

Chapter 2

Interview with Megan Boler: From ‘Feminist Politics of Emotions’ to the ‘Affective Turn’

Megan Boler and Michalinos Zembylas

Abstract In this interview Megan Boler discusses with Michalinos Zembylas her work during the 1980s and 1990s on “feminist politics of emotion”. A feminist politics of emotion is historically grounded in the popular slogan of second wave feminism, the “personal is political”. This shift to understanding emotions as collectively and socially produced and constructed rather than as private and individualized experiences represented a radical shift in theory and praxis concerning emotions and education. A feminist politics of emotion encourages scholars to analyze and understand the role of emotions in epistemology, ethics, cultural values and beliefs, and in the construction of social relations and hierarchies. The interview highlights the often overlooked histories of feminist pedagogies as a development from the second wave of feminism, and their pioneering attention to the role of emotions in education, learning, and knowledge production. This approach is contrasted with more recent theorizing of ‘affect’, that draws on Spinoza and continues to develop in the work on what is presently termed “new materialism”.

Keywords Affect theory • Feminism • Pedagogy • Politics • Emotions • Gender • Second-wave feminism • Social construction of emotions • Consciousness-raising • Feminist pedagogies

Introduction

The purpose of this short introduction is to provide readers a brief overview of Megan Boler’s work on emotions and educations since the landmark publication of her book *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education* (1999) and her highly influential

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contribution to the scholarship on the politics of emotions. Boler's book was one of the first publications in education that not only touched on the taboo issue of emotions in education but also it did so in epistemologically and methodologically innovative ways. She labels her approach 'a feminist politics of emotion'. Highly relevant to education, her approach alerts us to the idea that emotions are a site of socio-political control and therefore cannot be understood outside culture and ideology. Further, her work emphasizes how and when emotions function as a mode of resistance to dominant norms. These epistemological views have important methodological implications in terms of how one studies emotion in education.

In this interview, Boler reflects on the histories of scholarship regarding emotions in their socio-political contexts, and the scholarship on the politics of emotions in particular that emerged both from feminist legacies in educational praxis as well as early feminist interventions from different disciplinary perspectives. Boler discusses the promises and challenges of cross-and multi-disciplinary, as well as politicized approaches to the study of emotions. The interview concludes by highlighting the risks of an apolitical 'affective turn', and contrasts the recent developments in scholarship on affect with earlier, 1980s scholarship on feminist politics of emotion.

Michalinos Zembylas (MZ): *Your book "Feeling Power: Emotions and Education" (1999) explicitly invokes 'a feminist politics of emotion'. Can you tell us why you chose this approach in relation to the study of emotion? What are the strengths and weaknesses of a feminist politics of emotion? How would you describe its methodological valence?*

Megan Boler (MB): I chose this approach because of the longstanding cultural and historical associations of women with emotions, not to mention the fact that at the time I commenced this work it was solely feminist scholars who dared to mention emotion as a legitimate scholarly topic. In the early 1980s when I began graduate studies in philosophy, it quickly became clear that despite increasing interest in pushing epistemological boundaries (e.g., within philosophy of science), the idea that emotion might play a substantive role in our economies of attention, in our conceptualizations of knowledge and processes of knowledge acquisition, in ethical and moral evaluation—such notions were not yet popular by any stretch of the imagination.

This pointed disregard of emotions' roles and place in such arenas as epistemology, ethics, and education is most certainly tied to its gendered associations. The trans-cultural, trans-historical associations of emotion with women represent, to this day, paradoxical contradictions of cultural myths and ideologies. The idea that women are innately, biologically "too emotional" to function as proper political citizens, for example, within the public sphere, is a persistent myth which neatly coincides with cultural demands for women to embody particular kinds of emotion (ality), and to teach proper values and ethics to children by virtue of women's ("natural") emotional sensitivities. These contradictory cultural suppositions about women and emotion demonstrate the critical need for "feminist politics of emotion" to disrupt and intervene in these retrograde and patriarchal ideologies. These ideologies simultaneously penalize women for being "biologically" "over-emotional",

and thus too “irrational” to serve in positions of political power; while also requiring women to cultivate her emotionality in order to serve as ideal mothers and teachers.

