

## ABSTRACT

SAYLOR-LAUDANO, ELIZABETH ERIN. Preservice Elementary Teacher Perspectives' About Feminism. (Under the direction of Meghan M. Manfra and Beth L. Sondel, co-chairs.)

The purpose of this qualitative feminist case study was to explore preservice elementary teacher perspectives about feminism, including sexism and gender identity development. Specifically, I was interested in understanding how preservice elementary teachers came to their understandings about feminism and what messages they received in school regarding relevant topics. Data collected included written journal reflections, individual in-depth interviews, and a focus group interview.. The data were analyzed through narrative and constant comparative methods. Findings from this analysis indicated that the women perceived feminism to mean equality or the pursuit of equality for women. The majority of the women in this study did not self-identify as a feminist. Parents, media, peers, and teachers appeared to heavily influence the women's perspectives of feminism, sexism, and gender identity development. Most reported experiencing negative portrayals of feminism and gender role stereotyping. Findings also indicated that families, peers, media, and the school curriculum provided consistent messages to the women that their only value to society involved their appearance and their ability to reproduce children. Another significant finding was the impact that college experiences have had on their women's perspectives of feminism, sexism, and gender identity development. By exploring and developing meaningful understandings of the perspectives preservice elementary teachers have about feminism, teacher educators and more specifically social studies teacher educators are examining a key of teacher development. Exploring the development of teachers' understandings, ideologies, and beliefs can uncover their purposes for becoming teachers and

possibly for decisions they may make in their future classrooms regarding their teaching practice and the curricular choices that ultimately affect student learning.

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Preservice Elementary Teacher Perspectives' About Feminism

by  
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## **DEDICATION**

To my parents,

who instilled the values of education and perseverance

To my dog, Lou,

who patiently laid at my feet for 7 years as I completed this degree

And to all the amazing women I've met, and to those I haven't

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Elizabeth Erin Saylor-Laudano was born the middle of three children and grew up in upstate New York. Her mother was a public elementary school teacher and her father was a Lutheran minister. She attended public schools for all of her primary and secondary education. At the age of 17, she attended Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, PA, where she was a member of the soccer and track teams. She transferred after her freshman year to East Carolina University where she studied Communications, attended an internship at Walt Disney World in Orlando, FL, and was an ECU Ambassador. After working as a retail manager for a year, she returned to ECU to complete a M.A.T. in K-6 Elementary Education, and taught at a public elementary school in downtown Raleigh, NC, for ten years. She taught 3<sup>rd</sup> grade for two years, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade for six years, and kindergarten for two years. From 2008-2013 she was enrolled as a part-time student at NC State in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Concentration Social Studies Education. She left the elementary classroom in 2013 to focus on completing her degree and to gain experience teaching at the university level. While at NC State, three things have evolved: her critical feminist perspective, her passion for teacher preparation, and the foci of her future research, social studies and social justice.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Defining the Problem

Feminism is a democratic ideal, a social justice perspective, and a movement that promotes advocacy for citizenship and civic engagement; it is all encompassing in the pursuit of equality and justice for all (Butler, 1990; Collins, 2000; Connell, 2005; Crocco, 2002, 2007; de Beauvoir, 1949; Friedan, 1963; Gilligan, 1982; Harding, 1986; May, 2011; Noddings, 2001a, 2001b; Smith, 1999). The tenets of feminism and social studies education are aligned; they strengthen and support one another. According the Position Statement for the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)(2014), social studies education is focused on:

...a pedagogy that supports critical thinking and disciplinary habits of mind, important features for preparing young people to make ‘informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world’ (p. 200).

Despite the aims of democracy, gender inequality and sexism continue to exist. They exist through explicit and implicit thoughts and behaviors. Research reveals that sexism including gender stereotyping and sexual harassment can be reduced through feminist research and feminist approaches to education (Morgan, 1970; Popkin, 1990). Exposure to favorable information about feminism can also contribute to the adoption of a feminist identity (Myaskovsky & Wittig, 1997; Williams & Wittig, 1997). This may occur in an explicit educational context, such as courses that discuss feminism or other college exposures and experiences (Aronson, 2003; Henderson-King & Stewart, 1994; Stake & Rose, 1994).

Reading feminist texts (Horne, Mathews, Detrie, Burke, & Cook, 2001), having acquaintances or friends who self-identify as feminists (Findlen, 1995), and experiencing personal challenges with sexism (Cowan, Mestlin, & Masek, 1995; Duncan, 1999) can also catalyze feminist perspectives.

An important first step toward reducing sexism is to raise awareness about the prevasiveness of misogyny and sexism (Boysen, 2013; Coker, Cook-Craig-, Williams, Fisher, Clear, & Garcia, 2011; Hollingsworth, 1992; Lamb, Bigler, Liben, & Green, 2009; Phalke, Hyde, & Allison, 2014). Research indicates that teaching people to publically confront instances of prejudice can reduce the biases of those who observe the confrontation (Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006). Teachers who confront sexism in their classrooms have the particular ability to model a gender-fair norm due to their special authority within the class (Pornpitakpan, 2004). All people have the right to be exposed to and have critical awareness of gender inequality nationally and globally.

A review of the research regarding preservice teacher perspectives about feminism reveals a gap in the literature. When feminism is combined with related terms, including sexism and gender identity development, there is a lack of research on what perspectives students in teacher preparation programs have regarding these concepts and terms. Additionally, there is a dearth of research concerning how preservice teachers come to their understandings of feminism and what messages they received in school concerning feminism and their own gender identities.

The gap in this literature exposes a problem: by not exploring and developing meaningful understandings of the perspectives preservice elementary teachers have about

feminism, we as teacher educators and more specifically social studies teacher educators are overlooking a key aspect of teacher development. Exploring the development of teachers' understandings, ideologies, and beliefs can uncover their purposes for becoming teachers and possibly for decisions they may make in their future classrooms regarding their teaching practice and the curricular choices that ultimately affect student learning.

A deeper understanding of preservice teachers' beliefs and understandings of feminism are important if teacher education programs are to foster the development of reflective teachers who are conscious of the systemic, institutionalized oppression of women and all marginalized individuals and groups. A more rich understanding of their perspectives on this topic and of their understanding of the power they possess as instructional gatekeepers (Thornton, 1989, 1991) may better enable preservice teachers the disposition to transform society as opposed to merely transmit information and perpetuate the status-quo.

The need for this study is supported by the contextual literature regarding efforts to construct teacher education and more specifically, social studies teacher education programs, that confront the preexisting beliefs of students (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Biesta, 2009, 2010; Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2010; McDonald, 2007; Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013). This research accentuates the need to deconstruct current approaches to training teachers to teach social studies and emphasizes a crucial shift towards fostering preservice teachers to understand the interrelated goals of social justice, equity, democracy and citizenship.

All preservice teachers do not share these ideologies and purposes for teaching. Resistance to these ideas has been researched and illuminated (Dinkelman, 2009). If we understand how preservice teachers develop specific beliefs about feminism and gender

identity development and what messages they received in school about their own gender identities, perhaps we can help them develop greater awareness. From this starting point, teacher educators can work with preservice teachers to understand sources of resistance to feminism.

An abundant amount of literature examined the beliefs of students as they enter their teacher education programs (Kennedy, 2006; Slekar, 1998; van Hover & Yeager, 2007; Waring, 2010), and how their teaching practice is influenced by their beliefs and their perceptions regarding the purpose of social studies education and of teaching social studies (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Hawley, 2012, Hochstrasser-Fickel, 2000; Pryor, 2006; van Hover & Yeager, 2007). Additionally, the research explicates a connection between teacher education and preservice social studies teacher beliefs about social studies education (Adler, 2008; Angell, 1998; Doppen, 2007; Pryor, 2006). The scholarship elucidates the relationship between teacher education and teacher beliefs. Yet, preservice elementary teacher perspectives about feminism, including sexism and gender identity development, in social studies teaching and learning are absent.

## **Study Rationale**

### **The Significance of Teacher Perspectives**

Research reveals that teacher beliefs are fundamental to their pedagogical decision-making and heavily influence student achievement and educational equity in the classroom (Hochstrasser-Fickel, 2000). These perspectives and beliefs of preservice teachers are shaped by their own backgrounds and schooling experiences (Adler, 1984; Goodman and Adler,

1985; Smith, 2000, van Hover and Yeager, 2007). This includes social, cultural, linguistic, and historical group membership (Rodd, 1996).

With a set of standards imposed nationally and locally, in addition to the limited days and hours in each school year, teachers must make choices on what they allow through their curricular “gate” (Thornton, 1991). Ultimately, teachers determine how, when, and which topics are allowed into the formal space of their classroom (Bickmore, 1993). Thornton (1991) contests that how a teacher decides to use materials matters more than what materials they work with in their classrooms. Furthermore, novice teachers in particular demonstrate reluctance to include controversial topics for fear of community backlash (Evans, Avery, Pederson, 1999; Miller-Lane, Denton, & May, 2006). Although feminism, sexism, and gender identity development may not be deemed controversial themselves, the inclusion of these topics into the curriculum can be. Topics surrounding sex and violence are considered to be personal, sensitive, and likely to evoke strong emotional reactions, which then content can be perceived as taboo (Evans et. al., 1999).

Additionally, research explores the relationship between teacher education and preservice teacher beliefs and thinking about the social studies curriculum (Adler, 2008; Doppen, 2007; Pryor 2006). The work of Thornton and Houser (1996) concluded that elementary social studies teachers in Delaware possess “clearly a confusing array of beliefs concerning the aims and content of elementary social studies” (p. 1). Although myriad perspectives existed within elementary school teachers, the researchers reported that four broad areas were consistently associated with social education in the surveys and interviews:

(1) history, (2) geography, (3) the promotion of cultural awareness, and, (4) the socialization of the child.

Goodman and Adler (1985) found that the views of elementary student teachers had meager connections with the official National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) purpose statement of the time. Their study of 16 elementary preservice teachers concluded six salient perspectives on social studies: (1) nonsubject, (2) human relations, (3) citizenship, (4) school knowledge, (5) the ‘great connector’, and (6) social action. Understanding preservice teacher perspectives about feminism and if they make a connection between the aligned goals and objectives of social studies is research that has yet to be explored.

Research contends that prior beliefs of teachers are influential to their effectiveness as an instructor and that exploring these beliefs is foundational in learning to teach and in teacher education programs (Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013; Richardson, 2003; Richardson & Placier, 2001). Adler (2008) explains that the thinking and perspectives of social studies teachers act as a platform for decisions made about student learning and their practice as professional educators. Research on teaching (Clark & Peterson, 1986) and curriculum (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) has documented that what teachers believe about society, learning, student characteristics, curriculum, and instruction influences the curriculum they provide for their students. The literature also suggests that the future practice of preservice teachers is impacted by their perspectives with regards to their beliefs about the purposes of social studies education and the teaching of social studies (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Gradwell, 2006; Hawley, 2012; Hochstrasser-Fickel, 2000; Pryor, 2006; van Hover & Yeager, 2007).

As supported by the literature, preservice teachers are influenced by their personal experiences, beliefs, and ideologies. Exploring preservice teacher perspectives regarding feminism, including sexism and gender identity development, how they came to these understandings, and the messages they received in schools about their own gender identities will allow us to gain understandings on decisions made in their classrooms.

To summarize the rationale for conducting this research study: a) There is a dearth of studies exploring preservice teacher perspectives' of feminism; b) experiences are important to understanding the backgrounds and beliefs of students; c) beliefs are an important area of research because they frequently uncover viewpoints on educator teaching and practice; d) teachers are instructional gatekeepers, meaning their perspectives strongly inform curricular decision made in their classrooms; e) and this study contributes to an effort to promote critical feminist theoretical frameworks and foster critical reflection in teacher preparation programs regarding feminism, sexism, and gender identity development.

## **Study Overview**

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore preservice elementary teacher perspectives about feminism. It also aims to explore how they came to these understandings and the messages they received in school regarding feminism, sexism, and their gender identity development. This study focuses specifically on the ways in which preservice teacher backgrounds and experiences regarding these topics informed their beliefs and might ultimately inform their practice and possibly their purpose for teaching. I pursued the following research questions:

1. What are preservice elementary teacher perspectives' about feminism?
  - How did they come to these understandings?
  - What messages did preservice teachers receive in school regarding feminism, sexism, and their gender identity development?

### **Overview of Theoretical Frameworks**

**Social constructivist theory.** My goal was to gather and analyze data that honors participant perspectives of a phenomenon and, as such, I pursued a social constructivist approach to this research study (Creswell, 2009). The phenomenon under examination in this research study were the perceptions preservice elementary teachers regarding feminism and how they came to these understandings. Messages that preservice elementary teachers received in schooling regarding feminism and their own gender identity development were also examined. From social constructivist theory, which honors individual experiences and perspectives, falls critical feminist theory.

**Critical feminist theory.** A critical feminist theoretical framework provided an analytical lens through which I examined and analyzed data. For the purposes of this study I defined feminism as including “various social theories which explain relations between the sexes in society, and the differences between women’s and men’s experience” (Ramazanoglu, 1989, p. 99). However, it must be noted that any attempts to offer a general definition of feminism are inevitably confusing. Broad definitions include women’s emancipation, or liberation. But, Ramazanoglu (1989) contests that, “The broad version, however, fails to convey the variety and contradictions of feminist thought. A unified version of feminism cannot reconcile the conflicting struggles within feminism” (p. 7).

Over the decades numerous meanings have developed as innumerable political struggles and varied objectives exist of those who have fought for women. Rather than attempting to impose uniformity on multiplicity, some feminists have accepted feminism as a loose connotation for myriad conceptions of the relations between men and women in society (Mitchell and Oakley, 1986).

A key and important aim of critical feminist theory is to problematize gender and gender relations with the consequent understand that gender cannot be dismissed or explained merely as an extension of nature or of natural differences (Ramazanoglu, 1989). Feminism “initiated the cultural work of exposing and articulating the gendered nature of history, culture, and society” and challenged “male-normative terms of discussion about reality and experience” (Bordo, 1990, p. 136).

Feminist scholars argue that existing epistemological constructs of knowledge and power should continually be questioned (Butler, 2009; Chodorow, 1978; Collins, 2000; Harding, 1986, 2001; hooks, 1981; Lorde, 1984; MacKinnon, 1982a; May, 2011; Ramazanoglu, 1989, 2002; Reinharz, 1991, 1992; Sikes). Critical feminist theory promotes the reevaluation of the current justified beliefs of knowledge and attempts to illuminate the undeniable nexus of power in our society. This theory supports claims that the conventional research only captures the hegemonic viewpoint of individuals in power, deploying it exclusively to the individuals who will maintain and perpetuate that power. Feminist theorists have criticized conventional sciences for their arrogance in assuming that they could tell one true story about a world that is out there, ready-made for their reporting, without listening to women’s accounts or being aware that accounts of nature and social relations

have been constructed within men's control of gender relations (Harding, 2001). The construction of our social relations through this hegemonic, patriarchal perspective impacts both women and young girls in our society. Feminist theory can inform educational research by catalyzing this reexamination and by creating spaces of empowerment for all people.

### **Overview of Research Design and Methods**

Feminist case study was selected as the design for this research. For decades, "case studies have [had] an ambiguous place in social science although professional schools of nursing, business, public administration, social work, medicine, and psychoanalysis use them extensively, particularly for teaching purposes" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 164). Case studies have also been incorporated into feminist explications of women's legal and clinical issues to explain and demonstrate concepts (Miller, 1976). One of the reasons for the selection of feminist case study for this dissertation is because I believe more of this research is needed in field of education.

In the broadest application, "case study" refers to research that focuses on a single case or single issue (Reinharz, 1992, p. 164), which do not seek generalizations. In this study the case is the group of five women. Defining the parameters of a case study was important as this type of work has the propensity to necessitate incredible amounts of time and resources if a scope is not determined. In order to avoid this problem, Yin (2003) and Stake (1995) suggest that placing boundaries on a case can prevent this explosion from occurring. Suggestions on how to bind a case include: (a) by time and place (Creswell, 2003); (b) time and activity (Stake); and (c) by definition and context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Binding this case ensures that my study will remain reasonable in scope.

In this study, I explored the perspectives of women who were senior elementary education students enrolled in a teacher preparation program at a large public university in the southeast United States. The topic under examination, the phenomenon, is preservice elementary teacher perspectives of feminism and the experiences that have influenced their understandings regarding this topic.

The data sources included two written journal reflections, two individual in-depth interviews, and a focus group interview. These data sources were collected over a series of several months. I analyzed this data using a narrative and categorical analysis. All of the data collected was additionally analyzed through a critical feminist lens as I am a feminist researcher and, “Feminist research methods are methods used in research projects by people who identify themselves as feminist or as part of the women’s movement” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 6). The methods for this research will be elaborated upon in chapter three of this study.

### **Summary**

There is a dearth of scholarship regarding preservice elementary teacher perspectives about feminism, including sexism and gender identity development. This case study of preservice teachers attempted to address this gap. As noted, the participants for this research were undergraduate seniors enrolled in an elementary education teacher preparation program at a large state university in the southeast of the United States.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Introduction

This literature review examines research on feminist critiques completed by scholars and researchers over the past three decades and beyond. The main foci of this literature review are: (a) the feminist critique of society and social relations (b) the feminist critique of schools and school curriculum (c) the feminist critique of social studies (d) a discussion of what (contemporary) feminist work has been completed in social studies (e) an exploration of preservice teacher experiences, understandings, and beliefs (f) a summary of why this research is needed (g) and how this research will fill a gap in the field of education.

In order to have a deeper understanding of preservice elementary teacher perspectives, how their beliefs have been shaped, and how those beliefs influence teacher development, more work must be done to examine their experiences regarding feminism, sexism, and gender identity development. This work is important because teacher beliefs and perspectives strongly influence the teaching and practice of educators in their classrooms. The objective of this educational research study is to add a few more missing voices to the stories of our society, our schools, and the social studies curriculum, through a feminist lens.

Currently, there is a lack of research on preservice teacher perspectives regarding feminism, sexism, and gender identity development. The following is a brief overview of contemporary feminist perspectives regarding social relationships, including the organization and curriculum of schools. I focus specifically on the social studies, including discussions of the feminist work that has been completed in social studies and a discussion of the research needed to be conducted in this field.

## **Feminist Critique of Society**

American author, feminist, and social activist, bell hooks explains the necessity of a self-conscious resistance to the more general ideology of domination:

To me feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women will have equal rights with men; it is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels—sex, race, and class, to name a few—and a commitment to reorganizing U.S. society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires. p. 194

Although it is difficult to develop a precise definition of the intricately complex and varied theory of feminism, it is possible to assert that feminism “comprises various social theories which explain relations between the sexes in society, and the differences between women’s and men’s experience” (Ramazanoglu, 1989, p. 99). Feminism provides a critique of society with sex and gender as primary areas of focus. This critique has been used by educational researchers to similarly critique social relations in school, curriculum, and the classroom.

According to Ramazanoglu (1989), despite contradictions, most feminist theories share certain beliefs and characteristics including:

that much of what has been considered natural, normal, and desirable about gender relations should be challenged by feminism; that existing gender relations which privilege men and subordinate women are unacceptable and need to be changed; that the point of feminism is to change the world; that feminism is provocative because it is deliberately politicized; that feminism always encounters resistances to its goals;

that feminism does not start from an objective and detached viewpoint; and, that feminism questions why some knowledges are seen as more valid than others. (p. 8).

A key and important advance in feminist theory is the problematizing of gender and gender relations with the consequent understand that gender cannot be dismissed or explained merely as an extension of nature or of natural differences (Ramazanoglu, 1989). Feminism “initiated the cultural work of exposing and articulating the *gendered* nature of history, culture, and society” and challenged “male-normative terms of discussion about reality and experience” (Bordo, 1990, p. 136). These ideologies and orientations lead to social constructivist thinking, which point to gender as a social construction. When referring to the development of feminist thinking in the United States Biklen & Pollard (1993) write, “There is not a woman’s perspective, but rather many women’s perspectives shaped by how gender interfaces with race, ethnicity, class, and geography” (p. 7).

National and international scholars alike conduct feminist work. Robin Morgan argues that documenting women’s status and accomplishments in different countries must be a top research priority. She argues that we can clarify the way women’s lives are similar and vary globally, so we can engage in effective action on women’s behalf (Reinharz, 1992).

One of the core concepts in the work of philosopher and gender theorist, Judith Butler, is gender performativity. Butler (2009) points out that performativity was, to be sure, an account of agency, and her term “precarity” examines the lived conditions of populations who "suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (p. 2). Similarly to gender role stereotyping, sexism,

and heteronormativity, precarity and gender performativity call attention to issues of gender inequity. Butler (2009) argues that precarity is very much tied to gender norms, writing that:

Gender norms have everything to do with how and in what way we can appear in public space; how and in what way the public and private are distinguished, and how that distinction is instrumentalized in the service of sexual politics; who will be criminalized on the basis of public appearance; who will fail to be protected by the law, or more specifically the police, on the street, or on the job, or in the home.... So these norms are not only instances of power; and they do not only reflect broader relations of power; they are one way that power operates. (p. 3)

Butler's work refers to a more feminist critique of society, social relations, and the systematic gender oppression that exists overall. Her work demonstrates the manner in which feminism draws attention to sexism, gender norms, and modes of sexism in society.

**Sexism and gender norms.** Gender is socially constructed; it is fluid and flexible and should be considered a spectrum, rather than a binary (e.g., masculine or feminine). The term sexism refers to discrimination or prejudice that is based on gender, as it exists in our society. It functions to maintain status and power differences between gendered groups in society. One traditional way that sexism manifests is when girls and women are discriminated against for pursuing achievement in fields or occupations that are traditionally androcentric (e.g. science, engineering, military, fire fighting, etc.). Other ways in which sexism manifests is when boys or girls are pressured to conform to traditional concepts of masculinity or femininity. Sexist discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes, and attitudes are interrelated; they are all forms of sexism.

Gender stereotypes refer to certain attributes that are believed to characterize a group (e.g. “Girls like pink”). Gendered attitudes denote positive or negative associations between specific groups and attributes. For example, a proscriptive attitude refers to an attribute that a perceiver believes a group should exhibit (e.g., “Girls should like pink”); whereas a prescriptive attitude refers to an attribute that the perceiver considers that members of a group should avoid (e.g., “Boys should not like pink,” see Leaper & Brown, 2014). Prejudice transpires when a person is evaluated based on the perceiver’s own stereotypes and attitudes (e.g., negative perceptions of boys who like pink). A behavioral expression of prejudice is discrimination (e.g., harassing a boy who likes pink). Sexism is present when prejudice and discrimination are based on an individual’s gender.

***Modes of sexism.*** There are two specific, but related, modes of sexism. Ambivalent sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001a, 2001b) argues that sexism takes two forms, overt hostility and paternalistic benevolence (Oswald, Franzoi, & Frost, 2012). According to Glick and Fiske (1996) ambivalent sexism, gender-based prejudice is ambivalent because there are asymmetries in power and status between women and men, yet there is male—female interdependence within families and heterosexual relationships (Leaper & Brown, 2014).

In this model, sexism has two forms, hostile and benevolent. Hostile sexism refers to negative attitudes regarding individuals who disrupt conventional gender stereotypes. For example, teasing or harassing a female fire fighter or a boy who likes dolls are expressions of hostile sexism. Contrastingly, benevolent sexism, “reflects seemingly favorable responses to women who are in traditional gender roles” (Oswald et al., 2012, p. 1114). For example, a female student may receive a warning for a class disruption, when a boy may receive an

office referral for a commensurate disruption in class. Female stereotypes have been found to consist of both highly favorable and unfavorable attributes. Despite their apparent juxtaposition of positive/negative attitudes towards women, research has consistently revealed that these hostile and benevolent behaviors towards woman and girls are salient forms of sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001b). Jost and Kay (2005) elaborate on this phenomenon:

These proposals are consistent with three theories that stress the role of stereotyping and ideology in leading members of disadvantaged groups to justify and maintain the status quo: Jackman's (1994) velvet glove theory of protective paternalism, Sidanius and Pratto's (1999) theory of social dominance, and Jost and Banaji's (1994) theory of system justification. All of these perspectives hold that members of subordinated groups are often complicit in their own subordination. (p. 498)

Research that studies social cognition has illustrated that attitudes, stereotypes, and prejudices can operate at both conscious (or explicit) and unconscious (or implicit) levels (Greenwald, Banaji, Rudman, Farnham, Nosek, & Mellott, 2002). Over the last two decades, an increasing number of developmental and educational psychologists have grown concerned regarding explicit and implicit sexism that is directed toward children and adolescents in the school setting (Leaper, & Brown, 2014).

Sexism is seen through gender role stereotyping of boys and girls, men and women. It also occurs in social interactions through the form of sexual harassment. In the next section, we will specifically examine sexism in schools.

## **Feminist Critique of Schools: Sexism in Schools**

Two types of sexism that often manifest in schools include gender bias and harassment. Gender biases are reflected when teachers and school administrators hold varied expectations for girls and boys in overall school achievement, academic subjects, and behaviors deemed appropriate for girls or boys. These biases can influence a child's developing motives, beliefs, and abilities. The second type of sexism that affects many students in schools is sexual harassment. This refers to inappropriate or hostile sexual behaviors that take place in social interactions (e.g., unwanted touching, vulgarities, sexual teasing, etc.) and now, through online social media. Both forms of sexual harassment can directly and indirectly negatively affect a child's well-being and achievement. A direct influence transpires when institutions, adults, and peers discourage or encourage a child to partake in particular behaviors based on their gender. Indirect influences transpire when a child avoids practicing particular behaviors or achieving in particular domains because they have internalized gender-stereotyped expectations. Some research reveals that gender bias is most salient to White European American children because gender is their primary social identity (Brown, Alabi, Huynh, & Masten, 2011; Turner & Brown, 2007).

Unconscious or implicit stereotyped attitudes are seen when individuals respond automatically in situations based on conditioned semantic and emotional associations to particular social categories (Leaper & Brown, 2014). At times, these automatic responses differ from the conscious or explicit beliefs that children and adults hold (Greenwald et al., 2002).

**Agents of sexism.** Sexism is perpetuated in schools both directly and indirectly. Within the classroom, teachers can express explicit and implicit sexist attitudes and show differential treatment of boys and girls (Tiedemann, 2000). In hallways and other public areas in schools, peers can demonstrate sexism by harassing or ostracizing a target they perceive as not conforming to gender normative roles. Indirect sexism is also propagated in schools. Parents are influential in shaping the academic attitudes that children bring to school (Frome & Eccles, 1998; Herbert & Stipek, 2005). Most children also consume popular media, which is also a powerful source of sexism through its ubiquitous reinforcement of gender stereotypes (Signorielli, 2012).

**Teachers.** Teachers may perpetuate sexism in various ways at all levels of schooling. For decades, some teachers have been more likely to perceive boys as: liking math, logical, independent in math, competitive, needing math, and have been more likely to attribute boys' success in math to ability and girls' success in math to effort (Fennema, Peterson, Carpenter, & Lubinski, 1990; Jackson & Leffingwell, 1999; Tiedemann, 2000). According to Jussim and Harber (2005), teacher implicit and explicit biases can affect their expectations for their students, and that these expectations for their students can be self-fulfilling.

