criticize, and their tie to a distribution of expressive resources that is both encouraged and gendered suggest that these terms may be a political category of criticism of the sort that is busy condemning what it is, at

the same time, somehow promoting. I have argued elsewhere that many of our virtue terms are gendered (Campbell 1987). When this is the case, certain characteristics can be promoted as virtues for one gender while condemned as vices for the other. This does not quite account for the status of sentimentality or emotionality, for neither is clearly a virtue, but I intend to pursue this kind of analysis as far as it can be taken.

Sentimentality has received more attention than emotionality. Remarks on this condition are scattered through literary theory and philosophy, and recently there have been a number of philosophical articles on the subject that maintain, as their touchstone, the article by Michael Tanner mentioned above (See Tanner 1976-77; Jefferson 1983; Solomon 1990; and Midgley 1979).

The attention sentimentality has received focuses on its history as a critical term that went through a rapid transformation, from a rise in the eighteenth century as a term of praise for a refined emotional life to its fall in the mid-nineteenth century to a term of ethical and aesthetic condemnation, a time that coincides with the rise of the Kantian feminine. The period of sentimentality's decline as praise also coincides exactly with the rise of women novelists. In the introduction to *Great Short Works of the American Renaissance* (selections from Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville and Whitman), the editor, Willard Thorp, describes the change in the period:

The persistent self-sufficiency of these five should be viewed against a new phenomenon of the time in which they wrote—the arrival of the best-seller. . . . In 1855 Hawthorne took note of the situation in an angry letter to his publisher: “America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash—and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed.” (Thorp 1968, xi)

This historical coincidence has not been incorporated into a philosophical analysis of sentimentality.

Tanner raises a number of interesting questions about sentimentality: 1. Is it predicated of feelings or people and in what circumstances? 2. Is it a harmful quality? 3. Is there more than a contingent relationship between sentimentality and cynicism or brutality? 4. Is it a historical phenomenon? (Tanner 1976-77, 128) He does not, however, operate within a sensitive enough political framework to be able to answer the questions he sets: “I have found it too perplexing and difficult a subject to be able to offer more than a series of loosely related thoughts” (Tanner 1976-77, 138-39). In particular, Tanner does not take up the criticism of sentimentality as a local historical phenomenon, and this is a particular methodological choice:

There is a clear danger that in attempting to locate the central aspects of sentimentality one will oscillate between dealing with specific feelings and with the people who have them, trying to get to grips with the concept by dealing with a given emotional state, and moving outwards from there into the pattern of life of a person whom we would call sentimental, and hoping this oscillation will give the impression that it is, indeed will be, a dialectical process towards understanding. It won't. (Tanner 1976-77, 138-39)

If sentimentality is a criticism that has been primarily applied to a particular group of people who are patterning their lives in a particular way, we need to understand this fact in order to understand what kind of criticism it is, but this is one way in which the use of the term is duplicitous.⁴

In the philosophical treatments of sentimentality specific men (or characters) are often mentioned: Lord Alfred Douglas (by Oscar Wilde), Rousseau (by James and Southey), Rudolf Hess (by Midgley), Othello and Mendelsson (by Tanner). These men are not only mentioned as illustrations of sentimentality, but are lambasted, despite the fact that, as Solomon notes (1990, 307-8), sentimentality is thought to be common to women and its use as a term of criticism for men arose at exactly the same time that women were beginning to write novels. James's criticism of Rousseau illustrates the invective at its harshest:

There is no more contemptible type of human than that of the . . . sentimentalist and dreamer, who spends his life in a weltering sea of sensibility and emotion, but who never does a concrete manly deed. Rousseau, inflaming all the mothers of the mothers of France, by his eloquence, to follow Nature and nurse their babies themselves, while he sent his own children to the foundling hospital, is the classic example of what I mean. (James 1950, I: 125)

James goes on to caution against excessive novel reading and theater going (“[it] will produce true monsters in this line”), and offers us the portrait of a Russian woman weeping over a play while her coachman freezes waiting for her. But this woman is an imagined type and not a real named individual. The man who is attacked for sentimentality is a real man. The woman, whether she is attacked, or more likely, as Solomon suggests, forgiven, is, in discussions of sentimentality, every white woman of gentle birth, or at least, no one in particular.