The methodological valence of a feminist politics of emotion can be understood as drawing centrally upon a lens that asks us to rethink the rigid binaries defining Western thought. For example, a feminist politics of emotion often begins by drawing from the popular slogan of second wave feminism, the “personal is political,” to analyze and understand the role of emotions in epistemology, ethics, cultural values and beliefs, and in the construction of social relations and hierarchies (Echols 1989; MacKinnon 1989). The feminist rallying cry of the “personal is political” redefined frequently dismissed “personal” issues including emotions and other experiences as in fact highly relevant to politics and to the public sphere. For example, feminist consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s empowered participants to redefine women’s anger as a healthy sign of resistance to oppression, rather than as a pathological symptom of her personal failings. By expressing and sharing previously hidden and silenced emotions in these collective spaces, women had the opportunity to integrate emotions as knowledge with critical reflection, thereby supporting women’s political organization against male-domination (Boler 1999; Campbell 1994).

MZ: As you are suggesting, a feminist politics of emotion has to do with how women are excluded on the grounds of their “irrationality”. But do you think that this approach is still relevant today given that there has been a relative ‘progress’ in women’s positions in the public arena?

MB: Absolutely, this approach remains relevant. Although we’ve seen some progress in terms of women’s inclusion in political and public spheres, the facts of gender inequality speak for themselves: of the top Fortune 500 CEOs, 4.6 % are women; the number of women in governmental positions of power is extremely few, though a handful of women were elected or appointed during the 21st century; and the shocking under representation of women in sectors like science, tech, engineering and math (STEM) reveals a “leaky pipeline”: no matter the vigilance of educational systems trying to increase the number of women being “fed” into these male-dominated fields, the percentage of women becoming PhDs or leading research scientists is not rising. Women remain vastly under represented in spheres of political and economic power; and when women are permitted such positions, they are subject to extraordinary sexual harassment and double-standards not inflicted on their male counterparts.

In the end, more notable than the limited progress increasing women’s positions of power, is the highly successful backlash against feminism and the effective propaganda campaign claiming we are now ‘post-feminist’ and ‘sexism is over!’

What does a “feminist politics of emotion” have to do with questions like gender inequality around the world? For one thing, studies of the “leaky pipeline” failing to feed women into STEM areas, for example, cannot seem to understand or solve the “problem”. At the same time, again and again through the decades we learn that women are excluded by the “culture” (read, hostility, sexual harassment) of “boy’s clubs,” whether that be spaces in academia, politics, or private corporate sectors. The effective exclusion of women depends significantly on the affective realm, on hierarchies that are produced and maintained by ensuring that no one

threatens patriarchal social order (or what bell hooks (1994) refers to as “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy”). Similarly, women around the world are taught to abide by gendered norms that impose compulsory heterosexuality and deny reproductive choice. These gendered norms rely, arguably most stringently, on internalized emotions and affective rules, as evidenced by the scholarship that pioneered a feminist politics of emotion.

In their Introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, Gregg and Seigworth (2010) outline eight orientations to the theorization of affect. One of these they describe as “politically—engaged work—perhaps most often undertaken by feminists, queer theorists, disability activists, and subaltern peoples living under the thumb of a normativizing power—that attend to the hard and fast materialities, as well as the fleeting and flowing ephemera, of the daily and the workday... and of ‘experience’ (understood in ways far more collective and ‘external’ rather than individual and interior...)” (p. 7) This formulation most closely parallels what I term the feminist politics of emotion.

So in sum, yes—vigilance is still required in the ongoing struggle to include women in public spheres (see Boler et al. 2014), and to achieve anything like equity in positions of power. A feminist politics of emotion is necessarily inter- and multidisciplinary, drawing from diverse feminist theories and disciplinary frameworks. Whatever its shortcomings, the women’s liberation movement paved the way for women’s studies and feminist theory to find a place within educational and intellectual contexts. And ‘the personal is political’ as a basis for a feminist pedagogies provides a useful starting point for radical educational praxis.

