

Of Privilege and Pendulums: NCSS and Gender

Rozella G. Clyde and Jeremiah Clabough

The pendulum swings with the passage of time. Cultural changes advance much the same way. Across the American narrative, the pendulum has swung between a celebration of rugged individualism, competition, and wealth on one side to increased concern for a society protective of human rights and dignity on the other. The American narrative has captured and valued the actions of men much more thoroughly than those of women. The 2020 United States presidential election focused considerable attention and awareness on the number of qualified women competing for the job. With the selection of Kamala Harris as vice president, the pendulum has swung again, breaking one additional glass ceiling. This pendulum does not mean that life is binary.¹ Life is fluid, and the positions we hold are impacted by time and place.

Women have played a vital role in the American story. Unfortunately, few of these efforts are well documented. Wealthy educated white cisgendered men wrote the U.S. Constitution and set up a government that benefited business growth, competition, and white male privilege. Correspondences between Abigail and John Adams report Abigail Adams's request that John "remember the ladies" in the new government he was helping to frame. In 1920, just before the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) was founded, the first wave of feminism was securing the right for women to vote in presidential elections, the culmination of a 72-year struggle—a response to Abigail Adams's request.

During the 1995 celebration of NCSS's 75th anniversary, several publications recounted the NCSS story. In 2002, Margaret Crocco and O. L. Davis published the 100th NCSS bulletin, *Building a Legacy: Women in Social Studies Education 1784–1984*, as a response to the absence of female voices within the anniversary publications. Crocco asserted, "It is quite clear that women have always been a presence in social studies."² *Building a Legacy* chronicled the careers of 45 women, several of them former NCSS presidents. "Even though many women had long been active in citizenship education, it seemed that their contributions had been hidden, forgotten, or lost."³ In this article, we

chronicle some of the ways that NCSS has contributed to an emerging understanding of the roles gender plays in American society. We also interview a panel of social studies scholars who have been actively involved in researching and advancing changing gender narratives over the past 50 years.

The Second, Third, and Fourth Waves of Feminism in the United States

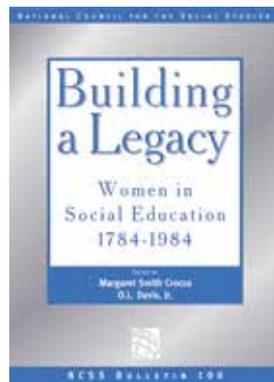
The second wave of the feminist revolution emerged from the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s. It was only through the Civil Rights Act of 1965 that most Black women achieved full suffrage. It took longer for many Native, Latina, and Asian American women. That struggle is by no means over. The battle to pass an Equal Rights Amendment is still being waged.

Working women have always contributed to American economic development, but often in menial, low paying jobs. Feminist efforts of the 1960s and 1970s continued the battles on economic and social fronts, combating sexist stereotypes and educational opportunities. The opportunity to hold and accumulate wealth has always been part of the struggle.⁴ When the second feminist wave began in the late 1960s, women were earning an average of 69 cents for every dollar a man in a similar position earned. That wage imbalance has only changed by 14 cents during the past 60 years.⁵ Today, more women have been admitted into higher paying, educational, corporate, and civil service positions, rising from hourly wage earners to more salaried white-collar positions, yet economic and political parity does

not exist.

The third feminist wave launched during the 1990s demanded greater autonomy and the right for an individual to define herself. This wave carried the protection of LGBTQ+ rights into the political mainstream, even earning gay and lesbian couples the protections of marriage in some states.⁶

Thirty years later, there is an emergence of a fourth wave, opening mainstream American culture to more female and non-binary individuals.⁷ Contemporary scientific research



has revealed the non-binary nature of human sexuality, and the impact it has on how we interpret and present gender.⁸

NCSS and Gender

How has NCSS addressed feminist and gender identification issues across these same decades? NCSS is a membership organization subject to the social and cultural movements within American society. From its inception a century ago, as women were earning the right to vote, NCSS has been charged with supporting K-12 educators working to navigate and balance civic themes and challenges that arise in classrooms. Most of the low-paid classroom teachers have been women, especially at the elementary level, while administrator positions and most college professorships tended to be held by men.⁹

Women have played a major role in NCSS activities from its inception, challenging the status quo, and serving in research and leadership roles. The first woman to hold the NCSS presidency was Bessie Louise Pierce, in 1926.¹⁰ Women's involvement in NCSS has also been evidenced through expanding leadership roles within organizational committees and participation in annual conferences, crafting position statements, and writing for the publications. However, between 1920 and 1950, only three women held the NCSS presidency, as Paul Robinson noted in an essay on Bessie Louise Pierce. In 1939, Ruth West became the second woman and the first teacher to be NCSS president.¹¹ In more recent decades, numerous women have served as NCSS president.

