

Teachers' Controversial Issue Decisions Related to Race, Gender, and Religion During the 2008 Presidential Election

By: [Wayne Journell](#)*

Journell, W. (2011). Teachers' controversial issue decisions related to race, gender, and religion during the 2008 Presidential Election. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 39(3), 348- 392.

*****© College and University Faculty Assembly of National Council for the Social Studies. Reprinted with permission. No further reproduction is authorized without written permission from Taylor & Francis. This version of the document is not the version of record. Figures and/or pictures may be missing from this format of the document. *****

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Theory & Research in Social Education* on 31 Jan 2012, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/00933104.2011.10473459>.

Abstract:

Using the 2008 Presidential Election as a case of curricular controversy, the author describes how six high school government teachers responded to the racial, gender, and religious diversity included on the presidential tickets of the two major political parties. Teachers had to decide whether the issue of Americans challenging the tradition of electing White males to the federal executive branch would be deemed “open” or “closed” in their classes, and if they were deemed open, whether they would disclose their own opinions on the issue. The findings suggest that Obama's race was a closed issue in each of the classes in terms of his eligibility for the presidency; however, the teachers and their students implicitly recognized the openness of the issue within both a broader societal context as well as their own political decision-making. Similarly, Palin's gender was also a closed issue in terms of her eligibility for the vice presidency, but the sexist comments made by students and teachers at each school suggest that although they may not have found Palin's candidacy controversial, her gender was an open issue with respect to how they judged female politicians in comparison to their male counterparts. Finally, Obama's religious background was a largely closed issue, although individual teachers positioned it as an open issue in their classes and used it to justify their belief that non-Christians should not be elected president. These findings offer implications for the teaching of controversial issues that are contextualized within traditionally taboo topics of race, gender, and religion.

Keywords: controversial issues | politics | race | gender | religion

Article:

* WAYNE JOURNELL is an Assistant Professor and Secondary Social Studies Program Coordinator in the Department of Teacher Education and Higher Education at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He can be contacted at: awjourne@uncg.edu

“Well, you know that Obama is a Muslim.” No, the correct answer is, he is not a Muslim. He is a Christian. He has always been a Christian. But the really right answer is, what if he is? Is there something wrong with being a Muslim in this country? The answer is no.—*General Colin Powell responding to criticism of then-presidential candidate Barack Obama on Meet the Press, October 19, 2008.*

The 2008 Presidential Election was a decidedly unique political event in American history. Forty-five years after Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech to a crowd on the Washington Mall and 145 years after President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, an African-American was poised to ascend to the nation’s highest political office. Barack Obama, the son of a White American mother and a Black Kenyan father, was perhaps an unlikely candidate for a post-9/11 society that still harbored the scars of terrorism and a legacy of Jim Crow, yet his mantra of change appealed to a growing number of Americans dissatisfied with the policies of the Bush administration and ultimately led to his capturing the Democratic nomination. Moreover, the addition of Sarah Palin as the Republican vice presidential nominee marked only the second time in American history in which a woman had secured a spot on the presidential ticket of one of the two major parties, and her nomination came on the heels of Hillary Clinton’s groundbreaking run in the 2008 Democratic primary.

The reality of electing the nation’s first African-American president or female vice president was never far from the center of political debate and public curiosity during the campaign, and as a result, Americans of all ages were forced to address whether the tradition of electing White males to the top two positions in the government should be challenged. Sadly, however, the opportunities created by this election rarely led to a thoughtful and sustained dialogue about the prevalence and evolution of racism, sexism, and religious discrimination in the United States. Instead, the media often accentuated the ugly aspects of these issues in ways that seemed to exacerbate existing stereotypes and fears. From the attention received by Obama’s response to derogatory comments made by Reverend Jeremiah Wright about White America, to the sexist messages portrayed through Saturday Night Live and the digitally altered pictures of a bikini-clad Palin that were widely circulated on the Internet, to the image of a White woman at a McCain rally asserting that Obama was “an Arab”, the 2008 campaign was filled with moments that appeared to detract from rather than advance conversations of these issues. Progressive dialogue that sought to delve deeper into the historical and cultural prejudices of American society, like the statement from General Powell that prefaced this article, was exceedingly rare.

In social studies classrooms across the United States, teachers were faced with the daunting task of teaching this historic election to students whose political interest had been piqued by the diversity of the candidates and the overall sense of national urgency present during the campaign (Journell, 2011). While the election offered an opportunity to link the formal curriculum to a real-life political event that contained far-reaching social implications, it also forced teachers to address an unexpected level of controversy in their classrooms. As Hess (2009) notes in her work, politics and political issues are inherently controversial and often cause teachers to proceed cautiously or avoid these topics completely. However, the demographics of the individuals running in this election created an additional element of risk for teachers by

requiring them to wade into issues related to race, gender, and religion, topics that are often considered taboo in educational circles (Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 1999).

Through a qualitative study of six high school government classes, I sought to better understand how the teachers and their students responded to the controversial nature of this election in their classrooms. Specifically, I wanted to analyze whether the teachers and their students considered an African-American presidential candidate with a non-Christian religious background or a female vice presidential candidate as a controversial issue, and if so, how the teachers would respond to these issues in their classrooms. The six classes were located within three high schools that varied in size, geographic location, and student demographics, which allowed for a comparison of responses from a variety of contexts. In all three schools, the diversity present in the election seemed to add an additional layer of complexity to the teachers' political instruction throughout the semester.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Ideology and Socially Taboo Topics

Classrooms are natural environments for controversy because they are typically more ideologically and culturally diverse than students' home lives or social circles (Parker, 2003, 2010). How this diversity is addressed in the classroom has been the subject of much work among those who argue that education is inherently an ideological institution regulated by power and authority (Anyon, 1981; Apple, 1979, 1982; Foucault, 1991; Friere, 1970/1993). Within that framework, teachers hold positions of considerable authority in the classroom, both as gatekeepers of information (Thornton, 1991) and as curricular decision-makers who regulate how students are allowed to participate and how information will be presented and taught (Reich, 2007).

Given this power structure, completely neutral classroom instruction can never exist (James, 2009; Kelly, 1986; Passe & Evans, 1996), even if it may be a worthwhile goal toward which teachers should strive (Brandt, 1959; Bullough, Gitlin, & Goldstein, 1984). Certainly, teachers' actions—from the language they use to their classroom demeanor—has an effect on students' social and civic development (Brophy, 1979). The literature is teeming with examples of social studies teachers who have shaped their classrooms, for better or worse, through their words and actions (e.g., Bolgatz, 2005; Journell, in press; Niemi & Niemi, 2007; Pace, 2003). However, when dealing with the taboo topics of race, gender, and religion, oftentimes what is not said or done in the classroom plays as much, if not more, of a role than the words or actions that actually take place (Bickmore, 2002; Crocco, 2001; Franck, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tatum, 1992). Delpit (1995) argues that this "silenced dialogue" reinforces dominant social norms and fails to combat the stereotypes students bring with them into the classroom (p. 23).

Dialogue, however, is an important step in combating societal oppression. As Applebaum (2009) notes, the goal of social justice education is "engagement but not necessarily agreement" (p. 399). In other words, students, especially those in positions of privilege, may not see the relevance in discussing elements of diversity or may even disagree with the premise, but

educators have a responsibility to continually expose students to these types of conversations regardless of their preconceived notions. Applebaum continues,

Engagement might be discomfiting and threatening for students who enjoy dominant group privilege and who have the luxury of choosing whether they want to critically reflect on their own assumptions about the social world and themselves. To attempt to get a glimpse of what dominant group privilege looks like from the perspective of the marginalized, systematically privileged students must be willing to consider what they might believe is impossible to think and be willing to engage with questions they never thought to ask. (p. 399)

Discussing diversity becomes even more important because the formal curriculum to which students are exposed rarely moves beyond a Eurocentric, White male perspective, which creates implications for the development of student identity. As Ogbu (1992) and others (e.g., Epstein, 1998, 2000) note, the type of curriculum taught to students of color is important in that they need to be able to view themselves in a positive light within their classroom instruction. Crocco (2000, 2007) has made similar arguments regarding the absence of women's history within social studies curricula. Research also suggests that a multicultural education may benefit students in positions of power as much as students of traditionally marginalized backgrounds due to the cultural awareness that can occur as a result of a diverse curriculum (Wills, 1996). In addition to helping construct the way in which students identify themselves and their place in the world, the identity constructed from classroom instruction potentially impacts perceptions of students' future abilities and aspirations, or what Markus and Nurius (1986) term, one's "possible self."

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the majority of educators who study the teaching of race, gender, and religion in schools argue that these topics need to be regularly addressed in a straightforward, respectful manner (e.g., Crocco, 2001; Gay, 2004; Loewen, 1995; Passe & Willox, 2009). However, the taboo nature of these topics often breeds controversy, especially when they are discussed within broader social or political contexts. Race, gender, and religion are not innately controversial; however, they underlie many of the controversial issues prevalent in society, such as affirmative action, abortion, and gay marriage. Research has shown that many social studies teachers approach controversy in their classrooms with trepidation or avoid it at all costs, even when controversial issues fit within the scope of the curriculum (Hess, 2004).

While the taboo nature of broaching race, gender, and religion in the classroom has been well documented (e.g., Cicetti-Turro, 2007; Evans et al., 1999; Tatum, 1992; Wade, 1995), one of the difficulties in researching teachers' and students' responses to controversial issues is the fact that what is deemed controversial can vary among individuals, is often predicated on context, and can change over time (Camicia, 2008; Ersoy, 2010; Hess, 2009). For example, Washington and Humphries (2011) describe one teacher's experience with discussions of race in a predominately White, rural high school. They found that many of the race-related issues the teacher considered "closed" or uncontroversial, such as biracial marriage, were still, in fact, "open" and subject to controversy for many of her students. This ideological contrast forced the teacher to reexamine many of her pedagogical decisions, such as whether to disclose her personal opinions on controversial issues surrounding race.

The focus of the present study is how the race, gender, and religious backgrounds of the candidates running in the 2008 Presidential Election impacted discussions of politics and the election in a variety of contexts. From a strictly legal standpoint, the demographics of the individuals running for office should not have been controversial because all fit the constitutional requirements for the presidency. However, the vignettes that prefaced this article suggest that a sizeable portion of the electorate considered Obama or Palin's candidacy an "open" or controversial issue, perhaps not in terms of violating the Constitution, but in terms of a public policy debate on whether Americans should oppose the historical precedent of electing White males to the federal executive branch and elect an African-American president whose father practiced Islam or a female vice president.¹

Controversy in the Classroom

Recognizing and defining controversy. Hess (2009) defines *open issues* as those having more than one rational point of view, thus ripe for deliberation. Conversely, she defines *closed issues* as those which have one generally accepted answer or point of view. Hess, however, acknowledges that issues do not necessarily remain open or closed, a phenomenon she describes as tipping. Hess provides an excellent example of how issues can tip over time in her description of Americans' changing interpretations of Japanese-American internment during World War II. Shortly after the war, there was an overwhelming consensus that the internment was necessary and, thus, a closed issue. In subsequent decades, opinions began to shift and people began questioning whether the internment was justified. By the late 1980s, the issue had tipped so far the other way that the internment was again considered a closed issue, only this time the consensus was that it had been a violation of human rights.