MZ: What was the impact of this approach to education and pedagogy in particular—both as a site of politics and research?

As the women’s liberation movement swept North America and parts of Europe from the late 1960s into the 1980s, the fight for women’s rights included the historic-first establishment of women’s studies programs and ‘feminist pedagogies’. Emotions were identified as core to the liberatory work of feminist pedagogies, which—as a political arm of the women’s movement—served as a politicizing, embodied intervention for social change, seeking spaces for women in the hallowed halls of higher education where women had been not only refused a place at the table, but stereotyped as the antithesis of logos and reason (Rich 1979; Culley and Portuges 1985). Questions about the role of emotions in knowledge and learning, pioneered by feminist educators, developed alongside Freirean, critical and radical pedagogies, though feminist pedagogies received much less recognition, to this day. As one scholar defines it:

Feminist pedagogy is grounded in the primary goal of social change. The foundations of feminist pedagogy can be unlocked by looking at its origins in grassroots political activity. Women’s consciousness-raising groups that formed in the late 1960s were based on friendships, common political commitments, and discussions of shared experiences. Furthermore, they emphasized reliance on experience and feeling, sharing common experiences in collective leaderless groups, and the shared assumption that understanding and theoretical analysis were the first steps towards revolutionary change. (Sayles-Hannon 2007, p. 35)

Feminist pedagogies embrace key principles, such as: attending to power relations (including those between teacher and student); valuing personal experience and emotion as these inform knowledge and learning; and transforming injustice through reflexive praxis. Audre Lorde's inspiring public speeches delivered in the late 1970s and her brilliant essays (collected in *Sister/Outsider*, 1984) challenged not only axioms of Western thought but white feminist assumptions, and consistently highlighted the importance of emotion as exemplified in her essay "Poetry is Not a Luxury." bell hooks' (1981) title invoked Sojourner Truth's demand, "Ain't I a Woman?," reminding feminists of ongoing questions regarding who has the power to define "women," not only during the women's suffrage movement, but still today. Women of color increasingly challenged the unaddressed racist assumptions of second wave feminism, including the white, middle-class concerns common to consciousness-raising, concerns that often didn't apply to their sisters of color (Echols 1989; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981).

After the early interventions of feminist pedagogies, it is predominantly feminist scholars from the mid 1970s who began to pioneer new scholarly directions related to the politics of emotion. These include the work of anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo (1974), philosopher Marilyn Frye (1983), educational philosopher Nel Noddings (1984). In her groundbreaking work *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1983) contributed a study of women stewards' "emotional labor" in the airline industry, illustrating key concepts such as "feeling rules" (p. 17) and "emotion work" (p. 7).

In 1989 philosopher Alison Jaggar follows political theorist Catherine MacKinnon's (1981) assertion that 'consciousness raising is to feminism what labor is to Marxism,' when she develops a significant epistemological intervention in her essay, "Love and Knowledge" (1989): "Critical reflection on emotion is not a self-indulgent substitute for political analysis and political action. It is itself a kind of political theory and political practice, indispensable for an adequate social theory and social transformation" (Jaggar 1989, p. 64). Like MacKinnon, Jaggar's argument counters the Marxist critique¹ that reflecting on subjective experience is a bourgeois cultural endeavor not necessary for political revolution. Outlining "emotional hegemony and emotional subversion", (p. 159) Jaggar coined the term "outlaw emotions" (p. 160) which represents a radical intervention in the hegemonic discourses that naturalize women's emotions as pathological and personal. She argues that "by forming our emotional constitution in particular ways, our society helps to ensure its own perpetuation. The dominant values are implicit in responses taken to be precultural; or acultural, our so-called gut responses" (Jaggar 1989, p. 160; see also Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990). By contrast, outlaw emotions are "incompatible with the dominant perceptions and values, and some, though certainly not all, of these outlaw emotions are potentially or actually feminist emotions" (Jaggar 1989, p. 161).

