In Social Studies, No One Can Hear You Scream:
The Representation of Women and Gender in Ontario’s Elementary Curriculum

By
Lora Maroney

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Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
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Abstract
This research examines the portrayal of women in Ontario’s elementary social studies curriculum, the challenges faced by educators who wish to bring a more diverse approach to gender representation in their classrooms, and current strategies. The study comprises a qualitative analysis of the Ontario social studies curriculum and a selection of textbooks, along with a semi-structured interview with an Ontario educator. Data analysis revealed the following themes: the potential for diverse gender representation in the curriculum and resources; lack of priority, time/initiative and resources/knowledge as limitations preventing teachers from working toward gender parity; and suggestions for implementation based on the case study’s successful initiatives. While the Ontario curriculum provides the opportunity for a rich portrayal of gender and inquiry into women’s issues, the textbooks themselves often fall short of presenting teachers with usable material. As a result, the additional challenges mean many teachers are not moving beyond “default” representation. Appropriate materials, professional development and pre-service training would go far in assisting teachers with increasing gender diversity in their classrooms. While the limited scope of this research invites further investigation, the diverse student makeup of Ontario schools necessitates a practical overhaul of the way teachers handle gender and women’s issues.

Key Words: social studies, women, gender, representation, diversity, curriculum, K-6
Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. i

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................ ii

Chapter One: INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................... 1
  1.0 Introduction to the Research Study ........................................................................ 1
  1.1 Purpose of the Study .................................................................................................... 2
  1.2 Research Questions ...................................................................................................... 3
  1.3 Background of the Researcher .................................................................................... 3
  1.4 Rationale for the Study ............................................................................................... 6
  1.5 Introduction to the Methodology ................................................................................ 7
  1.6 Overview .................................................................................................................... 9

Chapter Two: LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................................................... 10
  2.0 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 10
  2.1 Portrayal of Women in Social Studies Education ...................................................... 10
    2.1.1 Exclusion and erasure of women in social studies curriculum ....................... 11
    2.1.2 Problematic inclusion of women in social studies curriculum ....................... 14
    2.1.3 Problematic inclusion: Narratives of peace and domesticity ............................. 16
  2.2 Curriculum Reform Excluding Women from Consideration ...................................... 19
  2.3 Contextualizing the Research and Research Questions ............................................ 21

Chapter Three: METHODOLOGY ..................................................................................... 23
  3.0 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 23
  3.1 Research Approach and Procedures ......................................................................... 23
  3.2 Instruments of Data Collection .................................................................................. 25
  3.3 Participants ................................................................................................................ 26
    3.3.1 Sampling criteria ............................................................................................... 26
    3.3.2 Sampling procedures and recruitment .............................................................. 28
    3.3.3 Participants ....................................................................................................... 28
  3.4 Data Analysis ............................................................................................................. 28
  3.5 Ethical Review Procedure ........................................................................................... 30
  3.6 Methodological Limits and Strengths ....................................................................... 31
    3.6.1 Validity ............................................................................................................. 31
    3.6.2 Researcher bias ............................................................................................... 32
    3.6.3 Strengths .......................................................................................................... 32
  3.7 Conclusions ............................................................................................................... 33

Chapter Four: FINDINGS ................................................................................................. 34
  4.0 Introduction ................................................................................................................ 34
  4.1 Potential ..................................................................................................................... 35
    4.1.1 Ontario social studies curriculum document .................................................... 35
    4.1.2 Ministry-approved curriculum resources (Nelson Social Studies, Grades 3-6) .......... 39
  4.2 Priority/Interest .......................................................................................................... 43
    4.2.1 “Feminism is over” ........................................................................................... 44
    4.2.2 Teacher experience ........................................................................................... 45
Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction to the Research Study

If I asked you to picture a pioneer in the field of modern computing, an inventor of wartime and communications technology, a diplomat and political ambassador, and an activist and agitator, who would come to mind? For the pioneer of computing, you might bring up Blaise Pascal or Charles Babbage; for communications technology, Alexander Graham Bell or Guglielmo Marconi. ‘Activist’ might bring forth names like Martin Luther King Jr. or Malcolm X; John Adams and Thomas Jefferson top the list of famous ambassadors.

Conversely, if I listed the names Ada Lovelace, Hedy Lamarr, Shirley Temple and Helen Keller, what would be the descriptions for each? Ada Lovelace is famous for her connection to her poet father, Lord Byron; Hedy Lamarr was an actress, often called the most beautiful woman in the world. Shirley Temple won over the world with her dimples and thick ringlets on the silver screen, and Helen Keller inspired millions with her tale of a little girl overcoming her disability.

For those who have not yet grasped the connection: Ada Lovelace worked with Charles Babbage and created extensive notes that led to the world’s first computer (The Computer History Museum, 2008); Hedy Lamarr invented communications technology first used to direct torpedoes and evolving into the modern wi-fi system (Wenner, 2008); Shirley Temple became a US Ambassador and diplomat after finishing her acting career (Keating, 2014); and Helen Keller grew up to become a radical socialist fighting for the end to war and child labour (Helen Keller Reference Archive, 2000).

Looking at the popular narratives of these women contrasted with primary documents and biographies, it is clear that the roles of women in history are relegated to certain channels. Women may be sweet, pretty, talented, and artistic; they may struggle to overcome disabilities or childhood difficulties; but they may not contribute in a meaningful, lasting way, and we are rarely taught about the parts of their lives that do not mesh with this so-called feminine aesthetic. Moreover, the domestic sphere has been oversimplified and reduced to a specific anachronistic idea (cooking, cleaning, childrearing) while ignoring historical examples such as Ancient Israel, where ‘running
the home’ meant managing the family’s finances, balancing the household budget, and overseeing the duties and hiring of servants while the men worked the fields or went to war.

Rich narratives about the true history of women are not absent from academia; any adult with curiosity may walk into a bookstore and pick up biographies of famous female politicians, inventors, rulers, political dissidents, and so on, but this specific gendering of history does not begin in adulthood. It begins when we are very young, in the classrooms where we are taught that what we hear is the utmost truth, where textbooks appear to be carved in stone from the very face of Mount Sinai. If children are taught that women played no role in history — or, at the very most, a supportive or passive one — then what will they grow up to think about women? About their own potential, or the potential of their friends, family, or future children?