From an instructional standpoint, Hess (2009) outlines the steps teachers should take in order to successfully discuss controversial issues in their classes. Teachers must first recognize and define the controversial issues being presented in class. Then, teachers need to decide whether they wish to teach those issues as *open* or *closed issues*. If issues are deemed *open* teachers have to make the decision whether to engage their students in discussions of the issue. Finally, if controversial issues discussions occur, then teachers must define their role in the discussion, which includes deciding whether to disclose their personal opinions to their students.

Hand (2008) argues that issues should be taught as controversial when rational opposing views on the issue can be held simultaneously. However, determining whether rational opposing views on an issue exist is often left to the teacher and subject to controversy itself. Hess (2009) provides an example of this role of teachers in her response to a criticism of an article she wrote in *Social Education*. In that article, Hess had advocated showing Al Gore's documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, to teach about global warming. In a subsequent issue, a high school teacher submitted a letter to the editor that criticized Hess for advocating Gore's documentary without encouraging teachers to give equal time to a British documentary that characterized global warming as a myth. Hess responded by saying,

As an educator who advocates the inclusion of controversial issues in the curriculum, I frequently encounter the view that *all* topics should be presented to students as controversial so they can decide which view to support. I find that view irresponsible. Our job as teachers is to make the best judgments we can about the content of our courses. It

is a challenging task that will be done with more integrity if we make *public* our decisions about what questions we present as open or closed and the grounds on which those decisions are based. (pp. 121-122)

In an example directly related to the topics under examination in the present study, the teacher described in Washington and Humphries' (2011) study found that clearly defining whether issues were open or closed before engaging in discussions of race-related topics was an effective strategy to ensure that her students avoided discussion of closed issues while remaining active participants in discussions of open issues.

Teacher disclosure. Once issues are deemed controversial and open for discussion, then teachers must facilitate the discussion of those issues. The decision of whether or not to disclose one's personal political beliefs in the classroom, or what Hess (2005) describes as the "disclosure dilemma" (p. 47), is one with which social studies educators continually grapple, particularly in courses like civics and government which naturally lend themselves to issues-centered instruction (Avery, Sullivan, Smith, & Sandell, 1996). There is a strong theoretical base for teacher disclosure within the literature, stemming from Kelly's (1986) seminal work in which he argues that teacher neutrality is not only impossible, it is also undesirable. Instead, Kelly posits that teachers should strive for what he terms "committed impartiality," which allows teachers to model appropriate civic behavior by disclosing their own opinions while still remaining tolerant of dissenting views. Kelly believes that by adopting a committed impartiality stance in the classroom, teachers can transform the act of discussion into a civic goal unto itself that is separate from the content being discussed, an argument supported by others (Parker & Hess, 2001; Passe & Evans, 1996).

However, Kelly (1986) is quick to note that all instances of teacher disclosure are not desirable. He differentiates committed impartiality from what he terms "exclusive partiality," which is characterized by teachers pushing their opinions on their students without explaining that their views are merely one interpretation of a particular issue. Given the aforementioned power dynamics of the typical classroom, the line between committed impartiality and exclusive partiality can be thin, which is why many teachers shy away from broaching controversial issues in their classes (Hess, 2004; Kelly & Brandes, 2001; Miller-Lane, Denton, & May, 2006; Oulton, Day, Dillon, & Grace, 2004). It may also explain the uncertainty surrounding research on students' opinions on teacher disclosure. In a study of 22 high school social studies teachers and over 500 current and recently graduated high school social studies students, Hess and McAvoy (2009) found the majority of students (80%) were in favor of teacher disclosure, yet nearly half (46%) were either satisfied with the amount of disclosure they received in their classes or wished they had heard less of their teachers' points of view. Only 52% stated they wished their teachers had disclosed more of their personal opinions in class. Moreover, over 40% of both teachers and students surveyed expressed fear that teacher disclosure could influence the political beliefs of students. However, only 23% of students claimed they were likely to change their political opinions in light of teacher disclosure. The contradictions in these responses illustrate the larger issue surrounding teacher disclosure in secondary education, which is that students generally seem to enjoy when their teachers disclose their opinions on controversial issues, at least to the point that they perceive their teachers are trying to push their beliefs onto their students.

Unfortunately, as Hess (2008) notes in her review of the literature, few empirical studies of how social studies teachers broach controversial issues and conceptualize teacher disclosure exist. In her work, Hess (2002, 2009; Hess & Posselt, 2002) has found that although students seem to enjoy discussing controversial issues as part of their social studies classes, many teachers seek to avoid controversy in their classes at all costs. Her studies of teachers who do broach controversial issues in their classes have shown that there does not seem to be much uniformity on what necessarily constitutes a controversial issue, and the decision whether or not to introduce controversial issues into the curriculum depends on a variety of factors, such as school climate and the perceived support of the administration. Other studies on the teaching of specific controversial political events suggest pressure to adhere to the formal curriculum also affects the level of emphasis teachers place on controversial issues in their classrooms (Journell, 2010b; Merryfield, 1993; Wilson, Haas, Laughlin, & Sunal, 2002).

Hess (2004) has created a typology that describes ways in which teachers are likely to approach the disclosure dilemma in their classrooms. While she has found that some teachers purposefully try to teach a particular perspective, either by denying the controversial nature of an issue or by firmly believing there exists a true correct answer to an issue despite its controversial nature, Hess states that most teachers attempt to achieve “balance” in their instruction by removing themselves from discussions to ensure all sides receive a fair hearing. This observation aligns with Kelly’s (1986) belief that teachers find comfort in neutral impartiality, a finding that has been supported in work on preservice and practicing teachers’ views on teacher disclosure (Kelly & Brandes, 2001; Miller-Lane et al., 2006).

Despite the fact that most teachers believe they are balanced in their instruction, recent studies question whether teachers of “neutral” social studies classrooms are as balanced as they proclaim. In a study of six New York social studies teachers, Niemi and Niemi (2007) found those teachers who stated they purposely withheld their personal political beliefs from students in order to avoid swaying them toward a particular ideology regularly intimated their opinions in a variety of ways. Teachers often gave direct opinions to students that made them look like experts and would routinely give students political advice that often correlated with their own political beliefs. Moreover, the teachers would regularly engage in political name-calling, make snide comments about certain candidates, and attempt humor that let their true political opinions show. In one particularly vivid example, an exchange between one of the teachers and the district superintendent resulted in the latter referring to “Hillary Rotten Clinton” (p. 43), which prompted laughter from the class. After the superintendent left, the teacher made no attempt to address the comment, letting his silence express his feelings on the issue.

In a similar study during the 2008 Presidential Election, Journell (in press) found that several teachers prided themselves on being politically neutral in class because they did not reveal their candidate choice before the election. Yet, the words and actions of each of these “neutral” teachers often intimated a clear position on the election, such as showing speeches by Obama without countering with speeches by Republicans or making critical comments about candidates based on personal opinions. A comparison of the disclosure and non-disclosure classrooms found that students seemed appreciative of knowing their teachers’ political opinions, even if they did not personally agree with them or thought their teacher was trying to persuade them to adhere to a certain position.

Locating studies in which teachers disclose their feelings on political issues surrounding race, gender, and religion is considerably harder. As previously mentioned, most teachers tend to avoid these topics completely, and classrooms in which teachers regularly discuss their views on race and other taboo issues, such as the one described by Bolgatz (2005), are not typical. Too often, teacher disclosure in this area takes the form of insensitive comments or silence when discriminatory comments are made by others (Bickmore, 2002; Crocco, 2001; Delpit, 1995; Franck, 2002). Few studies have attempted to analyze teacher disclosure on race, gender, and religion within the context of controversial public issues, especially those that garner much national attention and inevitably permeate classroom walls. For example, Crocco and Grolnik (2007) describe the development of a curriculum for teachers around Spike Lee's documentary, *When the Levees Broke*, which critically analyzes the government's response to the Hurricane Katrina disaster and the thousands of people, mostly poor African-Americans, who were stranded in the wake of the storm. Although there have been reports of the curriculum achieving its intended goals of fostering empathy and teaching for social justice (e.g., Thomas-Brown, 2010), it is unclear how teachers have approached disclosing their own opinions about the racial and economic factors embedded within the documentary.

Of course, the "*Teaching The Levees*" curriculum was developed in 2007, two years after Katrina hit New Orleans, so even if teachers use the curriculum to revisit the controversy, it will not reveal how these issues were broached in the days and weeks after the disaster when emotions were running high and Americans were watching coverage of the rescue efforts on a nightly basis. The present study attempts to analyze how teachers addressed controversial issues related to race, gender, and religion within the context of an ongoing political event.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This study is part of a larger research project on teaching politics in secondary education during the 2008 Presidential Election (Journell, 2009). In this study, I observed six teachers who were divided among three high schools located in the Southwest Chicago suburbs in a county that voted for Obama by a 56% margin. The schools were chosen in a deliberate attempt to ensure a diverse pool of teachers, students, and political environments. I sent emails to the principals of over 20 schools in the same broad geographic area asking them to participate in the study. Four schools agreed to take part in the study; however, I was forced to reduce the number to three in order to account for travel time between each of the schools. The three schools that were chosen as research sites fit my preferences of having a variety of schools in terms of geographic location, size, student demographics, and community/ school political climate. The school that was not chosen as a research site was very similar in all of these categories to Roosevelt High School, which is why I chose not to include it as part of the study.²

The teachers at each school were chosen to participate in the study because they taught courses in civics or government, which given the scope of their curriculum, positioned them to naturally engage their students in discussions of politics and the election. At Roosevelt, the courses were designated as "civics" and were required of freshmen, while at Armstrong and St. Thomas High Schools "U.S. Government" was a required course for seniors. For the sake of brevity, I will use the term "government" to collectively describe the courses at all three schools throughout the remainder of the article.

At the two smaller schools in the study, I was able to observe all of the government teachers at that school. At Roosevelt, I chose three teachers who indicated a desire to teach about the election and whose classes did not conflict with others that I was observing.³ Each of the three schools and their respective teachers are described in greater detail below, and Table 1 offers demographic information about each of the teachers and the students in their classes.