¹Also bridging this divide between Marxism and the question of emotions, in 1981 *The Socialist Review* published U.C. Berkeley scholar Peter Lyman's pioneering essay, "The Politics of Anger".

In sum, the women's liberation movement not only developed feminist pedagogies that explicitly valued emotions as knowledge, but as well, laid the groundwork for the first women's studies departments established in higher education. By the early 1980s, feminist scholarship had gained legitimate institutional spaces and tactics (such as feminist pedagogies) to challenge the patriarchal binaries of emotion/reason that silence and dismiss emotions within realms of learning and knowledge creation.

MZ: How, then, do you perceive contemporary scholarship on the so called 'affective turn'?

MB: Affect theory emerged in the mid-1990s, and continues to trend as one of the more popular areas of contemporary scholarship. The "affective turn" may be understood as having two primary lines of inquiry: a trajectory that builds from the psychoanalytic work of Silvan Tomkins; and a second trajectory that draws on the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza as highlighted first by Deleuze and Guattari and then Brian Massumi. This second line of inquiry distinguishes feeling as "personal"; emotion as a "socio-linguistic fixing" or "qualified intensity" (Massumi 1995, p. 7); and affect as "a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential. ... [A]ffect cannot be fully realised in language, and ... is always prior to and/or outside of consciousness (Shouse 2005).

The affective turn has done us the major service of popularizing the study of emotion and affect. To date, however, this now fashionable arena relies heavily on a couple of oft-cited readings/uses of Spinoza, and thus a great deal of what counts as "affect theory" is not even secondary but tertiary readings or even further removed, from original sources. This also results in confusions such as presuming that the hypothesized "autonomy of affect" is a concept foundational to all "affect theory" or to Spinoza's philosophy. In fact, the "autonomy of affect" (Massumi 2002) is a concept built on an (unreplicated) empirical study that found a "gap" between the affect experienced in the body and the conscious "registering" of that affect. Scholars have attached themselves fervently to this "gap" and its apparently vast promise of affect's "freedom", giving hope in the bleak, post-post-modernist landscape where "agency" seems lost forever. While there is much more to be said, it is fascinating to witness the incredible appeal of an embodied force not "polluted" or "constrained" by the familiar traps of cognition and consciousness.

Along these lines, affect theorists' centrally engage 'capacities', 'potential', 'how bodies affect one another'—concepts sufficiently open-ended, and bordering on poetic, to enable scholars to interpret/riff on these sexy themes without pushing the more demanding socio-political implications of such accounts. (Quite similarly, Raymond Williams' (1977) concept of the "structures of feeling" expressed a similarly exciting zeitgeist, and since Williams did not develop the concept at length, its open-ended quality allows for generous interpretation; generations of scholars have been able to use "structures of feeling" in every conceivable way).

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normativizing power—that attend to the hard and fast materialities, as well as the fleeting and flowing ephemera, of the daily and the workday... and of ‘experience’ (understood in ways far more collective and ‘external’ rather than individual and interior...)”. (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, p. 7) This formulation most closely parallels what I term the feminist politics of emotion.

What I find most puzzling about the ‘affective turn’ is the resounding silence about the feminist interventions we’ve discussed here, interventions that arguably laid the groundwork for the popular uptake of “affect theory” in this 21st century. Thinking generously, one might forgive the absence of attention to feminist scholarly pioneers; but even putting feminist histories aside, given the persisting binaries that link women with emotion, men with reason—surely gender (and race, and class) are central to analyses of affect within patriarchal cultures? Without attention to socio-political hierarchies maintained by “feeling rules” and resisted by “outlaw emotions,” affect theory falls short of its potential as theory that can be put to work. Just as the fields of cultural studies have been challenged to engage their theories with praxis, so must affect theory be concerned with praxis, with materiality and everyday life that grounds such theory. But perhaps this hope merely reveals my own commitments to public intellectualism and activism, to discerning where the rubber hits the road, as they say. Personally, I am less interested in developing techniques for literary and cultural analysis, than I am in the socio-political implications of our scholarship.

