

*Book Review*

**Morris, J., & Concannon, K. (2022). *Emotions and affect in writing centers*. Parlor Press. (344 pp., Paperback \$35.99).**

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*Emotions and Affect in Writing Centers*, edited by Janine Morris and Kelly Concannon, takes up Sara Ahmed's (2004) call to not only look at "what emotions and affect *are*" but to explore "their functionality, or what they *do*" (p. xii). In their introduction, Morris and Concannon emphasize the centrality of emotions and affect in writing centers and explain how they hope to bring attention to these often invisible aspects of the work. The collection aims to help practitioners better understand the impacts of emotion and affect in their own contexts while also providing practical ways to navigate issues such as burnout, emotional labor, and mental health and encouraging future research on emotions and affect in the writing center.

While many of the volume's contributors define key terms in their chapters, definitions for emotion and affect in the introduction act as a foundation for the collection and are reiterated throughout the book. Morris and Concannon turn to Micciche (2007), Seibel Trainor (2006), and Worsham (1998) to describe emotions as "personal, socially constructed, biological, cognitive, and embodied" and emotional responses as "wrapped up in how we feel, how we learn to feel, and how we interpret and express those feelings" (p. xiv). Differentiating affect from emotion, the editors describe how affect is connected to emotional expression but "exists corporeally" and

"is conceptualized as a change of states or changes between people" (p. xiv). Considering both emotion and affect as distinct but related concepts allows for a more holistic understanding of not only specific feelings and expressions but also the environmental and relational aspects of communication center work.

The editors organize the collection's 15 chapters around three common themes. The first section focuses on writing center administrators, the second looks more closely at tutor experiences and training, and the third demonstrates the reach of emotions and affect beyond the writing center and explores future directions for research. Rounding out the book, the epilogue offers contributors the opportunity to reflect on emotions and affect in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement.

Morris and Concannon acknowledge that previous research on emotions and affect exist but argue that their volume is the first to include multiple perspectives from the writing center in one collection. Unlike the administrative-focused work of Adams Wooten et al. (2020) and Caswell et al. (2016), Morris and Concannon also draw from tutors' experiences and points-of-view. This book is unique in that the contributors use a variety of methods and theoretical frameworks to explore emotions and affect in different institutional contexts as well. Research

approaches include longitudinal methods in Chapter 1: “Studying Emotion and Emotional Labor over Time and in Context”; narrative methods in Chapter 4: “Navigating Emotions and Interpersonal Relations in Graduate Administrative Writing Center Work”; and quantitative methods in Chapter 6: “‘Could You Please Tell Me How?’: Listening, Questioning, and Emotional Knowledge Making in Online Synchronous Writing Center Conferences.”

*Emotions and Affect in Writing Centers* both builds on and challenges current wellness practices and research in writing centers. Expanding on the field’s current understanding, Chapter 4: “Navigating Emotions and Interpersonal Relations in Graduate Administrative Writing Center Work” calls for more attention to the impact of emotions on the mental and physical well-being of graduate assistant coordinators. The study shows how leadership positions “can enhance professional growth” but also “stunt emotional and mental well-being” (p. 70) without the proper understanding of and commitment to balance in emotional work. Based on their findings, the authors provide several strategies related to effective boundary-setting, reflection, and communication to help graduate student administrators prioritize their well-being and maintain healthy interpersonal relationships at work.

In Chapter 15: “Is It Enough? An Interrogation of the Wellness Turn in Writing Centers,” Genie Giaimo challenges writing center administrators to critically question the current trajectory of the well-being trend. She sees much of the research so far as merely naming problems or finding ways for individual administrators to navigate issues such as burnout, decreased resources due to austerity measures, and exploitative

labor practices at the writing center-level. She instead identifies a need for larger-scale, generalizable heuristics to address these problems at the institutional level, and she proposes a game-theoretical model as one option for helping writing centers understand and communicate with upper administration. For Giaimo, game theory allows administrators “to situate *how* we administer writing centers in relation to outsiders who often have more power and ... different goals” and to “build long-term strategies that respond to austerity at the macro—rather than micro—level” (p. 274). Administrators can use this system to push for systemic changes, challenge exploitative working conditions, and form more flexible, proactive solutions to the problems they often face.

In addition to explicitly addressing well-being, other contributors draw connections to related factors. For example, in Chapter 1: “Studying Emotion and Emotional Labor over Time and in Context,” Jackie Grutsch McKinney, Nicole Caswell, and Rebecca Jackson look at emotional labor and define two key types: emotion management—when “workers are urged to display certain emotions on the job and to repress or hide other emotions”—and emotional work, or “work that is relational and requires empathy, connection, mediation, and compassion to complete” (p. 5). These contributors gather perspectives using longitudinal methods and examine how the effects of emotion and emotional labor accumulate over time for administrators. They argue that emotions and emotional labor factor into administrative labor in both positive and negative ways and impact practitioners’ overall work experiences, which informs their decisions about whether to stay in their positions. Developing a more thorough understanding of emotions and

emotional labor can then help administrators identify specific stressors and find more effective strategies to sustain and support their work.

Besides covering a wide range of topics such as mindfulness, burnout, and empathy, some of the other strengths of this collection are its variety of methods, inclusion of tutor and administrator perspectives, and its focus on providing practical suggestions and applications. The takeaways offered can also be adapted for student support centers of all types.

While overall this collection is strong and can positively impact many centers, it also has some limitations. First, the collection includes tutor and graduate administrator voices but could have more frequently and explicitly addressed the differences in conditions across administrative statuses—tenure-track, contingent, or adjunct faculty; staff; etc.—and institutional contexts, such as public, private, 4-year, and 2-year colleges. Second, Giaimo cautions practitioners not to limit themselves to solutions that add more labor for those within the writing center without trying to address the larger institutional problems centers often face as well. However, many of the contributors recommend administrative practices, additional trainings, and other interventions that can indeed be helpful but also increase workloads without making any changes to the material and resource limitations put on many communication centers.

In their introduction, Morris and Concannon name administrators as their audience and describe their hope that the collection can also be used in tutor training and writing center pedagogy courses. Many contributors directly address ways their chapters can be applied in these settings by offering particular administrative practices, topics for tutor training, and

other methods for engaging with emotion and affect work which can assist practitioners who want to take up these strategies for their own contexts. This collection holds great potential to help communication center professionals name emotions and affect in their work, see their impact, and use this understanding to become more effective in addressing related issues both within their centers and at the institutional level.

### References

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