Table 1
Teacher and Student Demographics

Teacher Name	School	Race	Teaching Experience	Voted For	Disclosed Voting Preference Prior to Election	Class Grade Level	Class Demographics
Mr. Harrison	Roosevelt	African-American	Less than 5 Years	McCain	No	Freshman	Regular-Level 3 African-American 18 Latino 3 White
Ms. Jackson	Roosevelt	White	Between 5 and 10 Years	Obama	No	Freshman	Lower-Level 7 African-American 12 Latino 7 White
Ms. Wilkinson	Roosevelt	White	First Year	Obama	No	Freshman	Regular-Level 6 African-American 11 Latino 7 White
Mr. Ryan	Armstrong	White	Between 5 and 10 Years	McCain	Yes	Senior	Regular-Level 21 Students/All White
Mr. Leander	St. Thomas	White	Over 30 Years	Obama	Yes	Senior	Advanced Placement 17 Students/All White
Mr. Pierce	St. Thomas	White	Over 40 Years	Unknown*	No	Senior	Advanced Placement 7 Students/All White

*Mr. Pierce refused to share his candidate choice with the author or his classes.

Roosevelt High School

Roosevelt High School is located within a major urban area and services over 2,500 students. The student body at Roosevelt was very diverse; at the time of the study, the student population was identified as 43% Latino, 29% African-American, and 27% White. In addition, over 30% of Roosevelt students were eligible for free or reduced lunch, a statistic that is representative of the working-class status of the local neighborhoods that feed into the school. Based on surveys given to large numbers of seniors and freshmen at each school, the political climate at Roosevelt was strongly Democratic, and the student body was overwhelmingly in favor of Obama in the election.⁴ At Roosevelt, government was a required course for incoming freshmen, and each of the three teachers who participated in this study taught government exclusively.

Ms. Wilkinson. Ms. Wilkinson was a first-year teacher who had recently graduated from a prominent state university. According to Ms. Wilkinson, the diversity present at Roosevelt enticed her to accept the position at the school because it contrasted with her White, middle-class background, creating an opportunity for reciprocal learning with her students. She described herself as liberal, and she supported Obama in the election, although she kept that information from her students throughout the semester. The political leanings of her students were consistent with the overarching political climate at Roosevelt in that surveys showed the class was overwhelmingly in favor of Obama.⁵

Mr. Harrison. Mr. Harrison was unique in several ways. In his mid-forties but only in his fourth year of teaching, he had taken a nontraditional path into education. After a 20-year career in the private sector, Mr. Harrison decided to switch professions. After obtaining his teaching certification, he took a position at Roosevelt, the same school he had attended as a teenager. As a Roosevelt alumnus and an African- American, Mr. Harrison was able to relate to the personal lives of many of his students, yet his strong religious beliefs and economic success in the private sector often swayed him toward a more conservative approach to politics. Although he considered himself a moderate, Mr. Harrison ultimately decided to vote for McCain, a decision that went against the political climate of both the school and the local African- American community (Journell, 2010a). Mr. Harrison's class, however, leaned strongly for Obama.

Ms. Jackson. Ms. Jackson co-taught a lower-level class comprised of a large number of special education students. She shared teaching responsibilities in several of her classes with Ms. Lincoln, a special education teacher who, like Ms. Jackson, was White and in her late twenties. Although she remained publicly undecided throughout the semester and was a registered Republican, Ms. Jackson cast her vote for Obama in November. As with the two other classes at Roosevelt, Ms. Jackson's class disproportionately favored Obama in the election.

Armstrong High School

Armstrong High School is a small school of 600 students that serves a predominately rural area approximately 20 miles outside of the city where Roosevelt is located. As the only high school in its district, Armstrong received a considerable amount of local funding and catered to a predominately White, middle-class population. At the time of the study, the student body at Armstrong was 95% White with around 20% of students eligible for free and reduced lunch. Surveys showed that the student body at Armstrong leaned Democratic, although not to the same extent as the students at Roosevelt. At Armstrong, government was a required course for seniors and was paired with a semester of economics.

Mr. Ryan. Only one teacher at Armstrong, Mr. Ryan, taught government. As a young teacher in his late twenties and a coach of multiple sports at the school, Mr. Ryan was a favorite of students. An open conservative in his classroom, Mr. Ryan told his students that he planned to vote for McCain because the Republican platform seemed to mesh with his White, middle-class values and religious views. However, Mr. Ryan's class overwhelmingly favored Obama in the election.

St. Thomas High School

St. Thomas High School is a private Catholic school located within five miles of Roosevelt. Students must apply for admission to St. Thomas, and the annual tuition is nearly \$8,000 per student. In addition, students are required to attend mandatory religious retreats and participate in 30 hours of religious community service each year. At the time of the study, the school served over 900 students, 95% of whom were White. Surveys showed that the student body was almost evenly split in their support of each of the two major candidates in the election. As at Armstrong, government at St. Thomas was a senior-level course juxtaposed with a semester of economics. Two teachers were responsible for teaching government at St. Thomas, both of whom were White and had over 30 years of teaching experience.

Mr. Pierce. Mr. Pierce was in his fourth year of teaching at St. Thomas after retiring from a long career in public schools. The product of a Catholic education himself, Mr. Pierce considered himself a political independent but admitted that as he got older, he found himself voting Republican with increased frequency. Mr. Pierce was the only teacher in the study who refused to tell me, even in confidence, who he voted for in the election. Consistent with the school as a whole, Mr. Pierce's class was almost evenly split in their support of the candidates.

Mr. Leander. The other government teacher at St. Thomas, Mr. Leander, taught the Advanced Placement section and had a reputation among students for being a demanding teacher. Perhaps the most politically engaged teacher in the study, Mr. Leander considered himself a political independent and was a very vocal Obama supporter in his classroom. Mr. Leander's class was almost evenly divided between the two major candidates, although a similar percentage claimed to be undecided.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The focus of this study was to analyze how the teachers and their students would respond to the inclusion of an African-American presidential candidate whose father practiced Islam or a female vice presidential candidate on a major-party ticket. The following questions guided my data collection:

1. Generally, was the diversity present in the election discussed as an "open" controversial issue? The specific issues present in this election were:
 - a. Should an African-American be elected president of the United States?
 - b. Should a female be elected vice president of the United States?
 - c. Should a person with a non-Christian upbringing be elected president of the United States?
2. How did the teachers disclose their own views on issues related to race, gender, and religion as they pertained to the candidates running in the election?
3. How did the teachers and students generally discuss race, gender, and religion within the context of the election?

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

I used a multiple case study design, which allows for the examination of several "bounded systems" using one common framework (Stake, 1995, p. 5). In this study, the six government classrooms were the bounded systems being analyzed with the teachers and their students acting as participants. According to Yin (1994), case studies are ideal for "examining contemporary events, but when relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated" (p. 8). Given that I wished to better understand how these teachers broached controversy in their classrooms within the context of a historical political event, this method of inquiry seemed appropriate.

The primary mode of data collection was through my participation as a participant-observer in each class from the beginning of school in August through the election in November. On average, I visited each of the six classrooms approximately three to four times per week during the semester.⁶ The majority of my time in each class was spent observing and writing field notes of my observations. I decided against audiorecording the classroom observations because most of the classes were large, and even if I had placed the recorder in a central location, it is doubtful it would have picked up comments from across the room. Also, since the acoustics of each classroom were not ideal for audiorecording, it would have been extremely difficult to decipher participant comments in the midst of the other classroom noise. Therefore, the dialogues from the classroom observations presented in this article are reflective of my field notes and may not always contain exact quotations. However, all of the classroom communication presented contains as much verbatim material as possible and reflects the spirit of the comments as they occurred in the classrooms.

My field notes consisted of both my observations, in which I tried to record as much verbatim data as I could, as well as my personal interpretations of classroom events, which I recorded in the margins adjacent to my observational data. For example, when I heard comments that I perceived to be blatantly racist or sexist, such as when students criticized Michelle Obama's dress and weight, I would juxtapose the words used by the students with my interpretations of the comments. I conducted informal member checks with each of the teachers on a weekly basis in which I shared my interpretations of the events that were occurring in their classrooms. Occasionally, I would speak with a teacher after a specific observation if I felt I was unclear about my observational data from that class period, such as confirming which student had made a particular comment in class.

While most of my time in each classroom was spent observing, I volunteered to help with all aspects of classroom instruction if needed. Usually, this involved helping students with individual assignments or group work. On a handful of occasions, the teachers asked me to co-teach lessons with them based on my areas of expertise within the content area. For example, both Mr. Harrison and Mr. Pierce asked me to help explain the Electoral College during that portion of the curriculum.

In addition to the observational data, I gathered secondary data through classroom artifacts and semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 1998) with each teacher and several students from each class. I formally interviewed each teacher twice, once at the beginning of the study and again after the election (Appendix A). The first interview served to better understand the teachers' perspectives on civic education and their anticipated strategies for teaching the election (see Journell, 2010b). The second interview asked the teachers to assess their handling of the election throughout the semester. After the election, I also asked for students to volunteer to be interviewed as part of the study. I was able to interview a small sample of students from each class, and in these interviews, I asked students to reflect upon their teacher's coverage of the election (Appendix B). At Roosevelt, the students who participated in the interviews were representative of the diversity present in each of their respective classes, and collectively, the students who were interviewed in each of the classes were a mixture of males and females and represented a wide range of academic abilities.⁷ All teacher and student interviews were audiotaped and recorded for accuracy.

Data Analysis

Within any qualitative study, a researcher's own identity affects his or her interpretations of events, and this is particularly true in studies that focus on depictions of race, gender, and religion. Pillow (2003) argues that qualitative researchers must recognize their own identities and "be critically conscious through personal accounting of how [their] self-location, position, and interests influence all stages of the research process" (p. 178). As a married, White male university professor who taught high school government prior to entering academia, I am aware of the challenges associated with broaching these traditionally taboo topics in one's classroom. However, as an advocate of a social justice approach to education, I firmly believe that these topics should be discussed openly and candidly within public education. Moreover, I supported Obama during the 2008 contest in part because I hoped his candidacy would lead to a productive dialogue about race in the United States. Even though I did not support Palin's policies, I welcomed her inclusion on the Republican ticket as a way to call attention to the gender inequities that still exist in this country.

I disclose this information as a way of acknowledging my own biases entering this study. Therefore, I attempted to use analysis procedures that minimized these biases and would allow me to focus on what was actually occurring in each of these classrooms. Specifically, I used a constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which allowed for a comparison of various types of data across each of the research sites. Using an inductive or data-driven coding scheme (Boyatzis, 1998), I was able to identify and categorize instances within the data that contained similar characteristics which, in this case, dealt with discussions about race, gender, and religion in each classroom within the context of the election.