The research reveals juxtaposed findings with regard to gender equity in the classroom. Some research claims that teachers of good intention respond to boys and teach them more actively, which causes girls to be shortchanged and not have equal opportunity in the classroom (Sadker & Sadker, 1994). While other research states that boys, not girls, are on the weak side of an educational gender gap as they are on average, a year and a half behind girls in reading and writing and less committed to school overall (Sommers, 2000). In

2002, Jackie Woods, president of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) avowed that boys and girls are both being shortchanged. Perhaps teachers' gender stereotypes are reflected in these varied results and perhaps students' gender stereotypes are a reflection of their teachers' possible sexist perceptions.

Teachers have attempted to be more egalitarian in their explicit beliefs in recent years (Garrahy, 2001; Jones & Myhill, 2004). More recently, teachers have frequently rated boys and girls to have similar math competencies, which is consistent with the actual performance of both sexes (Helwig, Anderson, & Tindal, 2001; Herbert & Stipek, 2005). In a study conducted by Lavy (2008) some teachers evaluate the math competency of girls as higher than that of boys when the gender of the student is known to the teacher, however, when the gender is unknown they are not. Some teachers perceive boys to be more likely to underachieve and have behavioral issues than their female counterparts; this disparity is particularly significant for Black girls and boys (Wood, Kaplan, McLoyd, 2007). Some teachers often continue to assume that different interests and learning styles exist between boys and girls as well (Skelton et al., 2009).

Current research focuses on how teachers' implicit gender biases may influence children within the classroom (Leaper & Brown, 2014). Beilock, Gunderson, Ramirez, and Levine (2010) found that female teachers' own math anxiety was associated with an increase of girls endorsing the gender stereotype that "girls are good at reading and boys are good at math," thus exposing how implicit sexism of teachers affects children. Consequently, this could have an association with the lower performance of girls in mathematics (Beilock et al.,

2010). Teachers are not the only possible agents of sexism in schools, peers are highly influential agents as well.

**Peers.** The most frequent perpetrators of sexual harassment are peers (Fineran & Bennett, 1999). Peers can be agents of sexism at all levels of school, including pre-school and primary school. Brown and Larson (2009) claim that although sexism of peers is influential at all levels of schooling, that the impact is particularly influential during middle school. The most common forms of peer-directed sexism is engaging in the sexual harassment of classmates and through teasing or rejecting classmates not following traditional gender norms.

Sexual harassment of peers most commonly occurs in public, frequently in hallways and classrooms (Harris Interactive, 2001; Timmerman, 2005). A strong predictor of an individual's sexually harassing behavior is peer norms about the acceptability of sexual harassment (Jewell & Brown, 2013). According to Harris Interactive (2001):

- 54% of adolescents admit to perpetrating sexual harassment against a peer:
  - 39% of the perpetrators claimed they sexually harassed a peer because “a lot of people do it”
  - 24% of the perpetrators claimed “their friends encouraged them”

Sexual harassment occurs when peers perpetrate and condone the behavior, it also takes place when classmates are teased and/or rejected for not conforming to traditional gender norms.

Research on group norms suggests that children who do not fit the stereotype of the group or meet the norms can be mocked, bullied, or ostracized by the group members (Abrams, Rutland, Cameron, & Ferrell, 2007). Boys and girls who are considered atypical for

their gender are frequently harassed and excluded by peers (Jewell & Brown, 2014; Russell, Kosciw, Horn, & Saewyc, 2010; Smith & Leaper, 2006; Young & Sweeting, 2004). In contrast, classmates with the most positive peer relations, being rated the most popular and most liked, are highly gender typical children (Egan & Perry, 2001; Jewell & Brown, 2014; Lobel, Bempechat, Gewirtz, Shoken-Topaz, & Bashe, 1993; Rose, Glick, & Smith, 2011).

The research indicates a disparity between the experiences of negative peer behaviors for low levels of gender typicality or gender non-conformity. While girls experience negative comments from peers when engaging in traditional male activities like mathematics or athletics (Leaper & Brown, 2008), boys having poor athletic abilities or whom appear feminine often face harsher ramifications from peers (Lee & Troop-Gordon, 2011; Pascoe, 2007). As stated, it is most common for peers to exude sexist behaviors towards a classmate; however, parents can also be agents of sexism in with regards to schooling.

**Parents.** “Parents begin gendering their children from their very first awareness of those children, whether in pregnancy or while awaiting adoption” (Kane, 2006, p. 149). Parents shape children’s gendered behavior in myriad ways, many of which are beyond the scope of this section. Scholars of gender and childhood are increasingly interested in the role of peers in the process of gendering children (Kane, 2006), but they also continue to recognize the role parents’ play in engendering children (Coltrane & Adams, 1997; Maccoby, 1998). Differential gendered treatment by parents is evident from birth and throughout the early childhood years. For example, the literature indicates differential treatment of sons and daughters in terms of parental selection of toys (Etaugh & Liss, 1992; Pomerleau et al., 1990), clothing (Cahill, 1989), and décor for children’s rooms (Pomerleau et al., 1990), as

well as parental emphasis on emotions versus autonomy in family stories (Fiese & Skillman, 2000; Reese, Haden, & Fivush, 1996 as cited in Kane, 2006).

Through their own implicit and explicit sexism, parents can influence children's academic lives as well, subsequently becoming an indirect means by which sexism occurs in school (Gunderson, Ramirez, Levine, & Beilock, 2012). Some parents exhibit implicit sexist attitudes about the academic abilities of their children. Research reveals that some parents perceive math and science to be more important for boys than for girls; they perceive that boys are more competent in math and science than girls; and they expect higher math and science performance from boys than from girls (Andre, Whigham, Henrickson, & Chambers, 1999; Eccles, Freedman-Doan, Frome, Jacobs, & Yoon, 2000). Furthermore, parents assumed that sons are more interested in computer science than daughters (Sainz, Palmen, & Garcia-Cuesta, 2012).

Stereotypes', suppositions', and expectations' of parents can influence their beliefs regarding their children's interests and abilities, which consequently affect the self-perceptions and performance of children (Gunderson et al., 2012; Jacobs, Chhin, & Shaver, 2005). The parent perspectives in these research findings are not new. In an older study conducted by Yee and Eccles (1988), parents' attributed the success of boys in math to their ability, but the success of girls in math to effort. This study additionally notes the consistency in which parent beliefs and expectations concerning math (specifically when aligned with gender stereotypes) can impact children's attitudes and aptitudes surrounding math (Yee & Eccles, 1988).

Research illuminates the fundamental impact that parental expectations have on children's beliefs and behaviors and can be more important than actual academic experiences. Research has indicated that parents direct children's occupational choices down stereotypical paths (Chhin, Bleeker, & Jacobs, 2008; Whiston & Keller, 2004). With regards to academic achievement, parent gender biases may also include a variance in treatment of sons and daughters (Gunderson et al., 2012). Studies conducted in the United States reveal that sons encounter more frequent and detailed conversations regarding math and science concepts with their parents (Chang, Sandhofer, & Brown, 2011; Crowley, Callanan, Tenenbaum, & Allen, 2001; Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2003). Teachers, peers, and parents are not the only agents of sexism in schools; media can also be agents of sexism.

**Media.** Sexism has been documented in nearly all forms of children's media (Leaper & Brown, 2014). Sexist narratives and images are presented in media, perpetuating gender role stereotyping, which are then applied to youth in our schools. This ubiquity of gender stereotypes can validate and support sexism in school. A study by Aubrey and Harrison (2004) that analyzed contemporary children's television programs found that boys are portrayed as leaders by telling others what to do more frequently, answering more questions, and also demonstrating more inventiveness than girls. Video games repeatedly portray boys as aggressive, where girls are sexually objectified (Dill & Thill, 2007). Justification of sexual harassment directed at girls from boys, is fostered by these stereotypes of aggressive boys and sexualized girls.

Educational media is also permeated with sexist portrayals of girls and boys. As noted in Chapter I, women and girls are underrepresented in social studies and history texts and

when they are present, it is typically in an ancillary position. Females do possess some male gender normed characteristics (like assertiveness), but very rarely do males display female gender normed characteristics (like compassion) in elementary school textbooks (Evans & Davis, 2000). Diekman and Murnen (2004) state that boys infrequently have feminine-stereotyped personality traits or professions even amid award-winning children's books, which are considered to possess gender equity. Gender-stereotypical portrayals of occupations in children's books continue into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, along with the underrepresentation of girls (Hamilton, Anderson, Broadus, & Young, 2006).

**Sexual harassment in schools.** Sexual harassment is defined as uninvited and unwelcome verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature. It includes unwanted sexual interest, vulgar and sexually disparaging comments, unwanted touching, and sexual intimidation. Leaper and Brown (2014) explain:

It can involve physical aggression (e.g., unwanted touching, sexual coercion) or verbal aggression (e.g., unwelcome sexual comments, homophobic insults). Also, it can be expressed directly in face-to-face interactions or via electronic messages sent to the victim; or sexual harassment can be expressed indirectly behind a target's back (e.g., spreading sexual rumors) (p. 202).

***Pervasiveness of sexual harassment in schools.*** It is common for girls and boys to experience sexual harassment (Leaper & Robnett, 2001). According to a study of the sexual harassment of students in grades 7-11 in the United States conducted by the AAUW (2011), 56% of girls and 40% of boys reported having experienced incidents of sexual harassment. As students age, a gender gap of sexual harassment proliferates. Among high school seniors,

62% of girls and 32% of boys reported sexual harassment victimization. The report also found that across all grade levels, girls were twice as likely as boys to report being a target of unwelcome sexual comments and/or jokes, with 46% of girls and 22% of boys. Experiencing anti-gay or anti-lesbian insults was reported at commensurate rates with 18% of girls and 19% of boys. In our technological era, it is important to note that 36% of girls and 24% of boys experienced online sexual harassment via email, text messages, or postings on the Web (AAUW, 2011).

The AAUW (2011) survey also requested students to identify the gender of perpetrators and to assess common attributes of the typical targets of sexual harassment. The perpetrators of sexual harassment were more frequently boys than girls. Among the targets of sexual harassment, 66% identified boys, 19% identified girls, and 11% identified both boys and girls as their perpetrators. Characteristics relating to sexual attractiveness or traditional gender roles were the attributes that students perceived as the most common motivations behind sexual harassment. Girls who were most likely to be sexually harassed had qualities that included being physically developed (58%), very pretty (41%), not pretty or not very feminine (32%), and overweight (30%). Boys considered most likely to be sexually harassed included those perceived as not athletic or not very masculine (37%), overweight (30%), or good looking (11%). While the occurrences of sexual harassment vary slightly, similar patterns as those reported in the AAUW are found in other surveys (Chiodo, Wolfe, Croosk, Hughes, & Jaffe, 2009; Lacasse, Purdy, & Mendelson, 2003; Leaper & Brown, 2008; Pepler et al., 2006; Petersen & Hyde, 2009; Wei & Chen, 2012).

***Effects of sexual harassment.*** Girls are more likely than boys to be negatively affected by sexual harassment, including being slightly more prone to be targets of sexual harassment (AAUW, 2011; Fineran & Bolen, 2006). Sexual-minority boys are also more likely than heterosexual boys to be negatively impacted by sexual harassment (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010). Some of the negative effects of sexual harassment include a decline in academic performance and internalized symptoms like depression and anxiety (AAUW, 2012; Leaper & Robnett, 2011; Poteat et al., 2014). According to the AAUW survey, the most commonly reported responses to sexual harassment included not wanting to attend school (37% of girls and 25% of boys), finding it challenging to study (24% of girls and 24% of boys), staying home from school (14% of girls and 9% of boys), and ceasing to be involved in activities and sports (9% of girls and 5% of boys). Incidents of sexual harassment also seem to be related to the increase of body image concerns among girls (Chiodo et al., 2009; Lindberg, Grabe, & Hyde, 2007). Chiodo et al. (2009) conducted a longitudinal study of Canadian youths, which found that incidents of sexual harassment were higher in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, but students in 11<sup>th</sup> grade predicted a higher occurrence of feeling unsafe in school, substance abuse, emotional distress, and victimization by dating partners and other peers. Overall, the research has found that recurrent experiences with sexual harassment increase the propensity for negative consequences in socio-emotional adjustment, academic achievement, and the overall well being of girls and boys.

***Awareness of sexism.*** Children must first possess understandings of gender stereotypes and gender inequality in order to have a general awareness of sexism. Halim and Ruble (2010) suggest that children are aware of gender stereotypes in early childhood,

considerably before their entry into elementary school. Knowledge of gender stereotypes and gender inequity increases as children age. By middle childhood, children are aware of greater status, including higher income, which is associated with jobs performed by men in comparison to jobs performed by women (Liben, Bigler, & Krogh, 2011).

Bigler et al. (2008) found that in the beginning of elementary school, the majority of children were aware that a woman has never been the president of the United States, an understanding that continued to increase in elementary school years. In this study, slightly more than 25% of children, with higher rates among girls than boys, freely attributed the lack of any female president throughout history to discrimination (e.g., “People like voting for boys more than girls.”). One half of the children thought that individual voters would be discriminatory if a woman ran for president and one quarter believed that there is a current law against women being the president (Bigler et al., 2008). Neff, Cooper, and Woodruff (2007) found that children are more likely to perceive gender inequality in politics and business, rather than grasping the more ecumenical phenomenon in our nation in which women still make 70 cents to every dollar that a man makes for the same work.

While children and adolescents are largely aware of sexism (Brown & Bigler, 2005), they infrequently perceive themselves as a target of discrimination (Crosby, 1984; Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990). Although approximately 50% of adolescent girls report that they have experienced academic and athletic gender discrimination, the majority claimed that it only occurred once or twice in a year (Brown et al., 2011). Quinn et al. (1999) claim that there are psychological costs associated with perceiving oneself as the target of discrimination, possibly causing students to resist aligning themselves with a negative label.

In one experimental study by Brown et al. (2010), children were given negative feedback regarding their individual performance in a staged art contest. When they were told that they had lost the art contest, very few (8 of 108 children) perceived personal discrimination. Negative feedback was only perceived to be due to gender discrimination when it was communicated that (a) the contest judges were of the opposite gender, (b) the contest judges picked other-gender winners in previous years, and (c) the contest judges picked other-gender winners this year (Brown et al., 2010). These surveys of children and adolescents suggest that incidences and frequency of experiences involving sexism are likely to be underestimated.

Brown and Bigler (2005) indicate that awareness of discrimination and sexism is influenced by a child's cognitive development, situational variables, gender attitudes, and gender. They claim that children possessing a greater advancement in social perspective-taking abilities and those who have the ability to compare personal outcomes with others, will be more likely to recognize sexism than peers with less advanced cognitive abilities. Evidence also suggests that children perceive sexism more willingly when it is not directed at themselves, but at another individual or group (Brown & Bigler, 2004; Brown et al., 2010).

Girls are more likely than boys to perceive sexism during middle childhood and adolescence, which may reflect their awareness of their subordinate social status (Brown & Bigler, 2004; Brown et al., 2011, 2010; DuBois et al., 2002). Additionally, adolescent girls holding gender-egalitarian attitudes (Brown & Bigler, 2004; Leaper & Brown, 2008), or those who reported learning about feminism (Leaper & Brown, 2008), were more likely to identify gender discrimination.

## **Feminist Critique of School Curriculum**

Sexism affects all children in school. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) are subjects in which girls are stereotypically assumed to be less competent. As Solomon (2014) explains, girls are also assumed to be less capable athletically than boys. Contrastingly, girls are stereotypically assumed to be more competent than boys in overall school achievement. On the basis of these negative stereotypes, it is possible for boys and girls to be the target of sexism in academic classes and in the participation of sports (Leaper & Brown, 2014). This section acutely outlines gender bias in schools in the areas of academic subjects, sport participation, and overall achievement.

**Prejudice against girls in STEM.** Researchers and policy makers have become increasingly concerned with the gender gap in the STEM fields. The achievement of students' in subjects associated to STEM is considered imperative for economic success in our increasingly technological world (Zakaria, 2011). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2013), women received 57% of all bachelor's degrees in the United States; yet only 43% of those were in mathematics, 20% in physics, 18% in engineering, and 16% in computer and information sciences. Over the last four decades, the gender gap in these fields has grown increasingly myopic within the United States (National Science Foundation, 2013). It must be noted that women are not underrepresented in all STEM fields as women recently received 58% of biological and biomedical science bachelor degrees in the United States (NSF, 2013).

Research reveals that during adolescence, gender disparities in achievement develop in the areas of mathematics and some sciences (Petersen & Hyde, 2014). With regards to

math achievement, Lindberg, Hyde, Petersen, and Linn (2010) claim that no substantial difference exists between boys and girls in elementary and middle school. However, their study found a small, but significant difference in advancing math achievement of boys in high school and college. These findings correlate to the trend of girls decreasing their interest in mathematics between middle and high school (Hill, Corbett, & St. Rose, 2010).

Cross-national evidence exists of boys scoring significantly higher on average than girls on the AP Computer Science and AP Physics exams (Hill et al., 2010), and on the TIMMS high school physics examination (TIMMS International Study Center, 2000). Although research reveals that boys perform slightly better on standardized tests in American high schools, girls attain higher average grades in math and science courses (Hill et al., 2010; NCES, 2013). According to developmental scientists, gender-related differences in achievement have multiple contributing factors (Leaper, 2013). Robust evidence exists that gender biases are among these factors. Research suggests that many children stereotype STEM-related fields as male domains and perceive boys possessing a greater competency than girls in STEM-related fields such as mathematics (Muzzatti & Agnoli, 2007; Steffens, Jelenec, & Noack, 2010), computer science (Mercier, Barron, & O'Connor, 2006), and physics (Kessels, 2005).

Gender stereotype internalization by girls may affect STEM-related subject achievement. When perceived value or interest of specific subjects have been assessed, research commonly reveals that girls tend to rate computer and technology, mathematics, and physical science lower than boys (Chow, Eccles, & SImela-Aro, 2012; Else-Quest, Hyde, & Linn, 2010; Kessels, 2005; Riegle-Crumb, Farkas, & Muller, 2002). Girls internalize gender

stereotypes presented to them through interactions with parents, peers, and teachers. Leaper and Brown (2008) found that half of adolescent girls in the United States between 13 and 18 years reported hearing disparaging comments about girls in math, science, or computers from these sources. In this survey study, the most frequently cited agents were male peers (32%), female peers (22%), teachers/coaches (23%), fathers (15%), and mothers (12%). Brown and Leaper (2010) successively analyzed the data from this study (controlling family backgrounds and grades), further concluding that experiencing sexist comments had a negative relation to girls' interests in math and science, and beliefs about their own abilities.

A longitudinal study conducted by (Bleeker & Jacobs, 2004) found that mothers' negative stereotypes predicted ensuing declines in daughters' motivation and self-efficacy in math and science. Some research additionally suggests that parents may demonstrate more encouraging behaviors to sons regarding their achievement in STEM-related fields (Simpkins, Davis-Kean, & Eccles, 2005; Tenenbaum, Snow, Roach, & Kurland, 2005). Overall, negative gender stereotypes surrounding girls in certain STEM fields continue. Discrimination can occur explicitly and implicitly through parent, peer, and teacher stereotypes, leading to a lack of encouragement and an underestimation in the ability of girls' in STEM fields. Research suggests that girls internalize these gender biases, leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy of girls decreasing achievements in STEM.

**Prejudice against girl athletes.** The United States Civil Rights Act of 1972, Title IX, has dramatically impacted girls' participation in athletics since its enactment. The Women's Sports Foundation (2009) states that when Title IX was enacted, participation in high school sports was approximately 4% for girls and 50% for boys; while today, 40% of girls and 50%

of boys participate in high school sports. Yet, sports continue to be stereotyped as a male arena by many children (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002; Rowley, Kutz-Costes Mistry, & Feagans, 2007; Shakib, 2003).

Some studies claim that some girls feel conflicted between their peer norms of femininity and heterosexuality, and athleticism (Cockburn & Clarke, 2002, Shakib, 2003). Schmalz, Kerstetter, and Anderson (2008) found that specific sports are perceived as solely appropriate for girls (e.g., dance, cheerleading) or solely for boys (e.g., football, wrestling). Disparaging comments made in social settings specifically to girls regarding sport participation can lead to experiencing pressure to quit. Three-fourths of adolescent girls in the United States between the ages of 13-18 recounted disapproving comments related to girls in athletics (Leaper & Brown, 2008). The most commonly cited perpetrators in this survey were male peers (54%), female peers (38%), teachers/coaches (28%), fathers (30%), and mothers (25%).

Research also suggests that even if most girls are not explicitly discouraged from athletic participation; they may not be receiving equal encouragement or support as boys. Some parents are more likely to expect achievement in athletics from their sons than their daughters, and as noted above, parental expectations of success typically tend to predict the actual achievement of children (Fredricks & Eccles, 2002). Studies also uncover that popularity among peers is tied more strongly to athletic participation of boys than of girls (Shakib, Veliz, Dunbar, & Sabo, 2011).

Messner (1998) claims that teammates and coaches (who in many cases are also teachers (Schmeichel, )), use sexist, antigay, misogynistic language to enforce achievement

and conformity among players in many schools across our nation. The sport culture in our nation encourages and supports sexist and heteronormative attitudes in boys. Recent work suggests that in some instances, this may lead to an increased risk among some male athletes for condoning or performing sexually violent acts (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, Pakalka, & White, 2006).

**Prejudice against boy school achievement.** An academic achievement gap has been growing over the past several decades as boys are more likely than girls to get lower grades and more likely to drop out of high school in the majority of industrialized countries (UNESCO, 2010). This data directly contrasts the statistics of nonindustrialized countries, where educational access is frequently only afforded to boys.

The gender gap in academic achievement in the United States spans from elementary school through college, with the greatest gap in subjects including reading, writing, and the arts, which favor girls' achievement (Eurydice Network, 2010; NCES, 2013). Only 43% of all bachelor's degrees in the United States went to men (NCES, 2013). The gender gap in achievement is greater for Black and Latino/Latina youth than for White or Asian American students in the United States (NCES, 2013). Research indicates that traditional gender role stereotyping and sexism may attribute to these gender gaps in achievement.

As Leaper and Brown (2014) state, "sexism functions to maintain traditional status and power relations between men and women in society" (p. 201). Noted above, sexism can be manifested by discriminating against girls and women who pursue activities or careers associated with traditional male arenas like STEM and sports. However, another way sexism occurs is when boys and men are pressured to conform to traditional ideologies and gender

stereotypes of males and masculinity. Boys are frequently teased if they are not perceived as tough or athletic (Jewell & Brown, 2014).

Research suggests that the academic achievement of boys can be undermined by perceptions of traditional masculinity. High academic achievement and succeeding in school can be seen in some communities as not abiding by masculine norms (Kessels & Steinmayr, 2013; Legewie & DiPrete, 2012). The normative masculine behaviors of wanting to appear tough and independent, may conflict with requesting help or obeying a teacher's authority (Keifer & Ryan, 2008; Santos, Galligan, Pahlke, & Fabes, 2013). As mentioned, specific subjects may also be perceived as particularly feminine (e.g., reading, writing, arts) (Plante, Theoret, & Favreau, 2009; Rowley et al., 2007), causing males who may excel in these fields to be teased by their male peers for their high level of performance in a female stereotyped domain (Sherriff, 2007; Van de Gaer, Pustjens, Van Damme, & De Munter, 2006). Fuller-Rowell and Doan (2010) add that these specific pressures may even occur more frequently among youths from some ethnic minority backgrounds or those from lower-income settings.

Academic achievement and complying with teachers' authority may be directly undermined by boys' concerns with exuding traditional masculine ideologies. Boys may infer attitudes about teachers' expectations (Hartley & Sutton, 2013), with regards to teachers' overall perception that girls have greater potential for academic achievement in school than boys (Jones & Myhill, 2004). This notion is also reflected in the disproportionate rates of behavioral referrals and disciplinary actions for misbehavior that boys, especially Black and Latino boys, are subject to in school (Barbarin et al., 2014; Losen, 2011, Rowley et al., 2014).

## **Feminist Critique of Social Studies**

*“If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to forment a rebellion and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.”*

*Abigail Adams, U.S. First Lady, 1776*

Since the middle of the twentieth century, women’s issues and gender equity in education have been evaluated through a variety of lenses. Some attention has been committed to examining gender in schools in various fields and levels of education. Additionally, over the past four decades, scholars and researchers alike have been promoting the need for new theorizing and lenses to be utilized specifically in the field of social studies. Thus, the concept of feminist theorizing is not necessarily a new idea *to* the field of social studies; it just has not gained much popularity with scholars *in* the field of social studies. As Crocco (2004) accounts, feminist theorizing has surfaced only minimally within social studies. Subsequently, the need for feminist lenses at all levels and forms of education, specifically in social studies education, is evident.

Social studies scholar, educational historian, and women’s studies advocate, Margaret Crocco (2008) expands on the need for feminist theoretical work in social studies education research:

The ultimate goal of feminist theorizing is to provoke change in ways of thinking about women, men and the human condition, and thereby, to stimulate social change. Adopting new theoretical frameworks and discourses will provide social studies with a powerful and provocative set of tools to help reconsider the meanings of gender and sexuality for citizenship education. If we believe gender and sexuality to be products

of social historical, and cultural construction, and if we believe in equitable education for all citizens, then social studies must attend more comprehensively and proactively to how the field—in all its dimensions—has been and continues to be shaped by gender and sexuality. (p. 187).

As noted below, some work has been done in social studies with regards to gender. However, few empirical studies have examined preservice social studies teacher educator perspectives on gender, sexism, and feminism.

**Gender, social studies, and preservice teachers.** Gender in the social studies has been examined with regard to textbooks (Bradford, 2008; Clark, Ayton, Frechette, & Keller, 2005), curricular materials (Barton & Levstik, 2004), and civic knowledge (Lutkus, Weiss, Campbell, Maxxeo, & Lazer, 1999). However, a dearth of research exists that focuses on preservice teachers or teachers regarding how gender, specifically gendered discourses, are implicated in their beliefs, ideologies, and decision making (Crocco & Cramer, 2005). Engebretson (2013) argues, “a few empirical studies that have examined gender in preservice social studies teacher education have noted shortcomings in courses, programs, or in the self-awareness of the future teachers themselves” (p. 196). A study conducted with a group of Canadian secondary preservice teachers believed that it was important to include women and minorities in the curriculum; however, the majority struggled with recalling examples of how these groups were discussed during their own methods coursework (Segall, 2002).

Another study conducted in a secondary social studies methods course by Smith, Moallen, and Sherrill (1997), examined the potential for preservice teacher beliefs to shift from discriminatory to equality. These findings emerged from an examination of preservice

teacher autobiographies, which included a range of beliefs regarding gender, race, and class, taught throughout their lives. This work also found that while some were taught to believe in gender equity, others had been taught to discriminate on the basis of gender. The preservice teachers identified family members and experiences in and out of school as having major influence on their beliefs about gender. Yet, one of the most profound findings with regards to this dissertation was that the students, who expressed shifts in their beliefs from discrimination to equality for all genders and races, noted a positive personal experience that they had with an individual whom they perceived was different from them. In this study, exposure and increased awareness brought about changes from discriminatory to equality in preservice teacher beliefs.