To quote Dr. Seuss in his seminal work The Lorax (1971): “Unless someone like you does a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better, it’s not.” As educators, we are responsible for what students fill their heads with, and it is our duty and responsibility to make the best effort to provide a well-rounded and true to live depiction of historical figures, including people of all sexes.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the current (2013) social studies curriculum used in Ontario elementary schools from the perspective of teachers. The curriculum underwent a significant revitalization in 2013 from the previous (2004) curriculum, making a greater effort at inclusivity and visibility for previously omitted or significantly marginalized groups. As roughly half the world’s population is female, including students at the elementary school level, this is an extremely relevant issue for the educational community as a whole. In the twenty-first century it is no longer acceptable to present a male-focused view of the world to students, where women are shown in preconceived roles if they are present at all. This study aims to examine not only the curriculum documents themselves but also the attitudes of current teachers in the field, as teachers are the ones using the curriculum on a daily basis and actually presenting the material to students.
1.2 Research Questions

As a teacher candidate and a feminist looking to incorporate women into the education of my future students, the driving question behind this study is as follows:

*What is the primary-junior teacher perspective on the representation of women in Ontario K-6 social studies?*

As a means of furthering the exploration and connecting teacher experience to the materials available, this research also asks the following sub-questions:

*How and where are women most represented in the curriculum or classroom resources?*

*Where do teachers feel the K-6 social studies curriculum and resources fall in the 5 stages of inclusion of women?*

Finally, in an attempt to move the discussion beyond the status quo, the study also asks the following questions:

*What are the challenges teachers face when attempting to improve the representation of women and gender in the classroom?*

*What improvements could be made to the curriculum, available resources, or support/professional development provided to teachers?*

The current research seeks to answer the above questions by examining the 2013 social studies curriculum and classroom textbooks, as well as interviewing an Ontario educator to gain their viewpoint on the matter.

1.3 Background of the Researcher

As a child, I was raised in what I felt to be a feminist home. My parents and immediate family believed in the importance of education and choice for women, stressing that I should do what I wanted to do and not allow myself to be limited by anyone else’s perception or preconception. I was encouraged to read books; to play outside; to engage in scientific experiments and research; to practice music, visual arts and drama; and to learn skills from taking care of animals to cooking to building a tree house. My mother was an artist who worked from home in order to take care of my
siblings and me; my grandmother had been a teacher from the age of sixteen until her retirement; my mother’s sister worked as a professor at university; and so on. The media I consumed at home was largely female-focused, reflected in the stories I wrote as a child, all of which involved female characters.

Despite all this, as a young child in elementary school I never questioned the fact that women had almost no place in my education until years later. Looking back, I remember hearing of Laura Secord, of Iroquoian women farming and tending the longhouse, and of pioneer women working the land and taking care of their families in the 1840s. Other than that, history in my classrooms was the domain of men; men made discoveries, men fought wars, men caused things to happen. Men acted; women, if they were present at all, reacted. This continued on throughout high school and even through to university; unless a course had ‘women’ in the title, we shouldn’t expect them to have more than a token mention. The most popular depiction of women in history, other than homemakers and purveyors of the domestic sphere, was that of victim. As noted by Crocco (2012), women in world history has become even more problematic; women across the world are continually known for their oppression, not for their agency or successes. By the time I was a teenager I came to expect this sort of treatment, but in my younger years I never questioned.

For a long time I wondered how I could have missed this oversight, given my upbringing; at last I realized that, as a young student, I was not taught to look at the absences in my education. We took what we were given and accepted it as truth until told otherwise; thus, when I saw no women in history, I did not think to wonder why. This flies in the face of my home environment, where I had been given multiple books about women in history (including everything from inventors to serial killers to empresses), but because of the authoritative nature of the educational institution, my critical thinking did not extend to poking at the holes.

As I grew older, I adopted the mantle of ‘feminist’ even as I constantly evolved my thinking as to what that entailed. I argued with friends (and not so friends) for the importance of representation of women in media, citing the lack of female leads in Hollywood and mainstream literature. I began conducting my own research for fun on female inventors, particularly in STEM fields, as well as studying the presence of women
in combat throughout history. The more I read, the more angry I became with the current state of public knowledge; most people, myself included, had vast gaps in their knowledge of women in history, and I wondered how we could even begin to combat that.

Fast-forward to after my undergraduate career, when I moved to Japan to teach English and social studies at a high-achieving secondary school. There, I came up against very restrictive gender roles, both in real life and in education; many of my brightest female students spoke of their desire to become flight attendants, not to see the world or experience new places but because many of them went on to marry international football stars. I received more questions about my relationship status (which, as a queer woman in a conservative environment I was not permitted by the administration to disclose) than anything else, and upon hearing I had married over the summer, the student body burst into applause. On one hand this sort of enthusiasm was quite touching, but on the other, they had not clapped when I mentioned my career opportunities or my travel; only my entrance into matrimony merited celebration.

Japanese history education suffered from the same male-centric lens as Canada’s, even more absurd given how many powerful female figures exist in Japan’s past. From novelists and poets, to empresses and powerful leaders, Japan is full of women who acted very directly upon the development of the country, and yet the go-to image for Japanese women is that of the westernized geisha, subservient and accessory to men’s desires. The same goes for China; despite their history chock full of empresses, political leaders, famous criminals and warriors, people will often bring up ‘foot binding’ and ‘concubines’ when asked what comes to mind.

Now, returned to Canada and embarking on my own teacher education with the aim of becoming a primary-junior teacher, I am very invested in examining the ways that women are being taught to our students. My positionality in this paper is thus that of feminist theory as well as participatory action research, otherwise known as advocacy research, as described by Creswell (2007) and expanded upon by Blum, Heinonen and White (2009). Participatory action research focuses on the need to both examine existing power structures and hegemonies as well as create solutions or means to break down the harmful barriers they create. It is a gradual, transformative process, “emphasizing
WOMEN IN SOCIAL STUDIES

collective action … toward the goals of empowerment and social change” (Blum, Heinonen and White, 2009, p. 462). My research interest is not merely to examine curriculum to see what we are teaching, but to discuss with teachers how they are participating in this field of education and what they feel should be the next step.

1.4 Rationale for the Study

A sizeable body of work currently exists examining the current social studies curriculum across North America, including Canada and Ontario, most notably by Penney Clark but also including Margaret S. Crocco, Susan Hart, Richard Paxton, Elizabeth Schrader and Christine Wotipka, and Glynn Sharpe. The above authors discuss the various shortcomings of representation in social studies curriculum with regard to women, racialized peoples, and First Nations peoples, as well problems with the pedagogy and lack of engaging subject matter. Other authors examine similar issues in the fields of literacy and language arts, particularly focusing on the dominant narratives in the existing curriculum. This research draws heavily on the work of Schrader and Wotipka (2011), who in turn cite the formulative research of feminist researcher Tetreault to categorize the phases of women’s inclusion in history texts, in order to analyze as well as create a timeline of past and future advancements.

However, while some works do specifically focus on the need for inclusion of women, many do not. Paxton (1999) writes of the need to revitalize history and include a variety of voices in a revamped curriculum, but does not include women in his list of suggestions. Likewise, Sharpe (2011) writes of the glaring oversight of First Nations material in the curriculum, but through a male-centric lens. While Clark, an avowed feminist, wrote in 2005 of the need to rewrite the social studies curriculum to include women, her review of the new “revitalized” curriculum (2013) cites it as a tremendous success while completely avoiding the topic of women at all. It appears as though many male researchers do not consider the importance of women when creating a broader, more inclusive curriculum, and even some feminist researchers, despite their very clear positionality as such, can fall into the trap of forgetting the importance of women in student learning.