Any data that addressed race, gender, or religion, either explicitly or implicitly, were coded as such. Then, these data were broken down further by analyzing the context in which each instance occurred, such as whether a comment was made within a discussion of the election. At the conclusion of the data collection, I was then able to look broadly at these categories and develop patterns from which I derived meaning about each of the cases (Stake, 1995). At that point, I was able to place the findings within a framework of existing research and theory in order to create a narrative of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Stake, 1995).

It is important to note that since the presidential election was not part of the formal curriculum at any of the three schools, the amount of emphasis placed on the election varied considerably from teacher to teacher. In general, the Roosevelt teachers and those who taught lower-level classes spent less time on the election than the other teachers in this study due, in part, to the pressure placed on those teachers to prepare their students for the end-of-course U.S. Constitution test required by the state. Ms. Jackson and Ms. Wilkinson, in particular, only discussed the election when direct parallels could be made between the election and the formal curriculum. Mr. Harrison and Mr. Pierce regularly included the election into their daily lessons, but would spend the majority of their instructional time on the formal curriculum. Mr. Ryan and Mr. Leander, on the other hand, would discuss the election in depth almost every day (see Journell, 2010b).

This disparity in election instruction is evident in the way I present data in this article, but it is proportional to the amount of election-related data I received in each of the classes. The fact that

the two female teachers discussed the election the least is interesting, although I feel it is more of a coincidence than an implication of the study. Comments made by both teachers suggest that they would have incorporated the election more into their daily instruction had they not felt pressured to stick to the formal curriculum in their classes. In contrast, both Mr. Ryan and Mr. Leander worked under the same end-of-course constraints, but they both admitted that they were not worried about their students passing the U.S. Constitution test, which is why they felt as though they could devote more time to election-related discussion in their classes.

Finally, when dealing with topics of identity and power, such as race, gender, and religion, oftentimes phenomena related to these issues are transparent to those situated within the power structure (Foucault, 1980, 1991). As an “outsider” who was privy to observing election-related instruction at multiple sites, I was able to use the narratives from each case to create cross-case comparisons of the data. However, as I was making comparisons I was mindful to consider the political climate and demographics of each school (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While the findings of this study are not generalizable beyond the specific cases presented, the larger themes presented in the findings are broad enough that others could make naturalistic generalizations from these cases that would apply to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995).

FINDINGS

After analyzing the data, it was apparent the teachers approached controversy related to one taboo topic, such as race, differently than they did other topics. In order to present my findings in a coherent manner, I will discuss the teachers’ responses to race, gender, and religion separately.

Obama’s Race as a Socially Open Issue

Race was clearly a focal point of the election for the students in each of the six classes, even more so than gender and religion. At Roosevelt, students tended to place race front and center of their discussions of politics as evidenced by the comment made by an African-American student in Ms. Wilkinson’s class, who proclaimed that he would never vote unless it was for a Black candidate, and echoed by a comment made by Emilio, a Latino student in Mr. Harrison’s class, who told me that he decided to support Obama “when [he] heard there was going to be a Black president.” Even among students of different races, there seemed to be an implicit understanding that the result of the election would ultimately boil down to race. For example, during a small group discussion in Ms. Jackson’s class, I observed a White student state matter-of-factly that McCain would win because he was White, and the student’s classmate, an African-American, told him that he was probably right.

At the two predominately White schools, race was also at the forefront of election discussions, although it was often placed within contexts of electoral strategy or consequences, both intended and unintended, due to the historical nature of the election. For example, there was much discussion in Mr. Leander’s class about the so-called “Bradley Effect” where White voters tell pollsters they will vote for an African-American but fail to deliver on this promise once they enter the voting booth. Related to those discussions were regular comments that insinuated Obama would win only because he had widespread African-American support or concerns that

Obama would be assassinated should he win. For example, the following conversation took place as students were leaving Mr. Leander's class toward the end of the campaign:

Tommy (White student): [Obama] says he wants out of the war, but all he will do is move troops from Iraq to Afghanistan and then invade Pakistan.

Stuart (White student): Well, at least we will get one war taken care of.

Tommy: We are just starting to turn the tide in Iraq!

Stuart: That is just what McCain says.

Tommy: Well, it doesn't matter anyway. If Obama wins he will be assassinated; you know it is going to happen.

Given that many of these types of comments were made by students who supported Obama as well as the fact that Obama received a fair amount of support in all six classes and at all three schools (Journell, 2010a, 2011), the issue of whether someone should be disallowed from the presidency based on race could be described as predominately closed in each of the classes. However, these comments also suggest that the students recognized Obama's race was an open issue among portions of the electorate. Further, the intrigue over Obama's race in each of the six classes also suggests that his race was an open issue for these students as it related to their decisions on whether to support Obama in the election. During their coverage of the election, each of the teachers differed in how they handled this issue in their classrooms, particularly with their willingness to engage the issue and their level of disclosure.

Candid discussions of the issue. The only teacher to regularly discuss race in his or her class was Mr. Harrison. His class at Roosevelt was very diverse, and race often was used as a framework for discussing politics and the election, as this conversation shows:

Alberto (Latino student): Republicans are always just trying to make White people rich.

Eric (White student): I'm not rich!

Mr. Harrison: Alright, settle down. Everyone is entitled to their opinion, and in many cases, everything does come down to race.

David (White student): But not all White people are racist. That is a stereotype.

Mr. Harrison: That is true. But race is everywhere, even right here in [the Roosevelt district]. The number of Latinos is rising considerably.

Charlie (African-American student): They are taking over!

Mr. Harrison: Now how long do you think it will be until we have a Latino president?

Emilio (Latino student): They won't ever have a Latino president. They don't even want a Black president!

David: We will go in order. (prompts laughter from the class)

Mr. Harrison seemed to recognize the influence of race on his students' interest in the election. As he told me in our final interview, "The fact that Obama was running, an African-American, it was very easy to keep [the students] engaged, so it worked pretty good." Mr. Harrison also routinely tried to challenge his students' preconceived notions of the ways in which race and politics were inherently connected, as evidenced by the following conversation during a unit on political parties:

Marc (Latino student): If you are rich, you are Republican, and if you are poor, you are a Democrat.

Mr. Harrison: Well, not necessarily. I mean, how do you account for Oprah supporting Obama. She is one of the richest people on the planet.

Marc: But normal people like us aren't super rich.

Alberto (Latino student): Republicans are usually White and Democrats are usually other races.

Emilio (Latino student): That's racist!

Mr. Harrison: Hold on, now we are getting deep. We are exploring the racist attitudes that were passed down from our parents and grandparents, but is that still the norm?

David (White student): My whole family is Democrat, and we are obviously White.

Mr. Harrison: You say obvious like I should assume that. You couldn't assume things about my family. I have White and Indian people in my family, but I get what you are trying to say. Now you say your parents are Democrats. Are you going to be a Democrat you think?

David: No, not necessarily.

Mr. Harrison: I would like to talk to you in 15 years, especially if you don't go to college and get exposed to other ideas. What does your dad do?

David: He is a construction worker.

Mr. Harrison: Let's say you end up being a construction worker too; I bet you will have the same views.

Mr. Harrison was not content to let his students fixate on race with respect to their choice in candidate, regularly chastising them for not knowing anything about either candidate other than the fact one was African-American and one was White, which he described as a "travesty in today's society." In addition to his words, Mr. Harrison's disclosure of his own political preferences often appeared to send strong messages to his students about his feelings on race and politics. Although he never disclosed that he planned on voting for McCain due to a fear of social exclusion within the African-American community surrounding Roosevelt (Journell, 2010a), he did admit to his students that he had voted for George W. Bush in 2004, a fact that was initially

met with outrage from his students. Throughout the 2008 contest, Mr. Harrison often told his classes that he remained undecided, which was a constant reminder to his students that he did not support Obama simply because they were of the same race. As the following conversation from our co-teaching of the Electoral College shows, Mr. Harrison regularly disclosed his indecision when students tried to characterize the results of the election with certainty, often on the basis of race:

Emilio (Latino student): (pointing to Wisconsin and Michigan) Are those states still undecided?

Author: Yeah, their polls are too close to call either way.

Emilio: Obama is going to lose there because that is where all the White people live.

Mr. Harrison: Hey now, settle down. Emilio has a point. Race will be a big question in this race. It will depend on how much of people's decisions will boil down to something like race.

Author: Well, I am a White guy, but I am voting for Obama, so you can't make a blanket statement like that. But Emilio has a point, especially if you think of presidential elections as 50 small elections rather than one big election. Take a look at Pennsylvania. That state is normally solidly Democratic, but right now it is too close to call, and there is evidence from the primary election that Obama had trouble with the rural areas when he was running against Hillary Clinton.

Mr. Harrison: Now see, he knows who he wants and is comfortable with that. Me, I am still undecided.

After the election, three of the seven students I interviewed from Mr. Harrison's class stated they liked the fact that he tried to devalue the importance of race in choosing a candidate and cited his refusal to support Obama simply because he was an African-American as a favorable quality. For example, Alberto, a Latino student, told me that his favorite part of the class "was that Mr. Harrison didn't care that Barack Obama was an African-American; he cared about what [the candidates] were talking about." In another example, I asked Melissa, a Latina student, who she thought Mr. Harrison voted for, and after she said that she believed he had voted for McCain, we had the following exchange:

Melissa: He doesn't seem like the type to just vote for Obama because he is Black and all of that like most of our friends do, and I think you can tell how he kind of leans toward McCain more.

Author: Do you respect his opinion for not voting for someone just because he is Black?

Melissa: Yeah.

Mr. Harrison, however, was the exception to the rule. The rest of the teachers in this study seemed to only disclose their opinions on race when it was seen as an element of electoral strategy or when they wanted to emphasize the historical nature of the election; they did not disclose their opinions when race was framed as a social construct. For example, Mr. Leander would regularly discuss the impact of race on the election in terms of demographic groups voting for certain candidates. In response to a question about the Bradley Effect, Mr. Leander replied

that the economy outweighed race and Americans would vote for a “purple Martian” if he or she could fix the economy. A few weeks later as Obama started pulling away in the polls, he remarked that in order for McCain to win, he would either have to be the one of the greatest politicians in American history or the American people would have to be “more racist than we thought.”

Another example can be found in Ms. Wilkinson’s class. On Election Day, Emma, a Latina student, complained that Obama was going to lose the election because all of the White people in the United States were going to vote for McCain. To that point in the semester, Ms. Wilkinson had not disclosed her support of Obama, but she used the opportunity created by Emma’s comment to tell her class that she had voted for Obama that morning. Later in the period, several students asked me if I had voted, and once I told them I had, Ms. Wilkinson turned to Emma and told her that at least two White people were voting for Obama.