From the 1920s through 1960s as NCSS membership grew, the organization was still dominated by college and university faculty charged with researching theories and recommending curricular materials, course scope and sequence, and advocating instructional strategies. At the same time, NCSS membership among classroom educators grew as teachers sought ways to implement those policies and strategies.¹²

NCSS Committees Connected to Gender

In 1970, NCSS formed a Committee on Social Justice for Women (CSJW) in response to calls from feminist members.

The committee was charged with developing a policy statement, suggesting possible publications, and recommending convention programming. By 1971, the CSJW was allowed to “define its own role.” The committee began regularly publishing articles in *Social Education*, and in 1972, the first position statement on

Social Justice for Women was adopted. By 1975, when Carole Hahn was committee chair, the name was changed to Advisory Committee on Sexism and Social Justice (ACSSJ). This committee was granted permission to conduct a bias review of all articles for NCSS publications.¹³

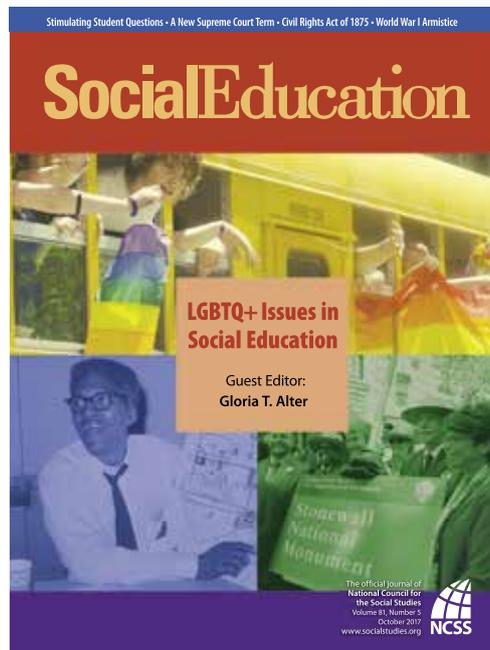
The NCSS position statement on Sexism and Social Justice adopted by the Board of Directors at the 1977 annual meeting recognized the role social studies teachers play in achieving economic, political, and social justice for all people. The committee laid out actions to accomplish these goals beginning with providing equitable female representation at all decision-making levels within NCSS. The committee proposed that NCSS should support the implementation of Title IX, focus attention on the “hidden curriculum” within schools, provide sexism awareness training at pre-service and in-service levels, and require all publications to be free of sex bias. By 1979, the committee was publishing its own 12-page quarterly newsletter.¹⁴ In 1984, the date for the annual meeting was changed from Thanksgiving Day, and it was suggested that childcare be provided during annual meetings.

ACSSJ committee members were elected for three-year terms and tasked with helping select conference speakers, workshop presenters, recruit authors for articles in NCSS periodicals, and develop policy statements. A Sex Equity Special Interest Group (SIG) was created, which laid the foundation for the current NCSS community structure. By 1988,

the gender and racism committees were folded into the Equity and Social Justice Committee.¹⁵

Special NCSS Publications on the LGBTQ+ Community

NCSS publications, such as the 2002 themed issue of *Theory and Research in Social Education* that looked at LGBTQ+ topics, have contributed to changing norms of gender issues.



Several members of our discussion panel (see pp. 182–186) contributed to that issue: Stephen Thornton, Kathy Bickmore, and Linda Levstik.¹⁶ More recently the October 2017 issue of *Social Education*, includes a special section about including LGBTQ+ issues in the social studies curriculum, edited by Gloria Alter. One article provides recommendations on concepts and questions that social studies teachers might ask to engage students in meaningful class discussions on the treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals. Additionally, Alter gives a list of key democratic dispositions to guide class discussions, such as mindfulness and deliberation.¹⁷

In the special section, Professor J.B. Mayo Jr. describes ways in which social studies teachers can design classroom activities to deconstruct media messages on gender identity. One of the activities is for students to analyze photographs about members of the LGBTQ+ community and discuss with supporting questions how these images challenge some perceptions of what it means to be masculine and feminine. After analyzing these photographs, the author recommends that students use various media platforms for writing activities to express their own definitions of gender identity.¹⁸

Conclusion

We have highlighted some of the actions NCSS has taken over the past 50 years to address the treatment of gender in U.S. classrooms. Margaret Crocco summed up her thoughts on the work NCSS has done and that still needs to be done as follows:

NCSS's recent position statement on teaching women's history signals a revival of interest in the status of women. Likewise, the special issue of its flagship journal, *Social Education*, on the 100th anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment reflects advances in scholarship on gender and sexuality as compared to earlier.