One theme present in the literature that does mention reform in terms of female inclusion is the need for women to be included in social studies curriculum in order to
WOMEN IN SOCIAL STUDIES

further a pacifist reading of history. Clark (2005) and Hart (1997) both write of women as innate peacemakers, making the argument that women are naturally pacifistic. In studying the representation of women in social studies curriculum, it is important not to discard facets of women’s roles simply because they don’t conform to a particular worldview. This is true whether through Clark and Hart’s assertion that women are by nature peacemakers and that the narrative of history should be shifted away from war, or my own that women played a much more active, involved role than has been previously been attributed to them. It is important not to privilege one sphere of women’s influence over another, and this research will attempt to fill that gap, celebrating the woman’s traditionally-viewed place in the home and daily life, as well as looking for material or teachers who attempt to broaden that narrow look into the portrayal of women.

Finally, researchers such as Crocco (2012) and others cited above focus very heavily on the problems facing current curriculum today, but do not put forth many suggestions for improvement, nor do they focus on actual lessons as taught by teachers. Few of the researchers spoke with teachers at all, focusing on the curriculum materials themselves without examination of how they are used. Not only does this leave a gap where teachers may be attempting to include women despite the lack of a specific curricular instruction, but conversely, simply because women are present in class materials does not mean teachers are making an effort to teach this content. This paper strives to solve this problem by speaking directly with educators and discussing their real, practical efforts in the classroom, rather than focusing merely on the documents alone.

1.5 Introduction to the Methodology

This research follows a case study approach for its methodology (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). In this study, educators are interviewed to discuss their approaches to including women in social studies curriculum over the course of their careers, including before and after the new 2013 curriculum came into circulation. The issue in this case is the portrayal of women in social studies curriculum and in the classroom; the different cases provided come from the individual teachers and their school environments, in order to provide a more balanced view of the situation.
The case study is appropriate for this research because it provides the most clear-cut way to examine the issue from a personal perspective. Robert Yin (2009) writes that a case study approach is most effective when the research attempts to address the *how* of an issue, which is precisely the focus of this particular study. He also writes that while the case study method provides an excellent introductory approach to a new topic of research, it is by no means limited to it and can thus be carried out throughout the duration of a study (2009, p. 6). By contrast, a narrative-focused approach as discussed by Creswell (2007) might create a scope too limited to draw generalizations or extrapolations on the overall treatment of women in the curriculum (p. 54-55); conversely an ethnographic approach that focuses on the shared experiences of women as teachers could be fascinating, but runs the risk of becoming too broad for the purposes of this study (p. 68-70). By selecting particular individuals and discussing their experiences in both theory and practice, the case study method provides a more nuanced view of teachers and the social studies curriculum without losing focus.

Data collection in this study will take two cumulative approaches: the first, examining curriculum materials to note the phases of representation of women, as laid out in the work of Schrader and Wotipka (2011); and second, through interviewing current educators to hear their personal impressions of the curriculum, their perceived shortcomings, and their practical attempts at including women in the classroom. The theory-based portion of the research will study the curriculum documents to discern which phase of representation (exclusion, complementary, bi-focal, feminist, or multifocal) the 2013 documents fall under. The fieldwork portion, speaking with teachers in semi-structured interviews, will incorporate the findings of the direct analysis as well as their actual teaching practices in order to provide suggestions for future work on the subject. As Kenneth Zeichner (2006) writes, the current divide between academics and classroom teachers is sharp and often insurmountable; by employing both academic research and incorporating classroom teachers’ suggestions and strategies, as well as framing this research with my position as a future teacher myself, this work will attempt to bridge the two.
1.6 Overview

Chapter 1 of this research paper includes the introduction, involving the purpose of the study and its position and contributions to existing research; my key questions about the portrayal of women in social studies curriculum; and my background and positionality as a researcher that have led me to become involved in this topic of study. Chapter 2 involves a review of the existing literature on the topic of women in the social studies curriculum, including common trends and themes pertaining to my research; current authorities in the field; and existing gaps in the literature. Chapter 3 details the methodology followed in the creation of this study, including the type of data collection; an introduction to the participant; the methods of data collection and analysis; an overview of the ethical review process; and limitations of the study. Chapter 4 provides the findings for the study, including the main themes discovered through the case studies, as well as quotes from the participant, particularly surprising results; and proposed solutions or improvements. Chapter 5 gives a deeper look at the results through discussion, providing insights; recommended solutions or suggested improvements; suggestions for further study; and limitations. References and appendices follow the final chapter.
Chapter Two: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

A large body of research has been conducted on the state of social studies education in Canada and the United States in order to determine whether changes should be made to bring the curriculum forward into the new millennium. Despite variations in scope, target grades and specific curriculum studied, and methodology used, several studies have concluded that the North American social studies curriculum, as a whole, is in need of drastic overhaul in terms of curriculum content and teaching (Clark, 2005; Crocco, 2012; Hart, 1997; Paxton, 1999; Schrader & Wotipka, 2011; Sharpe, 2011).

For the sake of furthering this research, a literature review was conducted on academic studies pertaining to the treatment of women in social studies curriculum. This chapter begins with an examination of the current issues facing social studies education with regards to women in the curriculum. The main problems identified in the existing research fall into three broad categories: the exclusion of women in the curriculum; problematic inclusion of women and their portrayal in the curriculum; and calls for reform not pertaining specifically to women but which, through an intersectional lens, can be made applicable to this situation, and whose omission of women also helps to further the point of this research. The problematic inclusion of women is further broken down into two stages, complementary and bi-focal. The chapter will also analyze the literature in terms of whether the researchers offered possible solutions and suggestions for application or merely posited problems without implementation, in order to highlight any gaps in the existing literature. This will contextualize and enable this study to gather the ideas presented by its predecessors and move them forward through this research.

2.1 Portrayal of Women in Social Studies Education

Criticisms of the treatment of women in Canadian education goes back decades, beginning most prominently with the 1970 Royal Commission on the Status of Women. The commission recognized the lack of female inclusion in contemporary curriculum materials and recommended “that the provinces and the territories adopt textbooks that portray women, as well as men, in diversified roles and occupations” (1970, section 69). Current research seeks to examine whether this recommendation has been met or requires further implementation. Penney Clark (2005), an important figure in the field of social
studies curriculum reform, examined the treatment of women in British Columbia curriculum, focusing on both the erasure of women and their limited portrayals when included. Following her research, occurring 35 years after the Royal Commission’s recommendation, she called for an overhaul of Canada’s social studies curriculum, inviting a “revitalized” history (p. 44) that dealt with the inclusion of female narratives and a broader, diversified portrayal of women. Similarly, Schrader and Wotipka (2011) conducted a qualitative research study of the portrayal of women in social studies curriculum in California over a span of 50 years. Like Clark, their findings showed that while efforts had been made over the past five decades to include women in the revised curriculum, the gains were minimal and several limitations remained (p. 81-83).