Research exposes that teachers are unable to recognize instances of inequity and bias in their own classrooms. Lundeberg (1997) examined the gender equity knowledge of secondary preservice teachers in two sections of her Educational Psychology class, which asked them to evaluate one of their class discussions for subtle gender bias, measured by frequency of responses by males and females in the class. This study found that 71% of the students perceived the class discussions to be equitable, when in fact they were not, according to the response frequency statistics. In a 37-item questionnaire mixed-methods study, Pryor and Achilles (1998) found that in general, preservice teachers' identification of gender equitable classroom practices was low. Although knowledge of general concepts of gender equality was fairly high, with definitions of gender equitable classroom being those which remove "sex-related bias in interaction and in participation patterns, classroom management and organization patterns and student expectations" (p. 63), the preservice

teachers' ability to apply gender equitable classroom practices was low in comparison. As students of a teacher preparation program, a lack of self-awareness and skills to apply gender equitable classroom practices indicates a possible dearth of adequate preparation in this area and it warrants more in-depth investigation (Engebretson, 2013).

The literature reveals that some work has arisen that investigates preservice teacher beliefs about gender, but much more work must be done. The absence and continued need for further research investigating the connection between preservice teacher beliefs and practices regarding gender has been identified by many scholars in the field of social studies (Crocco, 2001, 2005; Hahn, Bernard-Powers, Crocco, & Woyshner, 2007; Loutzenheiser, 2006; Sanders, 2002; Zittleman & Sadker, 2002). Hahn et al. (2007) explicitly call for research on "preservice teachers' beliefs about gender and social studies and how those beliefs relate to their teaching" (p. 353), as there is a significant lack of research in this area (Engebretson, 2013). In a recent review of gender and social studies, the need for teacher educators to focus on issues of gender in their work with preservice teacher has been noted (Woyshner, 2011). In addition, a noticeable gap exists in the current literature regarding gender and teacher education with regards to transgender people. This is an area in which a call for more research should be heard and heeded.

**The push for feminist work in social studies education.** The feminist movement in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century began to examine inequalities in the social studies curriculum, which spurred a more acute academic discourse concerning feminist theorizing. Benhabib's (1987) work constructed feminist theorizing as a position that assumes: (1) the gendered organization of social systems is fundamental rather than contingent construction of social

reality and (2) gendered social systems that have emerged thus far in history have contributed to the oppression and exploitation of girls and women. My research analysis employs a feminist critique to examine the oppressive features and consequences of social practices and, as Spatig (2005) notes, to ignite alternative visions of how to organize society and education in more equitable terms.

***Gender equity and the omission of women in social studies curriculum.*** The spark of the 1950's civil rights movement catalyzed the Second Wave Feminist movement, which began in the 1960's and 1970's. This critical historical period was specifically relevant in curriculum and instruction because sociologists and historians began prompting researchers to examine the various forms of curricular inequities in the educational institutions. These researchers began examining all areas of inequity including culture, ethnicity, race, disability, and gender. By quantitative and qualitative analyses, some progress has been documented in the representation of women in United States history and civics books over the past 40 years (Avery & Simmons, 2000; Bradford, 2008; Chick, 2006; Clark, Allard, & Mahoney, 2004; Clark, Ayton, Frechette, & Keller, 2005; Reese, 1994; Tetreault, 1986; Trecker, 1971).

Yet, with these analyses, researchers found severe inequalities in the way particular women were minimally included in textbooks and text illustrations. As men had been the principal writers of United States history since the nation's inception, "herstory" had been forgotten or minimized (Bennet & Williams, 2014). Two recent studies conducted by Clark et al. (2004) and Clark et al. (2005), which examined gender in 19 world history textbooks and 18 United States history textbooks from the 1960s-1990s, found that political and military history far outnumber representations of social history.

As noted, since the feminist movement of the 1960's, an obvious effort has been made to include more women in U.S. history textbooks, however only minor achievements have been made. The proof of this minor success is reflected in the rudimentary knowledge of the contributions that a few women have made throughout history, or even having the ability to name some influential women from the past. However, having meager superficial knowledge of one or two women in history is not nearly enough, nor is it necessarily due to a lack of women whom have make great contributions to our nation. To quote Nel Noddings (2001), "Women have done things of great importance that go unrecognized because women did them and because the focus of their efforts has not been the focus of political history" (p. 164). Scholar and author, Sandra Harding (2001), agrees with Noddings as she believes that women must create all areas involving social history and include issues central to women.

Noddings (2001) uses the example of the women from thirteen countries that organized to stop World War I in 1915. Many feminists, including cultural feminist, Carol Gilligan (2011), believe that this story or examples like this, which focus on peace, rather than war, should be emphasized in our U.S. or World History textbooks. Such examples would be highly beneficial to the engagement of critical thinking during class discussions. Unfortunately, research suggests that substantive discussions of social and political issues in primary and secondary social studies classes are extremely rare, especially in low-socioeconomic classrooms across the nation (Nystrand, Gamoran, & Carbonaro, 2001; Khane & Middaugh, 2008).

***Importance of an image.*** The use of carefully and purposefully selected pictures in the classroom can address both the lack of images of women in textbooks as well as the

stereotypical portrayal of women in textbook images (Bennett & Williams, 2014, p. 15). The images selected for social studies texts are of utmost importance for many reasons.

Specifically in early elementary school, many students are just learning to read, so the visuals are one of their main sources of information. These images can engage students and spark interest; they also can be used as a method for developing civic equity. Critically analyzing images of women can afford both teachers and students the opportunity to access a more comprehensive understanding of the way women were viewed in our past, how those perceptions have changed, and how these views have changed or have not changed in present day.

Kay A Chick (2006) analyzed three history textbooks used throughout elementary, middle, and high schools, finding that males are more prevalent than females in both text and images at all three levels of education. The findings from this study support previous research outcomes revealing that a gender imbalance remains in social studies textbooks. As many social studies teachers use textbooks in their teaching, this underrepresentation and myopic perspective, restricts the opportunity to teach multiple perspectives of women, thus charging teachers with modifying insufficient teaching resources (Engebretson, 2014).

Elementary school teachers have the autonomy in most circumstances to include or exclude the content and particular images they use when teaching social studies in their classrooms (Thornton, 1991). Yet, teachers must first become exposed and then aware on the ways in which power should be examined, while seeking to determine the most judicious use of this authority in their classrooms. By definition, social studies instruction should include diverse content of images of the vast spectrum of people who have contributed to history.

Noddings (2001) warns that as educators, we must begin to examine the current curriculum and speculate on the motives of who makes it and who uses it. As elementary teachers make decisions to include or exclude content and images in their curricula, they should examine the images of women that are currently used in American history (Bennet & Williams, 2014). When women and images of women are marginalized in the curriculum, the impression given to both boys and girls is that women are not as important as men and have made few significant contributions to history (Ruthsdotter, 1996). We want recognition of important work that has gone unnoticed precisely because the standard of importance has devalued it (Noddings, 2001).

Civic equity, democratic ideals, and equality are primary goals for social studies education and should be for *all* schooling. For many students, their hours spent in the classroom may be the only opportunity they have to learn, discuss, and understand these ideals. As such, our schools and the material that we use to teach our students should *not* reflect the inequities in our society.

The examination of curricular materials and specifically textbooks continues to be an important endeavor in social studies educational research. Textbooks are used because, as the research in this review states, elementary teachers are not as confident or comfortable with social studies education in relation to other subjects they teach (e.g., reading, writing, math). Elementary social studies is not only marginalized in the classroom, but in teacher education and professional development as well.

**Contemporary gains in the field of social studies education.** During the past two decades, some new intellectual developments including postmodernism, poststructuralism,

and postcolonialism began to spread throughout the academy, including new fields of study concerning human sexuality, introduced by various scholars. New college courses and concentrations emerged from societal efforts to gain equity for women and members of the LGBTQ communities. Feminist theorizing has been particularly lively within the arts and humanities. Yet, despite such changes in the humanities and social sciences, these developments have had little perceptible impact on social studies (Crocco, 2008). Scholars, who have engaged in discussions of gender equity through their work, refer to the necessity of a complete paradigmatic shift in the field of social studies and in society.

Sandra Acker's (1994) definition of discourse traditions as "systems of representations which circulate a set of meanings" (p. 21). Her work contends that changing these traditions can bring about revolutionary changes in educational perspectives and worldviews. These paradigm shifts produced more flexible considerations of what it meant to be a man or a woman. Feminist scholars add the importance of avoiding essentialism of any individual based on universal, inherent attributes by deconstructing gender norms. Crocco (2008) makes note of some changes in the discourses of the field, "Gender replaces sex as the way to describe differences and similarities between men and women, reflecting new notions concerning the social and cultural construction of physical and psychological attributes (p.172). As Crocco continues:

"Some other related changes have been made to the visibility of women in the field of social studies education. In social studies teaching and teacher education, men outnumbered women throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but women became an increasingly visible force, serving as presidents of the National Council for the Social Studies, chairs of the College and

University Faculty Assembly (CUFA), and editors of Theory and Research in Social Education, the field's premier journal, by the early 21<sup>st</sup> century" (Crocco, 2008, p. 173).

Currently, more than half of the CUFA board members are women. Additionally, the new Chair of CUFA is Dr. Meghan Manfra, whom is the co-chair of my doctoral committee along with Dr. Beth Sondel. Women scholars continue to conduct research and produce abundant amounts of scholarly work each year in the field of social studies as well. So, yes women are more visible in the current field of social studies, but much, much more contemporary research and accomplishments regarding gender equality in the field remains. Specifically, more feminist theorizing and feminist work continues to be needed in social studies educational research.

**Challenges of feminist work in social studies educational research.** Conducting feminist work as social studies educational researchers can be complex to understand and even more challenging to undertake. On a personal level, this feminist educational research has been incredibly challenging for many reasons. It has been challenging to attempt to combine the almost scientific manner of educational research with the more open and abstract orientation of feminist work. Feminist work challenges the traditional, historically patriarchal structure of what is considered 'true' research by actively resisting current dominant research structures. In essence, they can be two contradictory arguments, causing a difficult navigation through the process of conducting this type of work. Furthermore, as noted, many scholars have called for feminist theorizing in social studies educational research, but inevitably, few have taken on this challenge, making it more difficult and isolating for individuals who attempt this work.

It is complex work on many levels, but it also can be as simple as choosing to explore the lived experiences of women, as I have done in this study. Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964), a Raleigh native, born a slave, and the fourth black woman in the United States to receive a Ph.D., asserted that the lived experience of marginality provides access to knowledge not readily available to those positioned at the center of any culture. When referring to Cooper's work, Vivian May (2008) states that she realizes that narrow-mindedness "is not simply a question of speaking up or of rhetorical persuasion, but rather of how differences in power and social positioning affect whether one is heard or understood" (p. 139). This may account for the minimal change in social studies educational research referenced (Crocco, 2004, 2008; Gilligan, 1982; Halvorsen, 2013; Bennett & Williams, 2014; Harding, 1986, hooks, 1981; Noddings, 2001; Oleson, 1992; Ramazanoglu, 1989), as historically those heard and understood have not been women.

Women, and men for that matter, in social studies educational research should be asking themselves why don't more individuals know about Anna Julia Cooper or Mary Pickersgill or Francis W. E. Harper or Sacagawea or Elizabeth Keckley or Elizabeth Cady Stanton. This list could have gone on indefinitely. But, when many educators at all levels of instruction are asked about the individuals they remember learning about in school who shaped our country, they rarely note the names, accomplishments, or contributions of women.

As Noddings (2001) avows, currently if women are mentioned, the power and significance of their work and their points of view remain hidden, but imagine if this culture were fully articulated. Suppose the "different voice" identified by Gilligan (1982) were to

speak in social studies. She questions, what might be spoken and what might we learn? What new experiences and perspectives would we hear that would add more pieces to the whole puzzle of the human experience?

### **Feminist Critique: Past, Present, and Future of Social Studies**

Feminist critiques have sparked some educational reform, which has consisted of efforts to revise curriculum and pedagogy. It is important for feminist researchers and educators to continue this work for all levels of education. As noted in this literature review, a great deal has been accomplished regarding the inclusion of women and gender equity in social studies education, but much more work remains to be done. This research hopes to fill a gap in the literature and answer the call for more feminist work in social studies educational research.

**Feminist frame to research and teacher education.** Feminist critiques of traditional research (Alcoff, 1989; Harding, 1986, 1998; Reinharz, 1991) call for a challenge to science itself and to the positivist institution that has supported the oppression of women. Other scholars (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; & Belenky et al., 1986) have provided feminist critiques of ‘insider’ attempts to reform and reconfigure conventional theories and research in consideration of women and their experiences.

Awareness and having the opportunity to be engaged in feminist discourse are necessary means for further change to occur in research and education. Feminist educators must examine “their relationship to a male intellectual and political tradition that has more often than not ignored and excluded them” (Weiler, 2001, p. 2). Johnson-Bailey (1999) note that black feminists often talk about their feelings of craziness before becoming conscious of

the concepts of sexual politics, patriarchal rule, and most importantly feminism. In the process of consciousness-raising and life sharing, we begin to recognize the commonality of our experiences, and from that sharing we will build a politics that will change our lives and inevitably end our oppression (Guy-Sheftall, 1995).

Conscious-raising and opportunities for awareness are necessary as many women continue to not feel comfortable identifying as a feminist publically or do not self-identify as a feminist at all. Although the majority of the women who volunteered for this study identified with feminism in some way, they expressed varying degrees of comfort with self-identifying as a feminist. Additionally, they noted an awareness of being a member of a small handful of women in their teacher preparation program who were even willing to voluntarily discuss this topic. All members at some point of the research process noted some discomfort with openly discussing the topic of feminism.

Being a biological female does not mean that one's ideas are automatically feminist. Self-consciousness can be a struggle in becoming aware of the value of women's ideas and actions that have always been present, but much less frequently discussed. As women, we have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion, rather than as forces for change. Yet, community must not mean the detaching of our differences, and definitely not the "pathetic pretense" that these differences do not exist (Lorde, 1983). Lorde (1983) continues:

"academic feminists not recognizing *their* differences as a crucial strength is a failure beyond reach, surpassing the first patriarchal lesson. As feminists when we negatively

critique ourselves, we buy in to the more masculine, Western, capitalistic attitude of competition and conflict. However, in our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower” (p. 99).

However, the fact that more women than men identify themselves as feminists reflects women’s greater experience with the negative consequences of gender oppression, “Becoming a feminist is routinely described by women (and men) as a process of transformation, of struggling to develop new interpretations of familiar realities” (Collins, 2000, p. 26). My goal of this study is to explore preservice elementary teacher perspectives of feminism, sexism, and gender identity development. These perspectives may or may not be similar, but each participant’s experiences have influenced their perspectives and will be unique. As I conduct and analyze this research, I will bring in the critical feminist theoretical perspective by giving each individual woman and their experiences a voice.

**Feminist retelling of social studies curriculum.** The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) curriculum standards offers a framework for teacher preparation programs, teacher educators, and the state board of education. This is analogous to national and state standards serving as guides for classroom teachers (Marino & Bolgatz, 2010). As the 1994 NCSS standards served to direct most of the state standards (Lobes, 1998), it is feasible the 2010 standards will have a similar impact in future years with the development of Common Core State Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014) and the College, Career, and Civic Life (NCSS, 2013) standards. Subsequently, a significant point to note is that beginning fall of 2016, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) will require all secondary social studies teacher education programs to align the

curricula with the 2010 NCSS standards (NCATE, 2010-2012). As Engebretson (2014) notes, “these standards, thus, have a wide ranging, profound, and lasting impact on social studies education in the United States in a considerably formal way” (p. 21). These standards have a significant amount of power in determining social studies education in K-12 as well as in teacher preparation programs. Thus, research that critically examines the standards for topics surrounding gender and women in the curriculum is of the utmost importance.

Curriculum taught in the classroom is funneled down from standards written and implemented by state and national organization. National standards written and published in the early 1990s in history, civics, geography, and economics, have been investigated for the presence of gender diversity (Bernard-Powers, 2007; Crocco 2008; Gonzales, Riedel, Avery, & Sullivan, 2001). The findings have concluded that in general, gender related topics have been absent in these standards.

Although, gender is mentioned with race and ethnicity as significant in shaping citizen participation, *The National Standards for Civics and Government* (Center for Civic Education, 1994) notes gender only twice (Crocco, 2008). After examining these standards, Gonzales et al. (2001), uncovered all of the quotations located in the margins of the standards were attributed to European-Americans, and only 9% of those were women. While it is understood that students may not read the quotations in the margins of the standards, educators do, and they operate as an indication of the value given to certain voices as more significant and of most worth to learn. The team of researchers warns about the “ongoing neglect” (Gonzales et al., 2001, p. 123) of gender equity and the possibility of this leading teachers, who use the standards to guide their instruction, to include few contributions of

women in their teaching. Gender was mentioned once in the national geography standards, *Geography for Life: National Geographic Standards* (Geography Education Standards Project, 1994). Bernard-Powers (2007) has criticized the standards for “revealing that gender [is] not taken seriously as a category or lens” (p. 336).

Similar inequitable results regarding the inclusion of women were found in the *National Standards for History* (National Standards for History Task Force, 1996), which address both U.S. and World History. Joan Wallach Scott (1997), a contributor of these standards, rebutted criticism of the lack of women by claiming that they would “always lean to political history” when “compris[ing] political and social history”, which “makes the systematic inclusion of women difficult” (p. 174). Scott additionally commented that while the committee was aware of the increase in research and knowledge about the contributions of women in history, that “there could be much more about women in these Standards” (p. 176). Which leads to an important point, if women aren’t willing to fight for the inclusion of women, who will? Who will rewrite and retell the social studies curriculum from a feminist perspective if not women? A shift in the social studies curriculum paradigm is necessary. Women scholars in the field should lead this shift. The next section reviews some of the research that has been done regarding the role of women scholars in the field of social studies.

**Role of women scholars in the field.** Empirical research examining the presence of gender in curricular materials has been consistent, though not a predominant, theme in social studies research in the last half-century (Engebretson, 2014). The rise of the New Social Studies in the 1960s and the Second Wave of Feminism in the 1970s has catalyzed a

mounting number of women researchers who began focusing on women and gender from the 1980s to our current period (Avery & Simmons, 2000; Chick, 2006; Clark, Allard, & Mahoney, 2004; Clark, Ayton, Frechette, & Keller, 2005; Reese, 1994; Tetreault, 1986; Trecker, 1971).

Hahn, Bernard-Powers, Crocco, and Woysner (2007) contest that the *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*, “give little explicit attention to gender” (p. 343). Although these women researchers and scholars recognize that the standards are broad enough to provide teachers with the opportunity to include gender into the curriculum, they ultimately claim, “NCSS’s failure to provide curricular examples aligned with the standards that are oriented to gender resulted in a missed opportunity to facilitate the inclusion of gender in social studies courses” (p 343). The curriculum standards appear to align with the aforementioned the social studies textbooks at all levels of education, which seem to offer educators little support with regards to balancing the “disproportionate presence of males in the curriculum” (Engebretson, 2014, p. 23).

Dominant groups are dominant for a many reasons, some are obvious and others are hidden, some are subliminal and others subconscious. However, of one thing we can be certain, a powerful dictator will not simply relinquish their throne. Feminist consciousness can be used to directly contest the silencing of women’s’ voices, leading it to be a topic requiring more attention in the field. As Patricia Hill Collins (2000) noted, “Black feminist consciousness is problematic precisely because dominant groups have a vested interest in suppressing such though” (p.25). She is concise as her words pertain to all

subordinate rungs on the hierarchical ladder of our society. This question of possibility lingers as feminist researchers forge ahead on the path of social justice.

More women scholars in the field could deploy a critical feminist analysis “to uncover the predominant, subordinate, and omitted perspective(s) in official school knowledge require exploring and analyzing not just the events that are depicted in curriculum materials, but the versions of the events” (Crawford, 1996, p. 405) that are represented. It is the role of women scholars in the field of social studies to help teachers reflect on their perspectives. It is vital for all teachers to understand how they were shaped by school experiences. This work has been designed to specifically examine preservice elementary teacher perspectives on feminism, sexism, and gender identity development. A goal is to provide an opportunity for preservice teachers to reflect on their own perspectives, so they are able to examine how they were shaped by their school experiences, which will hopefully lead to the much larger question of how they can bring about change in their own classrooms regarding feminism, sexism, and gender identity development. The following section examines literature on the influence preservice teachers’ beliefs and perspectives have on their teaching practice and on student learning.

### **Preservice teacher Experiences, Understandings, and Beliefs**

As the research suggests, our constant daily decisions as educators are influenced by our beliefs and it is our personal experiences that shape our beliefs. Scholarship also contends that experiences that are influential to teacher beliefs prior to their teacher education programs are pertinent areas of research (e.g., Book, Freeman, & Brousseau, 1985; Jantzen, 1981; Robertson, et al, 1983). For example, the educational experiences of

preservice teachers affect their decisions to pursue a career in teaching along with personal moral and altruistic objectives. Schooling experiences also shape the beliefs brought by preservice teachers into their teacher preparation programs. Darling-Hammond and Sclan (1996) note that familial and social experiences influence teacher beliefs. Their prior life experiences also impact the ways in which they have created perspectives of practice and teaching (Foster, 1995).

A study that supports this research agenda was conducted by Book and Freeman (1986) who found that focusing research on the prior experiences and beliefs of teachers is critical in facilitating the formulation of balanced viewpoints with regards to the purposes of education, including a focus on more ecumenical social purposes of education.

The scholarship explores multiple examples where the experiences of teachers have formed their philosophies about teaching. Schooling experiences influence and shape decisions and beliefs concerning teaching (Smith, 2000). Slekar (1998) also notes research that explores the influence of school experiences on teacher beliefs about teaching and practice. The social construction of thinking pertaining to teaching, which focused on the ways in which social experiences and personal backgrounds were deemed influential on teacher thinking, has been examined (Marsh, 2003). Additional literature links previous experiences with teacher education, more acutely how beliefs are brought by students into their teacher education courses (Kennedy, 2006; Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013, van Hover & Yeager, 2004). Work has also been conducted on how beliefs can be influenced by teacher preparation programs (Doppen, 2007). It is important to note that none of these studies examined the influence of teacher experiences' on social studies learning and teaching.

However, the research suggests that experiences and backgrounds do have a commanding effect on the beliefs of teachers. Thus, exploring the formative process of the construction of preservice teacher perspectives about feminism would get to those experiences and backgrounds, allowing us to understand their perspectives and how they came to these beliefs.

By exploring the formative process through which teachers came to construct and value their beliefs, we can attain a comprehensive understanding of those individual beliefs, ideologies, experiences, and backgrounds. Goldman (2008) explains that a formative process is unique from the belief and that we should note how experiences contribute to beliefs about purpose, which functions as a part of the procedural formation of beliefs. I argue that exploring preservice teacher beliefs more deeply and concentrating on the major role that experiences play in teachers' perceptions of feminism, and the messages they receive regarding their own gender identities, provides a significant foundation for following explorations of how teacher beliefs influence their practice.

Teachers need to be open to critiquing their unique experiences, equity, justice, freedom, and welfare in education, keeping in mind that all learners have to be provided with equal opportunities for learning regardless of their personal backgrounds and different thoughts (Lee, 2010). Sheets (2009) and Tamura (1996) contest that teachers must reflect on the personal beliefs and values they hold and what personal experiences have constructed their perspectives about themselves, others, and the world.

When students plan a social studies unit, they often fall back on practices observed in the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) of many years in elementary classrooms

(Hintz, 2014). I want to better understand the practices preservice teachers observed in their own schooling regarding feminism, sexism, and gender identity development, to better understanding how their perspectives have been created. If preservice teachers are not provided with opportunities to explore (and possibly disturb) their experiences and beliefs through alternative theoretical perspectives and critical pedagogies, how could we expect progress or change to occur within our schools or our society?

### **The Need for More Research**

Research expresses the need for further investigation of how teachers think and what perspectives they hold. Scholars of social studies education research, Van Hover and Yeager (2004), argue for investigations that focus on gaining a deeper, more rich understanding of preservice teacher beliefs about content and the factors that shape instructional decision-making. Other research reveals the need for explorations of the theory and practice of teachers due to the wanting of educators to become more critically reflective of their development as teachers (Chant, 2002).

I contend that an exploration of preservice teacher perspectives of feminism and how they came to these understandings, including messages they received in schooling, is an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding. It is important because advancing our knowledge of preservice teacher beliefs, understanding, and perspectives about feminism may catalyze teacher educators and social studies teacher preparation programs to increase the strength of their current programs. It also could provide education students the opportunity to critically reflect on their own experiences, which may lead them to working towards a more critical pedagogical and transformative purpose for teaching.

Reflecting on personal experiences of social studies and schooling may aid teachers in the betterment of their practice (Adler, 1991; Armento, 1986; Slekar, 1998; Thornton, 1992, 2005), therefore, an emphasis should be placed on exploring teacher beliefs, which ultimately affect their classroom instruction, their curriculum development, and their teaching practice (Thornton, 2005). I believe that it is important to afford preservice teachers the opportunity to examine their experiences and reflect on their personal perspectives, specifically regarding feminism, sexism and gender identity.

As a critical feminist researcher, the topic was an obvious point of interest. However, there is also a gap in the literature concerning feminist research connected with social studies research. Hahn (1996) asserts that the “knowledge explosion in feminist scholarship” (p. 8) in the social sciences over the past two decades has not translated in social studies research. As a feminist educational researcher, I want to create new spaces for preservice teacher voices that examine and interrogate their perspectives and how they came to formulating these understandings regarding feminism, sexism, and their own gender identity development.

Osguthorpe & Sanger (2013) describe the vital need for understanding the formation process of teacher beliefs, which informs their purpose and decisions made in the classroom with this quote, “Ignoring significant elements of a learner’s background that are relevant to a given course of study is simply bad pedagogy, from a constructivist perspective” (p. 193). I believe that the principles of feminism aren’t just *relevant* to social studies education, the principles of feminism *are* social studies education and currently, both are highly marginalized. More work must be done and more attention must be called to these arenas.

**Elementary social studies education.** Although social studies education is all but invisible in many public elementary schools across the United States, I believe that it is a subject worth fighting to not only keep in our schools, but to drastically increase the time, resources, and value currently allocated to social studies as a subject in the elementary curriculum. I concur with Grant's (1996) position that the goals of social studies education should not be exclusive for an allocated time during the school day. Social studies objectives should be constant foundational practices of our schools and weaved throughout the multiple lessons of each school day. In 1992, the Board of Directors of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) defined social studies as:

...the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence.

Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world. <sup>1</sup>

Social studies has continued to be marginalized in elementary schools over the past three decades (Shaver, 1989; Thornton & Houser, 1996; VanFossen, 2005; Leming, Ellington, & Schug, 2006; Rock et al, 2006; Boyle-Baise et al, 2008; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Fitchett & Heafner, 2010, 2014), and the history of educational reform is one factor leading to this marginalization (Halvorsen, 2013).

Other factors spawning from this devaluation of social studies in various school reforms have advanced this marginalization as well. Professional development, allocated

funding and resources, and value of social studies have become all but absent in the public elementary schools of our nation, and when it is provided it is meager at best (VanFossen, 2005; Rock et al, 2006; Fitchett & Heafner, 2012; Fitchett & Heafner, 2010, 2014). Scholars have been conducting curricular material analyses for decades finding many textbooks and other social studies resources meager and dated, they also have historically marginalized women (Acker, 1995; Commeyras, & Alvermann, 1996; Ruthsdotter, 1996; Clark, 1997; Crocco, 2000, 2008; Noddings, 2001a, 2001b; Bennett & Williams, 2014;).