Gregg and Seigworth pose a related concern to Grossberg, and ask “Is it possible that affect itself has been over invested by theory? Is there a way that affect lets one off the hook...?” (2010, p. 314)

I do think that affect can let you off the hook. Because it has come to serve, now, too often as a ‘magical’ term. So, if something has effects that are, let’s say, non-representational then we can just describe it as “affect”. So, I think there is a lot of theorizing that does not do the harder work of specifying modalities and apparatuses of affect, or distinguishing affect from other sorts of non-semantic effects, or, as I said, analyzing the articulations between... the ontological and the ‘empirical’. I think that sometimes affect lets people off the hook because it lets them appeal back to an ontology that escapes. (p. 315)

It is worth noting that to the extent that ‘affect’ now functions as the magical catch-all term, it replaces some of the ways in which the psychoanalytic concept of the “unconscious” functioned (prior to the ‘affective turn’) as a way to account for the many ‘leakages’ and escapes of emotions and affect, its myriad ways of resisting our capture, articulation measurement, perception, and consciousness.

Indeed, for those interested in the political significance of emotions and affect, ‘affect’ is now all too easily invoked as a gesture towards the virtual, the possible—potential, and capacities. However, the most recent emergence of “new materialism” and “agential realism” (Barad 2012) suggests promising directions for rethinking the “virtual” and perhaps grounding this more helpfully within entangled material relations.

MZ: *To go back to an idea you said earlier about a feminist politics of emotion being “necessarily inter- and multidisciplinary”, I would like to ask you how contemporary work on affect can benefit from more inter- and multi-disciplinary*

approaches. To put this differently, what does this imply in terms of how we study emotion and affect?

MB: Contemporary analyses of emotion necessarily must draw upon multi-, cross-, and interdisciplinary studies. The need for such interdisciplinary approaches are required precisely because of the complexity of emotion. Firstly, what might we even mean by emotion—the feel, the physiological state? Do we mean fleeting emotions, triggered by obvious environmental events; moods; evaluations, cognitive appraisals nonetheless informed by emotive perceptions? Do we mean emotions as involuntary responses of fight and flight? Do we mean emotions as socially-constructed responses to complex social contexts and cues?

The recognition of ‘where’ emotion or affect might be ‘found’ is, at least, recognized as a trickier question than understood in previous historical periods and within older disciplinary traditions. With the advent of new modalities of data visualization—techniques of tracking and ‘measuring’ affective states—the necessity of new multi- and cross-disciplinary collaboration has never been more pressing. Not only are emotions, as states or objects of analysis, increasingly recognized as inhabiting or existing in different dimensions of the body, self, person, or subject (depending on your disciplinary purview), but there is opportunity for collaborative research and study in and of the overlapping realms in which affect is seen to “inhabit” or “circulate”.

No matter the extent to which scholars develop and expand theories of affect, for example, and no matter what roles neuroscience is understood to play in shaping what we identify and track as emotions, socio-cultural studies of emotion will always require analyses of the contextualizing influence of gendered ideologies that define what counts as acceptable or “good” emotions, etc. My salient point here is that, whatever radical changes in theorizations or sciences of affect and emotion we may witness, the entrenched ideological aspects—such as those that inevitably associate particular emotions, emotional labor, and the social burden of ‘character education’ with women—have not and likely will not change significantly. Although the gendered character of “emotional labor” is recognized a bit more widely today than it was in the 1980s, more often than not emotionality is still used to keep women “in their place,” contained in domestic spheres and excluded from public and political spheres. Indeed, to answer your question, these new areas of inquiry call for research from across the disciplines. Emotion, affect, or consciousness cannot possibly be grasped by any one disciplinary approach except as a highly partial narrative.