Representative examples of how these teachers discussed race within the historical context of the election could be found in Mr. Pierce and Mr. Leander’s classes the day after the election. In the former’s class, students were given a newspaper article that discussed the “Huxtable Effect,” which hypothesized that Obama’s victory was partially due to the widespread success and acceptance of *The Cosby Show* and its portrayal of a white-collar African-American family. Mr. Pierce later told his class that the election was history and it was something that the students would remember. Mr. Leander echoed these comments in his class, but went even further to say that Obama’s victory removed any racist arguments in the United States and told his class that the election got rid of “200 years of wrong.”

Avoiding discussions of the issue. Aside from Mr. Harrison, the teachers in this study seemed to avoid the issue of Obama’s race as a factor in the election completely or approached it with a sense of trepidation that appeared unusual when compared to their treatment of other controversial political issues during the campaign. None of the other teachers ever attempted to initiate a conversation on Americans’ conceptions of race and its impact on politics or the election, and even when students brought these topics up on their own, the teachers avoided disclosing their personal beliefs. For example, consider the following exchange from Ms. Wilkinson’s class during a video of a speech from the Republican National Convention:

Marcus (African-American student): Did you notice there are no young people in the crowd?

Xavier (African-American student): It’s just old White people!

Carol (Latina student): Well, duh, it’s for a White president. (At this point, the camera lands on one of the few African-Americans in attendance)

Several Students: What?

Lawrence (African-American student): They did that on purpose!

Showing campaign speeches was a regular part of Ms. Wilkinson’s class, and during every video she would make comments to students either alerting them to important aspects of the speech or

asking for their opinions on issues mentioned by the candidates. After every video, she would take a few minutes and discuss the salient elements of the speech. However, on this particular day, she chose not to engage her students on their perception of the lack of diversity present in the Republican Party or Carol's insinuation that White Americans would only be interested in voting for a White candidate.

Another example could be found in Mr. Leander's class during the final month of the campaign when many of his conservative students expressed frustration that Obama would win the election based on African-Americans turning out to vote simply because of race. On three separate occasions, students made comments that intimated strong feelings on the racial component of the election, and in all three cases Mr. Leander uncharacteristically avoided speaking to the issue. The first comment dealt with a White student's perception of the local voter registration drive, which he felt was being handled in a racist manner. He complained that registrars outside of the local courthouse were paying African-Americans to register to vote but that White individuals were being ignored. A few weeks later, another White student reported that he had seen an African-American wearing a shirt that had a picture of Obama on one side and on the other it said "Because he is Black." The student felt that if a White individual was wearing a shirt supporting McCain that said "Because he is White", it would be considered racist. Finally, the day after the election, Tommy, one of the more vocal conservatives in the class, suggested that CNN had made a mistake during their broadcast by linking to a live feed of Harlem residents, the majority of whom were African-American, celebrating right after Obama had been announced the winner.

As I have shown elsewhere (Journell, 2011, in press), Mr. Leander was rarely shy about sharing his opinions on almost every facet of the election; yet, when opportunities to discuss the election in terms of how his students conceptualized race within the American political system presented themselves, Mr. Leander chose to avoid engaging his students in more substantive conversations. Moreover, the day after the election, he seemed to implicitly give his approval to an off-color remark about an Obama presidency rather than discuss the social significance of Obama's victory:

Brian (White student): (to Mr. Leander) So, do we start calling it the Black House now?

Mr. Leander: (Laughing) I would imagine there will be a lot of that these days.

Stuart (White student): No, he is half-White; it will be the Grey House.

Finally, this pattern of avoidance was exemplified by the teachers' reactions to students' fears that Obama would be assassinated should he win the election. For example, in Mr. Pierce's class, as he was going around the room asking students to give their opinions on why they supported a certain candidate, Jimmy, a White student, stated that he did not mind Obama but he supported McCain because he thought that an Obama election would cause anger "especially down South" and possibly lead to his assassination. Instead of asking Jimmy to explain his comments like he had done with other students in the class who had articulated policy concerns about one of the candidates, Mr. Pierce simply acknowledged Jimmy's comment and went on to the next student. A similar example occurred in Mr. Ryan's class during a class discussion:

Luke (White student): Haven't all of the Catholics who have been in office been assassinated?

Mr. Ryan: Well, JFK was the only Catholic president, and he was assassinated if that is what you mean.

Luke: Well, Obama is Black, and people think he is a Muslim. I don't think he has a lot going for him if he gets elected.

Mr. Ryan: What are you getting at, Luke? That Obama will be assassinated if he wins?

Lois (White student): But McCain will probably die in office! Then you have to look at Biden and Palin.

Holly (White student): I don't want Biden!

Lois: He is better than Palin!

Curtis (White student): The way I look at it, no one killed Bush and everyone hates him.

Holly: But he isn't Black.

Katherine (White student): But Bush didn't do anything significant enough for people to want to kill him.

Charlotte (White student): Bush was bad, but not bad enough to be killed.

Mr. Ryan: So what are you saying, that even though Bush is unpopular, he is a White guy so no one would think of killing him?

Holly: Yeah, Bush was bad, but race is so big that it may cause people to flip out.

Luke: No one likes him, but they just make fun of him and call it even.

According to these students' logic, simply being African-American increased the likelihood of presidential assassination more than presidential incompetence or mismanagement of the economy. Interestingly, many of these same students publicly supported Obama, but few of them seemed to believe he would be able to serve his full term because of the racist views of "others" in the United States. Mr. Ryan seemed to recognize this irony, and his questions during the conversation gently probed at his students' implicit acknowledgement of racism as an unavoidable element of American society. Although Mr. Ryan's comments suggest an awareness of race as an issue for his students, it is also telling that he did not push harder with his questioning or revisit the issue at any point during the rest of the semester. This dialogue represents a level of engagement with the issue that exceeds what occurred in Mr. Leander's and Mr. Pierce's classes, but it still falls short of the candid discussions that occurred in Mr. Harrison's class.

Palin's Gender as a Largely Closed Issue

Overall, I observed very few examples that suggested the teachers or their students viewed Palin's gender as a controversial issue or a factor in Americans' political decision-making. In this sense, the issue of whether a female should be prohibited from the vice presidency was a closed issue. However, the ways in which Palin and her candidacy were discussed in these classes suggest that many of the teachers and their students placed considerable importance on her gender within the context of the election. Yet, this emphasis on gender often came across as sexist in that many of the comments about Palin focused almost exclusively on her appearance and femininity rather than her political positions.

Interestingly, unlike race, these discussions of gender were rarely avoided by the teachers. There were several times when teachers failed to address what I perceived to be sexist comments, such as male students in Ms. Wilkinson's class making catcalls along the lines of "She is fine!" or "That is his running mate?" while watching a video of Palin or students in multiple classes dissecting the appearances of the candidates' wives. However, comments related to gender were generally addressed with candor from the teachers. But the teachers' disclosure often seemed to trivialize the role of women, either by objectifying female figures in the campaign or by reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes. For example, consider the following conversation in Mr. Leander's class:

Mr. Leander: They spend \$150,000 on Palin's wardrobe, but she is just a hockey mom and an average person, but then they dress her up like Paris Hilton.

Tommy (White student): But she is hot!

Mr. Leander: Well, it is clear they have her on the ticket for one reason: sex appeal. At least, that is what they have turned her into.

Justin (White student): Well, have you seen her butt?

Mr. Leander: See what I mean? You are talking about it.

Brian (White student): Well, we didn't really have that issue with [Hillary] Clinton. [prompts laughter from the class]

This example is representative of the entire semester in that none of the teachers, male or female, ever attempted to discourage these blatantly sexist comments. In fact, two of the male teachers often remarked on Palin's physical appearance. In Mr. Harrison's class, one of his students asked him whether Palin was voted the "hottest governor" in the United States, to which Mr. Harrison replied that "she should have been" and followed by alluding that he was fine if a candidate's sex appeal caused someone to become interested in politics. A couple days later, when trying to make a point about campaign finance, Mr. Harrison called Palin "hot," but said that candidates do not run on their looks, and that Palin wasn't going to help the McCain campaign simply by being attractive. In a similar example, Mr. Pierce once described Palin as "literally and figuratively hot" and referenced the Miss Alaska pageant in which she had participated while attending college.

These types of comments did not cease with the candidates' wardrobes and physical features, however. Many discussions related to Palin or the candidates' wives either used sexist language

or suggested that women lacked the emotional balance to compete in a male-dominated political environment. For example, Mr. Leander told his class that Mrs. Obama had delivered a great speech at the Democratic National Convention because she had been perceived as a “strong, assertive, and even angry woman” and the speech had shown her “softer side.” Mr. Leander also regularly referred to Palin as the “little governor from Alaska” and described her debate performance as a success because she didn’t “run crying from the stage” like many pundits had predicted. Other examples included Mr. Pierce telling his class that Palin’s popularity created the scenario for a “cat fight” with Hillary Clinton, and Mr. Ryan stating that Obama had made a gaffe with his “lipstick on a pig” comment because of Palin’s gender.

Rarely did any of the teachers attempt to unpack the way in which gender appeared to affect Americans’ perceptions of the candidates or the election. One exception occurred in Mr. Ryan’s class when it was discovered that Palin’s teenage daughter was pregnant. Mr. Ryan asked his students if they thought the media would have made as much com- motion if Palin was a man, to which almost everyone, including Mr. Ryan, said they thought it was a double standard. In another example, Mr. Pierce prefaced the upcoming vice presidential debate by saying he thought Palin should admit Biden had more experience but that she had fresh ideas. However, he did not think Palin would follow that strategy, and he attributed this to the fact that she was a woman.

Again, while at no point did I observe students or teachers openly questioning whether Americans should vote for Palin because of her gender, some of the comments, such as Mr. Leander’s surprise that Palin had the emotional strength to complete a debate, suggest that Palin was judged by a different set of criteria than her male counterparts. The language used to describe Palin and the candidates’ wives appeared sexist in the sense that it seemed universally accepted in these classes that female politicians should be evaluated not only on their politi- cal ideology and ability, but also on their appearance and femininity. Unfortunately, none of the teachers attempted to broach that related issue in their classes.

Obama’s Religious Background as a Selectively Open Issue

On a much smaller scale, the propaganda surrounding Obama’s religious beliefs occasionally surfaced at each school. While teachers in each class confirmed Obama was a practicing Christian, occasional comments by certain teachers suggested an uneasiness regarding Obama’s possible association with non-Christian groups. Interestingly, neither teacher at the Catholic school ever broached the possibility that Obama had lied about his faith. Once, when Obama had made a slip of the tongue in an interview and accidentally said, “My Muslim faith,” Mr. Pierce included the story in his daily current events sheet but made a point to say that Obama had made a verbal gaffe and the media had immediately exposed it, effectively closing the issue in his class.