**Sexism in schools and social studies curriculum.** Clark (1997) claims that for the past several decades feminist agitation demanding increased content about women in school knowledge—in concert with other projects of gender emancipation in schooling—has had some influence on curricula and supporting learning resources. Although, the lack of women penned throughout the pages of history is a story that is as old as the written word, this problem became a major concern of historians and sociologists who were motivated by the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Lerner, 1975; Trecker, 1971). The civil rights movement of the 1950s catalyzed the examination of inequities in the curricular materials used in schools and in the education system itself. Researchers began to critically examine various arenas of inequity including race, ethnicity, culture, disability, and gender.

Research on the inclusion of women in textbooks found severe inequalities in the way women were included in text and illustrations (Commeyras & Alvermann, 1996; Larsen, 1995; Thomas-Tetreault, 1986). As men had been the principal writers of United States history since the nation's inception, "herstory" had been forgotten or minimized (Bennett &

Williams, 2014, p.15). Since the middle of the twentieth century, efforts have been made to include more women in U.S. history textbooks, but not much real progress has been made.

Initially, when women began to strongly disavow their absence between the pages of social studies curricula, the response was to find a few female individuals in history to all but randomly tack between the well-known male individuals and events like an afterthought. Nel Noddings (2001) refers to the approach taken to this inclusion as “add women and stir” (p. 29), regarding the inclusion as an additive approach. This study seeks to find if the aforementioned increase of curricular inclusion of women has been recognized or if it has impacted messages received by preservice teachers in their own schooling and in their social studies education classrooms.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

There are evident gaps in the literature on preservice elementary teacher perspectives of feminism, sexism, and gender identity development. Literature does exist on what beliefs teacher candidates bring with them to their teacher education programs (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Kennedy, 2006; Ownes, 1996; Klekar, 1998; van Hover & Yeager, 2007; Warning, 2010), and how their beliefs and thinking about purpose, social studies, and teaching social studies influence their practice (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Gradwell, 2006; Hochstrasser-Fickel, 2000; Johnston, 1990; McCall, 1995; Pryor, 2006; van Hover & Yeager, 2007). Rich, abundant research also has been conducted regarding how teacher education programs can be structured to challenge pre-existing beliefs and support educational reform efforts through propagating reform-oriented teachers (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Beista, 2009, 2010; Cochran-Smith, 2010; Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2010; Hammerness, 2003; McDonald, 2007;

Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013). Research also exists, which discusses teacher moral beliefs as a motivating factor for their decisions to teach (Campbell, 2003; Fenstermacher, 1990; Noddings, 2002; Tom, 1984).

However, an apparent dearth of research exists on elementary preservice teacher perspectives of feminism, sexism, and gender identity development. There is also a lack of research on how preservice teachers came to their understandings and what messages they received in school regarding these topics. To obtain a deeper understanding of how beliefs influence teacher development and practice, we must examine teacher experiences and perspectives contributing to teacher beliefs in the area. An area, which apparently lacks in-depth examination, is preservice elementary teacher perspectives of feminism, sexism, and gender identity development, calling for further research.

Hochstrasser-Fickel (2000) contest that “teachers’ thinking and underlying personal beliefs and theories that form the framework for their classroom decision-making have wide ranging implications for educational equity and student achievement” (p. 360). In McCall’s (1995) study of three preservice teacher attitudes towards the ideas in a social reconstructionist multicultural education methods course, it was concluded that it is important to understand preservice teacher backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives in order to understand the influence of their experiences on their practice. Preservice teacher experiences prior to and during their teacher preparation programs influence decision-making and teaching in their classrooms (Foster, 1995; Noordhoff & Kleinfeld, 1993). Chant (2002) additionally calls for extended research in this area:

Further investigations regarding personal theorizing and practice may enhance our understanding of how teachers can use an awareness of their beliefs to help improve their teaching. Such examinations have the potential to help teacher educators support the efforts of preservice, beginning, and experienced teachers through reflection and critical inquiry processes (Chant, 2002, p. 538).

In conclusion, the literature stating the calls for further research on preservice teacher perspectives of feminism, sexism, and gender identity development, and the importance of understanding how they came to these perspectives and beliefs, which influence their teacher development and practice, uncover a significant gap in the literature.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The following guiding concepts prompted this study: a) There is a dearth of studies exploring preservice teacher perspectives' of feminism; b) experiences are important to understanding the backgrounds and beliefs of students; c) beliefs are an important area of research because they frequently uncover viewpoints on educator teaching and practice; d) teachers are instructional gatekeepers, meaning their perspectives' strongly inform curricular decisions made in their classrooms; e) and this study contributes to an effort to promote critical feminist theoretical frameworks and foster critical reflection in teacher preparation programs regarding feminism, sexism, and gender identity development. These ideas were developed based on a review of the extant literature. In this chapter, I explain the research design and methodology for this case study of preservice elementary teacher perspectives about feminism, how they came to these understandings, and what messages they received in their own schooling regarding feminism, sexism, and gender identity development.

### **Research Questions**

Informed by the purpose of this research study, I explored the following research questions:

1. What are preservice elementary teacher perspectives' about feminism?
  - How did they come to these understandings?
  - What messages did preservice teachers receive in school regarding feminism, sexism, and their gender identity development?

## **Theoretical Framework**

My research perspective and world view are feminist. Being explicit about the guiding theoretical framework is essential in qualitative inquiry. Theory guides decisions made about the creation of the research questions, the choice of methodology, and the research methods selected for the study. Hatch (2002) explains that numerous theoretical paradigms shape educational research methodologies, which the researchers utilize to inform their chosen methodology. Theoretical consistency is achieved through a study that is both aligned and constructed soundly.

All decisions on the design for this research study come from my theoretical lens as a feminist researcher (Gilligan, 1982, Harding, 1998; Olesen, 2011; Reinharz, 1992). My worldview and research perspective includes the constructivist belief that universal realities are impossible and that individuals create their own unique understandings of reality through their experiences (Creswell, 2007). I also employ a critical perspective, which views historical constructs as having genuine consequences for people based on the perceived authenticity and social action based upon the perceptions of race, class, and gender (Merriam, 2002).

**Feminist research.** Feminist researchers are “highly conscious of the absence of women’s voices, distortions, and charge that preparing an account in the usual social science modes only replicates hierarchical conditions found in the parent discipline, where women are outside the account” (Smith, 1989, p. 34). Feminist research employs a critical perspective to catalyze progress in society for all individuals by analyzing how power and

privilege are perpetuated. A feminist theoretical framework honors both the exploration of personal narratives and the process of constructing meaning as a form of research.

Feminist research is absolutely and centrally “research by women” focused on the relationship between “feminist consciousness” and feminism (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p.11). Daniels (1975) claims that such contributions can come about only through carrying out research on topics in which female interests have not been previously explored. And so, as Stanley and Wise (1993) state “the emphasis on feminist research which is concerned to ‘fill in the gaps’ by focusing on women only. This emphasis on ‘filling in the gaps’ about women’s interests and experiences is reflected in much of the literature about sexism in the social sciences” (p. 31). Feminist research “insists on the value of subjectivity and personal experience” (Black, 1989, p.75). Stanley and Wise (1993) add:

...the emphasis on ‘objectivity’ derives from natural science models, concepts and concerns, but without considering whether this model, and its accompanying search for laws and calculable results, is at all appropriately adopted in thinking about social reality (p. 41).

Social constructivist theory can be effectively connected with feminist case study as Johnston (1990) avowed that the goals for research are *not* to describe case study participants in an objective way. Additionally, my interpretation of women’s lives, like many feminist theorists, asserts “a ‘positive valuation of subjective’ against the ostensibly objective, ‘top down’ world view of traditional scholarship, dominated by an approved canon in which a

white, male, decidedly Western perspective is disproportionately present” (Shulman, 1990, p. 43).

### **Research Lenses**

A social constructivist theoretical framework (Creswell, 2009) was employed as an orienting lens for this study in conjunction with the critical feminist theoretical framework described above. According to Creswell (2009), the goal of a constructivist researcher is to gather and analyze data that honors the participants’ perspectives of the phenomenon being studied. We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study (Creswell, 2007).

I designed the research questions and the process to reveal preservice elementary teacher perspectives on feminism. The data collection methods were designed to allow the women to explore and reflect on their experiences and messages received that have influenced their perspectives in multiple ways. The women were asked to write a journal reflection from a prompt prior to the first interview. They participated in two individual semi-structured in-depth interviews. The women participated in one focus group, providing them the opportunity to discuss their individual and shared experiences, possibly allowing for a shared increase of consciousness to occur. Finally, they were asked to write a final reflection on the research topic, including any final opinions regarding the work, and their experiences as participants in the study. By opening these multiple spaces, my goals were to facilitate conversations that aided the women in understanding and sharing how their experiences have been influential to their perspectives.

Researchers and scholars use the terms “social constructivist,” “social constructionism,” and “constructivist theory” to delineate various concepts. It is worth noting that these terms are not always used in a consistent manner, but I will attempt to clarify. “Social constructivism” and “constructivist theory” are generally used to relate the idea that experiences, knowledge, reality, and meaning are uniquely constructed by each individual. The terms “constructivist,” “social constructivist,” and “social constructivism” are most commonly used by the social studies research and methodological research that support this study (Angell, 1998; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Chiodo & Brown, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Lather, 1991; Merrim, 2002, 2009; Olesen, 1994, 2005; Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013, Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Reinharz, 1992; Stewart, 1994).

### **Research Methodology and Rationale**

A qualitative feminist case study was selected as the methodology for this research. This methodology was chosen because it supports the research questions for this study, which is fundamental to the research project. In the subsequent sections the components of this selected methodology are detailed to provide a clear explanation of the ways in which it aligns with the theoretical framework and the research questions of the study.

### **Qualitative Feminist Case Study**

**Researcher as key instrument.** Conducting qualitative research is unique because researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants. As this qualitative feminist case study is emergent, I used a specified protocol—an instrument for collecting data—for the journal reflections, interviews, and focus group. Creswell (2007) states as qualitative researchers, “They do not

tend to use or rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers” (p. 38). As the researcher, I was the key instrument as I analyzed and interpreted the data collected for this research study.

**Feminist case study.** Qualitative feminist case studies allow participants to share their experiences of a particular phenomenon in deep and rich personal accounts (Olesen, 1992). All qualitative feminist research shares with interpretive work in general the assumption of intersubjectivity between researcher and participant and the mutual creation of data (Oleson, 1994). In a certain sense, participants are always “doing” research, for they, along with the researchers, construct the meanings that become “data” for later interpretation by the researcher (Olesen, 1992). The nature of participant as researcher and researcher as participant ranges in qualitative research, however, two key foci of this qualitative research study will be to ensure non-exploitation of the female participants and also to empower them by giving them the opportunity to share their experiences and validating those experiences. In feminist research, the goals are to establish collaborative and non-exploitative relationships, to place the researcher within the study so as to avoid objectification, and to conduct research that is transformative (Creswell, 2007).

Feminists write case studies for the same reasons that nonfeminist scholars write them—to illustrate an idea, to explain the process of development over time, to show the limits of generalizations, to explore uncharted issues starting with a limited case, and to pose provocative questions (Reinharz, 1992). As Reinharz (1992) describes the case study as

...a tool of feminist research used to document history and generate theory. It defies the social science convention of seeking generalizations by looking instead for specificity, exceptions, and completeness. Some feminist researchers have found that social science's emphasis on generalizations has obscured phenomena important to particular groups, including women. Thus case studies are essential for putting women on the map of social life (p. 174). So, for example, feminist scholars produce case studies of organizations central to the women's movement to document the very existence of these groups and sometimes to challenge feminists' blindness about particular settings or contexts (Reinharz, 1992).

The individuals participating in the study shared an important story, their story. Value was placed on their personal narratives and the collaborative focus group session that were conducted to explore experiential, analytic, and historical information that feminist researchers and activists require to have a more in-depth understanding of women's lives and of themselves.

Case study research is not only a description, but is an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation (i.e., the researcher "mediates" between different meanings; van Manen, 1990, p. 26) of the meaning of the lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). The first steps in this process was interviewing the participants for this study. Following this, Creswell (2007) asserts, the researcher developed a textural description of the experiences of the persons, a structural description of their experiences, and "a compilation of the textural and structural descriptions to convey an overall essence of the experiences" (Creswell, 2007, p. 60).

Two interview formats were used in an attempt to address power disparities (Johnson-Bailey, 1999). In the Johnson-Bailey (1999) study, interviews with several hospital housekeepers were attempted as one-on-one interviews. However it was noted that the women were more talkative when they were together as a group. It is conjectured that because of the difference in class and educational levels between the researcher and the housekeepers interviewed, the private interviews were more uncomfortable. Whereas in the group interview setting the women collectively perceived that they had more agency—through numbers and alliances. This equaled the playing field for this group and made the environment a more comfortable and more suitable for dialogue. Other remaining interviews were conducted privately. Taking this into account, I focused the final interviews on exploring each woman's perspectives about feminism, sexism, and gender identity more deeply. The second semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix F) was more lengthy and specific in detailed questioning. The data collection concluded with a final reflective journal (Appendix G) and an in-depth analysis of all collected data commenced.

**Selection of narrative analysis.** Narrative analysis was integrated in this feminist case study. As case study research focuses on the unit of analysis (or in this study, the individual women) various types of methodologies are utilized in combination. Since this research study focused on understandings the perspectives and experiences of the women through their own constructed knowledge and understandings, a narrative analysis was employed. This enabled me to focus on interpreting the storied knowledge participants' used to understand their world (Bruner, 1986; Hatch, 2002). Similarly, I also focused on interpreting the meanings that individuals' stories carry for the participants (Hatch, 2002;

Merriam, 2002, 2009). I developed these stories or narratives through my analysis of interview transcriptions, autobiographical writing, and focus group transcriptions (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Merriam, 2009). This study focused on the participants' account of their experiences, as they understood it.

Narrative analysis comes from the perspective that stories told by individuals about their lives, represent their meaning making. Hatch (2002) attests to the complimentary nature of narrative research with the theoretical framework that guides the study, emphasizing that narrative analysis and constructivist perspectives share aligned methodological paradigms. Additionally, narrative analysis assumes that narratives connect life experiences together as a holistic unit. Josselson (2011) suggests that narrative analysis focuses on narrated texts that represent an individual's life stories in an effort to understand human experience as it appears in textual form. This method aligns with the social constructivist theoretical basis of this study as it recognized that individuals each construct a narrative truth.

### **Research Context and Access**

This research study was conducted at a large, urban public university in the southeast. The education program at this university was large with a considerable student enrollment in the elementary education program, which focused heavily on STEM teaching. Additionally, this university allowed me to conduct research, as I was a doctoral student and graduate teaching assistant at the university. These positions at the university granted me access to private spaces in the education building to conduct the interviews and the focus group session. Data collection took place in the beginning of January 2015 and concluded in March 2015.

**Participants.** The participants for this study were seniors enrolled in the elementary education program, seeking licensure to teach elementary grades K-5 in public or private schools. In order to recruit participants for this study, I contacted all 53 seniors enrolled in the elementary teacher preparation program via university email, looking specifically for female volunteers. The high majority of elementary teachers in the United States are women, so their particular experiences were extremely relevant to this research. Additionally, as a feminist researcher, my specific interests lie in examining women's unique perspectives and experiences.

I chose to recruit 5-10 female participants for this study, five of which were selected. As a feminist researcher, I believe that educational research should be collaborative and, whenever viable, it should involve preservice and/or in-service teachers. I am committed in creating a space in which preservice teachers assert their right to participate in the complex, feminist educational discourse which is often limited to advanced graduate courses and to the field of Women's and Gender Studies.

Additionally, I sought to identify participants who were willing to examine and share their lived experiences, ideologies, and identities, including the ways in which these positions have affected their constructions of the concepts of "feminism," "sexism," and "gender identity development." This goal was supported by Goodson's (1998) claim that "progressively more important for the future, will be the site of everyday life and identity" (p. 3).

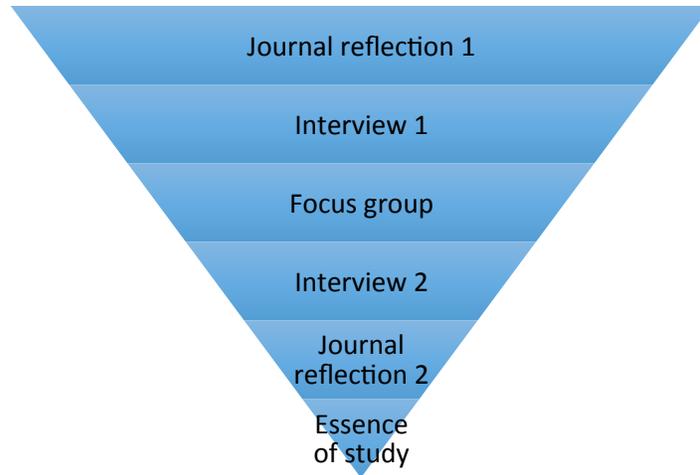
**Sampling methods.** The participant sample was maximum variation and criterion, because these sampling methods a) determined a criteria in advance that differentiated the

site or participants and b) all cases met the criteria of female preservice teachers enrolled in an elementary education program at the selected university whom are interested in participating in their perspectives, beliefs, and experiences pertaining to feminism. Additionally, using a criterion sample is useful for quality assurance (Creswell, 2007).

An additional sampling method was used in this study due to circumstances of the volunteer process. After sending the email, requesting volunteers for this study, 4 women meeting the criteria contacted me confirming their interest in participating within the first two days. As I required a minimum of 5 participants for this study, I decided to use a snowball sampling method. I asked each participant after the first interview if they could recommend a peer for this study. Three out of the 4 participants recommended the same individual. I contacted the referred individual explaining that she was recommended by some of her peers and asked if she would participate in the study. She agreed, becoming the final participant.

### **Data Collection**

The contextual data from preservice teachers regarding their perspectives surrounding feminism was collected with a reverse pyramid in mind. Contextual data was vital as it established the social context in which the participant experiences' occurred. The data collected method was designed to begin with general questions and understandings and with each additional data collection, the questions would become more acute in an attempt to get a deeper, more thorough understanding of the participants' perspectives.



*Figure 3.1 Data Collection Design*

The data collection began with the women completing an initial reflective journal prompt (Appendix B) and was followed by the first one-on-one interview (Appendix C). (It should be noted that one participant contacted me after our initial interview, wanting to elaborate on her contextual background and perspectives. We set up a time to meet and I audio-recorded as she elaborated on her responses from some of the questions posed in the first interview.) After my initial analysis of the journal responses and first round of interviews, I conducted a focus group interview (Appendix E) with the participants. The focus group was followed up by an additional one-on-one interview (Appendix F) with each participant. The data collection concluded with a final reflective journal prompt (Appendix G) was completed by each participant to conclude the study. These methods of data collection were selected to obtain three distinct sources of data, increasing the diversity of the information gathered and increasing the validity of the study through triangulation.

**Interviews.** To begin the study, participants were interviewed with a semi-structured format consisting of twenty open-ended questions and any reasonable clarifications, probes, or follow-ups. The open-ended interview questions were based on their perspectives of feminism, how they came to these understandings, and what messages they received in school regarding feminism, sexism, and their gender identity development. Measures were taken to ensure that the questions were open-ended and not leading to the participants (See Appendix C). The design chosen for both interviews was selected specifically to create a “casual conversation” atmosphere between the interviewer and the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) and to provide an opportunity to explore the participants’ life histories, experiences and ideologies. The interviews took place at the participants’ College of Education, the natural setting for their education courses and learning.

I incorporated a focus group interview session in an effort to create a more comfortable environment for the participants. Although we were all in the field of elementary education at some capacity, my position as an instructor, graduate student, and former elementary school teacher may have caused participants discomfort during the private interviews. I wanted to take this into consideration.

**Focus group session.** When designing the methods for this study, I decided that it would be important to conduct a focus group session. To organize my focus group I followed Hollingsworth’s (1992) collaborative focus group research experience:

Unlike a traditional apprenticeship approach to teacher education, which basically values and measures cognitive/academic knowledge as it is transmitted from experts to novices (e.g., the stance I had initially taken as a beginning teacher educator), our

approach became a process of articulating an emerging feminist consciousness that validated and encouraged cognition and the rationality traditionally associated with male epistemic processes as well as the emotion, intuitive leaps, and other less verbalized feelings that have been linked with women's learning (p. 376).

During the focus group session, the women discussed their perspectives on various issues surrounding feminism, sexism, gender role stereotyping, and gender inequality. I facilitated the conversations by posing specific questions, however, the women also included information and responses that did not necessarily answer any specific questions posed. The focus group protocol, comprising the list of semi-structured questions posed is included (Appendix E).

**Reflective journaling.** Participants completed a journal reflection before the first interview to begin the study and after the second interview to conclude the study. I utilized some preliminary data analysis of the interviews and the focus group to direct the final prompts for the last reflective journal entry (Appendix G). The participants were asked to be reflective and articulate their perspectives of feminism and how their experiences have influenced their beliefs. I also was interested in understanding if taking the opportunity to reflect on their experiences, beliefs, and perspectives regarding feminism, sexism, and gender identity development changed their original perspectives'. There were two ways that the participants were able to share their journal reflections with me, but all chose to email their final reflections.

## **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

To track the iterative nature of the data analysis I kept a research journal throughout the duration of the study. I used the journal as a space to write down my thoughts regarding the data analysis, my ideas about the organization of the information collected, my conceptual memoing, and my own reflection at the end of this study.

My data analysis process can be most accurately defined as a spiral of collection and analysis (Creswell, 2007). Merriam (1998) refers to this as a constant comparative method of analysis. I am also analyzing this data from an interpretivist position, which underscores the perspective that people make meaning in multiple ways (Connely & Clandinin, 1990).

As Creswell (2007) asserts, qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories, and themes from the “bottom-up,” by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information. This process is inductive and it involves researchers working back and forth over the multiple forms of data in search of some salient themes and understandings, leading to overall comprehensive sets of themes. In narrative research the data (e.g., interview transcriptions) is analyzed for significant statements or themes of how the participants experienced a particular phenomenon. Then, the researcher will develop “clusters of meaning” from these significant statements into themes (Creswell, 2007, p. 61).

While conducting the initial, more structured analysis as a beginning point of entry, I gave attention to various contexts and meanings. Stake (1995) claims that searching for patterns and consistency is a search for meaning, and the search for consistency within certain conditions are called “correspondence.” He continues that sometimes patterns may be

known in advance and serve as a template and other times patterns will emerge unexpectedly (Stake, 1995).

**Narrative data analysis.** The following section provides a detailed explanation of how I conducted the narrative data analysis in an effort to increase validity of the research findings through transparency. As stated above, my data analysis process attempted to organize the data in a way that divulged analytic synthesized findings. After interview transcription, all of the narrative data was read multiple times. Next, I begin the process of open coding the information. Josselson (2011) explains that this procedure considers the whole in relationship to the parts and how the parts comprise the whole. The codes emerged from the text by going through the iterative process of data-to-data comparison. Initially, all of the data was coded into three overarching categories: feminism, sexism, and gender identity development.

Next, I placed all of the participant responses to questions within each question within the larger section on a spreadsheet. From there, I conducted a categorical analysis, “abstracting sections belonging to a category, using coding strategies, and comparing these to similar texts from other narratives” (Josselson, 2011, p. 226). My goal for this type of data analysis was to identify the themes of the relationships among the stories in a complete ways. I synthesized all of the narrative data collected, which revealed salient themes and patters regarding perspectives and experiences of the participants. I recorded below each section on the spreadsheet. Lastly, I read the themes and patterns in all categories for the emergence of overarching themes or stories.

## **Methodological Challenges**

Feminist qualitative researchers face, along with all qualitative researchers, a pinched, conservative era in which many IRB review practices are not sympathetic to even the most traditional qualitative research (Lincoln, 2005). Challenges and restrictive effects of “these politics of evidence” (Morse, 2005, 2006, as cited in Olesen, 2011, p. 136) add another level of struggle to the feminist qualitative search for social justice (Lincoln, 2005) and reflect an enduring climate of positivism (Olesen, 2011).

Feminist qualitative researchers address validity, also called “trustworthiness,” in different ways depending on how they frame their approaches (Olesen, 2011, p. 135). My methodological selections throughout this research process were challenging as I continuously wrestled with feeling pressure to conduct this work in a more traditional vein, reflecting positivist origins of social science with established techniques to merit validity. These pressures did not come from my committee members, but rather my own perceptions as a researcher regarding dominant notions of what is considered valid and what is not in reference to quality research structure. Feminist research directly disavows positivist origins and typically utilizes techniques that reflect their postpositivist views but do not hold out hard and fast criteria for according “authenticity” (Lincon & Guba, 1985; Manning, 1997). Some feminist researchers “challenge different kinds of validity and call for different kinds of science practices” (Richardson, 1993, p. 65). With this in mind, the next section explains efforts taken to construct a quality research design.

### **Constructing a Quality Research Design: Trustworthiness**

This study was designed and conducted with a commitment to “trustworthiness”

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness and credibility criteria involve establishing results of the qualitative research that are deemed credible or believable from the perspectives' of the participants of the study. The purpose of this research was to explore, describe, and understand the specific phenomena of interest from the participants' standpoint. In reality, the participants of the study are the only individuals who have the ability to legitimize their perspectives, but only I can legitimize the findings. I deployed two specific strategies to increase the level of trustworthiness: triangulation, prolonged engagement.

**Triangulation.** As a social constructivist and critical feminist, I value the multiple realities that all individuals have from their experiences. Therefore, to understand these multiple and diverse realities, I deployed multiple data collection methods, using data triangulations. Triangulation was achieved through multiple sources of information for the same phenomenon. This research study involved in-depth interviews, a focus group session, and journal reflections. Additionally, I kept a reflection journal throughout the study. The three types of data collected were contextual, immediate, and reflective.

**Prolonged engagement.** The credibility of this study was increased through prolonged engagement. I met with participants multiple times over the period of two months. Choosing to meet multiple times over several months was selected to build upon the trust already established as a former instructor of the participants, but also to provide an opportunity to experience breath and variation of the data collected. Rather than meeting one time or simply filling out a survey, this study entailed more persistent observations of the participants. This decreased potential distortions due to my perspective as a researcher.

**Confirmability.** The nature of qualitative research immediately assumes that each researcher provides a unique perspective to any study. To enhance the confirmability of this study I employed several strategies a) I documented the procedures that I used for checking and rechecking my data throughout the study b) and I conducted a reflexivity audit to examine my data collection and analysis procedures, making judgments concerning potential bias.

An audit trail will demonstrate credibility by examining how neutral the findings are and if they reflect the participants' experiences, not the researcher's biases or prejudices. This audit can also answer whether the findings are grounded in data and if the inferencing is logical and supported.

**Reflexivity audit.** As a reflexive researcher I must be transparent with my historic and geographical situatedness, my biases, my personal investments, and the ways that I have attempted to avoid or suppress particular points of view.