An analysis of the existing literature reveals three main themes as discussed by the authors: research focused on the exclusion or erasure of women from social studies curriculum; research focused on the problematic inclusion of women in social studies curriculum, which seeks to portray women within limited roles that often follow a specific patriarchal agenda; and research that calls for reform on other counts but does not include women in its findings. This section will examine each in detail as it pertains to this research.

2.1.1 Exclusion and erasure of women in social studies curriculum

While a deep qualitative analysis will be performed in later chapters, even a brief glance at the 2004 Ontario Ministry of Education social studies curriculum for grades 1-6 reveals a large problem: the word ‘women’ only appears in the document a total of five times, three of which occur within the blanket statement “men, women and children” (p. 29, 30, 33) and provided no recommendations for how teachers might include women in their teaching. This glaring lack of representation may well have acted as part of a catalyst to revamp the curriculum for the 2013 renewed curriculum, the introduction of which encourages teachers to provide inclusive education regarding women, not only of their existence but to their contribution as well (p. 47-48). Research by Clark (2005; 2013) and Hart (1997) agrees that the lack of representation of women is a major oversight in curriculum materials and the field of education overall. Schrader and Wotipka (2011) noted that this was most commonly and blatantly observed in textbooks printed in the 1950s; while women made up a large percentage of the labour force in
World War II, for example, textbooks written in the 50s made no mention of women’s contributions whatsoever (p. 76). This is only one example; a full analysis of women omitted from the curriculum would require a massive undertaking all of its own. For the scope of this research, the chapter will focus on how and why women were excluded, rather than specifically whom.

A decade before the Ontario Ministry of Education reexamined its curriculum in 2004 and again in 2013 with the aim of improving its treatment of women, Susan Hart (1997) examined the Canadian social studies curriculum and noted the lack of female narratives. To illustrate this, Hart creates a comparison with her grandparents’ 50th anniversary party, where her grandfather, a celebrated war veteran and Air Force pilot, received commendations and accolades and was given several opportunities to make speeches about his remarkable life. Meanwhile, Hart’s grandmother, who had also suffered and sacrificed in coming to a new country after living through the war, was not asked to speak about her own experiences; “the silence”, Hart writes, “was deafening to me” (p. 1). This is the image that Hart uses to embody the absence of women from social studies curriculum materials, where the exploits of men are touted and women are glaringly absent. As far as social studies curriculum is concerned, the male experience is often considered universal experience, and likewise, male values the standard by which society should be judged (p. 2). This omission of female narratives, Hart argues, will have a detrimental effect on female students’ emotional development in the future. She quotes Coulter (1989), saying, “[young women] will not leave school with the strength and pride of knowing that women made a difference, that women resisted and struggled, that women were and are more than equally responsible for the survival of the human species” (p. 1-2).

This is in line with Schrader and Wotipka’s (2011) findings, where they noted that while the narratives of male soldiers and the effects of deployment on men received great attention in curriculum, the impact of the war on the women who remained at home to work and take care of the home front was completely absent (p. 76). Hart argues in favour of the use of first-person narratives as given by women in the community as a way of counteracting this silence with authentic experience (p. 4-5). This would provide a valuable addition to the lack of representation; however, this by necessity would restrict
the additional female voices to only those in the 20th century and still alive today. Hart’s work is unable to provide answers to how authentic women’s voices could be included for any other historical period.

Following Hart’s example, Penney Clark (2005) examined the social studies curriculum in British Columbia and in Canada overall, noting a pattern of exclusion and specific erasure of women from textbook materials. Her analysis followed the lack of representation of women through textbooks published in different historical periods: the interwar period, i.e. the years between World Wars I and I; the 1950s-1970s; and the popular feminist era of the 1980s. In textbooks from the interwar period, Clark found that women were largely invisible, with mentions appearing only 5 times in one 400-page textbook and only as accessory to men (p. 248). Pioneer narratives and the struggles of early settlers in the foundation and building of Canada are popular topics in curriculum; however, Clark found that textbooks focused solely on the male-dominated tales of farming and clearing land, with the exception of Donalda Dickie, a female curriculum developer (p. 249-250). During the next phase of curriculum development, Hart found that again women were largely absent from history textbooks; the handful of those mentioned were either writers or queens, as they were the women whose actions made it into accessible public record (p. 251). Pioneer women and were also absent from textbooks published during this period, and examples of inter-racial marriages, quite common during settlement times, were avoided or referenced only obliquely (p. 252).

In the 1980s, Clark did encounter a brief surge of inclusion of women in elementary school curriculum. While secondary texts continued to ignore or trivialize the role of women, elementary texts (particularly those published in Ontario) made more of an effort to include a broad overview of female involvement. However, Clark concludes that overall the exclusion of women involves the omissions of several important areas: examples of female agency and women’s role in community building and mentorship (p. 257); women’s engagement in paid labour in both public and private workforces; and the day-to-day lives of women performing unpaid labour in the domestic sphere (p. 258). These silences result in gaping holes in the social studies curriculum where female voices could provide valuable insight, as well as providing an incomplete and inaccurate depiction of history to students.
2.1.2 Problematic inclusion of women in social studies curriculum

While the inclusion of women in the curriculum in a quantitative fashion is an important first step, many researchers in the field feel this cannot be the end point. “It is not enough to include the names and faces of women in the current curriculum,” writes Hart (1997), “Rather, we must carefully examine both the form and content of what is taught in the social studies in order to explore more fully the contributions that women have made to social life” (p. 2). In examining the treatment and portrayal of women in social studies curriculum, the current literature has focused on not only whether women are represented, but also how. Schrader and Wotipka (2011) used the historiographical work of Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault (1968) in order to analyze the representation of women in California high school textbooks from 1956-2007. Their five-stage process, created by modifying Tetreault’s original taxonomy, categorized the approaches to inclusion of women in history into five main phases: exclusion, complementary, bi-focal, feminist and multifocal. The first stage, exclusion of women or male-defined narratives, is explained above. The overarching conclusion reached by the research of Pennycook (2011) and Crocco (2012) is that women, if included at all, are generally only given space if their narratives fulfill a particular role. They discovered that most curriculum only reached stages two and three of Schrader and Wotipka’s criteria.