Rather, the only teachers who treated the fact that Obama’s father had practiced Islam as an open issue were Mr. Ryan and Mr. Harrison, both of whom described themselves as devoutly religious. In our initial interview, Mr. Ryan admitted that he always tried to remain objective at school, but that “some of [his] Christian views are hard to keep out of the classroom.” An

example of this partiality occurred toward the end of the semester during a discussion about the election:

Charlotte (White student): Do you know what Obama's middle name is?

Mr. Ryan: I do. Do you?

Charlotte: No, I have been trying to figure it out.

Holly (White student): Isn't it something Iraqish?

Mr. Ryan: His name is Barack Hussein Obama [prompts laughter from the class]. Does his name make a difference? Does the fact that some people think he is a Muslim make a difference? Like when he said in an interview, "My Muslim faith," when the reporter asked him if he meant Christian faith? He says he is a Christian.

Katherine (White student): Why does it matter?

Mr. Ryan: Well, I wouldn't want someone in office who isn't a Christian. That's just my opinion. Would I want a Muslim in office? No way. Would I want a Buddhist in office? No way.

This was one of the rare times during the semester that Mr. Ryan voiced his opinion in a way that left little room for contradiction. Katherine's probing question could have sparked a discussion about the relationship between religion and government or Americans' unfounded fear of anything non-Christian, yet Mr. Ryan appeared to let his personal feelings overwhelm his philosophy of having all views be given equal consideration in his classroom. Although he prefaced his statements by saying they were just his opinions, the way in which he left no room for contradictory opinions suggests that he personally viewed the legitimacy of non-Christians being elected president as a closed issue.

Mr. Harrison offers a similar case. Like Mr. Ryan, he was very religious and would often tell his students that he decided on candidates by first evaluating them through his faith before considering how they would impact the nation and his personal life. As he told me in our final interview, he ultimately decided to vote Republican because "McCain and the conservative philosophy lined up more with [his] faith." While Mr. Harrison rarely pushed his opinions on his students, his approach seemed to change when students mentioned Obama's supposed ties to controversial figures, such as William Ayers. He told his students that he was worried about Obama's upbringing and stated that a person's character is based on with whom he or she associates before accusing Obama of associating with "supposed terrorists."

In a subsequent lecture, Mr. Harrison noted that the president has to be a natural born citizen, as opposed to a naturalized citizen, which led to the following exchange:

Gwen (Latina student): I don't think that makes sense.

Mr. Harrison: Well, it was put there as a safeguard. They don't want anything inside you to

compromise your loyalty to the United States. That is why Obama is being questioned about his ties to people who have extreme views about our country.

Alberto (Latino student): Isn't Obama a Muslim?

Mr. Harrison: I don't think he is a Muslim, but he has Muslim roots.

Eduardo (Latino student): Terrorist!

David (White student): Just because he is a Muslim doesn't mean he is a terrorist.

Mr. Harrison: Well, you can tell a whole bunch about people based on their friends. I think it is reasonable to question his Muslim faith because I don't care if he is Black or whatever, if he is a terrorist, that would be bad for the United States.

In this conversation, Mr. Harrison made it clear he had questions about Obama's faith even though Obama had publicly declared himself a Christian, which also insinuates an opinion about Obama's character. Mr. Harrison also appeared to suggest that practicing Islam equated to terrorism. He did not acknowledge David's remark stating a contradictory viewpoint; rather, he asserted his own opinion that voters should question Obama's faith because he may have had ties to terrorism. As with Mr. Ryan's statements, even though he used the words "I think," the way he positioned his comments suggests that he personally viewed this issue as closed.

At least one of Mr. Harrison's students seemed to recognize his bias on this issue. When I interviewed Vanessa about her opinion of Mr. Harrison's instruction over the semester, she indicated it "could have been better," and when I asked her to explain, the following conversation ensued:

Vanessa (African-American student): Because he was talking about Obama in bad ways.

Author: How so?

Vanessa: Like stuff he said when he had relationships between Muslims and stuff like that.

Author: So you don't think [Obama] is a Muslim?

Vanessa: No.

Author: But you think Mr. Harrison thought he was a Muslim?

Vanessa: Yeah.

Clearly, Vanessa seemed disturbed that Mr. Harrison would insinuate Obama may have lied about his faith to the point that it appeared to affect her attitude toward both Mr. Harrison and his instruction.

Summary

Across the classrooms, Obama's race was not viewed as an open controversial issue in terms of his eligibility for the presidency. However, comments made by students and teachers in all six classes suggested that they not only recognized the issue of Obama's race was at the forefront of many Americans' decisions about his candidacy, but that his race was also integral to their own decisions on whether to support him in the election. However, only Mr. Harrison candidly broached this issue with his students and disclosed his feelings on the issue. The remaining teachers either ignored the issue completely or implicitly acknowledged the openness of the issue without disclosing their own personal opinions.

Palin's gender was not viewed as an open issue with respect to Americans' decisions about her eligibility for the vice presidency. However, the sexist comments made by the male teachers and the students in all six classes suggested that many of them judged female politicians using a different set of criteria than that which was used for male politicians. Similarly, Obama's religious background and its impact on his candidacy was generally viewed as a closed issue in most of the classes. However, two teachers, Mr. Ryan and Mr. Harrison, taught the issue as open, and they both disclosed their personal opinions on the issue.

DISCUSSION

In discussing the treatment of race and racism in public education, Bolgatz (2005) states that "often teachers and students—sometimes apologetically, sometimes angrily, but mostly unselfconsciously—avoid the topics altogether. When they do take place, conversations frequently remain superficial or simplistic" (p. 1). Others have argued that the sentiment behind this assertion extends to the other traditionally taboo topics that are regularly avoided in public education (Bickmore, 2002, Crocco, 2001, Evans et al., 1999). Although the results of this study would generally support those views, these findings also raise important questions about discussing race, gender, and religion within a framework of controversial political issues as well as the role of teacher disclosure in this process.

First, it seemed that race, gender, and religion were not considered equally controversial with respect to the teachers' and their students' feelings about the candidates or the election. The large numbers of students and teachers supporting Obama suggested that they did not personally believe race should disallow a candidate from the presidency. Even the students who supported McCain did not claim to do so simply because he was White. However, the teachers and students in all six classes appeared to recognize that Obama's race was a controversial issue to a certain portion of the electorate, and it was also clear that his race seemed to influence students' perceptions of Obama's candidacy. Similarly, Palin's gender was not considered controversial with respect to her eligibility for the vice presidency, but the way in which Palin was discussed in each of the six classes raised a related issue regarding the extent to which female politicians are treated differently than male politicians. Unlike race, which was scrutinized throughout the semester, none of the teachers chose to broach this related issue of sexism within American politics.

Although Obama was a self-proclaimed Christian, the issue of whether a non-Christian should be elected to the presidency was clearly a controversial issue for at least two teachers. Mr. Harrison and Mr. Ryan viewed Obama's supposed ties to Islam as an open issue with respect

to the legitimacy of his candidacy, and they appeared to teach it as such. These findings support previous work by Hess (2009) in that teachers are often the ones who decide whether issues will be discussed as open or closed in their classrooms. However, none of the teachers ever explicitly defined any of these issues for their students or acknowledged that Obama or Palin's candidacies *could* be considered a controversial issue based solely on their race, gender, or religious affiliations. Since each of these topics was receiving considerable media coverage throughout the campaign, it seems as though each of these classes would have benefitted from a frank discussion of the issues surrounding the diversity present in the election at the beginning of the semester. Washington and Humphries (2011) provide a case study of a teacher who went to great lengths to ensure her students knew why she deemed certain issues open or closed in her classroom, a practice which may have been beneficial in the six classes I observed. Even in the classrooms in which these issues were implicitly deemed closed, discussions rarely took place to explain *why* these issues should be considered closed.

As a result, these findings offer yet another example of teachers missing an opportunity to engage their students in transformative discussions about White privilege, sexism in the United States, and American attitudes toward non-Christians. The treatment of gender as an issue in the election is especially telling. While the teachers did not necessarily treat Palin's candidacy as a controversial issue, the way in which they and their students discussed her in class seemed to reinforce existing stereotypes that politics is a male domain and women are too emotional to succeed in it. This finding reinforces previous work in political science that has found gender stereotypes to be a factor in Americans' political decision-making (e.g., Han & Heldman, 2007; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Koch, 2000), but the blatant sexism that occurred in these classes offers additional implications about the treatment of strong female figures in social studies classrooms. In all six classes, Palin was frequently evaluated as a politician based on her femininity and sexuality, not her political positions. One can only imagine the implicit messages that were sent to the students in these classes, both male and female, when sexist comments were made by teachers or lewd comments made by male students went unaddressed. The fact that none of the female students or, in the case of Ms. Wilkinson and Ms. Jackson, female teachers ever objected to these types of comments reinforces existing notions of classrooms as male-dominated spaces and illustrates the need for greater emphasis on gender equity in social studies classrooms.

Moreover, with Mr. Harrison's class the only one to really broach any of these issues (race) in any sort of depth, this study fits into a pattern found in the literature on multiculturalism in which those students who receive skilled diversity instruction are often the ones who need it the least (e.g., de Waal-Lucas, 2007). The teachers in the predominately White schools either avoided the topic completely or approached race as a sterile topic that may have affected the outcome of the election rather than as a complex societal issue being illuminated by the hysteria surrounding the first African-American presidential candidate in United States history. These findings lend further support to those who argue that all teachers can and should participate in diversity education regardless of the demographic composition of their classes, a notion based on the understanding that a multicultural curriculum can benefit students in the ethnic and cultural majority as much, if not more, than minority students (Au, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Wills, 1996).

Another salient finding is that teachers do not always seem to view disclosing their opinions on controversial political issues and socially taboo topics as one and the same, even when the latter is being discussed within the context of the former. In other words, the teachers in this study who claimed to be politically neutral in the classroom disclosed their opinions about race, gender, and/or religion as it pertained to the election; conversely, those who had no difficulty disclosing their political opinions often chose to avoid discussions of those topics in their classrooms. For example, Mr. Leander gave his opinion on just about every political discussion that occurred in his classroom except when the conversation turned to the social impact of race on the election. On the other hand, Mr. Harrison tried to avoid disclosing his political opinions in class, but he regularly voiced his opinions on aspects of race and religion in the election. Of course, there were two teachers, Ms. Wilkinson and Ms. Jackson, who seemed to avoid most aspects of controversy in their classrooms, which is consistent with literature on both controversial political and socially taboo issues (Evans et al., 1999; Hess, 2004).