I believe we have a somewhat complex historical situation, and only through this situation will we understand sentimentality. It is not that Kantian women lacked opportunities for action which gives rise to the use of sentimentality as

a critical notion, but that they were acting—among other things, they were writing, and in this writing they represented women expressing their emotions through action. *Little Women*, a famous sentimental novel by Louisa May Alcott, begins with the four March girls lamenting the fact that they are poor and that it won't be much of a Christmas without presents and with their father away at war. In Chapter 2, titled "A Merry Christmas," they awake and the servant Hannah informs them that a beggar has come to the door and their mother has gone off again to see what is needed. She soon returns, and they greet her in chorus:

"Merry Christmas, Marmee! Many of them! Thank you for our books; we read some and mean to every day," they cried, in chorus.

"Merry Christmas, little daughters! I'm glad you began at once and hope you will keep on. But I want to say one word before we sit down. Not far away from here lies a poor woman with a little newborn baby. Six children are huddled into one bed to keep from freezing, for they have no fire. There is nothing to eat over there; and the oldest boy came to tell me they were suffering hunger and cold. My girls, will you give them your breakfast as a Christmas present?"

They were all unusually hungry, having waited nearly an hour, and for a minute no one spoke; only a minute, for Jo exclaimed impetuously, "I'm so glad you came before we began!" (Alcott 1968, 15)

Alcott presents women acting morally, with compassion for those in serious social circumstances, and without the guidance of any man. I suggest that the political response to this type of presentation was the establishment of sentimentality as a limiting (or policing) virtue of feminine expression. It is a virtue because Kantian women are encouraged to cultivate the tender emotions—compassion, for example—for their work as nurturers. It is a limiting virtue because its use as a critical term is to imply that feminine ethical actions when they are outside the domestic sphere, and feminine literary productions, which are outside this sphere, either are not effective or are not appropriate actions, and do not have to be taken seriously. It is a virtue of femininity, and so in men it can be condemned as a vice. It has not received an adequate political analysis because it is falsely presented as a general character defect of women which they are accountable for but can do nothing about. Finally, it does not receive an adequate philosophical analysis because philosophers look for a clear use of sentimentality as a critical term. Its status as a clear and correctable masculine vice will be more salient than its nature as a limiting virtue of feminine expression. These remarks indicate only some of the complexities of the

historical circumstances in which the notion of sentimentality emerged as a critical notion in application to expressiveness.

Emotionality has received even less attention than sentimentality as a distinctive kind of criticism tied to expressive resources, although its connection to gender has never been questioned: "Although the emotionality of women is a familiar cultural stereotype, its grounding is quite shaky. Women appear to be more emotional than men because they, along with some groups of color, are permitted and even required to express emotion more openly" (Jaggar 1989, 161). This passage is somewhat disturbing in its suggestion that men might maintain a protected private life of feeling. In addition, I think there is more to be said about emotionality, for, of course, anger, the emotion that women have fought so hard for, is very freely expressed by many men.

Like sentimentality, emotionality is a limiting expressive virtue of feminine expression, though one whose imperatives seem to operate more independently of class and race. Women who are not emotional are cold. Women who are emotional are expressing themselves in such a way as to be dismissable. The important feature of emotionality is how women become dismissable. Emotionality is popularly connected to involuntary response as an expressive resource. As I remarked earlier, certain bodily responses associated with emotionality, tears notoriously, can be used to express joy, sorrow, frustration, shame, or any range of feelings. They thus give an emotional life the appearance of contingency by suggesting that nothing is any more important than anything else, because there are no discriminations in behavior that mark the importance. Insofar as women cry a lot, they cannot be reliably held to distinguish the important from the trivial. As a student has pointed out to me, the deliberate vagueness of the term which lumps all emotions together negates the necessity for any specific uptake that would help individuate a feeling, thus promoting what it condemns.

In actual critical use the insinuation of emotionality does not remain tied to involuntary response but can be used to suggest that a woman always lacks control over her emotional life as evidenced by nearly any manner of expression. James Dickey's review of *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* by Anne Sexton begins: "Anne Sexton's poems so obviously come out of deep painful sections of the author's life that one's literary opinions scarcely seem to matter; one feels tempted to drop them in the nearest ashcan rather than to be caught with them in the presence of so much naked suffering" (Dickey 1978, 117). Dickey, as a reviewer, is in precisely the right position to give certain expression acts the special critical uptake that will help form for all of us Sexton's insights into her life and madness. Instead, he does not just negate the sophistication of Sexton's expressive resources, he, in fact, pretends that she is not using any special expressive resources but is symptomatically betraying an emotional life she cannot control.