In the second stage, complementary inclusion, women are described in terms of their relationships to men, and their actions are included only insofar as they allowed men to perform other important functions. The phrase “men, women and children” as found in the 2004 Ontario social studies curriculum is a staple; the image of the loving wife supporting the Prime Minister, or female factory workers toiling on the home front to allow more soldiers to go overseas to war (Schrader and Wotipka, 2011, p. 78), are popular examples. The female members of the American military in World War II, for example, were described in textbooks as taking background jobs to free up men for fighting, allowing more male soldiers to join the front (p. 78). When women receive more focused attention in the curriculum, it is couched as important because they were “doing men’s work … women’s contributions to the war effort continue to be measured against male standards of patriotism and importance” (p.79). This allows for the majority of stories to remain male-dominated while nominally including women; this treats
inclusiveness like a checklist, and results in a very dangerous social phenomenon where only the absolute minimum is required. Pennycook (2011) notes in her study of gender bias in teaching practice that this is often done deliberately on the part of teachers; when selecting curriculum materials, teachers often purposely choose male-dominated narratives because they feel that boys will not be interested if they are not specifically and personally catered to (p. 17). The effects of this were studied in Pennycook’s research, which found that, after receiving curriculum chosen in this manner, female students were split between saying they would like to be doctors or nurses, while boys only declared their desire to be doctors. When women are portrayed as accessories or lesser to men, this message gets passed down to the students and becomes normalized in ways that run much deeper than their reading material (p. 14). This creates a vicious cycle of problematic pedagogy: teachers interviewed by Pennycook were adamant that the needs and interests of boys must be met in order to engage them. Conversely, teachers stated that girls did not exhibit boredom, and therefore do not require curriculum that reflects themselves and their experiences (p. 17). Here the classroom mirrors the curriculum, where female students’ interests and performance are important only in that they serve those of boys.

The third, or bi-focal, stage of problematic inclusion of women, refers to women’s work as important but entirely separate from that of men. In this stage the world is divided between male and female spheres, generally perceived as public and private, or work and home. This radical and non-permeable separation between male and female spheres radically enforces the notion of gender binary; women are thus not seen as affecting the paid labour force in any significant way, and men are not shown to have any relation to the home (Schrader and Wotipka, 2011, p. 81). The danger here is in line with Pennycook’s research on pedagogy, where the idea of separate male and female dominions may extend not only to the pages of the history books but to the classroom. Bi-focal representation is also the first stage wherein the systematic oppression against women is given mention, but women are generally painted as suffering under or reacting to brutality and persecution, rather than being agents of change for themselves (Schrader and Wotipka, 2011, p. 73-74). While the inclusion of oppressive systems and analysis thereof is vital to any social studies curriculum, this limited approach runs the risk of only
talking about women in context of their oppression. This is particularly prevalent in
world history textbooks, where women from so-called third-world countries are viewed
with pity or in need of salvation by western actors, and rarely as agents in their own lives
(Crocco, 2012, p. 181). Crocco argues that this often results in an ethnocentric slant to the
curriculum, which fosters the false notion that North American women provide a
universal model for women in other parts of the world to emulate (p. 183).

The final problem with inclusion, as identified by Schrader and Wotipka (2011),
is that of women dropped into the curriculum devoid of context or connection to the
actual material. These women are often held up as “exemplars” (p. 73). While this is
certainly an improvement over the complete absence of women from history, focusing on
a small handful of extraordinary women both denies the value and importance of
secondary women (that is, those who did not make headlines or participate in male-
dominated fields) and creates the expectation that these women were exceptions to the
rule. This approach gives little thought to how women actually interacted with the world
around them. Textbooks might mention contributions made by famous women, but
without the context of when and where these actions occurred, and what effects they
produced, there is no information on their significance or impact. Women in this
framework are reduced to pop trivia, a “seemingly random ‘sprinkling in’” as Schrader
and Wotipka put it (p. 80). This quantitative approach appears from the outside to support
the inclusion of women, but in reality fosters the idea that women as a whole are not
notable. Important women in this model are merely the randomly-selected handful who
did something exceptional, usually in a male-dominated field.

2.1.3 Problematic inclusion: Narratives of peace and domesticity

Clark (2005; 2013) and Hart (1997) both mention the omission of the domestic
sphere, pacifism and the creation of peace narratives when discussing problematic
elements of the social studies curriculum. They pose the danger of framing historical
narratives in a militaristic context, and thus argue for the inclusion of women in social
studies curriculum as a means of reworking this traditionally violent look at the past.
However, neither Clark nor Hart make reference to the long-standing role of women in
combat, politics, or activism throughout history; in touting the significance of the
domestic sphere and other traditionally ‘feminine’ spaces, they end up relegating
women’s roles within them and nowhere else. This unwittingly falls under the bi-focal mode of historiography, as explained above.

In 2005, Clark wrote of the tendency for historians to exclude women from history due to the historians viewing their contributions as historically unimportant: “If only macro-economic, political and military events are considered to be of significance historically, then there is little hope of seeing many women on the pages of Canadian history textbooks (p. 245). As stated in the above section, Clark’s legitimate critique of representations of women as “remoras, or just invisible” (p. 247) lampoons the historical propensity to downplay female involvement in society. In contrast to this prevailing academic opinion, she argues for the importance of the domestic sphere and women’s place in it “in order to determine how the unwaged work that goes on there contributes to the capitalist economy and to the survival of individual households in unmarked ways” (p. 245). While she is correct that historical significance based on the above criteria provides a very restricted view of the past, and certainly privileges some narratives over others, Clark declines to specify whether women are absent or excluded from these narratives. The first implies that women are not present in historical incidents of war, economics, or politics; the second, that their presence has merely been ignored by historians. This distinction is a vital one. Despite making reference to Laura Secord and Madeline de Vercheres, whose heroic war acts marked them worthy of inclusion in textbooks (p. 247), Clark does not follow up with any mention of other women whose influence may have affected war, politics or economics but who were also ignored in the curriculum. The question must be raised: are women like Laura Secord only elevated to textbook status due to their exceptional and rare participation in traditionally masculine endeavours, or are they merely handpicked examples of tokenism? Clark seems to think the former, but the existence of women acting on history outside the domestic sphere suggests otherwise.

Hart (1997) agrees with Clark that the importance of the domestic sphere and women’s roles in daily life cannot be underestimated and should be celebrated. She, however, goes a step further, arguing that the inclusion of female narratives would by definition turn the tide of historiography away from war to one of peace. Her intent is “to move away from a conflict model of history and look instead to caring and co-operation
as organizing themes” (p. 4). Citing similarly-minded authors before her, Hart writes of the dangers of a society comprising students raised on the idea that “war and conflict are natural and inevitable and that peace is idealistic and utopian” (p. 2); Hart argues that this particular viewpoint only exists due to history’s preoccupation with male narratives, using the example of her grandparents’ 50th anniversary (p. 1). Opening up the curriculum to include women’s stories, Hart writes, would expand the narrow, war-focused view of history to that of the domestic world; however, those are the only kinds of stories her article mentions women are capable of telling. All the examples Hart lists throughout her article of personal narratives of women that could be included in the curriculum fall under the same traditional umbrella as in current textbooks.