I recognize that I as the researcher and the women who participated in this study produced interpretations that are "the data" (Diaz, 2002) and this goes beyond mere reflection on the conduct of the research (Olesen, 2011). Reflexivity demands an uncomfortable assessment of the interpersonal and situated knowledge-producing dynamics of qualitative research, in particular, acute awareness regarding what unrecognized elements in my background contribute (Gorelick, 1991; Schepher-Hughes, 1983). As such, a subjectivity statement was included in my reflexivity audit.

As former elementary school teacher and university supervisor in the district and current graduate student and graduate teaching assistant at the selected university, I share

some common cultural understandings with the participants. However, I am not originally from this region of the country, I have a decade of experience teaching in the elementary school setting, and I have completed extensive master's and doctoral coursework. Due to these experiences, some of my cultural understandings and ideologies may differ from the participants of this study. I feel this simultaneously causes me to have both insider and outsider status; therefore I am obligated to clarify my own biases. I kept a reflective journal to document my personal assumptions before, during, and after the completion of the study. This was to acknowledge reflexivity and increase trustworthiness of my qualitative methods.

***Subjectivity statement.*** As a doctoral student, I have become ever more critically conscious of my feminist perspectives, agency, and voice. I believe that I have always been a feminist, but I was uncertain about how to articulate my perspectives and beliefs during late adolescence and early adulthood. Instead, I acted as a leader in the classroom and on the athletic fields as the president of my junior and senior classes in high school and as captain of the three sports that I played.

As a beginning elementary school teacher, I was always aware of the profound impact that I had on my young, impressionable students. I was critical of our social studies curriculum, constantly attempting to include more women and gender issues into the conversation. But admittedly, I feel now that although I introduced women into our classrooms, they were mainly women who had some relationship with one of our presidents (e.g., mother, wife), subsidiary roles and positions that were held mainly by wealthy, white women.

During a transition phase in my life and in my career, as both an elementary school teacher and doctoral student, I became acutely aware of how the issues surrounding feminism, sexism, and gender identity development translated into the classroom in multiple forms, both explicitly and implicitly. This led me to the greater understanding that we not only lack women in our social studies curriculum, but that women's issues and gender equality are much more ubiquitous and complicated than solely the lack of women noted in our elementary social studies textbooks. Gender inequity, oppression, and the subordination of women are systematic and all encompassing. It happens with such frequency on myriad levels that many do not even notice its existence; it has become ingrained in our society. We must first be aware of this occurrence before we can advocate for change. This research sought to examine preservice teacher perspectives of these topics first to gain a better understanding, and then to utilize the findings to direct future work that is needed in this field.

**Ethical considerations.** It is my duty to fully disclose that during the fall semester, prior to this research study, I was an instructor of one section of a senior seminar course. I was also a teaching assistant in the participant's Social Studies and the Young Learner methods course in the Elementary Education Department of the selected university. It is for these reasons that I solicited senior elementary preservice teachers that were not students in any of the courses that I was instructing in the spring semester while this research study was being conducted. As a qualitative researcher, I understood the importance of accuracy, ethics, and participant comfort. I strictly followed and adhered to all Institutional Review Board regulations.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this research study and the questions that I have chosen through my review of the scholarship has informed my analysis and subsequently, my findings. This research was conducted to explore preservice elementary teacher perspectives about feminism. This study also sought to explore how they came to these understandings and the messages they received in school regarding feminism, sexism, and their gender identity development. This research specifically focused on the ways in which student backgrounds and experiences regarding these topics have informed their beliefs. My proposal focuses on the ways experiences contribute to the formative process that preservice teachers form their beliefs, which ultimately inform their practice and possibly their purpose for teaching. Therefore, I explored the following research questions:

1. What are preservice elementary teacher perspectives' about feminism?
  - How did they come to these understandings?
  - What messages did preservice teachers receive in school regarding feminism, sexism, and their own gender identity development?

### **Context and Participants**

To recruit participants for this study a recruitment email (Appendix A) was sent to all seniors enrolled in the elementary teacher preparation program at the large university in the Southeast where I worked as a teaching assistant and instructor. Out of 52 students, 4 contacted me within 48 hours, volunteering for the study. After my initial interview with

each of the four participants, I asked if they could recommend at least one more individual for the study, three of the four noted the same individual. I contacted this woman about the study, noting the peer referrals, and she agreed to participate, thus, completing a snowball sampling method.

All five participants in this study were White females, enrolled as undergraduate seniors in an elementary teacher preparation program at a large Southeast university in the United States. This research study took place during the spring semester as the women were completing their full-time student teaching experience in their perspective elementary schools. The table below includes demographical information about the participants that is salient to the study.

**Table 4.1**  
Participant Demographics

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Birthplace</b>	<b>Hometown</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>Religion</b>
Samantha	Southeast	Rural/Conservative	Conservative	Southern Baptist
Sarah	Southeast	Rural/Conservative	Conservative	Southern Baptist
Sue	Southeast	Suburban/Conservative	Moderate	Christian
Sophie	Southeast	Urban/Conservative	Conservative	Catholic
Sunny	Northeast	Urban/Liberal (0-11 yrs.) Suburban/Conservative	Liberal	Catholic

**Samantha: Struggling with old and new beliefs.** Sam, a dark-haired senior with bright eyes and an athletic build, attended university on a full athletic scholarship. She wore

the necessary dress clothes to the elementary schools for student teaching, but always felt more comfortable in athletic wear or jeans and a t-shirt. As the captain of her varsity team, Sam was a leader and had a wonderful sense of confidence when speaking about her perspectives or opinions. Sam never hesitated to share her thoughts in class, which was unique for her elementary senior cohort.

Sam was raised in a “very rural” southern town with strong conservative Christian values and politics. Sam grew up in the church and in her “small community,” which instilled concrete gender roles for men and women, based on the Bible. She was raised to believe that “men always have the final say.” As a self-proclaimed “tom-boy,” Sam struggled a great deal growing up with not identifying as a “girly girl” as pressures from home and her community were ubiquitous. Sam did have support from her family, teachers, and church leaders in playing the sports she loved as many affirmed that participating in a more male dominated activities didn’t make her “less of a girl or less beautiful or less desirable.”

Sam attended public school for elementary and high school, but was home-schooled during middle school, where she was educated in regular academic subjects along with Bible study taught mainly by her mother. College was a revelatory experience for Sam in many ways. It was the first time she had been exposed to an international microcosm such that exists on large, public university campuses. It was the first time that Sam had been exposed to multiple viewpoints, and also the first time that Sam’s conservative, static perspectives had been questioned by peers and/or educators. Sam stated that before she came to college, she “never knew any gay people,” and was taught that their “lifestyle” was a choice and an abomination. Yet, during college, Sam became close friends with a self-identified lesbian

student in her cohort. At the time of this study, Sam was still struggling through her new perspectives, but it was obvious that some of her old positions had shifted.

**Sarah: The 180 degree shift.** Sarah is a slightly shy, blond haired and blue eyed southern sweetheart. She had a soft voice with a southern accent and was one of the kindest students I had ever met. Sarah's background and upbringing gave her every cause to grow-up and become the stereotypical "southern belle," getting married early and having "hundreds of babies." Yet, Sarah's put-together, "southern belle" exterior was quite the opposite of her interior.

Sarah was raised in a "predominantly white, more rural" town in the south. Her town focused on strong conservative Christian beliefs and politics. Sarah's parents both had high-paying jobs and financial wealth was deemed a priority in her house. She admitted on a few occasions that racists, sexists, and prejudiced undertones were prevalent throughout her community and in her home. Sarah was raised to believe that women should prioritize "having children before having a career." All of her formal schooling was public education.

College had a profound impact on Sarah's beliefs and perspectives. The exposures to a diversity of peers, professors, and perspectives altered many of her core beliefs. The changes that Sarah underwent during college regarding her understandings and perspectives were nothing short of a complete 180-degree turn, which is expanded upon in the findings.

**Sue: Balancing personal orientation and traditional southern beliefs.** Sue, a longhaired, no fuss senior with a big smile, was from a small city in the south. She participated in a lot of extra-curricular activities on campus, had two part-time jobs, and loved being a coach for youth intellect competitions. She typically blew into the room like a

whirlwind, not because she was disorganized, but because she was involved in so many activities and typically ran from one to the next.

Sue attended public schooling and had a “non-traditional southern” upbringing because her mother worked and her father stayed at home with her and her sister. She came from the outskirts of a city in the south and noted conservative Christian undertones in her community. At times Sue appeared to have a nonchalant attitude when discussing issues of gender or sexuality, but it may be due to concern that if she appeared too passionate about these issues, people would assume it was because she was a lesbian. Sue never self-identified as a lesbian to me, but she did state that she “came out” to her parents in middle school, whom were supportive, and she spoke occasionally of her girlfriend. Additionally, Sue was the peer recommended by the women whom initially volunteered for the study. One phrase that sticks in my mind when describing Sue attitude about issues related to gender and sexuality is, “people should be people,” which was a frequent response to these types of questions.

**Sophie: Processing personal identities.** Sophie, a tall green-eyed senior, typically didn’t speak up much in class; however, when she did speak her words were insightful. She came from a large, close-knit, Lebanese family and grew up in a large southern city. All of Sophie’s schooling prior to college was in private Catholic institutions.

Sophie identified her family as having a strong influence on her beliefs growing up and commented on the pressures she received from her family to “get married and have children,” preferably male. At the time of this study Sophie noted that having a boyfriend was not “a huge priority,” let alone getting married.

Sophie was a strong, independent woman with many progressive beliefs regarding the roles of women and the societal constraints placed on them. She tended to be more reserved when in groups or classes, but was passionate about her perspectives during one-to-one conversations. Sophie noted one of the most profound experiences that began the journey of forming her current perspectives on feminism was working at an all girls' camp. College and personal friendships also had major impacts on her identities, which she was continuously processing during this study.

**Sunny: Apologetically outspoken.** Sunny's long, wavy red hair, tortoiseshell glasses and colorful attire made it impossible to lose her in a crowded room. Due to her pale complexion and self-proclaimed "strong emotions", she was acutely aware that she frequently got red and blotchy when she spoke out in public, but that didn't stop her. However, she did frequently apologize for stating strong opinions that may have been deemed "unpopular" by her peers.

Sunny was very progressively minded and so was her family. Growing up, politics were discussed frequently in Sunny's home and her parents were registered Democrats. She was raised in a large, urban area in the northeast until middle school when her family moved to a suburban area outside of a large city in the south, she noted "the transition of moving from north to south was huge."

Sunny had fairly concretized perspectives about feminist issues and issues of equality. Unlike the majority of her peers in class, she would volunteer her thoughts frequently, which were rarely conservative in nature. She admitted that this caused discord between her and many of the peers in her elementary education cohort. But, she noted that she did have some

“like-minded” friends, several of which participated in the study. Sunny frequently commented on feeling like an “outsider” amongst her classmates due to her more liberal beliefs and ideologies. She also noted that one of the most difficult realizations she had reached toward the end of high school and beginning of college is that “not all women are feminists.”

## **Findings**

### **Perspectives About Feminism**

In its most condensed form of a collective understanding, all of the women in this study perceived feminism to mean equality or the pursuit of equality. Sarah noted women’s suffrage and women’s movements briefly, however, the majority of the women described their understanding of feminism to be formed from a more contemporary perspective, which focused more on the concept of gender equality.

As a whole they believe feminism to be related to “equality among the sexes”, but the majority also understood feminism to mean equality of all people, not solely equality between women and men. When speaking about their perspectives of feminism, three women noted famous female celebrities in the media. Sarah and Sam spoke about Emma Watson’s recent speech at the United Nations where she discussed feminism, the importance of gender equality, and the “HeForShe” campaign (see Appendix H). Sophie referenced Beyoncé’s recent performance with the word “FEMINIST” in large capital letters behind her on the stage, along with the belief that she exudes being a powerful woman (see Appendix H).

All five women understood the term feminism to have both positive and negative connotations. Sam, Sue, and Sarah women were introduced to the idea of feminism or

feminists in a negative encounter, while Sunny and Sophie were introduced to feminism through a positive association, but since have experienced negative associations with the perspective. Subsequently, as expanded upon in the next section, all of the women's college experiences have changed some former negative perspectives to positive perspectives of feminism. When referring to her current perspectives of feminism Sophie stated, "It doesn't have a negative connotation. It's something I hope to be." Yet, she continued this thought with, "I don't consider myself a feminist...I don't, I don't know. But, I hope one day I can be."

Along with the majority of the other women who participated in this study, these seemingly conflicting positions were common. The women's dichotomous nature of their position as feminists may be an extension of their experiences regarding feminism prior to college and during college. The next section will explain how the preservice elementary teachers came to their understandings of feminism.

### **How They Came To These Understandings**

**First Introductions.** Of the five women who participated in this study, Sophie and Sunny were introduced to the term feminism in a positive context. Subsequently, Sophie was the only woman who could not remember being exposed to the concept of feminism prior to college and Sunny had a fairly positive perception of feminism up until college.

The positive experience for Sophie took place during her college years when she was a counselor at an all girls' summer camp. Sophie described the summer camp as a place where "girls were pushed beyond their wildest dreams", noting the activities and living facilities as aspects of camp that would be "normally thought of as for boys", due to the

outdoor living, which included a lack of running water and electricity. The camp was described as a place that focused on building the girls' self-confidence and advocating for girls in general. Sophie stated that only in the past few years at camp had she ever met people who identified as feminists publically or privately. Additionally, Sophie noted that she felt that feminism "has recently gotten big in the media, like more than ever before", noting Beyoncé's recent performance. Due to her positive experiences with feminism in the camp's all-female environment and the recent positive media attention, Sophie understands feminism to be "empowering" and that "the term feminism has always had that empowering vibe for me."

When speaking about her early understandings of feminism Sunny explained, "It wasn't until later in life that I realized people weren't feminists, that women weren't feminists." She continued to explain that the first time she believed to be introduced to feminism was in her public elementary school in the north. Sunny recalled learning about women and some women's perspectives, noting that it wasn't until she was in high school in the south that she heard feminism used in a negative way. She commented on these experiences stating the by adverse comments made by her peers "on a bus or in conversation" and "that it was never taught" in her middle or high school.

The other three women had been exposed to the concept of feminism in primary and secondary schooling and all experiences placed feminism in a negative context or it was not introduced at all. When questioned about the context of her first introduction to feminism Sam said, "A woman was out of line or being essentially bossy and rude and just making a big deal of something that shouldn't be made a big deal." Sue noted, "Probably in a joke or

something was the first time.” Sarah added, “When I was growing up, I never really thought about feminism. I guess I wasn’t really introduced to it, but once I did hear the word feminism I always thought it was promoting women over men...” Sue added, “I was clueless for the longest time. I never even heard of it, ever, until like real late in high school, which is kind of ridiculous. I don’t know. I mean, I had heard it in jokes I guess.”

**Experiences and understandings.** All women noted that they did not recall ever having explicit conversations about feminism prior to college. Additionally, many noted that their understandings of feminism had negative affiliations from their experiences prior to college. Sarah reiterated, “Growing up, I thought when I heard it that it was women trying to be promoted over men.” Sam added, “Yeah, I think it was very ill-interpreted because like Sarah, I always thought when I did hear it I always thought it was women trying to be better than men and in the Christian faith it’s very much like men lead the household.” When elaborating on earlier perspectives of feminism Sam explained:

“Growing up, feminist or feminism to me was very negatively connotated. It was like bra burning, walking through the streets naked, like all of the super obnoxious dramatic end of the scale.”

### **School Messages**

**Early years.** “Make me a sandwich”, was a phrase Sue remembered hearing on the school bus by a male peer making a joke about a woman’s place being in the kitchen. When asked to elaborate on this school experience Sue replied sarcastically, “You want to hear a feminist joke? Why is there a ledge under the stove? The ledge is so her toes can get close while she’s cooking or washing the dishes.” Sarah stated, “[I was] very, very clueless for the

longest period of time. Towards the end of high school I began to hear it as a negative kind of way.”

During the focus group, when the women were asked if males or females made the negative comments about feminism, the women consented that it was both. Disheartened, Sunny looked down and stated, “I hate when it’s women”. The group nodded in agreement. When asked who made disparaging comments regarding feminism in their early schooling years, the majority agreed with Sue’s response, “Definitely peers and high school is high school. But, that’s about the extent it went. And then obviously in college where you kind of dive into these subjects, it clicked.” For the majority of the women, these types of sexist jokes and anti-feminist macro and micro-aggressions occurred during their primary and secondary schooling experiences. Subsequently, these experiences were the only exposure to conversations regarding feminism that the majority of the women ever were involved with until college.

**College years: Era of enlightenment.** All of the women in this study noted their college experiences as having a major impact on their perspectives about feminism. Two expressed dramatic shifts in their perspectives, one of which, Sarah, I interpreted as a 180-degree ideological shift. For example, when referring to her experiences regarding feminism in her life Sarah stated, “I wasn’t really introduced to it...it wasn’t until Dr. B’s classes that I really understood that it was equality for all of us no matter what our sex was.” Similarly, Sam explained:

“As much as I hate to admit it, I had no idea that it was an issue, really what the issue was. I didn’t even know what was going on with the whole concept of feminism literally until my social studies unit last semester.”

In the previous semester, the women all took a *Social Studies and the Young Learner* course taught by Dr. B\* and Dr. G\*. I was a teaching assistant for both sections of the course. The course was rooted in theories of critical pedagogy and designed with a social justice focus. Each week critical theory and culturally relevant pedagogy were employed to frame teaching and learning. When I met with both professors in the weeks prior to the fall semester to plan for the course, we reviewed the potential syllabus that the two professors had outlined. As I reviewed the syllabus, I noticed the absence of gender issues and women as a specific topic. Treating me as their equal, the two professors were very open to my suggestions throughout the semester. They both agreed the need for women and gender to be a specific topic discussed during the course and asked me to teach both classes on the topic that week. The title of the lesson was “Herstory”. Other conversations regarding women’s issues and gender were woven throughout some of the other discussion during the semester as well. However, this two-hour lesson that I taught solely focused on women and women’s issues, past and present. It appeared to have had an impact on the women’s shifting perspectives.

When I asked the women about what context women and women’s issues were discussed in any of their teacher preparation courses, they noted very few. They noted Dr. B’s *Multicultural Education* seminar during their junior year and discussing the topic during

their *Social Studies and the Young Learner* course. Subsequently, the *Social Studies and the Young Learner* course is the only methods course that the women noted any type of an open dialogue regarding women's issues and/or gender inequality.

When asked about their experiences with discussing feminism in any of their teacher preparation courses Sunny noted, "When you did the 'HerStory' thing. Well, I really liked it because going through school, I don't feel like I was every shown a lot of women leaders or like women that were famous throughout history for certain things. So, I thought that was really neat and it gave me good ideas for how to incorporate women into my classroom."

Sam remarked on her experiences surrounding the 'HerStory' lesson:

"I saw the 'Always Like a Girl' commercial and then I was sitting in Dr. B's class and she was like, " You need to think about something that is important to you because I think that if you find something connection wise that is important to you, then you will do well in this unit. Otherwise, you're really going to struggle. And I was like, 'Okay fine, whatever.' But, I was sitting there and trying to figure out everything and I saw that commercial and I looked at her like, "Can I do that?" She was like, "Well, yeah. Sure. Just start looking up stuff about feminism," and I went, "Oh." And I just started looking it up and I came across the Emma Watson research and as soon as I heard the 'HeForShe' campaign, it has completely 180'd my whole...it has turned my thinking around completely. I think that it is equality for both sexes on every scale and across every range of things."

As a woman who was raised in a small, conservative area, Sarah stated that her perspectives of feminism drastically changed in college. When explaining her current beliefs she stated, “Equal does not mean same as.” Sophie was working through articulating her current beliefs about feminism as she reflected:

“My belief of feminism is that it’s equality of the sexes in all aspects but, I also feel like it’s something that like I need to keep learning about and I need to keep moving towards understanding more. I don’t think that it’s just black and white, you need to be equal, and it’s not let everybody get the same thing because I don’t think that’s what it is. I think there’s so much more to it and I think it’s something that...I think that equality is achievable but I think there needs to be more people who are educated about it and who need to work towards it and like push their belief systems to be more feminist I guess.”

Sunny was the only participant who thought of feminism in a positive way prior to her college experience. She noted, “I’ve always thought of it very positively. It wasn’t until later in life that I realized that a lot of people didn’t identify as being a feminist.” Her experience was also unique in that her enlightenment during her college experience was not that some women are feminists, it was that some women are not. Interestingly, none of the women discussed the possibility of males identifying as feminists. Yet, Sunny summed up the all of the participants’ perspectives of feminism when stated, “I boil it down to really just equality in every way for everybody.”

## **Summary**

The interpretation of the data analysis regarding the preservice elementary teacher perspectives of feminism yielded several salient findings. First, the majority of the women recalled no explicit experiences discussing feminism prior to college and the majority of their introductions and early exposures with feminism were framed in a negative perspective.

Second, college was a true era of enlightenment for all of the women with regards to their beliefs and understandings of feminism, due to critical exposures that they experienced. Although they all only noted two courses in their teacher preparation programs that included discussions of feminism and feminist perspectives (both led by the same professor). These small exposures appeared to involve deep, critical discussions regarding the topic that were incredibly influential in forming the current perspectives of these five women. Another interesting finding was that none of the women ever mentioned men as possible feminists in any way throughout the entire study, they focused their discussions strictly on women who may or may not identify as feminists.

The final finding was that all of the women appeared to be continuing to evolve in their understandings of feminism and whether or not they would self-identify as a feminist. They all expressed strong perspectives and ideologies that directly align with feminism, but few were willing to self-identify as a feminist. This specific finding will be discussed more critically in chapter 5.

## **Perspectives About Sexism**

Overall, the women all understood sexism to mean unfair treatment of groups and individuals based on their sex. Many understood certain biases and stereotypes attributed to

an individual's sex to be examples of sexism. All of the women expressed experiences with sexism, but some voiced more experiences than others. My interpretation of the data concludes that the majority of women in fact, have had more experiences with sexism, but some were just more conscious than others of sexist attitudes and behaviors they have been exposed to throughout their lives. Some fascinating perspectives were revealed during the focus group, where it appeared that the women were working through their consciousness and new awareness of sexism together. Sophie condensed the feelings of the women during the focus group when discussing their experiences with sexism by stating, "I never really recognized it because I didn't know what I was looking for basically."

### **Experiences with Sexism**

Glick and Fiske (1996, 1997, 2001a, 2001b, 2011) have conducted seminal work on sexism in recent decades. The authors' have developed a theory of sexism formulated as ambivalence toward women and validate a corresponding measure, the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI). Glick and Fiske (1996) explain:

The ASI examines 2 positively correlated components of sexism that nevertheless represent opposite evaluative orientations toward women: sexist antipathy or Hostile Sexism (HS) and a subjectively positive (for sexist men ) orientation toward women, Benevolent Sexism (BS). (p. 491)

Out of all of the experiences concerning sexism shared by the women, the majority was through hostile, rather than benevolent sexism. The identified agents of sexism by the women were peers, parents, teachers, and society/media. In the following sections, we will

explore the participants' experiences with benevolent and hostile sexism, which have led to their beliefs and understandings.

**Benevolent sexism.** The women who noted experiences with benevolent sexism recall being treated as though they were more fragile and less equipped to succeed. At first this may have been interpreted as hostile sexism, however, several noted that if and when they did succeed, it was celebrated instead of expected as it typically is with boys. The women liked the extra attention and admiration for accomplishing a goal or doing well at a sporting event. Sam noted, "In the world of stereotypes, being female is not all bad. I feel like it could be harder for some guys, just the way stereotypes are set up in society." Sue made a similar comment with, "I feel like women are the underdog, it's empowering to overcome that situation. But, men are expected to be awesome, I feel like that would be hard. They are supposed to be good at sports. Nobody expects me to be good at sports, so when I am, they are like "You're amazing". Sophie added, "Women have stereotypes where we're cast down, but men have to kind of go up."

The other instances the women recalled of benevolent sexism included being able to work as a counselor at an all-girls camp or being given special privileges because they were female, like "getting a seat on the bus" or "being allowed to park somewhere they knew they weren't allowed to" because they "pretended not to know the rules and the male security officer let [them] park in the lot anyway." Although there were several examples that the majority of the women could recall sexism working to their benefit, their experiences with hostile sexism far outweighed the benevolent sexism in their lives.

**Hostile sexism.** All five women noted experiences with hostile sexism by peers, parents, teachers, and society/media. Additionally all participants’ experienced hostile sexism with regards to their purpose and their value as a woman in our society.

All noted hostile sexism in the area of sports. The majority observed hostile sexism in their student teaching environments and some of the women noted personal experiences with hostile sexism in the area of STEM.

**Value to society: appearance and regeneration.** All of the women have experienced hostile sexism regarding the value they felt as a woman in society. Below is a chart of the words and phrases that the women used to describe the perceptions and associations of women and girls, men and boys, and their values in society.

**Table 4.2**  
Associations and Perceived Values

<i>Girls/Women</i>	<i>Boys/Men</i>
Pink, purple	Blue
Dresses, ribbons	
Dolls	Play sports
Prim and proper	Tough
Pretty face/One type of body	
Better in reading	Better in math
Stay at home with children	Do not stay at home with children
Teach children, make sandwiches, do laundry	
Pursuing a career are bitchy, not focused on home life or caring for children	Business world, Presidents, CEOs

It is clear from the participants’ perspectives that appearance and ability to have and raise children are the only areas of perceived value of women in our society. In essence, we live in

an androcentric patriarchal society where women are essentially valued solely for their sexual attributes, both physical and biological. According to their perspectives, no other values are recognized by society.

The women all felt that society perceived them as mothers and nurturers and that their sole responsibility in progressing society was through procreation. Sarah explained that she was told from a very early age, “You should get married and have children and then start your career.” Sophie stated, “Women are valued for being able to have kids and continue the family name.” None of the women questioned the name they would be continuing. Sophie continued, “Society values looks and being able to raise a family more than being able to work or do things like be the president.” Another woman echoed, “Society values how you look, one body type, and having a pretty face.” When referring to women’s value, Sam commented, “I think in some households, it’s very high”, but noted no other area.

When Sue was asked about the value she perceived women to have in society she stated, “In terms of society we are probably valued less than men based on how they are portrayed in the media and how we are progressing in anything like business.” Sam explained that men are valued “in the medical, political, law, high business” fields and the value of women is “lower than it should be.” Sunny added similar thoughts, “Very little. I think not enough. Very low. Low political values.”

***Sports.*** All of the women in this study described experiences with hostile sexism in the area of sports. All reported having been called a “tomboy”, typically these instances revolved around participation in sports. Peers and parents were reported as the agents of sexism in this area. As Sue stated, “If you’re in co-ed sports, they tend to beat you up a little

bit more or if you're the only female", referring to her male peers on the field during intramural soccer games. After receiving affirmation from her family and community, Sam was able to feel confident about participating in competitive sports as a woman. She explained, "I have had enough support from my family, teachers, church leaders and they have encouraged me to be like, 'You know what? It's okay that you're a girl and that you like competitive sports.'" Although Sam may not have deemed this positive affirmation from her family and community members as hostile sexism, it is in my interpretation. I interpret these affirming statements to be sexist because Sam clearly needed support to play competitive sports, as playing these sports was inferred as abnormal, thus perceiving sports to be a male domain.