Juxtaposing these two moments in time reinforces an important lesson: history can both progress and regress. Without sustained attention, change may falter or reverse course.

I hope that NCSS will become bolder in calling for change directed at greater equity and inclusivity, for women and all others. Such an education is urgently needed for democracy that takes seriously its commitments to all citizens.¹⁹

A sentiment shared between Dr. Crocco and those in our focus group is for NCSS to lead and not to follow. This may require NCSS to take stands in the midst of uncomfortable discussions that may be considered controversial by some for not aligning with conventional norms, but that align with NCSS's principles of advocating for the human dignity of all. ●

Notes

1. Alex Iantaffi and Meg-John Barker, *Life Isn't Binary: On Being Both, Beyond, and In-Between* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2019).
2. Margaret Smith Crocco, "Preface," in *Building a Legacy: Women in Social Education 1784–1984*, eds. Margaret Smith Crocco and O.L. Davis (Silver Spring, Md.: NCSS Bulletin 100, 2002), 9–12.
3. Crocco, "Conclusion," in *Building a Legacy*, 147–150.
4. Rick Perlstein, *The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon and the Rise of Reagan* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 458–460; Kathleen Berkely, *The Women's Liberation Movement in America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999), 52–54; Gail Collins, *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009), 186–190.
5. Rakesh Kochhar, *How Pew Research Measured the Gender Pay Gap*, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/12/11/how-pew-research-measured-the-gender-pay-gap
6. Steve Kornacki, *The Red and the Blue: The 1990s and the Birth of Political Tribalism* (New York: Harper Collins, 2018), 219–230; Gil Troy, *The Age of Clinton: America in the 1990s* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2015), 79–81; Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2012), 130–142.
7. Lynn Varacalli Cavanaugh, *A Brief History: The Four Waves of Feminism*, www.progressivewomensleadership.com/a-brief-history-the-four-waves-of-feminism
8. Iantaffi and Barker, *Life Isn't Binary*.
9. Crocco, "Conclusion," in *Building a Legacy*, 147.
10. Murry Nelson, "Bessie Louise Pierce," in *Building a Legacy*, 43–44.
11. Paul Robinson, "Ruth West," in *Building a Legacy*, 45–46.
12. Crocco, "Introduction," in *Building a Legacy*, 35–40.
13. Carole Hahn, Personal E-mail Correspondence on February 18, 2021.
14. Hahn on February 18, 2021.
15. Hahn on February 18, 2021.
16. See the themed issue of *Theory and Research in Social Education* 30, no. 2 (2002), which focuses on gender issues and issues connected to the LGBTQ+ community.
17. Gloria Alter, "Discovery, Engagement, and Transformation: Learning about Gender and Sexual Diversity in Social Education," *Social Education* 81, no. 5 (2017): 279–285.
18. J.B. Mayo Jr., "LGBTQ Media Images and Their Potential Impact on Youth in Schools," *Social Education* 81, no. 5 (2017): 303–307.
19. Personal communication by Margaret Crocco to the authors by e-mail, April 25, 2021. See also Margaret Smith Crocco, "Women and the Social Studies: The Long Rise and Rapid Fall of Feminist Activity in the National Council for the Social Studies," in *Social Education in the Twentieth Century: Curriculum and Context for Citizenship*, eds. Christine Woysner, Joseph Watras, and Margaret Smith Crocco (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 142–159; see *Social Education* 84, no. 4, for the special section commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the 19th Amendment; NCSS, *Supporting Curricular Promotion and Intersectional Valuing of Women in History and Current Events* (2019) www.socialstudies.org/position-statements/supporting-curricular-promotion-and-intersectional-valuing-women-history-and; NCSS, *Contextualizing LGBTQ+ History within the Social Studies Curriculum* (2019), www.socialstudies.org/position-statements/contextualizing-lgbt-history-within-social-studies-curriculum.