I conclude, tentatively, that both sentimentality and emotionality are limiting expressive virtues of femininity. They police expression through the development or limitation of certain expressive resources that will, at the same time, allow for the dismissal of what is significant to women about our own lives when this significance is a violation of the constraints on gender performance. This is to say that when we express ourselves we must do so within the constraints of gender. The pervasiveness of these criticisms of women's affective lives suggests strongly that women are constrained to express gender roles when they express feeling.

Emotionality and sentimentality give the fight for control of anger a special importance. Anger is an emotion that requires judgment and action and is associated with a powerful range of cultural metaphors. Its control can stand as a symbol for access to a range of expressive resources that are so finely discriminated and object-directed that they cannot lead to certain expressive criticisms. But one's intended anger can still, of course, be categorized as bitterness.

V. CONCLUSION

Bitterness, sentimentality, and emotionality are terms of interpretive dismissal. They contrast interestingly to inarticulateness, a term more often applied to certain groups of men than to women. Inarticulateness is a categorization that suggests, quite explicitly, a poverty of expressive resources that is no fault of the individual, but, in fact, challenges the interpreter to be highly sensitive to the intended effects of behavior in conveying significance. We do well to keep this contrast in mind when we are subject to or witness to the charge of individual accountability that comes with criticisms like bitterness or emotionality. I hope to have done something to indicate the seriousness of this kind of criticism: there is a seriousness of critical intent elided by the very use of terms which invariably suggest overreaction on the part of the person expressing her feelings. However, because of the relation of feeling to significance, when our feelings are trivialized, ignored, systematically criticized, or when they are extremely constrained by the poverty of our expressive resources, this situation can lead to a very serious kind of dismissal—the dismissal of the significance to a person of her own life, in a way that reaches down deeply into what the significance of a life can be to the person whose life it is.

NOTES

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Jacobsen. This version was prepared while on a Killam Post-doctoral Fellowship at Dalhousie University.

1. A theory of emotions that focuses on the public nature of expression and the role of interpretation in forming emotional experience must deal with the phenomenon of emotional concealment. I do not offer an account in this paper of how concealed feelings can be formed or individuated; however, I do not take concealment to be an in principle problem for the kind of theory I am offering. "Conceal" is a contrastive notion to "express." To conceal something is not express it. It is to prevent its becoming manifest rather than attempting to make it manifest. Thus, cases where we conceal our feelings are cases where we have certain expressive opportunities. I do not prevent myself from yelling at you when you are not there. Because concealment requires the opportunity for expression, it has a role within theory of expression, rather than challenging the importance of expression to a theory of affect.

2. As many of these occasions are also of communal significance, we have an extensive shared vocabulary of feeling concepts—some of them classic emotions like grief, others less well-conceptualized, like pique. I suggest, however, that not all communications of feeling can be packaged into concepts. Often there is no exact label for what I am feeling, and I may use metaphor, gesture, association, and so on to try and express significance. Hence the points that follow: that the resources for expressing feeling both are and need to be diverse.

3. Involuntary but controllable behavior is behavior that, while not typically intended by an agent, is, nevertheless, in many ways under the agent's control. The agent can typically prevent the behavior and control many aspects of its presentation. In this way crying can be contrasted to a nervous tic which an agent can neither prevent nor display in various ways.

4. Despite the fact that Tanner has raised the historical question, Jefferson follows Tanner in attempting to provide an analysis that takes into account no cultural, historical, or political factors that have governed the use of this criticism. Solomon attributes the bad reputation of sentimentality to historical fate of the moral sentiments, but adds the following remark:

Kant's unprecedented attack on sentiment and sentimentalism was at least in part a reaction, perhaps a visceral reaction, not only against the moral sentiment theorists (whom he at least admired) but against the flood of popular women writers in Europe and America. . . . It is no secret that the charge of sentimentalism has long had sexist implications as a weakness which is both more common (even "natural") and more forgivable in women than in men, and one might plausibly defend the thesis that the moralist's attack on sentimentality cannot be separated from the more general Victorian campaign . . . against the rising demand for sexual equality. (Solomon 1990, 307-8)

Solomon suggests that the moralistic attack on sentimentality cannot be separated from a historical demand for sexuality equality. He does not, however, follow up these remarks. The interest in a critical term because of its history with no attention to the particulars of that history calls for some account.

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