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Author

Lee, Rachel

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MOOD AND MATH

While usually my girls (ages seven, five and five) are excited by the prospect of red and white pinwheel mints awaiting them in the post-voting area, this time around they were not so thrilled to go. I found myself speaking an extra cheerful running monologue on how great it was that we were going to decide who would be president, smiling widely at those who were leaving our polling place having cast their ballots, but getting only tight perfunctory smiles in return. "I'm scared. Too many people," said one of my twins from behind the curtain she'd created out of my pant leg as I inked my ballot. Later, when dropping the girls at school, our kindergarten teacher shared her own thoughts on the election: "The mood is so different, not like the last presidential election where everyone was so hopeful. You can feel it; I'm very worried."

In hindsight, it is easy to proclaim the Democrats overly pessimistic and Republicans overly optimistic. The mood on campus was palpably anxious on the day before the election. Even those wiser friends using New

York Times' statistician Nate Silver's reports as flu shot in the days leading up to the election were infected by the smog-stress.

What do we make of this striking dissonance between mood—emotional rhetoric aka spin doctoring—and math? Or put another way, how might gender and feminism help us to understand that mood and math? Math, or at least, layman invocations of 1%, 99%, 47%—statistical language to express discontent and sense of shrinking opportunity—were certainly crucial to the outcome of this election. For higher education in particular, the dueling arithmetic on which proposition (30 or 38) gave what percentage of revenue garnered from which formula of income or sales tax on which percent of the population filled the yahoo boards of bantering mommies, at least at my local public magnet, with confusion and minor disagreements. How do these local events draw upon and transform stereotypes of boys being good at math and girls at social and emotional intelligence, when the Biggest Boy Rove had clearly ignored the math

and succumbed to his own rhetorical (terrorizing, falling of a cliff) spin on Obama's stewardship of the nation and the American people's lack of faith in it?

While not having the answers to the above questions, I offer them as provocation not to fetishize statistics and clear calculations (the hagiography of Nate Silver already does that) but to contemplate seriously the social and civil mood—aka the qualitative atmosphere of our decision-making processes and political action. The late scholar and polymath Teresa Brennan, who was also concerned with the way we could feel the atmosphere upon entering a room, used the term "affect" to name the circulating vital energies carried by hormones, pheromones, and other airborne neurochemicals. Using diverse sources—from biochemistry, neurology, theology, crowd theory, clinical practice, and psychoanalysis—Brennan takes aim at the "foundational fantasy" that we are self-contained individuals and pursues the longstanding (ancient) understanding of a "social well-spring" from which affects flow and in which our bodies

are bathed. In this portrait, humans are nodal points for the transfer, projection, reception, and transformation of depleting and enhancing energies among and between us. We attach the agitation in the air felt by our bodies to some narrative that makes sense of it. Put more concretely, campaign discourse filled the air to such an extent that it became a tropical storm-- a worry that became "Obama's not going to be re-elected" or "Obama's going to be re-elected."

Useful for my purposes here (the tie-in to electoral politics, if only punningly), Brennan spoke of "the masculine party," populated by beings of either sex, projecting their unwanted affects, such as aggression, onto a "feminine" other. Also a being of either sex, this "feminine" party internalizes that aggression as depression or anxiety: "The feminine party, while carrying the masculine other's disordered affects, also gives that other living attention. . . . Depression, in men or women, is a feminine affect, aggression a masculine one" (43). Speaking of affects as circulating vital energies (of aggression, depression and caring attention), Brennan uses her gendered terms to differentiate the habituated, somaticized modes connected to historical divisions of labor wherein the masculine party (and she extends this to colonizers) direct negative emo-

tions outward via aggression toward others, whereas the feminine party (and she extends this to the colonized and poor) serve as receptacles of that emotional dumping.

For me the most salient post-election report came from NPR coverage of women's role in government that led with numbers highlighting the disparity between the percentage of women in the electorate (women are 50.8% of the U.S. population and 52% of likely voters) and the percentage of female congressional representatives (18-19% in the House and 20% in the Senate).¹ What gave flesh to these statistics, however, was not the math (the difference between the figures) but the subsequent salience of that accounting told in this anecdote: women speak less in absolute, durational terms and less about the issues they care about unless there is a parity threshold of women in the room, not because they are naturally silent (passive) but because men (here synonymous with Brennan's masculine parties) regularly cut them off with much greater frequency than they do their male counterparts.² (When men

1. These figures are from the 2010 census and a Gallup poll from the most recent election.

2. Or unless the deliberative body makes conscious efforts toward procedural inclusivity. See Tali Mendelberg's contribution to the segment of "To the Point: Women's Issues across Party Lines" hosted by Warren Olney and broadcast on Friday, November 9, 2012. According to Mendelberg, the issues women care about include healthcare for the poor, taking care of the disabled, and tending to the needs of children. See also Mendelberg and Christopher Karpowitz's *New York Times* Op-Ed "More Women, but Not Nearly Enough," on November 8, 2012, <http://campaignstops.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/08/more-women-but-not-nearly-enough/>

are in the minority, however, they do not correspondingly speak less.) If we explained this difference only in terms of the numbers, well, we couldn't explain it at all. Changing the mood in the United States, thus, becomes a matter of both the math and feminine affect.

Let me finish this opening Interim Director's reflection not by arguing that the calculative reasoning—aka "the math"—reigns the day, but that our emotional intelligence has been severely narrowed by the habit of silo-ization (going it alone, maverick reliance on only the self), one supported by the ideology of neoliberalism—the idea not only that the market decides everything best but that the social sphere should bear all of the costs of industries and markets while all of the profit of the same should accrue to the private sphere. Our social sphere becomes that which should also bear the dumping of incredible aggressive "masculine" external energies. . . and who exactly is internalizing those energies and reshaping them?

— Rachel Lee