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Panel Discussion on NCSS and Gender

In order to unravel the role that gender has played within NCSS, we assembled a six-person focus group from the NCSS activist leadership core covering the past 50 years. Our group included individuals whose work began during the 1970s and continues today: Kathy Bickmore, Debra Fowler, Carole Hahn, Linda Levstik, J.B. Mayo, Jr., and Stephen Thornton. Their edited discussion follows.

Rozella G. Clyde and Jeremiah Clabough

Clyde: *I would like to start by asking why issues of gender matter in our social studies classroom. Also, what does the word “gender” actually mean to you, and how has that meaning changed over the years?*

Thornton: Rozella, your invitation to this discussion mentioned the NCSS commitment to dealing with controversial issues. I wonder what makes gender controversial. What message are we conveying by the use of that term?

Mayo: Thank you, Steve, for bringing that up. That is one of the first things I want to talk about. Personally, I no longer think gender is controversial, and I would quite frankly love it if we could drop that term.

Fowler: I agree one thousand percent. The framing of these topics is very important and linking gender to *issues* or *problems* instead of *topics* or *matters* can be pejorative and could really be impactful about the way we think about these topics.

Thornton: Doing that also privileges certain perspectives. For example, even four or five years ago there was a lot of discussion about gay marriage as a controversial issue. Well, some people do not have a dog in the fight. Other people do and it’s about their lives and their human rights. It is only a matter of controversy for people who have no stake in the matter.

Clyde: *What does gender mean to you?*

Levstik: That has really changed over time! I was thinking about some of the things that Jane Bernard Powers, Carole Hahn, and I wrote early on when we spoke about *gender*, and we really meant *women*. We did not problematize who the women were or how anybody defined what it was to be a woman. It seems to me that what gender means to me now is an issue of assignment. It is an identity assignment--something that people say about themselves and not that others assign. It is a continuum with lots of variations.

The Panel



Kathy Bickmore is a professor of Comparative International Education and Curriculum and Pedagogy at OISE University of Toronto. She is a member of the NCSS College and Faculty Assembly (CUFA) and the International Assembly.



Debra Fowler is the co-founder and executive director of History Un-erased. She is a member of the NCSS LGBTQ Community and was a co-author of the NCSS position statement on contextualizing LGBTQ history within the social studies curriculum.



Carole Hahn is professor emerita at Emory University. She chaired CUFA in 1977 and was president of NCSS in 1983. She was the chair of the Social Justice for Women’s Advisory Committee in 1975.



Linda Levstik is professor emerita at the University of Kentucky. She has served as CUFA Chair and chaired the NCSS National History Standards report. She has been an editorial board member of *Theory and Research in Social Studies Education*.



J.B. Mayo is an associate professor at the University of Minnesota. Mayo was CUFA chair in 2013–14, is a member of the LGBTQ Community, and currently serves on the editorial board of *Theory and Research in Social Studies Education*.



Stephen Thornton is a professor at the University of South Florida in Tampa. He has served as CUFA chair and on the Task Force of the NCSS National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies (2010). He is currently on the editorial board of *Theory and Research in Social Education*.

Thornton: I was grappling with this very issue yesterday because I was putting together a reading list for a student who is doing work on transgender issues in social studies. The reading list was supposed to reflect research in the field, but I came up against exactly what Linda was saying. What people meant by gender has not only changed over time, but even recently. There is by no means a consensus, as far as I can see.

Mayo: I will jump in and share my thoughts. Gender is a continual social construction. It is a complex set of characteristics and performances. I think that when we talk about gender now, we must talk about performance, because folks perform it differently, and they do it differently daily, weekly, and monthly. I think that stressing gender as a social construction and performance is very important.

Fowler: I agree. When I was thinking about this question I thought, “Well I know what it feels like to be a female-bodied person. I do not know what it feels like to be a woman.” I know what it feels like to be treated like a woman. I am thinking about gender as a social construct. It is evolving in its scope and leverage in political, social, and cultural arenas. It certainly is on a continuum.

Clyde: *How has NCSS worked to address gender identity and the range of issues concerning the treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals?*

Bickmore: Maybe I can build on this by agreeing with much of what has been said, but by adding the word *cultural*, and owning the fact that gender still has an odd relationship with biology and sex. Even though it is a continuum, I do not think it is quite that linear. It is linked, and the reason that matters is relational.