MZ: So, if I asked you, then, to describe the most important recent developments (analytical/methodological/theoretical etc.) in studying emotion, affect and consciousness in education in recent years, what would you say?

MB: I would cite the innovative, interdisciplinary, and prolific contributions you have made to educational studies throughout your career, Michalinos, quite seriously. In addition, I would answer this by pointing to the riskiest or most potentially “dangerous” implications of the most recent developments. And here, I see two: firstly, the most challenging and potentially ‘dangerous’ development is represented by neuroscientific accounts of emotion that effectively reinscribe discourses of

emotions as biologically rooted, as entirely matters of nature rather than culture. Secondly, as I have been arguing, it is apparently all too easy to erase or forget the gendered realities of emotion and the feminist scholarship that put emotion on the map. This risk of adding another layer of misogyny into the histories of emotion, by erasing feminists' work, is all too real, especially if affect theorists choose not to ignore the ways in which feminist politics of emotion and affect theory might productively, mutually inform one another. Nonetheless, both risky directions leave ample room to explore the implications for education, teaching and learning. Contemporary scientific investigations and research on the brain and in the areas of neuroscience has potentially radical significance for studies of emotion. However, no matter how advanced these new forms of measurement and data visualization become, there will remain variables, idiosyncratic differences, cultural differences, and differences in social mores and rules that govern emotional behavior, conduct, expression, and reflective practices with regards to human experience of emotions. So while some may anticipate that emotions will be entirely described and predicted by neuro- and brain science in years to come, it would be easy to overstate how and what such measurements and visualizations will contribute to cultural studies of emotion and affect.

MZ: And to go back to the contribution of the 'affective turn' in studying emotion and emotion. How does this bear on questions of emotion and affect?

MB: Critical humanities scholars may finally have an incredible opportunity to intervene in the ethically precarious intersection of brain science, data visualization, and the applications of these techno-scientific information into human (affect) engineering.

Patricia Clough recognizes this potential when she writes:

"Affect is also theorized in relation to the technologies that are allowing us both to 'see' affect and to produce affective bodily capacities beyond the body's organic-physiological constraints. The techno scientific experimentation with affect not only traverses the opposition of the organic and the nonorganic; it also inserts the technical into felt vitality, the felt aliveness given in the pre-individual bodily capacities to act, to engage, to connect—to affect and be affected. The affective turn, therefore, expresses a new configuration of bodies, technology and matter that is instigating a shift in thought in critical theory." (2010, pp. 2–3).

The most promising areas of scholarly development that will, I believe, become increasingly indispensable in our studies of emotion will be work such as that of Manuel DeLanda (2013), Rosi Braidotti (2013) and Karen Barad (2012), often associated with new materialism, who bring complexity theory to bear on studies of the social and biological. Manuel DeLanda's (2013) book *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* outlines dynamical systems theory, differential geometry, and complexity theory, all of which can expand the current invocations of Spinoza's notions of capacities and potentials of bodies. Such analyses of multiplicities and the manifold provide innovative directions for understanding the materiality of entanglements, contradictions, and frictions that constitute the realities of affect and emotions in their relational contexts.

Arguing against notions of ‘essence’ (such as the commonly accepted assumption that the essence of being human is to be a “rational animal,” Massumi 2002, p. 2)—i.e., pre-determined, a priori or otherwise ahistorical traits presumed to transcend individual instances—DeLanda (2013) draws on a Deleuzian ontology that replaces the notion of fixed essence with the morphogenetic process. A focus on this process understands species as “historically constituted entities” rather than a timeless category (DeLanda 2013, p. 8). This underscores a dynamic rather than static way of accounting for identities, differences, and similarities. DeLanda thus radically sidesteps essentialism by drawing on notions of multiplicities and the manifold (2013); drawing from Deleuze, he outlines in this book how “multiplicities specify the structure of spaces of possibilities” (p. 10). Multiplicities are “concrete universals” (p. 13); unlike an essence, the “universality of a multiplicity is typically *divergent*” (p. 22) and the focus on multiplicity over essence allows for a theory of progressive differentiation.