However, as Hess (2002) notes in her study of skilled teaching of controversial issues, context plays an important role in how teachers broach controversial topics in their classrooms and whether they choose to disclose their personal opinions. It certainly seems plausible, given studies on White teachers' trepidation toward teaching racial issues (Glazier, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000), that Mr. Harrison, as an African-American, had an easier time discussing race and racism in his class than the White teachers in this study. Similarly, Roosevelt High School, which had a diverse student body, may have been viewed as a more natural environment for discussions of diversity and equity than the two predominately White schools. Moreover, the differences between the academic levels of the classes as well as the teachers' varying levels of experience may have played a role in determining how much critical analyses of race, gender, and religion occurred in each class. It is also plausible to assume that veteran teachers may have more experience dealing with taboo issues in their classrooms or that teachers may feel more comfortable engaging in critical analyses of social issues in "advanced" classes. Yet, the teachers in this study did not necessarily fit into that pattern; Mr. Leander, who had over 30 years of experience, appeared to skirt critical discussions of race in his Advanced Placement class on a regular basis.

These findings also raise questions about teacher disclosure with respect to political issues related to race, gender, and religion. Based on the literature pertaining to teaching socially taboo topics (Evans et al., 1999) and controversial issues (Kelly, 1986), students should theoretically benefit from teacher disclosure during discussions of socially taboo topics that are placed in the context of an open controversial issue. However, that assumption may be predicated on having progressive teachers who are advocates of equity and diversity. For example, the teacher in Washington and Humphries' (2011) study appeared to make a positive impact on her classes by disclosing that she believed certain antiquated issues related to race were closed while acknowledging that others remained open. Similarly, Mr. Harrison's disclosure on the issue related to Obama's race seemed to deepen his students' understanding of the need to evaluate political candidates on their merit, not the color of their skin.

However, what if a teacher's disclosure confirms stereotypes or speaks against diversity? The findings from the present study may offer a cautionary tale for teacher disclosure, at least with respect to intermingling socially taboo and controversial political issues. Consider Hand's (2008)

definition of controversial issues as those which have two rational alternatives. Should issues questioning whether a candidate's race, gender, or religion could affect his or her eligibility or ability to hold political office ever be raised in an era supposedly defined by increased attention to diversity and equality for all students, and if so, should teachers be encouraged to disclose their opinions?

I raise this question in response to Mr. Ryan and Mr. Harrison's assertions that non-Christians' eligibility for the presidency should be questioned even though there is no religious requirement for that office outlined in the U.S. Constitution. Even if Mr. Ryan or Mr. Harrison had presented their belief that Muslim-Americans should not be allowed to run for the presidency in a way that was consistent with Kelly's (1986) view of committed impartiality, should teachers still be allowed to articulate those views? I recognize that by even asking that question, I am disclosing my own bias toward teaching for social justice and open-mindedness, which can easily be construed as promoting a certain political agenda (Applebaum, 2009; Friedman, 2007; James et al., 2010). However, if teaching for diversity and tolerance are stated missions of schools and organizations like the National Council for the Social Studies (1991), should we consider statements that seem intolerant or promote stereotypes as "rational" just because they are said within the context of a political discussion that certainly fits the criteria of controversial?

While I do not profess to know the definitive answer to that question, it seems clear that the decision whether to disclose one's views on controversial political issues holds even greater weight when those issues carry racial, sexist, or religious undertones. Research has shown how teachers present issues of race, gender, and religion in the classroom can greatly affect students' perceptions of identity and self-worth (Crocco, 2001; Epstein, 1998, 2000; Markus & Nurius, 1986; McCarthy & Moje, 2002; Ogbu, 1992). Therefore, if teachers disclose intolerant opinions on socially taboo controversial political issues, the ramifications may go beyond the potential for civic disengagement and political cynicism that can occur when teachers present unrestrained partisan views in the classroom (Journell, in press; Niemi & Niemi, 2007). While one could easily imagine the damage teachers could create if they practiced what Kelly (1986) calls exclusive partiality or what Hess (2004) describes as denial or privilege with respect to their disclosure, I argue that even a committed impartiality stance could affect students' feelings of self-worth or their attitudes toward diversity if teachers' political stances promote social intolerance.

Perhaps what makes disclosure so potentially dangerous in this context is the transparent nature by which it may or may not occur. For example, Mr. Harrison prided himself on teaching for diversity, and with respect to the issue of Obama's race, I would argue he achieved that goal. However, religion was so engrained within his belief system that he had difficulty separating his personal beliefs about Islam from his philosophy of teaching for diversity, at least as it pertained to race. In other words, Mr. Harrison's theological certainty appeared to trump his other pedagogical decisions, a phenomenon that has been observed in other contexts (James, 2010). Based on Vanessa's interview, it was clear that at least some of his students recognized his clear bias on this issue, but the danger resides in those who may not have. These findings offer implications for teacher educators and those who advocate for increased teacher disclosure in social studies classrooms. It certainly seems as though the answer to the disclosure dilemma is far more complex than simply stating that teachers should or should not disclose.

CONCLUSION

I hesitate to generalize too far beyond the teachers and students in this study when discussing implications. Clearly, additional research needs to be done in this area before definitive conclusions can be made about the teaching of socially taboo topics within the context of controversial political issues. The 2008 Presidential Election provided a rich context from which to analyze this issue, but teachers across the United States are inevitably engaging their students in discussions on political issues in which race, gender, or religion is lying just below the surface. What seems clear from this study is that the inclusion of diversity adds an additional layer of complexity for teachers when deciding whether to broach controversial political issues in their classes as well as disclosing their personal opinions on those issues.

APPENDIX A

Teacher Interview Protocol

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How long have you been teaching at ___?
3. How long have you taught government?
4. What is your educational background?
5. What activities are you involved in at school?
6. What is your teaching philosophy?
7. What is the greatest benefit of teaching at ___?
8. What is the biggest challenge of teaching at ___?
9. How would you define citizenship?
10. How would you define civic education?
11. How do you think civic education fits into your teaching of government?
12. What is your approach to teaching current events and politics in your classroom?
13. How comfortable are you in teaching current events and politics?
14. How would you describe your own political affiliation and beliefs?
15. Who do you plan on voting for in the election?
16. How do your own political views influence the way you present current events or politics in your classroom?
17. Do you let your students know your political views?
18. How would you describe the political climate of this school?
19. How would you describe the political climate of the surrounding community?
20. How do the political beliefs of the surrounding community affect your instructional practices?
21. What concerns do you have about teaching politics, if any?
22. Do you think that your students are interested in learning about politics? Why?
23. What is your procedure for bringing in current events into your classroom instruction?
24. How do you balance bringing in current events with the formal curriculum?
25. How do you determine which current events to teach?
26. Have you ever taught a presidential election before?
27. If so, what type of instructional strategies did you use?
28. Do you plan on using the same type of instructional strategies this time? Why or why not?
29. Do you plan on teaching the 2008 presidential election?
30. What type of emphasis do you plan on giving the election?
31. How do you plan on balancing the election and the mandated content you have to cover?
32. How do you encourage your students to develop their own political voice?
33. Do you believe that students should discuss political issues in class?
34. What advantages/disadvantages do you find in teaching a largely homogeneous/heterogeneous group of students?

APPENDIX B

Student Interview Protocol

1. Who would you vote for in the 2008 Presidential Election? Why? When did you come to this decision?
2. How did you come about this decision?
3. What political party do your parents associate with?
4. How much have you paid attention to the election outside of class?
5. How would you describe the role that this class has helped you shape your opinion on the 2008 Presidential Election?
6. What are the political issues that are most important to you?
7. Why?
8. Do you enjoy your government class?
9. What is your favorite part of government class?
10. Have you enjoyed discussing the election in class? What has been your favorite aspect of discussing the election?
11. How would you characterize the time that Mr./Ms. ____ has devoted to discussing the election in class?
12. What political party would you consider yourself to be a part of?
13. How would you describe the role that this class has helped you shape your political views and beliefs?
14. How would you describe your feelings on how Mr./Ms. _____ taught and discussed the election in this class?
15. If you had to give any advice to Mr./Ms. ____ on how to teach a presidential election in the future, what would it be?

NOTES

I would like to acknowledge Mark Dressman for his guidance throughout this project, as well as Marilyn Johnston-Parsons, Jeffrey Mondak, and Christopher Span for their insight on various aspects of the study.

¹I am purposely choosing to ignore the allegations that Obama was legally ineligible for the presidency due to the constitutional requirement that presidents must be born in the United States. To date, no legitimately recognized legal evidence has ever been produced to contradict the fact that Obama was born in Hawaii.

²Pseudonyms have been used for all schools and participants to help protect their identities.

³At Roosevelt, there were three additional teachers who were not selected to be part of the study. One of the teachers taught civics courses for English Language Learners that were presented entirely in Spanish, and unfortunately, my own language limitations prohibited inclusion of her classes in the study. Another teacher taught the honors-level civics course, and I originally intended to include her as part of the study; however, she went on maternity leave soon after the start of school. A third teacher was also considered for the study; however, I interviewed her at the beginning of the study, and she intimated that she did not know how much about the election she was going to be able to include due to the other curricular requirements she felt she had to cover. For this reason I chose not to include her as a participant.

⁴For more information on the political climate of each school, refer to Journell (2010a).

⁵The same survey that was given to seniors and freshmen in each building was given to each of the six classes I observed. A copy of the survey can be found in Journell (2011). The survey response rates for each class were as follows: Wilkinson 96%, Harrison 100%, Jackson 81%, Pierce 71%, Leander 100%, Ryan 95%.

⁶I chose my observation dates by conferencing with the teachers on a weekly basis to ensure that I did not observe on dates they were giving tests, showing non-political movies, or other forms of passive instruction. The total number of observations in each class were as follows: Wilkinson 29, Harrison 34, Jackson 23, Pierce 33, Leander 21, Ryan 31.

⁷The one exception was in Mr. Pierce's class, which only had seven total students. Only one student from that class volunteered to be interviewed. A complete list of students who were interviewed, along with their ethnicity, government grade, and candidate choice in the election can be found in Journell (2009).

REFERENCES

- Anyon, J. (1981). Social class and school knowledge. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 11, 3-42.
- Apple, M. W. (1979). *Ideology and curriculum*. London, England: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Apple, M. W. (1982). *Education and power*. Boston, MA: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Applebaum, B. (2009). Is teaching for social justice a "liberal bias"? *Teachers College Record*, 111, 376-408.
- Au, K. (2009). Isn't culturally responsive instruction just good teaching? *Social Education*, 73, 179-183.