How has NCSS worked to address gender identity? Until recently, we have very rarely paid real attention to the relational aspects of the cultures of gender. For instance, the topic of gender-based violence is remarkably absent in much of the work that we have done.

Thornton: Kathy, I was thinking somewhat related thoughts of how this goes back to Linda’s point about how meanings have changed over time. The vast majority of stuff you saw in social studies about gender was really about liberal concepts of justice, such as the idea that women should have the same things as men, rather than questions about the categories or the normative assumptions. I do not think that this perspective has necessarily changed as much as you might expect. In fact, the people whose work really emphasized the relational aspect of gender do not tend to get cited very much in social studies.

Bickmore: One of NCSS’s contributions is our scholarship in the journals *Theory and Research in Social Education* and *Social Education*. An article that Nel Noddings published in 1992 makes this case: it is not just about relationships among genders.* It is about the ethics and concerns linked with marginalized gender identities and alternative understandings of what is important that have maybe not had enough attention. For instance, many women and gender-nonconforming people have an interest in peace and in a social safety net of care.

Hahn: This question is not just where we are today, but how we got here. If I look at some of our early work about attention to women’s history and NCSS position statements from 1971 and 1977, I certainly view words differently today than I did then. The fact remains that what NCSS was writing in 1971 is what needed to be said in 1971.

Thornton: Well, it is also a matter of when you write these things. You write what you think is possible in the conditions of the time. I read somewhere the other day about an article I had in *Social Education* in 2003, about silence on gays and lesbians in social studies. Somebody said, in a kind way, “Thornton does not go really far enough on some of these issues.” You know, I would have nodded and said, “Yes, but that was not my point at the time.” The point I was making at the time was a very straightforward point.** I did not say that mine was a complete solution or the way we should see the world. So, yes Carole, I know exactly what you mean.

Hahn: Over the years, I have observed that NCSS tends to follow—rather than lead—social change. For example, our work for equity and justice in the 1970s grew out of demands for social change led by the second feminist movement.

Levstik: I think Carole is absolutely right. At one point in NCSS there was a committee that dealt with women or gender. NCSS decided that it did not really need that anymore, and that committee was disbanded. Right, Carole?

Hahn: Yes, that was the committee called Social Justice for Women, whose name was changed in 1975 to the Sexism and Social Justice Committee. In 1988, this Committee and the Racism and Social Justice Committee were combined into a newly constituted Equity and Social Justice Committee. However, the Committee was later eliminated altogether when NCSS reorganized.

Mayo: Again, I am in full agreement that things are written at a time, and I do not think NCSS is actually being timely right now. If NCSS were leading conversations on gender, there would

* Nel Noddings, “Social Studies and Feminism,” *Theory and Research in Social Education* 20, no. 3 (1992): 230–241.

** Stephen J. Thornton, “Silence on Gays and Lesbians in Social Studies Curriculum,” *Social Education* 67, no. 4 (2003): 226–230.

certainly be more written within its pages about non-binary gender, about performance of gender, and about transgender. NCSS certainly does not reflect all of those issues today. In fact, I would say what was happening in 1971 was more timely.

Levstik: I do think it is important to go back to what Steve was saying. NCSS, at least as represented in *Social Education*, was very different in the 1970s than it is now. I remember being impressed by the journal and using some of those early pieces on civil rights and on the Vietnam War. There were really good powerhouse people who were writing. They were taking fairly strong stances that at the time would have put them in an unpopular position in a fair number of schools across the nation. I do not see that kind of thing being what the journal does now.

Clyde: *How can schools confront gender stereotyping and be more supportive of gender and sexual diversity among students and staff?*

Mayo: I will say a couple of things here about the ways in which policies reinforce gender stereotypes. I mean there is such flexibility in terms of student agency about their chosen pronouns and about their chosen names. I have a problem with school policies, parental notification, and the language used. For example, if a kid wants to be known as Sam, then, let the kid be known as Sam, and do not check in with mom and dad about it. These structures are harmful on a day-to-day basis. Then, we can ask: how can teachers be more supportive and recognize the agency of young people? When it comes to their own self-identity, we need to make sure there are spaces in schools where all genders are welcome. That means bathrooms, sporting facilities, and whatever else.