How does this bear on questions of emotion and affect? My suggestion is that, in fact, the most robust work in new materialism can be productively put into conversation with scholarship on emotion and affect from across disciplines. We need an ontology of affects that recognizes the dynamic and non-static relationality within time and space, that simultaneously allows us to speak in some generalities about particular affects or emotions, but also to understand how singular instances of emotion and affect—while part of a dynamic process described by such notions as that of multiplicities—are significant in their very differentiation.

Related to the issue of understanding multiplicity and differentiation as described by dynamical relation theory, another challenge for future studies is to understand how contemporary scholarship on affect can pay tribute to feminist, historical predecessors. The scholars engaging feminist politics of emotion courageously blazed trails into Western Enlightenment theory with radical new theorizations of emotions. These accounts understand emotions to be embedded in the materiality of lived experience. How do socially- and culturally-constructed rules of emotion define identities, determine communities, and which bodies are permitted the privilege to express which emotions?

By taking into account the gendered and feminist histories that form the bedrock of emotion and affect’s ‘place’ within Western culture and discourses, work on affect might be able to deliver much-needed interventions into “binarized” scholarly discourses that still shun emotion and affect. With due recognition to these feminist and gendered histories, scholars can acknowledge the pioneering intellectual and political histories that made the ‘affective turn’ possible.

MZ: Turning to your current research, how do you position your approach nowadays in relation to the developments in studying emotions in education in recent years?

MB: Sarah Ahmed’s (2004) work resonates closely with my own commitment to the feminist politics of emotions. As Gregg and Seigworth pose in a question to Grossberg (2010):

There is a strong body of feminist work on emotion and affect and, within affect theory itself, there are definite disciplinary differences within and across philosophy, psychology, critical race studies, and feminist standpoint theory—just to name a few. We’re thinking especially of the way that women have historically been associated with emotion and hysteria as part of a wider effort to distinguish particular groups as incapable of rational thought and hence scholarly practice. Isn’t part of the continued difficulty then in theorizing affect and emotion partly due to how the historical trajectory of both terms has been used to dismiss and trivialize others in the past, and even still today? (p. 316)

It is precisely these ideological aspects of emotion’s lived experience and role in defining social hierarchies of power (intersecting not just with gender but also with race, class, and other identifying/marginalizing categories) that continue to require scholarly attention and intervention.

MZ: And in terms of the key challenges you see for research into emotions and education in the next 20 years?

I see three key challenges:

1. To engage humanities and cultural studies scholarship with work in the neurosciences and in affect theory, to engage non-linear complex dynamic theory to address emotion and affect. While Massumi’s (2002) examples of autonomic responses as significantly constitutive of affect provides a jumping-off point, DeLanda’s (2013) analyses of the manifold and multiplicities and Barad’s (2012) “agential realism” and determination to “queer the binary,” offer nuanced analyses that promise even more persuasive accounts as these are put into conversation with affect theories.
2. In relation to education, to develop pedagogies that can engage emotions and affect as part of the necessary work of “critical pedagogies”—pedagogies that ensure more than what I have termed “drive-by difference” (Boler 2007) and that invite students to reflexively re-evaluate closely-held assumptions, values and beliefs within a socio-historical frame. We urgently need new pedagogies suited to MOOCs and exponential expansion of online learning (Boler 2015).
3. Finally, we will be challenged to work against prescriptive formulations of character education that seek to impose universalized, reductive, and/or dehistoricized ideas of what counts as “correct” and “proper” or suitable emotions. In a closely related vein, the rise of neuroscience as explanatory models for emotion are already working hand-in-hand with prescriptive educational policies and pedagogies; neuroscience can too easily be drawn upon in reductive ways to bolster universalized assumptions about emotions. This underscores the importance of taking up the agential realism and new materialism of DeLanda and Barad as discussed above, approaches informed by and resonant with the work of scholars like Braidotti and Haraway. These radical directions support our ongoing efforts to move beyond violent Western dualisms that threaten, still, to marginalize a feminist politics of emotions. This encourages cross-disciplinary conversation between those interested in radical educational practices of freedom, and the science and policy-oriented arenas that increasingly seek to define static emotional norms.