While the above arguments do highlight the prevalent and unfortunate trend of social studies curriculum to privilege one type of story over another, often resulting in the relegation of “women’s work” and domestic life to that of unimportance, they nevertheless serve to further the dichotomy of a ‘man’s world’ and a ‘woman’s world’. Men and women may have different perspectives, it is true, and in order to create a rich, nuanced view of history we must include the voices of all people. However, is it possible to downplay the value of war and hostility-based narratives, or to elevate domestic or behind-the-scenes work to the level of political and economic importance, without playing into the same gender binary? Clark and Hart’s writing suggest not; they argue that the domestic sphere is just as vital as narratives of war or politics, but they still speak of ‘domestic’ as coded ‘female’ and ‘war and politics’ coded as ‘male’, thus ignoring women’s roles in both war and politics and men’s roles in the home. In an interesting counterpoint to the above, Kameron Hurley (2013) wrote about the biases and perceptions of women that have pervaded our media, including not just education but popular entertainment as well. Hurley’s piece appears as an article on A Dribble of Ink, a popular fantasy and science fiction blog, and it contradicts the very assumptions made by both traditional textbooks and Hart and Clark. Hurley challenges the prevalent “women, cattle and slaves” narrative (Hurley, 2013), that is that women were non-actors of history. This statement is in line with Clark and Hart’s opinions above; however, Hurley makes the point that women were very much involved in war all over the world, and often took positions of power and leadership of entire nations. Without denigrating the role of
women who did act on the domestic sphere, Hurley expands the dominant view of women to include entrance into what even Clark and Hart declare to be the ‘masculine’ world of combat and political power. The social studies curriculum, it could be argued, might also do the same, if administrators and teachers made efforts to erode the barrier between traditionally viewed ‘male’ and ‘female’ spaces in history.

2.2 Curriculum Reform Excluding Women from Consideration

The topic of reforming the social studies curriculum has received attention from many academics, particularly those above who specifically focus on the need for reform with regards to inclusion of women. In addition to this, however, is a body of work dedicated to examining the social studies curriculum without focusing on female representation. Paxton (1999) and Sharpe (2011) have conducted extensive research on the need for overhaul of the social studies curriculum, but did not appear to have considered that women might be a necessary component to this. Paxton (1999) in particular notes four problem areas of the curriculum as identified by students: that history is 1) dull, 2) erroneous, 3) overly broad and 4) difficult to understand (p. 323-324). Sharpe (2011) focuses on the deliberate omission of painful or shameful episodes in Canadian history, specifically that of residential schooling and the treatment of aboriginal Canadians. These are very serious problems, and ones that could easily be tied in with the issue of female representation despite the authors not taking their research in that direction. Regarding Paxton’s research, historical narratives that focus on men as the active participants and women as either absent or only tangentially portrayed might very well be dull; they are also most definitely erroneous, as Clark (2005) and Hart (1999) have pointed out. As for overly broad, Paxton writes of history textbooks that attempt to tell the whole story of the world (324), yet as Schrader and Wotipka (2011) have demonstrated, this story is very likely to be that of male experience translated into universal values. Paxton’s solution to the problem involves the use of the personal narrative approach as a means of engaging students, making history not merely a collection of facts to be memorized but a story to be immersed in (p. 325), but the example voices chosen by Paxton are entirely male. Paxton’s work could easily be expanded to include women, thus providing a richer curriculum for both teachers and students. Likewise, Sharpe (2011) writes of the horrors faced by children in residential
schools and the importance of teaching these uncomfortable truths to students today, but does not focus on how this experience affected women. In his research the male experience is understood to be the default, even though Sharpe’s research could be made richer by including the experiences of women. However, in suggesting reforms for the curriculum that do not consider the current portrayal of women to be a problem, both Paxton and Sharpe help to underscore the premise of this research, that women are often forgotten even in progressive rewrites of the curriculum.

In a similar vein, Pantaleo (2002) conducted a survey of children’s literature taught in classrooms to determine whether the literary canon should be altered to be in line with the 21st Century. While female teachers made up the overwhelming majority of respondents, 9 of the top 14 authors chosen by teachers and teacher-librarians were men (p. 3-6). However, despite this lack of women appearing in her lists, Pantaleo did not identify this as a problem to be remedied, instead focusing on Canadian authorship as the primary concern. Moreover, when framing her study and coding the responses, Pantaleo did not include the gender of protagonists in the stories studied. This is a major omission, as an analysis of popular children’s literature in terms of male vs. female protagonists could provide tremendous insight into gender representation in the classroom. As Pennycook (2011) stated, teachers often believe that boys will not read unless they are given books about male protagonists, whereas girls cannot afford to be choosy and therefore will read what is handed to them even if they never see themselves reflected in a story (p. 17). The addition of sex-coding for protagonists could be a valuable addition to Pantaleo’s research and help to further tie in to the importance of representing women in the curriculum. It is important to note that in developing a new literary canon for Canadian education, Pantaleo did not make an effort to include female authors, or to make teachers aware of their own implicit biases. While this body of research falls under the category of literacy, this still relates to social studies and the portrayal of women in education overall. Like Paxton and Sharpe above, Pantaleo’s lack of consideration of women as important says just as much about women’s role in curriculum as their presence.

Finally, despite her 2005 call to revamp the social studies curriculum in Canada to involve women, Clark (2013) reviewed the new revitalized history and declared it a
success despite not giving a single mention to whether women had been included or their roles expanded in any way (p. 42). Clark details several initiatives that have sprung up in the past 40 years, including the Association for Canadian Studies, the Historical Thinking Project, and Canada: A People’s History (p. 44), none of which mention women in any meaningful way. This provides a crucial limitation to her work: Clark declares this new history in 2013 a tremendous success (p. 45), but does not address the fact that the complaint made by the Royal Commission in 1970 still exists today. Her overview concludes on an entirely positive note, providing no further steps for history education to take in order to continue its improvement; she also does not address any existing inequities or erasures. This is surprising when viewed in contrast to her 2005 work, seen above; Clark is a feminist scholar who previously laid harsh criticism on the treatment of women in history (2005), yet when it came time to study the changes, she appears to have forgotten her own views. Her positionality as a feminist researcher is entirely absent. However, the flaws make her work useful, as they illustrate the pervasive notion of “male history”, and further the prevailing opinion that history education reform need not work to include women in order to be considered successful.

