NAVIGATING DIVISIVE TOPICS IN TEACHING & RESEARCH

KRISTIN HALTINNER & DILSHANI SARATHCHANDRA
Department of Sociology & Anthropology
OVERVIEW: OUR RESEARCH AND TEACHING TOPIC AREAS
NAVIGATING DIVISIVE TOPICS

- Emotion management
- Data-driven analysis
- Critical thinking
The challenge with fear and guilt

Pro-social emotions

Fear + agency + hope + responsibility or pride = engagement
EXAMPLES FROM OUR CLASSROOMS

CLIMATE CHANGE & SOCIETY

RACIAL & ETHNIC RELATIONS

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & SOCIETY
EMOTION MANAGEMENT IN RESEARCH

- Interviews with Minuteman Militia
- Interviews with Climate Change Skeptics
• “I feel like we’re giving humans too much credit for the larger picture where I think, um, that if you believe in God I think that you have to give Him more credit to a larger, on a larger scale of His control on a situation where human impact in a world that He created would be miniscule if any.” (Karen)

• “The UN. It’s about control, control of the citizens. And power. And, you know what’s called the globalist elite who would like to have a One World government… You know, eugenicists and stuff like that… The UN has a horrible track record. I mean, in terms of what they’ve done – going into countries, killing people and raping women. It’s usually, they’re not – they’re the United Nations. They’re not the United People. They don’t give a shit about you and I. It’s about power and control.” (Mark)
Boyd (1999) finds that Christians who believe that God is in control are unlikely to be concerned about climate change or are skeptical about its veracity. Our findings indicate that skeptics employing a religion-inspired narrative argue that the climate might be changing, but it isn’t due to human interference, it is, rather, the will of God and, thus, not something to worry about. For example, Jodie suggests “It’s going to happen whether it happens or not. For me, it’s all in God’s hands.” Karen argues that it is anthropocentrism that leads to this false fear of climate change:

“I feel like we’re giving humans too much credit for the larger picture where I think that if you believe in God I think that you have to give Him more credit to a larger, on a larger scale of His control on a situation where human impact in a world that He created would be miniscule if any… God has a plan for this world and if He chose to wipe it out by global warming, then He could!”
DATA DRIVEN ANALYSIS IN THE CLASSROOM

- Role of opinions
- Opinion vs. Data Driven positions in the classroom
EXAMPLES FROM OUR CLASSROOMS

RACIAL & ETHNIC RELATIONS

CLIMATE CHANGE & SOCIETY

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, & SOCIETY
## Data Driven Analysis in Research

- Not opinion, not judgement but evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Information Seeking</th>
<th>High Information Seeking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proudly Ignorant</td>
<td>Vigorous, Independent Thinkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bashfully Unaware</td>
<td>Anti-bandwagon (trusts minority voices)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grand Conspiracists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CRITICAL THINKING IN THE CLASSROOM

- Diversity & Stratification
- Climate Change & Society
- Science, Technology & Society
What should we call participants?

Challenging existing literature
In the study of politically divisive issues, the lessons we offer our students are the very lessons we need to incorporate in our research.

Perils of confirmation bias.