"I was a goalie growing up and I had to go to goalie training and I would cry before goalie training because they were all boys and I got totally overlooked", Sarah recalled her experiences with sexism in sports. Another participant connected Sarah's experience to some of her current observations as a student teacher, "even their conversations on the playground, they already think boys are better than girls in everything." Other participants recalled being told they "weren't good enough because they were a girl." During the focus group the unequal distribution of financial and other resources between men's and women's sports at the collegiate and professional level was also discussed. The women all agreed on the marginal support and financial resources in women's athletics in comparison to men's.

**Family.** When Sophie was asked how being female has affected her life she reiterated being allowed to be a counselor at an all-girls camp in which she worked during the past few summers. However, she also noted some hostile sexism with regards to her perceived value

as a woman, “I come from a Lebanese family, it is a very male centered culture. You have kids until you have a boy. It’s like all girls have to look forward to is marriage and children.” When explaining what family gatherings were like Sophie mentioned a lot of negative, surprised responses from family members as many would say, “Oh, your 21 and you don’t have a boyfriend yet?” She continued to share that an older sister who is married is constantly asked if she is “pregnant yet”, because “all that is expected next in her life is to have a child.”

Sam recalled:

“I remember from a very young age, granted my mom was a stay-at-home mom—when my sister was born my mom quit her job to come home with my sister and I and so I remember when I first started talking about being a doctor, one of the conversations that was brought up was, ‘Do you know how much doctors work? If doctors work this much, when are you going to have time to raise kids? When are you going to have time to keep the house clean? To do the things a wife is supposed to do?’”

She continued, “So that was definitely something that was engrained in me from an early age. I think picking a career according to what my wifely duties were.”

**Community.** Sam reported mixed experiences in her response to my question of how being a woman has affected her life. She stated, “It has definitely helped me in my field”, referring to elementary education. But, she also noted explicit sexism occurring at the church

where she works and worships. Sam explained, "I had a fellow nursery worker at the church who is male and he [was] not allowed to change diapers. This was super inconvenient when I was the only other person working with him." When asked why this was a policy at her church she replied that the church workers said, "Not sure it's a good idea." This example reveals multiple forms of sexism experienced by Sam. First, because she was a woman, she was the only worker allowed to complete the task of changing dirty diapers in the nursery, solidifying the perspective that care taking is solely women's work. Second, she witnessed the sexist attitudes and beliefs of her church members when they enforced the policy that men were not allowed to be alone with or change the diapers of young children, alluding to the stereotype that men interested in working with young children have inappropriate motives. This hostile sexist perspective and negative stereotype of men interested in working with young children was brought up by many of the participants at various points in this study.

***Males working with young children.*** When discussing the topic of sexism, many assume a discussion of negative repercussions as a result of being a woman. However, in this study I uncovered an implicit and explicit perspective that men interested in working with young children may have a high propensity to be homosexual, or even pedophiles. This was clear in the example that Sam gave us of the policy at her church where men are not allowed to be alone or change young children. However, the other women in this study echoed their understanding of this underlying perspective in society.

Sophie stated, "If I were a guy in elementary ed., I'd feel a lot more pressure due to the female dominant major. I don't know how they do it." Sarah commented that it had to be,

“more difficult for them in this major, especially going into schools and whatever stereotype from people they are working with.” The other participants alluded to the awareness of the stereotypes associated with men who were interested in working with young children, all of them being negative.

During the focus group Sam stated, “I think it’s because it comes with like the stigma that comes with being an elementary education teacher. I think men are concerned about what that means. I hate to speak for them but maybe their sexuality or what they’re interests [are].” Sunny added, “I have a lot of guy friends that don’t do it because of that. Or get out of it because of that.” Sam added later in the focus group:

I feel like men in especially elementary ed. I don’t want to speak for them but I feel like they may see it as sort of taboo to be in elementary ed. because it’s like...it’s a predominantly female profession and it’s also a very nurturing one and people will definitely question your intentions as a man in elementary education. Especially I feel like in the younger grades.

Sunny included that her male peers in the elementary education program “hated” the idea of working in kindergarten because if the children had any type of accident or any other instance where the teacher may need to be nurturing they would feel as though they were “crossing some kind of line.” Sophie added a final thought by commenting “you have to wear pink to school every day and bow ties just to be less intimidating to the kids.” Sue commented on similar perspectives during our second interview stating, “I feel like society

has made this *huge* deal” about “men specifically with younger children”, yet this does not appear to be an issue with higher education.

Besides the sexist negative stereotypes revealed about men interested in working with young children by the women, they also noted that they believed many people in society “questions their ability to be nurturing”, as Sue noted in reference to men. Sarah noted, “There’s a male teacher in our 4<sup>th</sup> grade and one of our students that we have was originally going to have him and their parents didn’t want them to have him for the sole purpose of they didn’t think he would be nurturing enough for their child.”

**Media.** Sue, Sarah, and Sunny all noted the media when asked how they were valued by society. One noted how fairytales reinforce sexist portrayal of “the damsel in distress.” Sunny noted, “I think it’s definitely ingrained within a lot of our children’s books which is scary to think.” During our focus group when Sue described perpetrators of sexism in the media as “rap artists” and rap music, the women all nodded in agreement. Then, Sarah commented about other media, “ I think that media is also catching up now though and trying to correct itself because ‘Frozen’ and ‘Brave’, I think that is’ something that society especially is working towards...trying to fix.”

Everyone agreed that television and movies were some of the first external influences that children are exposed to at a very young age and the importance of creating media with less sexist portrayals of women and girls. These sexist portrayals and perceptions of women and girls in the media mirror the beliefs and understandings of peers, parents, and community members as experienced by all participants. Sophie summed up the participants’ perspectives

regarding their value as women in our society, “It’s like all women have to look forward to is children, instead of considering a Master’s degree or being the president.”

### **Sexism in School Messages**

**Benevolent sexism.** The only example of benevolent sexism noted by any of the participants occurred to Sarah. She recalled experiencing a lot of benevolent sexism in elementary school, “I feel like it helped me out when I was in elementary school because my teachers catered to my needs.”

**Hostile sexism.** Sarah noted positive consequences of being female in elementary school, but immediately expressed negative consequences of being female in high school. Sarah shared that she was the victim of “inappropriate touching” by a male teacher who was later fired for this offense, noting that this happened because she was a girl and that sexual assault probably happened less frequently to boys. Her assumption was correct because according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Children’s Bureau report *Child Maltreatment* (2010) found that 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 20 boys is a victim of child sexual abuse.

**Peers.** Sunny recalled being picked on a great deal throughout school. She reported being “targeted in negative ways by peers” due to “being loud” and “having her own voice.” Both girls and boys demonstrated negative views of Sunny portraying confidence and assertion in the classroom, something they typically associated with male characteristics. Sue attributed hostile sexism by peers in middle and high school to them “perceiving females as reading into behaviors and being insecure.” In this example the peers displayed negative attitudes and/or treatment of girls who were upset or became emotional by comments made

to or about them, inferring that the only reason the girls were affected was because they were girls and therefore, more emotional.

Sam discussed some of her experiences with sexism in college when working on group projects with both males and females. She explained:

“I like leadership roles, I’m not afraid to speak my mind or take responsibility. It always fascinates me how many times guys have had a problem with me being a leader. They’d say things like, ‘Well, I really think a guy should take charge of this.’ I’d ask why and they would reply, ‘I don’t know. Just because boys are better leaders usually.’”

One final example of peers as agents of sexism revealed in this study was the majority of the participants’ views regarding males in the elementary education program. The majority of the participants made comments leading to the perspectives that women are more fit than men to work with young children. Many questioned the ability of males to be “nurturing” and included society’s assumption that the motives of males wanting to work with children should possibly be questioned.

***STEM teachers.*** Some of the women experienced hostile sexism by teachers and male peers in the area of STEM. Sarah recalled her experiences in middle and high school, “whenever I would want to do something more challenging in math the teachers would say, ‘I don’t know if you’re ready for that.’ She continued, “But, if one of my male peers wanted to do it they would be like, ‘Okay you can try it.’” Many of the women noted similar

experiences when their teachers and peers perceived they were less capable in math and science classes because they were girls.

**School curriculum.** When the participants were asked what women they remember learning about in school the resonating response was “not many.” Other responses included, “I really don’t know” and “Really, not many.” Sue’s remark to this question was, “It’s a joke.” Sarah added that in school they “mainly learned about men” and “never did biographies of famous women, [it was] always men.” Sunny remarked, “Books tend to be written by white males, so they only show white males predominantly.”

The few women that the public school participants remembered learning about in school were historical women of color, as learning about women typically occurred during Black History Month. Ten unique women were named in total. The public school participants named six unique women, four of which were women of color. Rosa Parks was the only individual named more than once. Interestingly, Sam, the participant who was home-schooled from grades 6-8, named the most women with five, three of which were from the bible. She commented, “Not much in school, but from the Bible in home-schooling”, in regards to the context in which she learned about women. Below is a chart of the participant responses of women they learned about in school.

**Table 4.3**  
Women Learned in School

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Influential Women</i>
Sophie, Sue	Rosa Parks (x2)
Sam*	Harriet Tubman
Sue	Coretta Scott
Sunny	C.J. Walker

**Table 4.3 Continued**

Sue	Amelia Earhart
Sarah	Helen Keller
Sam*	Ruth, Naomi, and Esther
Sam*	Joan of Arc

The majority of the women, with the exception of Sam, recalled learning about women in social studies or history classes and as noted, the majority of their learning about women took place during Black History Month. None of the women the participants learned about in public or home schooling were contemporary. All of the women named were in the historical context with Coretta Scott King, wife of Martin Luther King Jr., being the most current individual noted. Sophie attempted to recall learning about a female author named “Rachel” in AP U.S. History, but ended the thought with, “I can’t even remember. That’s how important she was to the class.” Sophie also recalled writing a letter to Hillary Clinton in Girl Scouts.

The participants all agreed that women “were underrepresented like 100%” in the school curriculum. However, they all expressed empowering feelings when discussing how learning about women made them feel. Sam noted, “I loved it. I loved studying women. For me it was more like...Hey, look, girls can do good things too.” Sarah recalled, feeling excited whenever she had learned about women who had done “big things,” but was disappointed that “it really wasn’t taught” much in schools. Sophie expressed that reading about perspectives’ of different women, such as autobiographies, set her on a path towards reading less fiction and more historical accounts, playing a big role in her love of reading.

*Student teaching experiences.* All of the participants discussed both explicit and implicit sexism that they have observed in their student teaching placement schools during this study. During the focus group, Sunny retold something that had happened that day regarding a female elementary student and the sexist nature in which the faculty was treating the child. Sunny reported that a 4<sup>th</sup> grade girl had worn a short plaid skirt and shirt with knee-high boots to school. Sunny explained how the teachers were “discussing her outfit in inappropriate ways in front of the whole class” and that they were “degrading her mother.” One of the teachers also took a picture of the little girl and sent it to a fellow teacher to have a laugh.

The teachers continued talking and laughing about the outfit at lunch and as Sunny explained, “My kids can’t go anywhere at lunch” so they were exposed to the teachers’ response to the little girls clothing the entire time. Sunny was disheartened by this observation because she felt the teachers were not being good role models for the girls or the boys in the classroom. She said defiantly, “boys don’t need to hear that that’s how women can be talked about or anyone really.”

On the very same day a male student in Sunny’s classroom looked up a picture regarding rape and showed it to multiple students. Before Sunny understood what the picture was, she noticed a boy showing the picture to his male peers and they were all laughing at it. Sunny explained her disgust, “They knew what it was. They did.” However, her cooperating teacher questioned if the boys understood the picture of rape. Then Sunny said, “Well this girl knows that she’s dressing like a whore that you’re talking about, but that boy, oh he

doesn't know about rape.” This was her experience with sexism and the “double-standard” displayed by elementary school teachers in her cooperating school.

Sarah reported her experience with sexism in a school faculty meeting. She was observing the meeting when she overheard one of the faculty members describe a student as “ditzy.” This was upsetting to Sarah because she expressed the perspective that only “blond girls are called ditzy” and that blond men are *never* called ditzy, men are rarely called ditzy in general. As the conversation continued the principal of the school joined the conversation and stated, “Oh, well she’s a blonde.”

Sam and Sue noticed benevolent sexism in their schools as they have observed teachers “let girls off the hook on behavior” more than boys. Sam added that she at times felt herself being more lenient with the girls in her classroom than with the boys for similar infractions. Girls are perceived as “delicate” and “you don’t want to break them,” Sue explained.

The final example of sexism demonstrated in the cooperating schools happened to Sarah. She was observing a meeting and the female administrator was reminding everyone that the district superintendent, who happened to be male, was visiting the next day. She ended the meeting by reminding all of the women to “paint the barn door.” When I asked Sarah what this meant exactly she said, “that’s something people say in the south and it means to wear make-up.”

## **Summary**

The interpretation of the data analysis regarding the preservice elementary teacher perspectives of sexism yields several significant findings. I believe the most profound

overarching finding to be the values the participants' perceived society to have of women. The perception that society essentially only values their superficial physicality and their ability to have children was clear. Although, I do not believe that all of the women shared these perspectives, they believed that more should be expected and that they are capable of contributing much more to society. Yet, these two values of women were consistently noted throughout this study and appeared to have been ingrained expectations on a deep level of their subconscious.

**School curriculum.** The lack of women included in the school curriculum is clear from the women's perspectives. They were unable to recall many women or discuss in any type of detail the ways in which the women contributed to society. As noted, when women were discussed in the school curriculum, it was typically during Black History Month, which may explain why the majority of the women the participants remembered learning about were women of color.

This directly aligns with research conducted by Wineburg and Monte-Sano (2008) where they asked 2,000 high school juniors and seniors across all 50 states to name the most famous Americans, not including presidents or First Ladies. Additionally, on the last five lines of the ten on the survey, the students had to write down names of famous women.

The top three individuals named overall were people of color and two were women, Rosa Parks and Harriet Tubman. Amelia Earhart, the famous female pilot named by my participants, was sixth on their list. These three women were also frequently named when Wineburg and Monte-Sano surveyed 2000 adults the same question. However, the frequently was not as high for any of the women.

In an attempt to explain the phenomenon of the students responding with three people of color and two being women as the top three most famous Americans, the researchers noted the textbook shift in a 1995 study (Lerner, Nagai, & Rothman, 1995). This study found that people of color and women have become a more central focus in American history. Yet, Wineburg and Monte-Sano (2008) noted, “If changes to the contemporary curriculum are the reason behind young people’s answers, then we would expect a very different selection from Americans of older generations” (p. 644).

Not all Americans complete high school, but all complete elementary school. The elementary years are incredibly influential as student’s brains and knowledge are forming. Early childhood education is fundamental to all students and in the majority of elementary schools across the nation, each year K-5, students learn about famous people of color during February, Black History Month. I argue that this yearly repetition during formative years is extremely profound to student learning and internalization of information. I would also argue that the same handful of individuals is noted each year during Black History Month, concretizing these few individuals into memory.

While I agree that more women and people of color have been included into the textbooks over the past few decades, I disagree that this inclusion qualifies as any level of depth. An incredibly minute number of women whom have contributed to our society are included in the school curriculum. Many of the women named in this study were named in the Wineburg and Monte-Sano study of students and adults. I contest that this is because not many other women are discussed in our schools, more specifically in social studies and

history classrooms. I also believe that this impacts young girls and boys' perspectives of who is important in our history and our society. Who is valued and who is not.

**Regions and families.** Ancillary to the perception of the women's value finding, I believe there is some significance in the particular sexist attitudes and behaviors of the participants' families who were raised in the south. It appears that all of the women raised in the south, except Sue, were taught that having a family is more important than having a career. Sue was raised in the south, but she was also raised by a stay-at-home father, altering her perspective of normative gender roles.

As noted in the literature review, parents have an incredible amount of influence on the formation of their children's beliefs and perspectives. From a very early age these women were taught that their contribution to society was children and that any other possible contribution to society like "being the president" was secondary. Sunny, who was raised in the north, was not taught to perceive that having a family should be the first priority of a women's life.

**Society and peers.** An additional noteworthy finding connected to the perceived role and value of women in society was the pervasive perspective that men are not suitable to work with young children. All of the women shared the perspective that society questions the motives of men interested in working with children. Many of the women questioned men's ability to be nurturing and some alluded to sexually deviant ulterior motives for wanting to work with children. Yet, a report by Newport and Wilke (2013) titled *Desire for Children Still Norm in U.S.* determine that 94% of all Americans between the ages of 18-40 had children or wanted to have children someday. Society doesn't question men's desire for

fatherhood, but they question their motives for wanting to work with children. The topic of perceived homosexuality was also brought up by some of the participants as perspectives that they understand society to hold regarding men interested in working with children. This conversation connects to the findings of this research study to the elementary preservice teacher perspectives of gender role identity development.

### **Perspectives About Gender Identity Development**

The participants' perspectives about gender identity development were complex. Similar to the concept of feminism, the women appeared to shift their understandings of gender identity development during college. Prior to college the majority were unaware that gender and sex are not synonymous. During this study, many of the women were still working through their understandings of gender identity development.

### **How They Came to These Understandings**

All of the participants revealed that they had never participated in any explicit discussion regarding gender identity development until college. They did discuss the implicit attitudes and behaviors that they were exposed to before college, additionally noting that they perceived children's experiences today as similar to their own concerning gender identity development. Parents, families, communities and media were all noted as agents of gender identity development.

**Parents and families.** Parents were noted as the most salient factor of a child's gender identity development . All of the women agreed with Sue that gender identity development of children begins "on the day they are born" or even prior, when the sex of a

baby is announced. They noted that many parents select the room color, clothing, and toys according to the sex of the child, as well as the activities when they get a little older. Sophie commented that gender identity development is “ingrained very young” with “pink toys sets and pink Barbies” for girls and that “boys can’t play with Barbies.” Sunny added, “I don’t think it’s intentional. Even if it is or not, but it’s everybody that’s around. You can’t escape it.” Sarah explained, “I think adult treat babies differently in the toys they give them, in the way they hold them and cuddle them or [if] they let them cry.” Sophie also added, “From a very young age even if it’s not explicitly told, you need to ‘act like a girl’, you need to do this” because you are a girl.

**Table 4.4**  
Gender Stereotypes

<i>Girls</i>	<i>Boys</i>
Pink, purple	Blue, red
Dresses, ribbons	Strong personalities
Dolls	Sports
Not athletic	Leaders
Submissive	Dominant

The table above is a combined list of words and phrases noted by the women throughout the study in reference to common gender stereotypes for boys and girls today. Similar gender stereotypes have been indicated in research for multiple decades (Condry & Condry, 1976; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eliot, 2009; Hoffman & Hurst, 1990; Sax 2005), which supports the argument that not a great deal of progress *has* been made in this area.

“**Act like a girl.**” All participants in this study were told to “act like a girl” at various points throughout their lives. Parents, peers, and teachers made this statement in a

disapproving manner, typically. As noted previously, all participants had been called a “tomboy” many times during development, most remembering this as being one of the first times they received feedback for behaving “atypically” for a girl. All recalled being called a “tomboy” in context to them participating in a sport or outside activities.

When the participants were asked if they had ever been told to “act like a girl”, their responses were illuminating. Sam responded:

Yes. Probably more act like a girl than don't act like a boy, thankfully. When I was little, I was a daddy's girl and I wanted to be with him all the time. He taught me how to read and he's super outdoorsy. I would love to go hunting with him and I remember one day we stopped all of the sudden. He stopped taking me to do things together. My sister is the typical stereotypical white girl: tall, absolutely gorgeous, hair halfway down her back, dating a frat guy. She was on the homecoming court as a freshman in high school. My mom said, ‘See why couldn't you be a girl and make homecoming court and do all this stuff?’ [She] said, ‘I thought when I made your dad stop taking you out to do things that would change things.’

Sarah said, “When I was young, I wanted to wear basketball clothes and they didn't have any for girls. My peers and the teachers were always like, ‘Why are you dressing like that? That's not how you're *supposed* to dress.’” She continued, “There is a stereotype around ‘act like a girl’: fix your hair every day, wear make-up every day, you can't get a job that's hands on. You have to get a job where you sit and look pretty. But, I don't feel that way.”

When Sue was posed the question, she responded, “Yes, basically all my life, I feel like. I definitely was a tomboy in elementary based on the amount of sports I did and I hung out with all guys. I was definitely told to be a girl, go to cotillion.” I asked Sue to explain cotillion and she said, “It’s like manners school. It has dancing, table setting, manners, how to be at a formal dinner. Very debutantish, very southern too.” Sophie commented that ‘act like a girl’ means to be “calmer, more polite, prim and proper.” She also recalled her mother telling her to ‘not act like a boy’ and her Girl Scout leaders told the girls to ‘act like a lady’ if they were ever “acting out” because ladies should be “prim and proper.” Sam concluded, “My parents have always encouraged me to be more girly.”

**Table 4.5**  
*“Act like a girl”*

<i>Appearance</i>	<i>Behavior</i>
Be beautiful	Be polite
Pretty face	Manners
Wear make-up daily	Be calm
Have long hair	Sit and look pretty
Fix hair daily	Don’t act out
Wear appropriate clothes	Don’t be aggressive
Dress up	Heterosexual

The table above displays all of the terms and phrases used by the women throughout the study to describe expectations of women and girls in contemporary society.

All of the women noted parents, community members, peers and teachers as forming children’s gender identity development. Sarah stated that gender identity development has “got some to do with T.V., but the family and community set up what norms are in our

families and communities.” This echoed all of the participants’ perspectives on gender identity development as all noted media as a *huge* factor.

**Media.** All participants revealed that they perceived media as having an influence on gender identity development. As Sue explained, “As young as they can turn on the T.V. That’s where you start priming kids to be stereotypically girl. I can remember [watching] cartoons like Johnny Bravo and He-Man, the opposite of women’s stereotypes.” Sophie stated that gender identity development is “Ingrained in them from a very young. [On the] T.V. there are pink toy sets and pink Barbie’s.” She also noted that advertisements implicitly tell children that boys can’t play with stereotypical toys for girls, like Barbie’s. Sophie concluded, “If it’s not explicitly told, ‘you must do this’, media and ads. are everywhere.” Sam added, “Media is huge. There’s a commercial that talks about encouraging girls to pursue more artsy stuff instead of science and math programs and I think that is a mistake that teachers cannot afford to make.” Sunny concluded, “I think T.V. and books prime children to lean one way or the other, but they are influenced by the real people they see interacting.” The “real” people those children see interacting besides their families and community members are individuals in their school setting, teachers and peers.

### **School Messages**

**Teachers.** All of the women agreed that schools and teachers played a major role in their gender identity development. As noted previously, Sarah experienced teachers questioning why she was wearing “boy clothes” during a period in elementary school when she was very interested in basketball and enjoyed wearing the clothing. Sarah explained that she chose to wear it because she was interested in basketball, she liked the way it looked, and

it was also very comfortable. Sophie examined the influence teachers have on gender identity development when she recalled teachers saying things like, “Girls, why don’t you go play with dolls, boys go play with Legos.”

***Role of teachers.*** As reported, the women perceived the role of teachers as highly influential in a child’s gender identity development. Sunny explained, “I think everything cause they’re viewed as a role model and they’re who the kids are with almost the most. They play the majority of the role of either saying yes or saying no to it, assigning those roles.” Sam agreed, “Kids look up to teachers absolutely, and anything a teacher says is okay or not okay influences a child.”

Sarah commented, “Schools play a huge part. I know teachers that line up their kids by boys and girls. This is happening in my school right now and it’s perpetuating a stereotype. If you’re a boy, you have to do this, etc.” She continued, “We should work as educators to revert that and make it okay to choose what you want to be.” Sophie agreed with Sarah’s perspectives on the roles of teachers regarding gender identity development. She stated that teachers, “need to express acceptance, no matter what someone chooses to play with or wear” and “children should be deemed gender neutral till older.” When explaining the role she felt teachers should play in a child’s gender identity development she said, “Teachers need to encourage all students to do all things and focus more on them as a person.”

Sue felt that teachers play less of a role in elementary school, as young students are “more with family” during this time. But, she noted:

Teachers are key during middle and high school when people are really wrestling with their identity. When I was figuring out my own life in high school, I relied on teachers to be my rock. Even if I was having a hard time with my family, I feel like my teachers were the very next person in my community that I would rely on. They have a unique role. They see you everyday, strong influence.

Sam perceived teachers as having “a large role” in gender identity development, but stated that she didn’t believe they were the only strong influence. She stated, “I think peers definitely have some influence, and a huge home influence.”

**Peers.** Consistent with the research, peers were perceived to have a strong impact on gender identity development. When speaking about her experiences and for children in general, Sarah claimed that gender identity was developed “a lot through their experiences in school because that’s when they’re really around a lot more boys and girls.” Sophie’s high school experience drastically changed her perspective regarding gender identity development as her best friend identified as a gay male. She expressed that this was a “huge transition” and it “opened her eyes” because she started learning about “how people saw you and tried to put you in a box.” However, along with all of the women in this study, gender identity development wasn’t explicitly discussed until college.

**College experiences.** All of the women stated that they had never participated in explicit discussions focused on gender identity development prior to college. Additionally, all perceived gender and biological sex as synonymous until college. College was also the

first time that many of the participants had the opportunity to meet and/or get to know individuals whom identified as members of the LGBTQ communities.

Sophie stated that she “didn’t learn it explicitly” growing up and that she felt she was allowed to develop her gender by “being allowed to do what they wanted; both sports and dance and dress how they wanted”, in reference to her and her sisters growing up. She believed that she did not learn about the “idea of different gender roles [until] high school” where she met her best friend who identified as a gay male, which then led to college where it was discussed more explicitly in a few of her classes.

Sunny explained her experiences with regards to gender identity development, “In college, I explicitly remember learning about it and understanding it more. Not fully.” When asked where she had these explicit conversations regarding gender identity development, she replied, “A little bit in Dr. B’s class and I took a lot of literature classes, it progressed in those and finally I took a Women’s and Gender and that is where we explicitly talked about it.” Sue reiterated this experience with her response, “College. That sounds very naïve, but probably college. I took a lot of psychology classes before my Ed. Psych., where they touched on forming [your] own identity and all the phases you go through. Definitely college.” Sam stated, “Probably not until I came to college. I don’t think I understood the largeness or the concept really until probably last year. I think it started in Dr. B’s [seminar] class. It started there and continued into Social Studies methods...” She added, “the [elementary teacher preparation] program has done a good job of teaching us about gender stereotyping in schools.” Sarah reflected on her experiences with gender identity

development, “My freshman year in college, I took a sociology class and we talked about it. But, in-depth in Dr. B’s seminar.” Sarah added to her response:

Dr. B’s seminar really changed my viewpoints on a lot of things because I was raised in a strict Christian home and was taught that everything else was wrong. So before Dr. B’s class I would have never thought it was okay that...well not that it was okay but that like your gender, you don’t really choose your gender, that like your...you can’t help. I used to think that it was a choice, like you could choose who you wanted to like or what type of people you’re attracted to but then, through Dr. B’s class, I learned it was more innate and that it was okay to be that way too.

Sarah also shared that her roommate was a lesbian and that she learned a great deal from her. However, for the first time in her life, she was exposed to the ways in which peers treating her roommate because of her sexuality with stereotyping, negative attitudes, and rude behaviors.