2.3 Contextualizing the Research and Research Questions

The existing body of research on women in social studies education described above generally agrees that massive problems exist within the North American curriculum and calls for change. Whether focusing specifically on problems relating to women, such as exclusion or problematic inclusion (Clark, 2005; Crocco, 2012; Hart, 1997; Pennycook, 2011; Schrader & Wotipka, 2011), or by failing to consider women in their calls for reform (Clark, 2013; Pantaleo, 2002; Paxton, 1999; Sharpe, 2011), researchers have identified a lack of attention paid to women and their portrayal in social studies education. Various initiatives have been conducted in an effort to combat these problems, such as the gradual shift in California’s education from complete exclusion of women to a complementary model of women existing inside a largely male sphere (Schrader and Wotipka, 2011), or the revitalized Ministry of Ontario social studies curriculum (MOE, 2013). However, little examination of the implementation of these materials has been conducted, and few teachers have been interviewed about their thoughts on the subject at a practical level.
The primary gaps in the existing research fall into three main categories: calls for reform that do not include the portrayal of women in their analysis (Paxton, 1999; Pantaleo, 2002; Sharpe, 2011; Clark, 2013); research conducted solely on curriculum materials and textbooks without interviewing teachers or obtaining insight into actual teaching practices (Clark, 2005; Crocco, 2012; Schrader and Wotipka, 2011); and studies that focus on outlining the problems with current curriculum but which do not provide practical solutions or suggestions for improvement (Crocco, 2012; Paxton, 1999; Sharpe, 2011). Previous research by Clark (2005), Schrader and Wotipka (2011) and others listed earlier in the chapter provided excellent groundwork for future studies by laying the foundations of curriculum analysis and identifying current problems; thus, the next step in research is to take their work and apply it to classrooms and actual teaching practices.

This research seeks to further the work conducted by previous researchers in the field by moving their findings from a purely academic and curriculum-based approach into the classroom. It bridges the gap between academia and the classroom by interviewing teachers in the field and examining the actual implementation of curriculum changes and portrayals of women in social studies, as well as identifying proposed solutions and areas of improvement by current teachers.

The key question answered in this study is: how are women portrayed in K-6 social studies curriculum from the perspective of primary-junior teachers? This allows for an examination not only of curriculum materials but how teachers approach them and what efforts are being made to include a richer portrayal of women by teachers themselves. In so doing, this study examines the issue of what forms and media are women currently represented in the curriculum. Finally, in order to move the discussion beyond the realm of research and academics, it specifically asks teachers what they feel is missing from the Ontario curriculum and what changes they feel should be implemented.
Chapter Three: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an outline of the methodological approaches that make up this study. It begins with an overview of the research approach and procedures used, as well as the rationale behind them. It then moves on to discuss the instruments of data collection and the sampling methods used in participant selection. The chapter continues with a survey of the participants chosen for this study, including selection criteria and demographics, as well as providing a summary of the tools and methods used to complete data analysis. The chapter then covers potential ethical issues with the study and the steps taken to ensure compliance with ethical review procedures, and explores the limitations inherent to the study as well as the efforts to ensure validity despite these limitations. Finally, it concludes with a summary of the methodological approaches and their rationales pursuant to the research questions and purpose of the study.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

The very nature of education is a transformative process that changes not only lives but the world said lives inhabit. When studying education and conducting research to expand our knowledge on the subject of teaching, to gain insights and perspectives of those involved, and to push the envelope of understanding and refuse to accept the stagnation of progress for the sake of the status quo, qualitative methodology provides a compelling framework. Qualitative research situates the researcher inside the world and invites not only critical analysis and interpretation but engagement and immersion; a qualitative researcher does not operate solely within the confines of a lab or an office but out in the world where knowledge is made real. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) write, qualitative research involves “a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” and that in turn “transform the world”. Unlike quantitative research, which often purports to be bias-free and 100% objective, qualitative studies recognize that researcher bias is inherit to all research and that this must be considered and accounted for rather than ignored or explained away (Merriam, 2009).

The current research study provides a qualitative exploration of the inclusion and representation of women in K-6 Ontario social studies classrooms from the perspective of elementary school teachers. Data were collected through a literature review, a holistic
analysis of the Ontario social studies curriculum documents and ministry-approved textbooks using Schrader and Wotipka’s (2011) methods, and semi-structured interviews with participating teachers in order to triangulate results (Bryman, 2011). The study used this multi-site case study approach with multimethod triangulation in line with its feminist and participatory-action framework to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the primary-junior teacher perspective on the representation of women in Ontario K-6 social studies?
   a. How and where are women most represented in the curriculum or classroom resources?
   b. Where do teachers feel the K-6 social studies curriculum and resources fall in the 5 stages of inclusion of women?

2. What are the challenges teachers face when attempting to improve the representation of women and gender in the classroom?

3. What improvements could be made to the curriculum, available resources, or support/professional development provided to teachers?

Qualitative research, as described by Merriam (2009), focuses on the individual’s experiences and perceptions of events rather than third-party data or interpretation by the researcher, thus creating and understanding meaning. The particular approaches used in this research study were chosen to gather the impressions, experiences and perspectives of teachers in the field, as well as to provide a more in-depth look at curriculum materials, to best examine the portrayal of women in social studies curriculum. This research uses a case study approach due to the importance of context (in this case, the classroom and actual teaching practice) when discussing interpretations of curriculum materials (Yin, 2009). A multi-site case study approach was intended in order to improve the generalizability of the research, as choosing only teachers from a single school would not have the broadest results. The multiple perspectives would allow for the researcher to gain greater insight into teachers’ perceptions. However, given the staggering reluctance of participants to continue with the study, only one interview was conducted and used in data collection.

This study takes shape using both a feminist and a participatory-action framework in order to further future change in the field of education with regard to the treatment of
women. Action research is “a systematic approach that seeks knowledge for social action” (Ozanne & Saatecioglu, 2008, p. 423) that often includes non-traditional forms of experience and expression as data (Billies et al., 2010). In action research, the researcher has a responsibility to the participants and to the world at large to take this knowledge and use it to make changes. The findings of this study will be used in the researcher’s own future teaching practices to better understand and improve personal pedagogy regarding the inclusion of women. Feminist research, meanwhile, is at its core the “reclaiming and validation of women's experience through listening to women's voices” (Kitzinger, 2004, p. 113) in order to challenge the existing structures of society. This interview conducted research on women by talking to women and, further, examining existing materials through the female perspective, in the hopes of creating an in-depth, holistic look at women in social studies, rather than a low level ‘box-ticking’ approach where inclusion in any form is deemed enough.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

The aim of the current study is to examine the inclusion and representation of women in the 2013 Ontario social studies curriculum from the perspective of teachers. Given the qualitative nature of the research, semi-structured interviews were determined to be the most appropriate method for data collection. Semi-structured interviews involve the creation of an interview guide (see Appendix B), which includes the questions that will be asked of all participants, but with the understanding that additional followup questions may be asked in order to take advantage of information that comes up during the interview process. This creates a relaxed atmosphere and allows for the organic flow of conversation and information, but with a consistent overall structure to allow for comparisons between participants (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006).