Fowler: Sometimes, there is a grand chasm of disconnect between policy and practice, and those who are tasked with the efficacy of that policy need to have an opportunity to learn about gender and LGBTQ identities from many different lenses including an anthropological, a biological, and a historical lens. Schools need to have specific enumerated policies to ensure safety and protection, but also in tandem with training and mentorship.

Bickmore: We might mention hegemonic masculinity and the ways schools tend to reinforce, not challenge, male aggression.

Clyde: *Kathy, please give some specific examples of how schools reinforce that aggression.*

Bickmore: Sports, popularity contests, and so forth. I am talking about associating hegemonic forms of masculinity with aggression and encouraging while not discouraging them. So, again we are focusing this conversation a lot on the Other. There

is something to be said about protecting the Other. But what about the majorities who reinforce the intolerance, and the basic education around what it means to be a young person in this world? How can there be a little more space for diversity among us when we consider culture and race and class, as well as gender and sexuality?

Clyde: *So, you are talking about the school culture itself, as opposed to curriculum. What would be some ways in which schools might change the tone of their school culture and be less aggressive in that way?*

Bickmore: Well, the issue is one of lived curriculum, as well as co-curricular activities like sports culture and so forth. It is absolutely about what is problematized in the language lessons, the social studies lessons, history, geography, and so on.

Fowler: It is important to frame this through a lens of empowerment and not victimization, to elevate those marginalized groups into a space of honoring and respecting them. We should not just acknowledge them but weave them into the fabric of how we present the historical narrative and social studies content. These actions can allow for systemic adaptive change.

Clyde: *How might that be done?*

Fowler: From our work with History Un-erased, I believe there are six states now that have mandated a policy for LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum. There are many teachers across the country in these hidden spaces, who are doing this work and doing it well. When thinking about that systemic adaptive change, I feel strongly that there needs to be a whole-school approach. Irrespective of discipline, and irrespective of grade level or the role a teacher has in the school, there needs to be a collective commitment and intentionality in moving the needle forward. The fear we need to address is not being able to navigate conversations with students and discussions in the most educated manner. Teachers are afraid of being well intentioned but of potentially saying or doing the wrong thing.

We have been working with the New York City Department of Education for the past four years, and our curriculum is entirely digital and available to every New York City educator. Beginning last year, we have been providing virtual training through a train-the-trainer model to maximize the outreach and impact.

Mayo: We were talking earlier about the importance of position statements. I actually looked at position statements this morning before we came online, and there is currently no position statement about gender. Perhaps, it is also time for NCSS to think more about gender and not lump it within LGBTQ and move the “T” over to gender where it belongs. That would

be a move forward in terms of the resources offered by the organization. I still turn to the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) for information. I still believe that the Human Rights Campaign is a place to go. In my home state, Out Front Minnesota is on the cutting edge of talking about youth, gender, and queerness generally, and I am sure there are other organizations like Out Front.

Hahn: I would certainly support the need for a position statement, and it would be an opportunity to address and bring visibility both to curriculum and instruction, and to the wider context. I also think we are way overdue for a special issue of *Social Education* on the subject.

Clyde: *How do you suggest educators confront social bigotry and hateful attitudes connected to various gender issues?*

Bickmore: Well, let's start by looking at the difference between a reaction, on one hand, and education, on the other. Some schools have been somewhat clear about how to react after human rights have been violated. But what schools are supposed to do is to educate proactively about diversities, including what is happening in the world beyond the United States.

Clyde: *So we should be proactive and be educators. How do we do that?*

Thornton: I think that we have to do more than hold discussions about bullying. I think one of the most important insights is to emphasize actions that change people's minds. In addition to providing more information or modifying their behavior, it is important to change how they feel. You really have to do something deeper with the curriculum, instruction, and relational activities within classrooms. That is much harder to do. However, I think it is the only thing that eventually makes a great difference. This is not totally unrelated to what Kathy and Nel Noddings do, but it is also not unrelated to the work you did 30 years ago, Carole, on classroom climate. Teachers need to develop the right kind of classroom climate to handle what students feel, not just what information they are getting.

Levstik: Steve, is it really that difficult to do? I mean, it seems to me that if you are teaching interesting materials, and you are bringing in diverse perspectives, you would be building the relationships within your class.

Thornton: Right. To begin with, you must have people who are purposeful and who want to do it.