Sam also learned a great deal about gender identity development from her interactions with a close friend who identified as a lesbian. When discussing how she learned about gender identity development, she noted:

As I became friends...I have a really good friend that’s gay and she is...I’m confused because I’m trying to figure out their roles in a relationship and how that fits into my world. In reality it doesn’t, so I’ve had to learn how to kind of change my view and

my way of thinking in order to understand what's going on with them. It's very recent.

## **Summary**

The interpretation of the data analysis regarding the preservice elementary teacher perspectives of gender identity development yielded several salient findings. The majority of the women recalled no explicit experiences discussing gender identity development prior to college and the majority of their introductions and exposures prior to college were implicit.

**Early exposures.** Almost all of their early exposures with gender identity development were experiences concerning their appearance and behaviors in which they were taught to follow gender normative behaviors and expressions. The individuals and groups understood to have the most influence on the development of the participants' gender identity was parents/families, media, teachers, and peers. The women perceived parents/families and media to be the most influential in the early years of development prior to elementary school.

Teachers, peers, and parents were most influential in elementary school with teachers and peers having a profound influence on gender identity development during middle and high school. All of the women perceived teachers as having a *huge* role in gender identity development of children as they make critical decisions including creating their classroom environment, selecting curricula, leading classroom conversations, and modeling (or not modeling) respect and tolerance for all children and their families. All preservice elementary teachers also noted their belief in wanting to create an accepting environment for all children in their classrooms and setting a tone that allows children to express themselves freely with

regards to gender. A few noted some discomfort with teaching gender identity development in their elementary classrooms, but understood that it was the right thing to do as a teacher and leader. The discomfort with gender identity development that one teacher expressed was due to her feelings of lacking pedagogical strategies to implement in her classroom.

**College.** As with their perspectives on feminism, college was a true era of enlightenment for all of the women with regards to their beliefs and understandings of gender identity development. They all only noted two courses in their teacher preparation programs that included discussions regarding gender identity development (both led by the same professor). These small exposures appeared to involve deep, critical discussions regarding the topic that were incredibly influential in forming the current perspectives of these five women. Other courses where the women were exposed to concepts of gender identity development were Sociology, Educational Psychology, and Women's and Gender Studies, all of which were elective. However, the two main factors that had the most influence on the dramatic change in all of the women's perspectives of feminism, including gender identity development and gender inequity were their exposures to related concepts, and opportunities to meet members of the LGBTQ communities.

**Chapter conclusions: Shifting worldviews.** The findings of this study indicate that critical exposures during college classes, including discussions and coursework, or by meeting members of the LGBTQ communities were highly influential in the women's current perspectives about feminism, sexism, and gender identity at the time to this study.

Although the college coursework exposures may have appeared infrequent, they did have a profound impact on the perspectives of the women as all noted the classes and specific

lessons in which they learned about feminism issues, including sexism and gender identity development. Not only had their perspectives shifted on these topics, but the influence was so great that some decided to teach lessons incorporating these topics while student teaching. For example, Sam taught a few lessons that focused on income inequality in her classroom, which I highly doubt she would have taught without the exposures these issues in her college classrooms. Sunny taught an entire unit on Sybil Ludington, sexism, and gender inequity in her classroom as well. During this unit they discussed sexism and gender inequity in history textbooks and curriculum as everyone had at least heard of Paul Revere, but none had ever heard of Sybil, a 16 year old girl, whose midnight ride was double the distance and completed. She noted the students' excitement surrounding the lessons and unit project adding that some "students who rarely did well in *any* subject got amazing grades" because they were so enthusiastic about the project.

The other factor that I think influenced a shift in the women's worldviews regarding feminism, sexism, and gender identity development was their opportunity to meet and befriend members of the LGBTQ communities. Sophie, having been raised in fairly homogeneous parochial schools, had never met an individual who identified as gay until high school. She said that "having a best friend who was gay really opened my eyes" to a lot of homophobia and prejudices. I believe that this close relationship was very influential in her shifting perspectives about gender inequality issues. Sam, having been raised in a conservative, religious, rural area stated that she had "never met any gay people," although I would argue that she had never met any individuals who self-identified as members of the LGBTQ communities. Yet, one of Sam's closest friends in college self-identified as a

lesbian. It was clear that Sam struggled with the messages she had been raised in the church to believe regarding a woman's place and homosexuality, which conflicted with the messages in college that she received from her close friend and during the lessons that discussed feminism, including sexism, gender, and sexuality. The final chapter includes conclusions, discussion points, and suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study explored preservice elementary teacher perspectives about feminism, including sexism and gender identity development. Six collections of data were gathered from three sources. Two analysis techniques were employed to determine the women's perspectives and to gain an in-depth understanding of how they came to these perspectives, including what messages they received in school.

The following chapter is organized by an overview of these findings. Discussion points will be addressed, followed by implications for policy and practice. Limitations will be presented and my own personal transformation as a result of this research study. Finally, future directions based on findings will be presented.

Findings from this study indicated that for the majority of their lives, four of the five women were taught that feminism was a negative concept. They perceived it as “promot[ing] women over men,” and believed that gender equality was a radical idea, which directly disavowed some of their conservative religious upbringings and beliefs. All of the women experiences sexism in multiple forms and all experienced gender role stereotyping throughout their lives. The women came to their understandings through implicit and explicit communications regarding ideas and behaviors deemed appropriate for girls and women. Parents, media, peers, teachers, and their communities all were agents in the development of their beliefs and understandings of feminism, sexism, and gender identity development. In college, it appeared that professors, peers, and media were strongly influential regarding beliefs and understandings of the concepts. Below is a diagram displaying the intersection of the women's perspectives about feminism.

## **Conclusions: Feminism**

### **Are They Feminists?**

When the women were asked if they self-identified as a feminist their responses were mixed. Out of the 5 women who volunteered to participate in this study, only Sarah firmly responded, “Yes. I do.” She continued, “It’s important for women to be treated equally as men. I feel it’s okay for other people to know that. I want other people to adopt that mindset too.” Although Sunny affirmed that she self-identifies as a feminist, her response was less definitive. Sunny answered, “It doesn’t come up and it usually scares people...but yeah, I would.”

Sam’s response to the question was, “Yes and no.” She explained her thoughts, “I do because I don’t want to see the stereotypes and the issues continue...but, I’ve never been one to go out of my way and do something radical about something.” She ended her thought by stating, “ If it’s out there and someone wants to talk about it, I’m okay to talk about it. But, I don’t see myself going out and toing a riot or anything like that.”

Although Sophie said “No” when asked if she self-identified as a feminist, like Sam, her responses throughout the study regarding her beliefs and ideologies aligned with feminist perspectives. Sophie explained:

If someone were to ask me, I would say I do believe in equality for both genders, for all genders. But, I don’t think I would ever put that into a conversation. I think people can tell it’s part of me, but I don’t, I don’t feel like I identify as a feminist, but I don’t think I would ever be publically like ‘I’m a feminist.’

Sue also gave a mixed response to this question, “I don’t think I put enough thought, enough research into the whole feminism movement to fully identify as a feminist. I feel like I know the basic facts in terms of we want equality, I feel like there is probably some more information than that. I don’t know.” Then, Sue continued with a more dismissive answer to the question and concluded, “I don’t think anyone has ever asked me if I’m a feminist or not. If someone asked me on the street, ‘Are you a feminist?’ I’ll be like, ‘People should be people.’”

The women who participated in this study formed their understandings of feminism through their experiences and reflections regarding sexism, gender identity development, and the messages they received in school. Although these women all perceived feminism to mean equality of all, including gender equality, and they all believed in this ideology, the majority did not self-identify as a feminist at the time of this study. This finding may appear counterintuitive. However, these women occupied various complex spaces with regards to their alignment with feminist dispositions and their self-identification as feminists.

As a feminist researcher, the goal of this research was not to shame these women for occupying different spaces of knowledge or understandings of feminism. The purpose was to understand the perspectives about feminism of these female preservice elementary teachers. The next section elaborates on my interpretation of the spaces that these women occupy.

### **Explanation of Spaces**

Every individual associates with a variety of identities. For example, one individual may identify as an introvert, a woman, a White person, and an educator, among many other identities. In my interpretation, the women fell into two overarching spaces with regards to

feminist perspectives: egalitarian and feminists. None of the women occupied a nonfeminist space. Although the spaces have the labels as an overarching identifier, it must be noted that the perspectives, beliefs, and understandings of each woman are nuanced and individual within each category, which is why I chose to call them spaces.

**Table 5.1**  
Spaces of Feminist Identity

	Nonfeminist	Liberal Egalitarian	Feminist
Sam		X	
Sarah			X
Sophie		X	
Sue		X	
Sunny			X

**Egalitarian spaces: Sam, Sophie, and Sue.** Abundant research suggests that many women align with feminist principles, but reject the label of *feminist*. This is evident in commonly heard statements like, “I’m not a feminist, but...,” and in the mixed responses of the women like, “Yes and no.” Research contests that this is a common phenomenon with women, outright rejecting any label or feminist identity, while simultaneously aligning with particular feminist principles (Aronson, 2003; Burn, Abound, & Moyles, 2000; Buschman & Lenart, 1996; Cowan, Mestin, & Masek, 1992; Liss, O’ Connor, Morosky, & Crawford, 2001; Misciagno, 1997; Myaskovsky & Wittig, 1997). This rejection of feminist identity continues even as support for the objectives of women’s movement have increased (Hall &

Rodriquez, 2003; Huddy, Neely, & Lafay, 2000; Twenge, 1997). Individual women do acknowledge that gender-based discrimination is an issue (Sigel, 1996), as all of the women in this study have agreed. Misciagno (1997) explained that traditional models of feminist consciousness ignore de facto feminists, women who hold feminist perspectives but do not identify as feminists. More recently, Zucker (2004) suggests, “a new way of theorizing about and measuring feminist identity that accounts not only for beliefs and behaviors of self-identified feminists and nonfeminists, but or a third group of women who endorse feminist beliefs but reject the feminist label” (p. 424). She calls these women *liberal egalitarians* and this space is where 3 of the 5 women in this study cluster.

Sam, Sophie, and Sue all noted strong beliefs in gender equality, including equal pay for women and the ability of women to hold the same professional positions as men. They directly disavowed gender stereotyping, including beliefs that women are strong, capable leaders and that women have more value in society than solely being decorative objects and producers of children. Additionally, the women directly disavowed specific normative gender roles and felt they had a critical role as teachers to dispel gender biases and stereotyping in their future classrooms. They all spoke of their aversion to the sexual objectification of women and their deep concerns for the pervasive sexual harassment and rape cultures in our society.

With this said, when all 3 women were asked if they self-identify as feminists, they preemptively explained their strong beliefs and commitments to equality, but quickly continued by almost reverting back to their dispositions prior to college when most associated feminism with “riots” and women behaving “radically” in public. Sue additionally

stated that she hasn't "done enough research on the whole feminist movement to fully self-identify as a feminist." In my interpretation, some of these women were continuing to struggle with agency during the time of this study.

**Feminist spaces: Sunny and Sarah.** Two of the women in this study identified as feminists, although they occupied different nuanced spaces within this category. In my analysis, Sunny was coded as a soft identification and Sarah was coded as a hard feminist identification. Yet, as a social constructivist and critical feminist my interpretation of these women's perspectives of feminism is much more complex.

For example, Sunny did not immediately identify as a feminist when asked. She first explained her understanding that "usually scares people" and was almost trying to convince herself that she shouldn't be concerned with how others perceive her because she identifies as a feminist. She ended the thought with "I am who I am. I'm sorry. But, yeah. I would." This was the reasoning for my initial soft feminist identification code.

Yet, throughout the semester, Sunny demonstrated strong a feminist identity by creating a 3-week social studies unit on Sybil Ludington, Paul Revere, and sexism. Sybil was an individual that Sunny was introduced to during the 'Herstory' lesson in her *Social Studies and the Young Learner* methods course in the fall semester. Sunny reported her enthusiasm for teaching this unit and reported her students being inspired by the topic. So, although Sunny may not have identified as a feminist in a strong manner verbally, she displayed her feminist identity by actions in designing a unit for her elementary students that critically analyzed how women's stories and contributions have been silenced throughout history.

Contrastingly, Sarah immediately identified as a feminist, and stated that if she was “open to talk about these issues in public, then maybe [she] could persuade others to do so.” However, Sarah expressed concerned feelings throughout the study with regards to negative responses she may receive from administration, parents, and co-workers for teaching about feminism and gender equality. It was unclear if any of these concerns were attributed with being a student teacher and future beginning teacher.

However, Sarah’s narrative was remarkable overall as her perspectives of feminism drastically changed during college due to critical exposures in college.

**Table 5.2**  
Sarah’s Changes in Perspectives

<i>Before College</i>	<i>After College</i>
Value: Children then career	Value: Career then children
Biological sex and gender are the same	Gender is a spectrum
Sexuality orientation is a choice	Sexual orientation is not a choice
Romantic relationships/Marriage: Only men and women	Marriage equality
Teaching to transmit	Teaching to transform

### **Interpretation of Women’s Spaces**

Various identities exist within each person. Decades ago, Erikson (1959) theorized that the concept of identity has multiple components, “a conscious *sense of individual identity*” and the upholding of “internal *solidarity* with a group’s ideals and identity” (p.

109). In more recent years, social psychologists have inscribed personal and social identities as distinct types (Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi, & Ethier, 1995, Thoits & Virshup, 1997). Individuals are likely to engage in behaviors related to their prominent social identities (Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi, & Cotting, 1999; Styker & Serpe, 1994), which may include gender, race, ethnicity, political affiliation, and occupation.

As Deaux et al. (1999) explain, “when a person defines him or herself in term of a category or group of somehow similar people, the person takes on shared meanings of that categorical label’s implication, as well as assuming elements of a common agenda for action” (p. 91). Thus, when individuals disavow or associate with certain social identities, consequences for their behaviors ensue. Associates of ostracized groups experience physical and psychological marginality (Abrams et al., 2007). Disavowal of specific social identities may occur to avoid people’s negative reactions to them (Smart & Wegner, 1999). Subsequently, repudiation of invisible social identities can be particularly successful.

**Liberal egalitarian space factors.** Many factors exist as possible explanations for 3 of the 5 women occupying the liberal egalitarian spaces. One factor may be that the for majority of the women’s lives, negative associations with feminism were instilled both implicitly and explicitly by parents, media, peers, teachers, and community members. During the majority of their growth and development (ages 0-18 years), hostile sexism including sexual harassment and narrow gender identity constructs pervaded their lives. Subsequently, all of the women believed that society only valued women for their appearance and their ability to produce and rear children.

***Mass media stereotypes.*** As discussed in Chapter 4, school media proved to perpetuate some stereotypes due to the lack of women and women's contributions discussed in schools. However, another major factor regarding media's influence on the women's liberal egalitarian spaces is social, broadcast, and advertising media.

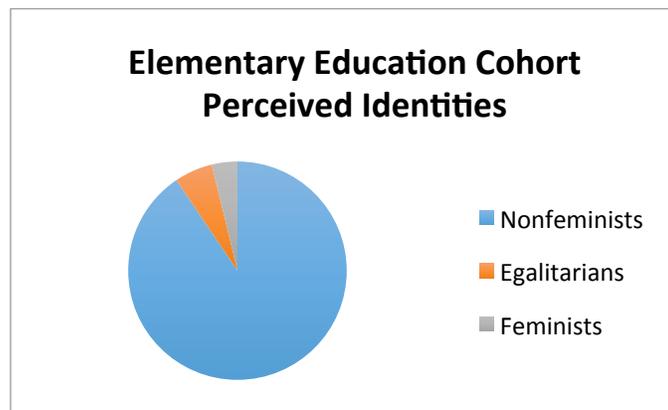
Galdi, Maass, and Cadinu (2014) suggest, "The dissemination of restrictive versus permissive social norms concerning sexual harassment depends, to a large degree, on available channels of communication" (p. 389). These researchers explain that television, in particular, which is vastly appealing and engaging, excessively depicts stereotypical messages both verbally and nonverbally, as well as directly and indirectly. Research also suggests that exposure to objectifying media, including sexual and sexism media content, is associated with greater acceptance of stereotypical attitudes in both men and women. Ward (2002) found that regardless of exposure levels, young women exposed to images depicting women as sexual objects and men as sex driven in prime time TV images show stronger endorsement of stereotypical attitudes about sex than women exposed to nonsexual content (Ward, 2002; Ward, Hansbrough, & Walker, 2005).

As discussed in Chapter 4, the majority of the women in this study mentioned individual in popular media like Beyoncé and Emma Watson when initially discussing what first came to mind when they were asked about feminism. It would be remiss not to conclude the incredible impact the media and media stereotypes have on individuals raised in a technological age where media exposure have never been more ubiquitous.

***Parent, peer, and professorial influences.*** Parents, peers, and professors heavily influenced the women's perspectives on feminism. A great deal of their understandings of

feminism, almost all negative, were formed by parents and peers prior to college. It is important to note that peers were incredibly influential throughout the women's lives, which influenced their perspectives.

All of the women noted that they believed the majority of their senior elementary education cohort were not feminists and did not share feminist perspectives. They all expressed some feelings of discomfort when discussing these topics in Dr. B's classes because they were concerned about what their peers thought of them, fearing judgment for their beliefs. During the focus group, the women discussed their beliefs that they were the only individuals in their cohort with feminist perspectives or even having the interest and courage to discuss these issues.



*Figure 5.3 Elementary Education Cohort Perceived Identities*

It is important to clarify that the women's perceptions of their peer's nonfeminist identity may not be accurate, as I did not directly question their peers during this study. However, I believe that it is worth noting the participant's *perceived* understandings, which led to some expressed feelings of isolation and even stigmatization as members of their

elementary education cohort who were interested in feminist issues and willing to examine these issue by volunteering to participate in this study.

Critical exposures and discussions of these topics were influential to the women who participated in this study. These exposures leads to the strong influence of the professor who chose to discuss women's issues and gender inequality in class. The few critical exposures established by one particular professor appeared to have a major impact on women's perspectives of feminism, sexism, and gender identity development. The findings of this study support that these critical exposures had such a profound impact on the women that they shifted out of the nonfeminist space that the perceived remainder of their cohort occupied.

***Millenials.*** According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (2015) millennials, individuals born after 1980, represent the most racially diverse generation in America. They are also more detached than previous generations to institutions of religion, politics and marriage, but more digitally networked. Although the majority of millennials align with progressive views, most so not affiliate with political parties. In short, millennials reject labels. Extensive research exists on various generations of individuals, including behaviors and beliefs they may share due to the era in which they were born. I believed it was important to include the possibility that generational influences may be a factor in the women not wanting to fully identify or label themselves as a feminist even though they share feminist dispositions.

**Feminist space factors.** Although Sunny and Sarah occupy the feminist spaces, their backgrounds and experiences were very different. Sunny was raised and went to public

school in the northeast and she noted that the city she grew up in was progressive socially, culturally, and politically. While in elementary school in the north, women were discussed and celebrated in the school curriculum. Sunny was the participant who stated that she didn't really have experiences with hostility towards feminist perspectives or even realize that women weren't feminists until later in life after she had moved to the southeast. Sunny experienced the inclusion of women in her early schooling. Sunny also explained that she came from a more politically progressive home environment. Additionally, Sunny shared during the interview that she was a victim of rape, stating that this incident influenced her perspectives of feminism.

Sarah's occupation of the feminist space was unique in my interpretation. She was raised in a small southern town with a very religious and politically conservative upbringing. Sarah grew up and developed in an environment where conservative Christian values, including gender role stereotyping and homophobia, permeated all aspects of her life. In my interpretation, Sarah's metamorphosis in college was profound. Without her college experiences, it would be highly unlikely that Sarah would have had such a dramatic paradigmatic shift. The critical exposures that she had in college, including the few courses that discussed feminist perspectives and meeting members of the LGBTQ communities, shifted Sarah from a nonfeminist space prior to college to a feminist space at the end of college.

### **Summary of Perspectives**

At the time of this research study, the consensus of the participants was that feminism meant equality or the pursuit of equality. However, the participants' perspectives of feminism

have altered and changed throughout their lives. College had an incredibly profound impact on the women's perspectives and understandings of feminism, sexism, and gender identity development. For many of the women, exposures to these topics and the opportunity for increased consciousness altered their previous understandings in a dramatic ways. During the time of this study, it was clear that all of the women were processing their perspectives and understandings of the topics. This processing and development was important to critically analyze in this work.

Prior to college all but one of the participants had never discussed feminism, sexism, and gender identity development explicitly. They all were exposed to these concepts, but it was through implicit associations, experiences, and communications with parents, peers, media, teachers, and communities. Additionally, all of the women had negative experiences and associations with feminism, except for Sunny, who was raised in the northeast until middle school. And although Sunny had early positive exposures with feminism, she noted a drastic change in her experiences regarding feminism after moving to the south.

Finally, all of the women's experiences prior to college with feminism, sexism, and gender identity development heavily influenced their perspectives as they entered their teacher preparation programs and all had negative experiences associated with these concepts, including hostile sexism and gender role stereotyping. It is important to clearly note that for these five women the majority of their experiences, understandings, and beliefs on these topics had been formed prior to college. The revelation that feminism promoted empowerment, equality, and agency was a relatively new concept. Expectations regarding their appearance, mannerisms, dress, and behavior were ingrained from an early age and for a

long duration of their lives. However, it is equally important to express the strong impact that college experiences and courses (albeit few), which opened dialogue surrounding these topics, had on these women.

It was clear throughout this study that the women were wrestling with tensions they were facing with many conflicting positions between many of their conservative roots and their new progressive understandings of gender equity and identity development.

**Researcher interpretation: Preservice teacher feminist identification matters.** I want to begin by stating that I recognize that we all have multiple identities. I also want to clarify as a feminist researcher that my intent has never been to shame any of the women who participated in this study for identifying or not identifying as feminists. With this said, I want to be clear that I believe it is incredibly important for women to self-identify as feminists and as this study focuses on preservice elementary teachers, I believe it is deeply important for teachers to self-identify as feminists.

In general, “when a person defines him-or herself in terms of a category or group of somehow similar people, the person takes on shared meanings of that categorical label’s implication, as well as assuming elements of a common agenda for action” (Deaux et al., 1999, p. 91). I interpret our self-identifications to express confidence, possibly even pride in those particular identities. Identities, which are connected with understandings, ideologies, and beliefs, which in the case of preservice teachers, may be connected with their purposes for becoming teachers and possibly for decisions they will make in their future classrooms.

When women disavow a feminist identity or uncertainty is expressed (as with three of the women in this study), a more critical examination is necessary. It was clear that the three

women who did not identify as feminists all understood feminism to mean gender equality, which all firmly believed in with confidence. So, I interpret their lack of self-identification to mean that deeper, more internalized ideologies must exist to cause the hesitation or uncertainty with confidently stating, “I’m a feminist.” On a much more subconscious level, I believe that these women still perceive male affirmation to be incredibly important and in a patriarchal society, it is. They have grown up in a society where patriarchy is explicit and implicit, and although they may feel that gender equality should exist, they also understand as members of the subordinated group that it currently does not. It is common for members of stigmatized groups to experience psychological marginality (Frable, 1993), and choose to disavow their social identity to avoid the confrontations with other people’s reactions to those identities (Smart & Wegner, 1999).

I would argue that feminist self-identification and agency are issues because if an individual isn’t comfortable in simply stating that they are a feminist, how confident could they be in teaching about feminist issues? As educators, and more specifically social studies educators, examining issues of inequity and social justice should be of top priority in our democratic society. However, it is doubtful that these critical and challenging discussions would actually take place in a classroom where the teacher is not even willing to identify as a feminist out loud.

## **Discussion**

### **Expanding Access: Feminist Theorizing in Social Studies**

Feminists have, since the early 1970s, criticized a variety of academic disciplines for being gender blind (Kelly, 1988). The term ‘feminist methodology’ first appeared in

sociology, but I argue that salient points are applicable across disciplinary boundaries regarding these methods. One criticism of sociology is that it ignores feminist research in other areas. Educational researchers like Margaret Crocco and Nel Noddings, among others, have called for feminist theorizing and research in the area of social studies.

At the risk of over simplifying, feminist methodology draws on the practice of consciousness raising and stressing the importance of the women's experience. We live in a patriarchal society and given the permanence of sexist practice and policy in society and dominant narratives regarding women, systematic marginalization of women and other non-dominant groups is inevitable. Yet, teaching is an inherently political act, and teachers can employ critical pedagogies to analyze, critique, and affect change to the status quo (McLaren, 1995). Findings from this study indicated that relatively small critical exposures to feminist perspectives during one social studies and one multicultural education course had a profound impact on the women who participated. However, they all additionally noted the perception that their feminist perspectives were not shared by their cohort. Expanding access of feminist theory could benefit preservice teachers and their future students.

Feminist theorizing and methodologies specifically interrogate socially constructed *categories* used to propagate privilege and power of certain individuals and groups. As Crocco (2008) contests:

The ultimate goal of feminist theorizing is to provoke change in way of thinking about women, men and the human conditions, and thereby, to stimulate social change. Adopting new theoretical frameworks and discourses will provide social studies with

a powerful and provocative set of tools to help reconsider the meanings of gender and sexuality for citizenship education” (p. 187).

Education and the education system of our democratic society should not model an intricately designed machine functioning to maintain or perpetuate divisions in our nation. The literature suggests that feminist research fits hand and glove with the fundamental purposes of public education and even more acutely with social studies education. However, as this study indicates, preservice elementary teachers may have limited access to feminist theory and methods in their teacher preparation programs. Additionally, suggested by the findings is the profound importance of critical exposures to feminism.

This research accentuates the need to deconstruct the current paradigm of simply training teachers to teach. It emphasizes the need for a crucial shift, which fosters teachers towards a more critical viewpoint, believing their purposes for teaching to be more focused on goals of social justice, equity, democracy and citizenship. Social studies courses would be an excellent forum for such critical explorations. This study focused on feminism and gender inequality, however, I believe other complicated issues of an intersectional nature should be explored as well. This research had led me to a greater interest in intersectionality and intersectional research.

### **Expanding Understanding and Clarifying Roles**

Critical exposures are needed in education to create and cultivate new and challenging concepts that may change disposition alignments. One way to achieve this is by expanding the understandings of feminism in teacher preparation courses.

Without the few critical exposures in their elementary teacher preparation courses, it is highly unlikely that these women would have shifted feminist identity spaces. Increasing exposure and awareness of new concepts and perspectives is critical to education.

The goals of teacher education, more specifically, social studies education should continuously be questioned. What are the goals of social studies education? Barth and Shermis (1970) noted three positions: social studies as citizenship transmission, social studies as social science, and social science as reflective inquiry. Are teachers being prepared to transmit information or to transform thinking? Are they being prepared to regurgitate information or critically think about their purpose as public educators? Are we asking them to take their blinders off without explaining what they may see and what they may not see? As Sophie stated, “I don’t think I really knew what I was looking for,” when she discussed her understandings of sexism and gender role stereotyping before and after our critical exposures in class.