- Avery, P. G., Sullivan, J. L., Smith, E. S., & Sandell, S. (1996). Issues-centered approaches to teaching civics and government. In R. W. Evans & D. W. Saxe (Eds.), *Handbook on teaching social issues* (pp. 199-210). Washington, DC: National Council for the Social Studies.
- Bickmore, K. (2002). How might social education resist heterosexism? Facing the impact of gender and sexuality ideology on citizenship. *Theory and Research in Social Education, 30*, 198-216.
- Bolgatz, J. (2005). *Talking race in the classroom*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Brandt, R. B. (1959). *Ethical theory: The problems of normative and critical ethics*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Brophy, J. (1979). Teacher behavior and its effects. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 71*, 733-750.
- Bullough, R. V., Gitlin, A. D., & Goldstein, S. L. (1984). Ideology, teacher role, and resistance. *Teachers College Record, 86*, 339-358.
- Camicia, S. P. (2008). Deciding what is a controversial issue: A case study of social studies curriculum controversy. *Theory and Research in Social Education, 35*, 290-307.
- Cicetti-Turro, D. (2007). Straight talk: Talking across race in schools. *Multicultural Perspectives, 9*, 45-49. doi: 10.1080/15210960701334102
- Crocco, M. S. (2000). Women, citizenship, and the social studies. *The Educational Forum, 65*, 52-59.
- Crocco, M. S. (2001). The missing discourse on gender and sexuality in the social studies. *Theory into Practice, 40*, 65-71.
- Crocco, M. S. (2004). Dealing with difference in the social studies. *International Journal of Social Education, 18*(2), 106-126.
- Crocco, M. S. (2007). Speaking truth to power: Women's rights as human rights. *The Social Studies, 98*, 257-269.
- Crocco, M. S., & Grolnik, M. (2008). Teaching The Levees: An exercise in democratic dialogue. *Journal of Educational Controversy, 3*(1). Retrieved from <http://www.wce.wvu.edu/eJournal/>
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York, NY: New Press.
- de Waal-Lucas, A. (2007). Teaching in isolation: An examination of the treatment of multicultural content in a predominately white and affluent suburban school. *Social Studies Research and Practice, 2*, 1-21. Retrieved from <http://www.socstrp.org/>
- Epstein, T. (1998). Deconstructing differences in African-American and European-American adolescents' perspectives on U.S. history. *Curriculum Inquiry, 28*, 397-423.
- Epstein, T. (2000). Adolescents' perspectives on racial diversity in U.S. history: Case studies from an urban classroom. *American Educational Research Journal, 37*, 185-214.
- Ersoy, A. F. (2010). Social studies teacher candidates' views on controversial issues incorporated into their courses in Turkey. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26*, 323-334.
- Evans, R. W., Avery, P. G., & Pederson, P. V. (1999). Taboo topics: Cultural restraint on teaching social issues. *The Social Studies, 90*, 218-224.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *The history of sexuality: Vol. 1. An introduction*. (R. Hurley, Trans). New York, NY: Vintage.

- Foucault, M. (1991). Governmentality. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality* (pp. 87-104). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Franck, K. C. (2002). Rethinking homophobia: Interrogating heteronormativity in an urban school. *Theory and Research in Social Education, 30*, 274-286.
- Friedman, E. B. (2007). Is teaching for social justice undemocratic? *Harvard Educational Review, 77*, 442-473.
- Friere, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York, NY: Continuum. (Original work published 1970)
- Gay, G. (2004). The importance of multicultural education. *Educational Leadership, 61*(4), 31-35.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Glazier, J. A. (2003). Moving closer to speaking the unspeakable: White teachers talking about race. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 30*, 73-94.
- Han, L. C., & Heldman, C. (Eds.). (2007). *Rethinking madam president: Are we ready for a woman in the White House?* Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Hand, M. (2008). What should we teach as controversial? A defense of the epistemic criterion. *Educational Theory, 58*, 213-228. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-5446.2008.00285.x
- Hess, D. (2008). Controversial issues and democratic discourse. In L. S. Levstik & C. A. Tyson (Eds.), *Handbook of research in social studies education* (pp. 124-136). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hess, D., & Posselt, J. (2002). How high school students experience and learn from the discussion of controversial public issues. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision, 17*, 283-314.
- Hess, D. E. (2002). Discussing controversial public issues in secondary social studies classrooms: Learning from skilled teachers. *Theory and Research in Social Education, 30*, 10-41.
- Hess, D. E. (2004). Controversies about controversial issues in democratic education. *PS: Political Science & Politics, 37*, 257-261. doi: 10.1017.S1049096504004196
- Hess, D. E. (2005). How do teachers' political views influence teaching about controversial issues? *Social Education, 69*, 47-48.
- Hess, D. E. (2009). *Controversy in the classroom: The democratic power of discussion*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hess, D. E., & McAvoy, P. (2009). To disclose or not to disclose: A controversial choice for teachers. In D. E. Hess, *Controversy in the classroom: The democratic power of discussion* (pp. 97-110). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Huddy, L., & Terkildsen, N. (1993). Gender stereotypes and the perception of male and female candidates. *American Journal of Political Science, 37*, 119-147.
- James, J. H. (2009). Reframing the disclosure debate: Confronting issues of transparency in teaching controversial content. *Social Studies Research and Practice, 4*, 82-94. Retrieved from <http://www.socstrp.org/>
- James, J. H. (2010). "Democracy is the devil's snare": Theological certainty in teacher education. *Theory and Research in Social Education, 38*, 618-639.

- James, J. H., Parker, W., Avery, P., Kunzman, R., Schweber, S., Slekar, T., & Barton, K. (2010, November). Is teaching open-mindedness pushing a liberal agenda? In J.H. James (Chair), *Is teaching open-mindedness pushing a liberal agenda?* Symposium conducted at the meeting of the College and University Faculty Assembly of the National Council for the Social Studies, Denver, CO.
- Journell, A. W. (2009). Teaching politics: A study of high school government courses and the 2008 Presidential Election. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Urbana, IL.
- Journell, W. (2010a, April). The governmentality of secondary education: Competing influences in three schools during the 2008 Presidential Election. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Denver, CO.
- Journell, W. (2010b). The influence of high-stakes testing on high school teachers' willingness to incorporate current political events into the curriculum. *The High School Journal*, *93*, 111-125.
- Journell, W. (2011). Teaching the 2008 Presidential Election at three demographically diverse schools: An exercise in neoliberal governmentality. *Educational Studies: A Journal of the American Educational Studies Association*, *47*, 133-159. doi: 10.1080/00131946.2011.554590
- Journell, W. (in press). The disclosure dilemma in action: A qualitative look at the effect of teacher disclosure on classroom instruction. *Journal of Social Studies Research*.
- Kelly, D. M., & Brandes, G. M. (2001). Shifting out of "neutral": Beginning teachers' struggles with teaching for social justice. *Canadian Journal of Education*, *26*, 437-454.
- Kelly, T. E. (1986). Discussing controversial issues: Four perspectives on the teacher's role. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, *14*, 113-138.
- Koch, J. W. (2000). Do citizens apply gender stereotypes to infer candidates' ideological orientations? *Journal of Politics*, *62*, 414-429. doi: 10.1111/0022-3816.00019
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African-American children*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2000). Fighting for our lives: Preparing teachers to teach African-American students. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *51*, 206-213. doi: 10.1177/0022487100051003008
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, *97*, 47-68.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Loewen, J. W. (1995). *Lies my teacher told me: Everything your American history textbook got wrong*. New York, NY: New Press.
- Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist*, *41*, 954-969.
- McCarthy, S. J., & Moje, E. B. (2002). Identity matters. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *37*, 228-238.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merryfield, M. M. (1993). Responding to the Gulf War: A case study in instructional decision making. *Social Education*, *57*, 33-41.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Miller-Lane, J., Denton, E., & May, A. (2006). Social studies teachers' views on committed impartiality and discussion. *Social Studies Research and Practice, 1*, 30-44. Retrieved from <http://www.socstrp.org/>
- National Council for the Social Studies. (1991). *Curriculum guidelines for multicultural education*. Retrieved from National Council for the Social Studies website: <http://www.socialstudies.org/positions/multicultural>
- Niemi, N. S., & Niemi, R. G. (2007). Partisanship, participation, and political trust as taught (or not) in high school history and government classes. *Theory and Research in Social Education, 35*, 32-61.
- Ogbu, J. U. (1992). Understanding cultural diversity and learning. *Educational Researcher, 21*(8), 5-14, 24.
- Oulton, C., Day, V., Dillon, J., & Grace, M. (2004). Controversial issues—teachers' attitudes and practices in the context of citizenship education. *Oxford Review of Education, 30*, 489-507.
- Pace, J. L. (2003). Using ambiguity and entertainment to win compliance in a lower-level U.S. history class. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 35*, 83-110. doi: 10.1080/00220270210157597
- Parker, W. C. (2003). *Teaching democracy: Unity and diversity in public life*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Parker, W. C. (2010). Listening to strangers: Classroom discussion in democratic education. *Teachers College Record, 112*, 2815-2832.
- Parker, W. C., & Hess, D. (2001). Teaching with and for discussion. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17*, 273-289. doi:10.1016/S0742-051X(00)00057-3
- Passe, J., & Evans, R. W. (1996). Discussion methods in an issues-centered curriculum. In R. W. Evans & D. W. Saxe (Eds.), *Handbook on teaching social issues* (pp. 81-88). Washington, DC: National Council for the Social Studies.
- Passe, J., & Willox, L. (2009). Teaching religion in America's public schools: A necessary disruption. *The Social Studies, 100*, 102-106.
- Pillow, W. S. (2003). Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 16*, 175-196. doi: 10.1080/0951839032000060635
- Reich, W. (2007). Deliberative democracy in the classroom: A sociological view. *Educational Theory, 57*, 187-197. doi: 10.1111/j.1741-5446.2007.00251.x
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tatum, B. D. (1992). Talking about race, learning about racism: The application of racial identity development theory in the classroom. *Harvard Educational Review, 62*, 1-24.
- Thomas-Brown, K. (2010). Using "When the Levees Broke/Teaching the Levees" to teach middle school students about empathy and social justice. *Social Studies Research and Practice, 5*, 76-90. Retrieved from <http://www.socstrp.org/>
- Thornton, S. J. (1991). Teacher as curricular-instructional gatekeeper in social studies. In J. P. Shaver (Ed.), *Handbook of research on social studies teaching and learning* (pp. 237-248). New York, NY: MacMillan.
- Wade, R. C. (1995). Diversity taboos: Religion and sexual orientation in the social studies curriculum. *Social Studies and the Young Learner, 7*, 19-22.

- Washington, E. Y., & Humphries, E. K. (2011). A social studies teacher's sense making of controversial issues discussions of race in a predominately white, rural high school classroom. *Theory and Research in Social Education, 39*, 92-114.
- Wills, J. S. (1996). Who needs multicultural education? White students, U.S. history, and the construction of a useable past. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 27*, 365-389.
- Wilson, E. K., Haas, M. E., Laughlin, M. A., & Sunal, C. S. (2002). Teachers' perspectives on incorporating current controversial issues into the social studies curriculum. *International Social Studies Forum, 2*, 31-45.
- Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.