Bickmore: In some of my recent research in Canadian schools, gender-based aggression was not handled. Teachers told us in focus groups that they knew some of their students were being

abused at home or abused for homophobic reasons and/or other kinds of gender reasons, and that they explicitly advised students not to talk about those things in the classroom because it was too "sensitive." In contrast in Bangladesh, not known for being a feminist community, they teach about some aspects of gender including violence, harassment, dowry abuse, and so forth.

Clyde: *What other things should we actually be talking about connected to gender issues? What should NCSS be talking about as an organization in relation to gender issues?*

Thornton: We need to be thinking about social studies education as not just something that deals only with the content in classrooms. We need to be thinking about schools as democracies and schools as socially educating places.

Mayo: What is going through my mind right now is the whole range of issues that arose from the George Floyd case. We are also looking at increases in hate against Asian American and Asian communities. I am finding that my white teacher candidates are just scared. They do not know what to do, what to say, and how to say it. The teacher candidates are afraid that what they say is going to come out sideways and wrong, and they will be accused of being racist or homophobic.

I would love for us, as teacher educators, to remind teachers, maybe particularly around issues of gender and in human sexuality, to be bold on some level, to offer things with grace, to understand we are going to make mistakes—that none of us have all the answers. Few of us have any answers, but if we can, at least in community, approach these important issues, there is some hope that we will not do harm.

Right now, I am facing a group of mostly white teacher candidates who are afraid to do anything because of trauma. I am not dismissing the fact that things are hard. If we do not make the attempt and if we do not have the confidence in ourselves as good humans, we are not going to get anywhere. NCSS can send some kind of message along those lines. Maybe that is my plea, because it is becoming hard work for me to convince aspiring teachers to address issues that we are all living. We are all impacted by these issues. 🌍

To give a perspective from the K-12 social studies classrooms, we also asked a middle and high school social studies teacher to share their thoughts on gender issues in their classrooms and schools. These teachers' comments appear on the following page.

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We asked two classroom teachers about the way in which their schools deal with gender. Their replies follow.

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Q. Please describe your school context.

Secondary Social Studies Teacher in the Midwest:

I am the teaching and learning specialist for secondary social studies for a district that encompasses first and second ring suburbs as well rural exurbs of the Twin Cities. Our district is 61% white, 13% African American, 8% Hispanic, and 8% Asian. Over 20% of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Middle School Social Studies Teacher in the South:

I teach 7th grade social studies in the largest middle school in the second largest school district in the state. There are approximately 900 students at my school. The ethnic distribution is predominantly BIPOC and Latinx students (approximately 78%). My school qualifies for Title I funding and has a high free and reduced lunch rate.

Q. What does the word gender mean to you? Why do issues of gender equity, identity, and expression matter in our K-12 classrooms?

Secondary Social Studies Teacher in the Midwest:

Genders are ways people express who they are and are separate from sex and other biology. Gender and its meanings are social constructions. Gender equity, identity, and expression are all in the classroom. From the content (who gets taught) to pedagogy (who is able to participate), myriad issues exist.

Middle School Social Studies Teacher in the South:

Recent research and accounts have revealed that the traditional view of gender as being based on one's born physical characteristics is more fluid than understood by earlier generations. Recognizing these new perspectives about gender, gender identity, and gender expression are important for making all students comfortable in my classroom, not just for those who adhere to traditional gender norms.

Students who do not feel safe or who feel ill at ease in the classroom are not as successful as those who do.

Q. In what ways do existing policies and programs in your school reinforce gender stereotypes and/or endanger students? How do they protect and support students and faculty?

Secondary Social Studies Teacher in the Midwest:

Using the correct pronouns or names is a start. Moving away from the binary ideas about gender.

Middle School Social Studies Teacher in the South:

Existing policies that require teachers to inform parents of students' requests to be called by their transgender names reinforces stereotypes about gender. They also endanger children who are forced to live by whatever decision is made by their parent or guardian. Other than anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies, there are no safeguards to protect and support students and faculty.

Q. How can schools be more supportive of students and staff in the personal expression of their gender identities?

Secondary Social Studies Teacher in the Midwest:

There should be better training on working with trans students. There is a need to move beyond the gendered stereotypes.

Middle School Social Studies Teacher in the South:

The development of policies supporting students and faculty in their personal expression would be a great place to start. Brochures could provide information about the gender spectrum. This helps combat the misinformation about personal expressions of gender identity. Another way to support students and staff is to include hate speech, verbal abuse, and physical abuse in anti-bullying policies already established by most school districts.