As Crocco explains, “Changing the silence associated with gender and sexuality in the social studies begin, at least in part, with changing the way social studies educators conceive of their domain, roles, and responsibilities” (p. 222). Teaching is a political and value laden. Expanding understanding through critical exposures can provide preservice teacher with the opportunity to critically examine the sociopolitical context of schooling and their positions educators. Additionally, it could assist teachers in their own employment of critical pedagogies to analyze, critique, and affect change to the status quo (McLaren, 1995). Teacher preparation should include an exploration and interrogation of the complexities and hegemony in our society.

## **Expanding Feminist Pedagogies**

Theorists in critical pedagogy (McLaren, 1989), multicultural social reconstructionism (Sleeter, 1991), and feminism (Weiler, 1988) reject the notion that classrooms are neutral sites for the production of knowledge (Titus, 2000). Despite the proliferation of research regarding issues of gender equity in education, much of the work has been focused on preservice teacher discussions surrounding differential treatment of females and males, aiming to eliminate sex inequity through gender-neutral practices.

Feminist pedagogical literature emphasizes how classrooms can offer knowledge, which empowers feminist perspectives (Maher & Thompson Tetreault, 1994; Ropers-Huilman, 1998), some work addresses students' resistance to espouse feminist knowledge (Lewix, 1990; Deay & Stizel, 1991; Orner, 1993; Briskin & Coulter, 1992). In essence, preservice students are resisting open dialogues of social justice and education that is intended to empower them. More work must be done in this area, as empowerment and agency are critical to all educators, but specifically female educators as members of a patriarchal society.

As noted in this study, teachers enter teacher preparation programs with their own experiences, beliefs, and ideologies. If a student does not identify as a teacher for social justice, or have not yet developed a critical consciousness about feminist issues, the sociopolitical positioning of schools, and institutionalized privilege and oppression of certain individuals and groups, feminist pedagogies have the potential to increase awareness and engagement. Thus, preservice teachers should be afforded the opportunity to explore these issues in their teacher preparation programs as well as in-service teachers through professional development. They should have the opportunity to design their curriculums and

culture to integrate their feminist perspectives into their classrooms. We need to increase empowerment and agency of preservice teachers, allowing them to understand they have the power to reimagine their roles as educators and the power to do this in the classroom.

### **Limitations of Study**

There were limitations of this study. First, because preservice elementary teachers who participated in this study were recruited via email during the final semester of their senior year, the five women who participated in this study had some level of feminist perspectives, understandings, or interests. Only four initially volunteered and the fifth was referred, who happened to identify as a lesbian. These women expressed throughout the study that they perceived themselves as the *only* members of their cohort willing to openly discuss these issues.

The espousal of feminist beliefs and teaching practices depend on beliefs, which are fluid and context-dependent. Pressures of beginning teacher in the southeast, coined the “Bible belt” may challenge their confidence with discussing these issues. Extensive research reveals passivity as a choice when discussing subjects deemed controversial (Bickmore, 1999; Colleary, 1999; Pascoe, 2007; Wegwert, 2011).

Findings from this study are in a specific contextual setting. When viewed from a developmental perspective, teachers belief systems are a function of the society in which they work and live. At this point in their lives, they were recently exposed to critical discussions involving feminism, sexism, and gender identity development in their college courses and to peers that identified as members of the LGBTQ communities. Yet, after college, they may choose to go back to their hometowns, which for many were climates of religious

conservative beliefs. These locations where feminism was perceived as a negative ideal, possibly causing them to internalize dominate discourses that are functions of cultural, institutional, and pervasive sexism and inequality. Thus, reverting back to their previous perspectives prior to college, which ultimately will affect decisions made in the classroom, their teaching, and student learning.

### **Personal Transformation**

As a social constructivist and critical feminist this qualitative research project was intended to add to the dearth of educational research examining female preservice elementary teacher perspectives about feminism, including sexism and gender identity development. In conducting this research, I also wanted to create space by not only capturing the women's perspectives about feminism, but also understanding how they came to these beliefs by asking them to explore and reflect on how they came to these understandings. Additionally, I wanted to provide the women with an opportunity to discuss their experiences openly and I hoped that some consciousness would be raised as a result.

The data analysis process spiraled and as I engrossed myself in the data, I too was continuously reflecting on: 1) my own experiences as a girl raised in the northeast; 2) my ten years as an elementary teacher; 3) how individuals all have unique experiences and identities; 4) the fundamental sociopolitical power of teaching.

As a young girl in the northeast, I was involved in sports and dance from an early age. My parents supported my activities, however my mother did enroll me in dance lessons without asking if I was interested and strongly pushed me to be a cheerleader in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. She said I could choose something else if I didn't like it when the season was over, which I

did. I detested the idea of cheerleading for many reasons, I felt like it was demeaning in a way and that we were only there as decoration, cheering on the true individuals of importance, the boys. I wanted to play the sport, not cheer for the people playing. But it was something my mother wanted, undoubtedly typing back to her own notions of women and sports from her own childhood. The only activity she was involved in during high school was cheerleading because at the time, that was the only sport available for women. I was determined to be successful in sports and at the time, I think it was because it increased my self-confidence and was a great way to work collaboratively on a team with my friends. But, as I was reflecting during this research, I think maybe I didn't realize it at the time, but I was also trying to prove to my mother that women could play sports and that didn't mean they weren't "acting like a girl."

I also reflected on when I decided to run for junior and senior class officers. Many teachers and peers recommended that I run for secretary or vice-president at the most, but I found that insulting and at the time. I didn't realize that my feminist perspectives were coming through. I ran for class president both years and was elected. When I reflect now, I realize that it took a lot of courage to do those things and in many ways I feel that my current work takes a strong level of courage. Feminism is still deemed as controversial to many individuals as groups, many of these individuals choose to enroll in elementary education programs. But, as with sports and running for class office, this is something that I feel passionately about and it's an area where I believe dominant perspectives must change.

I reflected a great deal on my teaching experiences as a White, middle-class female in an urban public school. I think the doctoral progress aided in my deeper level of

consciousness with regards to the power my status granted me in multiple contexts in education and beyond. I also reflected on my own teacher preparation program and I couldn't remember social justice issues ever being discussed. I'm certain that the topics of this research were *not* discussed. If I would have been a participant in this study when I was in my teacher preparation program, I'm not certain that I would have identified as a feminist at all. Much like the women in this study, no one had ever asked me if I was a feminist and it was not discussed in any of my courses. In this way, I was pleasantly surprised by the findings in this study. It made me feel hopeful for these women as future educators and for their students.

All individuals have their own backgrounds, experiences, and identities. This became even more evident during this study. Superficially, the women were all similar: white, middle to upper-class seniors in an elementary teacher preparation program. Yet, their experiences and perspectives were all formed individually. I was not entirely sure what I would find when I began this study, but reflecting on their personal experiences and understandings reminded me of my own experiences when similar and different. Our beliefs, as part of larger systems, are fluid and often seem to contradict or compete. These women reminded me that critical consciousness is not automatic by simply being a member of marginalized group. Sexism and gender role stereotyping are so deeply ingrained in our society that it can be challenging to become fully conscious of these issues, even when you have been experiencing them your entire life. During this study, I believe we were all forced to examine this knowledge and to be uncomfortable with the realization that we may have been part of it at points in our lives. Unfortunately, I think I may have been a cog in the wheel at one time or another.

Finally, reading the women's final written reflections created an incredible amount of warmth and hope. All of the women noted that this was the first time that they had ever met with a group of women to discuss women's issues and they believed it to be valuable. Many noted that discussing these issues individually and in a group raised consciousness of their own understandings as a result of exploring their experiences and learning about other women's experiences and perspectives. During the course of this study the women all noted the critical role teachers play in the development of children, stating that they would be advocates of gender equality, while consciously modeling a resistance to the gender role stereotyping of children. The possibility of hope and interruption in the dominant narratives strengthened my commitment to feminist work as both a researcher and a teacher educator.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

#### **Future Direction**

As noted in the literature review, preservice teachers enter teacher preparation programs with specific beliefs, understandings, and ideologies (Kennedy, 2006; Slekar, 1998; van Hover & Yeager, 2007; Waring, 2010). Teaching practice is influenced by teacher beliefs and perceptions regarding the purpose of social studies education and of teaching social studies (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Hawley, 2012, Hochstrasser-Fickel, 2000; Pryor, 2006; van Hover & Yeager, 2007).

Research reveals that beliefs and understandings of teachers profoundly influence their decision-making framework, heavily impacting student achievement and educational equity in the classroom (Hochstrasser-Fickel, 2000). Subsequently, as the scholarship specifies that the perspectives' and beliefs' of teachers are cardinal to their decisions-making

process, further research indicates that a critical factor in the construction of their perspectives is the teachers' backgrounds (Adler, 1984; Goodman and Adler, 1985; Smith, 2000, van Hover and Yeager, 2007).

Exploring and developing further meaningful understandings of the perspectives preservice elementary teachers have about feminism, would benefit teacher educators and more specifically social studies teacher educators by continuing to examine this key aspect of teacher development. Possessing a deeper understanding of preservice teachers' beliefs and understandings of feminism is vital to teacher education programs that are working to form reflective teachers who are conscious and critical of social justice issues. The abundant literature supports rich research efforts to construct teacher education and more specifically, social studies teacher education programs that confront the preexisting beliefs of students' and beget educators whom are oriented in teaching for reform (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Biesta, 2009, 2010; Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2010; McDonald, 2007; Osguthorpe & Sanger, 2013).

Stakeholders in education could position teacher preparation classrooms as sites where issues of social justice are consistently discussed. Coursework and activities that encouragement more elementary teachers toward orientations of reformative teaching perspectives and practices could also be expanded. Teacher preparation programs could increase preservice teacher critical exposures engaging elementary teachers to position their work as critical educators and creating opportunities for students to critique power and privilege structures in our society and across cultures globally.

Teaching preservice teachers from social constructivist and critical feminist theoretical frameworks will focus teaching and learning on multiple perspectives by honoring individual experiences and perspectives, and discussing epistemological concepts of knowledge as socially situated.

Future research should include intersectionality in teacher preparation classrooms and with preservice teachers. Race was not discussed or raised during any part of this study. The disconsciousness and/or discomfort with discussions of race should be explored in future research. If race was addressed by any of the women, I would have incorporated these perspective into the study. I chose not to include intersections of race, as my goal was to focus this research on the participants' perspectives of feminism, sexism, and gender identity development. This work was also beyond the scope of the senior class cohort as only one woman was Black and she did not volunteer for the study. The remaining few women of color in the cohort also did not volunteer for this study. Future research should continue to examine feminism with women, but should additionally include intersections of race and class.

Finally, future research should include identification of and case study research with elementary preservice teachers and teacher preparation program educators who do position themselves as critical educators. This work could be used to construct an exemplary profile for these educators.

**Notes:**

1. The definition was officially adopted by National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) in 1992. See National Council for the Social Studies, *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (Washington, D.C.: NCSS, 1994): 3.
2. According to Gramsci, domination in the industrial West relies on the reproduction of cultural norms, the distribution of dominant belief systems and attitudes through consensus. It is a manipulation of consciousness and daily implementations. Gramsci refers to this as hegemony.

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## APPENDICES

## **APPENDIX A: Recruitment Email**

Dear Elementary Education Pre-service Teacher:

My name is Liz Saylor and I am a doctoral student at NCSU in the department of Curriculum and Instruction. You are being invited to participate in my dissertation research study. This project will explore your perspectives about feminism and how you came to these understandings. This study will additionally be exploring your perspectives on and experiences with sexism and gender identity development.

Please respond to this email if you are interested in participating in my doctoral research.

Thank you for your time and consideration of participation.

Sincerely,

Liz Saylor

## **APPENDIX B: Reflective Journal Prompt 1**

Pre-Interview Prompt: *My goal for our first interview is for you and I to have a comfortable and productive conversation. The purpose of this activity is to introduce what we might be talking about during the interview and to help you begin to think about your perspectives of feminism. I will be using this journal prompt to get a better idea of your initial thoughts and ideas when you first hear the term “feminism.”*

1. What feelings, thoughts, or reactions to you have when I say the word “feminism?”

## APPENDIX C: Interview 1 Protocol

### Background/demographics

1. Where did you grow up? Explain your school setting.
2. What led you to become an elementary school teacher?
3. Tell me about your experiences in elementary school as a female student.
  - a. In middle school?
  - b. In high school?

### Views about gender

4. What does gender mean to you?
5. What are gender role stereotypes?
6. When did you first learn about gender role identity?
7. Can you recall any experiences when you were stereotyped by your gender?
  - a. Have you ever been told “act like a girl” or “don’t act like a boy”? Please explain.
  - b. What does it mean to “act like a girl”
8. When do children learn gender roles?
9. How do children learn gender roles?

### Gender and Schooling

What part do teachers/schools play in gender role identity?

### Views on Sexism

10. What is sexism?
11. Have you ever experienced sexism? Can you recall some of these experiences?
12. How has being female affected your life?
  - a. Can you recall any positive experiences that may have occurred because of your sex?
  - b. Can you recall any negative experiences that may have occurred because of your sex?

### Educational experiences and gender/sexism

13. What women do you recall learning about in school?
  - a. In what context? (e.g. current event, social studies, history)
    - i. How did this make you feel?
14. What women have been influential in your life?
15. Do you have any female heroes?

### Views on Feminism

16. What comes to mind when I say feminism?
17. In what context did you first hear the term feminism? Explain your experience.
18. What does feminism mean to you? Why?
19. Do you self-identify as a feminist in public? Why or why not?
  - a. If so, how do you express being a feminist?
20. What value is placed on women in our society?
- 21.

## **APPENDIX D: Confidentiality Pledge for Focus Group Participants**

Elizabeth E. Saylor: Department of Elementary Education at North Carolina State University

As a participant in focus groups, other focus group participants will know your identity and the researcher cannot guarantee that others in these groups will respect the confidentiality of the group. I ask you to sign below to indicate that you will keep all comments made during the focus group confidential and not discuss what happened during the focus group outside the meeting. This focus group will be audio-recorded.

- I have reviewed the above information.
- I agree to maintain confidentiality of information shared in this focus group.
- I have received a copy of this information letter.
- I have already signed a consent form to participate in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E: Focus Group Protocol

### Feminism

1. What has had the most profound impact on your perspectives of feminism?
2. Since we last spoke, what new primary or secondary schooling experiences do you recall regarding feminism?
3. What have you observed in your teacher preparation program regarding feminism?
4. What do you recall learning about feminism in your elementary methods courses?
  - 4a. Which courses?
  - 4b. In what context?
5. Based on your understanding of feminism, how would you describe the school in which you're student teaching?
6. Based on your understanding of feminism, how would you describe the curriculum?
7. Based on your understanding of feminism, how would you describe the interactions between students and teachers?
  8. Interactions between girls and boys?
  9. Interactions between boys and boys?
  10. Interactions between girls and girls?
11. Reflect on the concept of patriarchy (place a note card with the word "patriarchy" on it). How does this operate in your life? How does it operate in your school?

The women who signed up for this study align with the feminist perspective (for the most part). I would like them to serve as key informants by asking the following questions:

12. In what ways is learning about feminism important? When should it be taught?
13. How is it personally important to you?
14. In what ways is it important for preservice teachers?
15. In what ways is it important for elementary students?
16. As mentioned, you realize that your perspectives regarding feminism are different from other women in your class. What strategies do you use to speak about feminism with these women?
17. To what extent do you feel that you are an advocate for feminism?
18. What does it mean to advocate?
19. How can you be an advocate?
20. What is your role over the span of your career for being an advocate for the feminist perspective in the elementary classroom?

### Sexism

1. What has had the most profound impact on your perspectives of sexism?
2. Since we last spoke, what new primary or secondary schooling experiences do you recall regarding sexism?
3. What have you observed in your teacher preparation program regarding sexism?

4. What do you recall learning about sexism in your elementary methods courses? 4a. Which courses? 4b. In what context?
5. Based on your understanding of sexism, how would you describe the school in which you're student teaching?
6. Based on your understanding of sexism, how would you describe the curriculum?
7. Based on your understanding of sexism, how would you describe interactions between students and teachers?
  8. Interactions between girls and boys?
  9. Interactions between boys and boys?
  10. Interactions between girls and girls?
11. In what ways is learning about sexism important? When should concepts of sexism be taught?
12. How is it personally important to you?
13. In what ways is it important for preservice teachers?
14. In what ways is it important for elementary students?
15. As mentioned, your perspectives of sexism may be different from other women in your class. What strategies do you use to speak about sexism with these women?
16. To what extent do you feel that you are an advocate against sexism?
17. What does it mean to advocate?
18. How can you be an advocate?
19. What is your role over the span of your career for being an advocate against sexism in the elementary classroom?

### **Gender Identity Development**

1. What has had the most profound impact on your perspectives of gender identity development?
2. Since we last spoke, what new primary or secondary schooling experiences do you recall regarding gender identity development?
3. What have you observed in your teacher preparation program regarding gender identity development?
4. What do you recall learning about gender identity development in your elementary methods courses? 4a. Which courses? 4b. In what context?
5. Based on your understanding of gender identity development, how would you describe the school in which you're student teaching?
6. Based on your understanding of gender identity development, how would you describe the curriculum?
7. Based on your understanding of gender identity development, how would you describe interactions between students and teachers?
  8. Interactions between girls and boys?
  9. Interactions between boys and boys?
  10. Interactions between girls and girls?

11. In what ways is learning about gender identity development important? When should concepts of gender identity development be taught?
12. How is it personally important to you?
13. In what ways is it important for preservice teachers?
14. In what ways is it important for elementary students?
15. As mentioned, your perspectives of gender identity development may be different from other women in your class. What strategies do you use to speak about gender identity development with these women?
16. To what extent do you feel that you are an advocate against gender inequity and gender stereotyping?
17. What does it mean to advocate?
18. How can you be an advocate?
19. What is your role over the span of your career for being an advocate against gender inequity in the elementary classroom?

## APPENDIX F: Interview 2 Protocol

### Feminism

21. What has had the most profound impact on your perspectives of feminism?
22. Since we last spoke, what new primary or secondary schooling experiences do you recall regarding feminism?
23. What have you observed in your teacher preparation program regarding feminism?
24. What do you recall learning about feminism in your elementary methods courses?
  - 4a. Which courses?
  - 4b. In what context?
  
25. Based on your understanding of feminism, how would you describe the school in which you're student teaching?
26. Based on your understanding of feminism, how would you describe the curriculum?
27. Based on your understanding of feminism, how would you describe the interactions between students and teachers?
  28. Interactions between girls and boys?
  29. Interactions between boys and boys?
  30. Interactions between girls and girls?
  
31. Reflect on the concept of patriarchy (place a note card with the word "patriarchy" on it)...How does this operate in your life? How does it operate in your school?

The women who signed up for this study align with the feminist perspective (for the most part). I would like them to serve as key informants by asking the following questions:

32. In what ways is learning about feminism important? When should it be taught?
33. How is it personally important to you?
34. In what ways is it important for preservice teachers?
35. In what ways is it important for elementary students?
36. As mentioned, you realize that your perspectives regarding feminism are different from other women in your class. What strategies do you use to speak about feminism with these women?
37. To what extent do you feel that you are an advocate for feminism?
38. What does it mean to advocate?
39. How can you be an advocate?
40. What is your role over the span of your career for being an advocate for the feminist perspective in the elementary classroom?

Transformational component of this study...

Move them..

### Sexism

20. What has had the most profound impact on your perspectives of sexism?

21. Since we last spoke, what new primary or secondary schooling experiences do you recall regarding sexism?
22. What have you observed in your teacher preparation program regarding sexism?
23. What do you recall learning about sexism in your elementary methods courses? 4a. Which courses? 4b. In what context?
24. Based on your understanding of sexism, how would you describe the school in which you're student teaching?
25. Based on your understanding of sexism, how would you describe the curriculum?
26. Based on your understanding of sexism, how would you describe interactions between students and teachers?
  27. Interactions between girls and boys?
  28. Interactions between boys and boys?
  29. Interactions between girls and girls?
30. In what ways is learning about sexism important? When should concepts of sexism be taught?
31. How is it personally important to you?
32. In what ways is it important for preservice teachers?
33. In what ways is it important for elementary students?
34. As mentioned, your perspectives of sexism may be different from other women in your class. What strategies do you use to speak about sexism with these women?
35. To what extent do you feel that you are an advocate against sexism?
36. What does it mean to advocate?
37. How can you be an advocate?
38. What is your role over the span of your career for being an advocate against sexism in the elementary classroom?

### **Gender Identity Development**

20. What has had the most profound impact on your perspectives of gender identity development?
21. Since we last spoke, what new primary or secondary schooling experiences do you recall regarding gender identity development?
22. What have you observed in your teacher preparation program regarding gender identity development?
23. What do you recall learning about gender identity development in your elementary methods courses? 4a. Which courses? 4b. In what context?
24. Based on your understanding of gender identity development, how would you describe the school in which you're student teaching?
25. Based on your understanding of gender identity development, how would you describe the curriculum?
26. Based on your understanding of gender identity development, how would you describe interactions between students and teachers?

27. Interactions between girls and boys?
28. Interactions between boys and boys?
29. Interactions between girls and girls?
  
30. In what ways is learning about gender identity development important? When should concepts of gender identity development be taught?
31. How is it personally important to you?
32. In what ways is it important for preservice teachers?
33. In what ways is it important for elementary students?
34. As mentioned, your perspectives of gender identity development may be different from other women in your class. What strategies do you use to speak about gender identity development with these women?
35. To what extent do you feel that you are an advocate against gender inequity and gender stereotyping?
36. What does it mean to advocate?
37. How can you be an advocate?
38. What is your role over the span of your career for being an advocate against gender inequity in the elementary classroom?

### **Key Informant/Personal Perspectives**

What question or questions would you ask if you were designing this study

Did I miss anything?

What is important?

If they give a question...how would they respond?

### **Final Reflection**

What are some of your thoughts about this process?

What did you realize things about your experiences with feminism, sexism, and/or gender identity development that you did not notice before?

What did you realize things about your perspectives that you did not notice before?

What do you think about the structure of this study?

Is there anything you would like to add to our conversation that you thought of after we stopped talking?

## **APPENDIX G: Reflective Journal Prompt 2**

Pre-Interview Prompt: *My goal for this final reflective journal prompt to get a better idea of your final thoughts and ideas about feminism, sexism, and gender identity development. Additionally, I will be using this prompt to get an overall understanding of your perspectives regarding this research process.*

### **Final Reflection Prompts:**

What are some of your thoughts about participating in this process?

What did you realize about your experiences with feminism, sexism, and gender identity development that you did not notice before?

What did you realize things about your perspectives regarding feminism, sexism, and gender identity development that you did not notice before?

What do you think about the structure of this study?

Is there anything you would like to add to our conversation that you thought of after we stopped talking?

## APPENDIX H

### North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board For The Use of Human Subjects in Research

#### GUIDELINES FOR PREPARATION OF INFORMED CONSENT FORM

##### **PLEASE READ ALL OF THIS INFORMATION CAREFULLY PRIOR TO COMPLETING THE CONSENT FORM**

An **Informed Consent Statement** has two purposes: (1) to provide adequate information to potential research subjects to make an informed choice as to their participation in a study, and (2) to document their decision to participate. In order to make an informed choice, potential subjects must understand the study, how they are involved in the study, what sort of risks it poses to them and who they can contact if a problem arises (see informed consent checklist for a full listing of required elements of consent). Please note that **the language used to describe these factors must be understandable to all potential subjects, which typically means an eighth grade reading level.** The informed consent form is to be read and signed by each subject who participates in the study **before** they begin participation in the study. A duplicate copy is to be provided to each subject.

If subjects are **minors (i.e. any subject under the age of 18)** use the following guidelines for obtaining consent:

- 0-5 years old** – requires signature of parent(s)/guardian/legal representative
- 6 – 10 years old** - requires signature of parent(s)/guardian/legal representative and verbal assent from the minor. In this case a minor assent script should be prepared and submitted along with a parental consent form.
- 11 - 17 years old** - requires signature of both minor and parent/guardian/legal representative

If the subject or legal representative is *unable to read and/or understand the written consent form*, it must be verbally presented in an understandable manner and witnessed (with signature of witness). If there is a good chance that your intended subjects will not be able to read and/or understand a written consent form, please contact the IRB office 919-515-4514 for further instructions.

**\*For your convenience, attached find a sample consent form template that contains necessary information. In generating a form for a specific project, the principal investigator should complete the underlined areas of the form and replicate all of the text that is not underlined, except for the compensation section where you should select the appropriate text to be used out of several different scenarios.**

**\*This consent form template can also be adapted and used as an information sheet for subjects when signed informed consent is waived by the IRB. An information sheet is usually required even when signed informed consent is waived. The information sheet should typically include all of the elements included below minus the subject signature line; however it may be modified in consultation with the IRB.**

**North Carolina State University  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH**

Title of Study: Pre-service Teacher Perspectives about Feminism

Principal Investigator: Elizabeth E. Saylor  
Meghan Manfra

Faculty Sponsor (if applicable): Dr.

**What are some general things you should know about research studies?**

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

**What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this study is to explore female preservice elementary social studies teacher perspectives of feminism regarding sexism and gender identity development. Knowledge of how they came to these understandings and the messages that they received in their social studies schooling experience about feminism and their own gender identities is beneficial as I could gain understanding in female preservice elementary teacher perceptions of feminism and gender roles in relation to the elementary social studies objectives of democracy, citizenship, and civic engagement.

**What will happen if you take part in the study?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in two individual semi-structured interviews, one focus group, and one personal reflection. Each interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes and the focus group will take approximately 2 hours.

**Risks**

The topic of the study is sensitive in nature and the focus group will not be anonymous and will include peers in the elementary education program. However, all participants will be required to sign a consent to confidentiality pledge. This confidentiality pledge states the expectation that all participants will maintain the anonymity of other members in the focus group session. This pledge is separate from the research study consent form. There are no other foreseeable risks or discomforts from participating in this study as the questions are experientially and opinion based. This focus group will be audio-recorded.

**Benefits**

I anticipate achieving a greater understanding of elementary social studies preservice teacher perceptions about feminism. The students could possibly benefit from the reflective process of recalling personal experiences with

regards to feminism and gender identity in schooling and specifically in their social studies classrooms. The first interview will occur in the fall semester. However, the second interview and focus groups will take place in the spring semester while the participants will be completing their student teaching experience in their classroom placements full-time. In the fall they were enrolled in Social Studies and the Young Learner that specifically focused on equity, social justice, democracy, and citizenship. This knowledge could benefit participants who may have never considered the topics of feminism or the construction of gender roles or how they relate to social studies education. This study could benefit the field of education, institutions of higher learning, administrators, teachers, and students by possibly illuminating the importance of knowledge and understanding of including all individuals when discussing equity, social justice, democracy, and citizenship.

## **Confidentiality**

The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely. No reference will be made in oral or written reports, which could link you to the study. Additionally, you will be asked to sign a consent to confidentiality pledge. This confidentiality pledge states the expectation that all participants will maintain the anonymity of other members in the focus group session. This pledge is separate from the research study consent form.

## **Compensation**

You will not receive anything for participating.

## **What if you are a NCSU student?-**

Participation in this study is not a course requirement and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your class standing or grades at NC State.

## **What if you are a NCSU employee?-**

Participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment at NCSU, and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your job.

## **What if you have questions about this study?**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher.

## **What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

## **Consent To Participate**

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

**Subject's signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Investigator's signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX I



*The Daily Signal, 2014*



*Huffington Post, 2014*