These last two challenges require ongoing education and interventions into dominant cultural values and systems, such as gendered expectations and roles discussed earlier in our interview. To enact—much less to develop—such pedagogies goes beyond what is emphasized in nearly all teacher education programs. And frankly, the strongest contemporary scholarship in education that engages emotions and pedagogies with finessed socio-political analyses is the body of work you have been contributing since we first met, so many years ago!

MZ: And finally, what impact would you like your work to have on epistemological and/or methodological understandings of and research on emotion in education?

MB: To begin with Gregg and Seigworth's (2010) powerful quote:

There is no single, generalizable theory of affect: not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be. If anything, it is more tempting to imagine that there can only ever be infinitely multiple iterations of affect and theories of affect: theories as diverse and singularly delineated as their own highly particular encounters with bodies, affects, worlds. (Isn't theory— any theory with or without a capital T— supposed to work this way? Operating with a certain modest methodological vitality rather than impressing itself upon a wiggling world like a snap-on grid of shape-setting interpretability?)” (pp. 3–4)

I have already been inspired by the myriad scholars who have taken up *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education* (1999) amongst my other essays in this arena, to build upon and pioneer innovative directions of inquiry regarding emotions and education. In terms of how my scholarship may illuminate epistemological concerns: How can we expand our understandings of emotion and affect without replicating misleading binary divisions between emotion and reason? We can, at minimum, hone our scepticism regarding disciplinary approaches that presume binaristic paradigms. These theoretical challenges map fairly directly onto methodological challenges: How do we investigate various phenomenon related to emotion and affect without reproducing the dualisms so endemic to language, to Western thought, metaphysics, epistemologies? Given the radical and extensive scholarship now available in nearly every discipline that challenges head-on misleading presumptions of binary oppositions as somehow given (whether by nature, God, or even social norms), there is little excuse for engaging overly-reductionistic conceptualizations of emotion and affect.

Trained as I was under the mentorship of scholars such as Hayden White, Donna Haraway, Helene Moglen, and Jim Clifford in the History of Consciousness graduate program—methodology itself must be approached with healthy scepticism, first and foremost with attention to the performance and presentation of any knowledge, claim about its scalability and generalizability. If we can successfully balance this skepticism while developing novel approaches to researching emotion and affect in its sometimes ineffable complexity, then I see hope for the future of inter- and multidisciplinary research into emotions and education that can avoid reproducing such pitfalls as “one size fits all” character education, or easy invocations of empathy as a teachable skill that serves as the panacea for all social ills. To date, my early work in emotion and education has helped to catalyze reflexive theoretical forays and praxis I hoped for but dared not imagine: a generation of

scholars who take seriously the ways in which social hierarchies of power determine who can express which emotions in what forms; who is excluded or included by virtue of emotional norms and behaviors; and how emotions can be granted their full and salient place within educational contexts. Emotion and affect in teaching and learning have a profound role in epistemological and ethical reflexivity, requiring a critical praxis necessary to create inclusive spaces for all voices in the never-finished work of freedom.

I look forward to greater cross-disciplinary conversation between fields such as educational theory, and those disciplines presently engaged in the popularized interest in affect (such as comparative literature, continental philosophy, cultural studies, and feminist and queer theory). The general lack of engagement with educational studies returns us to my central point: a feminist politics of emotion is historically rooted in the pioneering work of those committed to liberatory praxis of feminist, critical and radical pedagogies. And just as emotions have been ignored due to their (female) gendered association, so too is educational theory often overlooked, in no small part because of its gendered associations, which tend to position educational theories outside the respected purview of much scholarship.

MZ: *Thank you very much Megan for this thought-provoking interview!*

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