As interviews were conducted during the school year, all participants were extremely busy with the demands of teaching during the data collection process. The semi-structured nature of the interviews ensured that the participants’ time was maximized, as scheduling a followup interview to cover any additional or missing information that occurred to the researcher after the fact would have been very difficult. Bernard (2006) recommends semi-structured interviews in these situations, as they guarantee an efficient use of time while still allowing some fluidity: “It demonstrates that
you are fully in control of what you want from an interview but leaves both you and your respondent free to follow new leads. It shows that you are prepared and competent but that you are not trying to exercise excessive control” (Bernard, 2006, p. 212).

The interviews were conducted face-to-face and documented using audio recording software. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) note that the informal nature of semi-structured interviews precludes the use of in-situ note-taking, as it distracts from the flow of conversation and may result in errors in transcription. Attempting to take notes while speaking with the participants “will result in poor notes and also detract [from] the development of rapport between interviewer and interviewee” (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, p. 1).

The interview questions were ordered in a way that would allow participants to ease into the conversation through the use of simple background information (e.g. “How long have you been teaching?”). This was done to reduce the levels of formality and discomfort by jumping immediately into the heart of the research questions. As the interview continued, questions gradually became more specific and detailed; once rapport was established and participants were more willing to share information, the questions delved deeper into the participants’ reflections and perceptions as well as their experiences. The full list of interview questions appears in Appendix B.

3.3 Participants

The following section reviews the sampling criteria used in determining participants for the research study. Given the constraints on time and the number of participants, a combination of typical case and convenience sampling were used. The additional criteria are explained below along with the procedures and recruitment process, followed by the demographics and biographical information on all participants selected for the interview process.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

Given that the aim of the research study is to examine teacher perspectives on the inclusion of women in social studies education, both in their own teaching practices and in existing curriculum materials, it was vital that the participants already make an effort to inform their pedagogy in this way. Teachers who had not thought about the inclusion or portrayal of women, those who did not make it a priority, or those who actively choose
not to include women were not included in the selection process. The following sample criteria were used to determine participants:

1) *Teachers should identify as female*

While it is important for all teachers, regardless of sex or gender, to focus on including women in their teaching practices, for the sake of this research study it was decided to interview only female teachers. The practice of focusing on raising the voices of a particular group when studying issues that affect that group is well documented (Creswell, 2012; Kitzinger, 2004), in order to best represent that group rather than the voice of the majority. Further studies could provide fascinating additional analysis by interviewing teachers of all genders.

2) *Teachers should be aware of the issue of including women in social studies*

Future studies with a larger participant sampling and additional time and resources may consider including teachers who do not prioritize or have not considered the importance of including women in the curriculum as a control or contrast group, in order to examine the status quo. These studies could also include those teachers who actively oppose the “feminization” of education as an alternate voice on the topic. However, given the tight scope of this project, it was decided to include only those teachers who focus on including women in their teaching and/or who have an interest in how they are portrayed in the existing curriculum materials.

3) *Teachers should comprise a range of experience*

Given that social issues are constantly evolving, it is important to interview teachers with varying years of experience. Teachers with a decade or more of experience can provide valuable insight on the changes to the profession over time, as well as their perception of the shifts or stages in the inclusion of women in social studies by themselves, their colleagues, and/or teaching materials. These participants are unlikely to have received initial teacher training with a focus on social justice or gender education, meaning their efforts would generally be self-directed. In contrast, new teachers will have little experience with the changes in the profession, but are more likely to have received an education more heavily steeped in issues of sex and gender. Including teachers with this range of experience will help to provide a more comprehensive picture of any changes in social studies education with respect to gender.
3.3.2 Sampling procedures and recruitment

A combination of purposive and convenience sampling was used to select participants. Purposive, or non-probability, sampling involves a selection of participants made using the judgement of the researcher based on specific researcher-identified criteria instead of random selection. Convenience sampling is a type of purposive sampling that is often used in qualitative research projects with limited resources (Lund Research, 2012). Convenience sampling involves identifying the target pool of potential participants (in this case, Ontario elementary school K-6 teachers in the Greater Toronto Area) and inviting participants until the requisite number for the study is reached.

In this study, the existing networks held by the researcher through previous volunteer or practicum placements, the university, and membership in various educational communities were used to contact potential participants with the terms of the research project. Initial parties had the option to forward the information to interested teachers, who were then contacted for participation by the researcher via email. In addition, potential participants located through the university, the Ministry of Education, ETFO, OESSTA, and other networks were also contacted.

The majority of contact requests went unanswered. Seven potential participants responded with interest, but withdrew after receiving their confirmation email from the researcher. Two more agreed to participate but declined during the interview-setting process. One participant agreed to the interview and allowed their data to be included in this study.

3.3.3 Participants

The participant is a female educator who has worked as a teacher in Ontario for 18 years. She worked at a private school for one year, then in public schools for ten years. She worked as a literacy consultant for the TDSB for three years, and now is in the fourth year of a teaching position. Her subject areas are social studies, media literacy, and drama. She has taught grades 1-6, and worked with 7-8 as a literacy consultant.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis process conducted in this research study is twofold. First, the participant’s interview was studied and coded into categories and themes based on patterns in the responses, revealing the following themes: potential, priority/interest,
WOMEN IN SOCIAL STUDIES

time/initiative, resources/knowledge, and teacher-initiated programs. Second, the 2013 social studies curriculum document and Ontario Ministry of Education-approved textbooks were studied using the methods described by Schrader and Wotipka (2011) in order to analyze not only the presence or absence of women in social studies textbooks, but the way in which they are represented. It was discovered through this analysis that the highest level of inclusion in the five-stage process was multifocal for the curriculum document, but bi-focal for the class texts.

For participant interviews, the sole interview was transcribed and then coded into specific categories based on which topics the participant spoke of most often. This was done to create a broad, thematic picture of the participant’s viewpoint and experiences of women in the curriculum. Once initial analysis was complete, the categories and keywords from the interview were then analyzed together in order to come up with overall themes common. The themes were then matched against the curriculum analysis. This stage allowed for a synthesis of results, leading to the overall findings as discussed in the following chapter.

As for the curriculum analysis process, the procedure as outlined by Schrader and Wotipka (2011) describes examining not only whether women are included in curriculum materials but how their representation is handled. For this research, these curriculum materials included the revised 2013 Ontario social studies curriculum guidelines, as well as textbooks on the ministry-approved Trillium list currently in use in Ontario classrooms. The analysis process involved noting: whether women were mentioned in the curriculum, both in text and pictures, and what roles they had; which notable women were missing from the texts, or which roles were only described from a masculine standpoint; and whether the women mentioned were described as participating in traditionally masculine or feminine pursuits or spheres (Schrader & Wotipka, 2011, p. 75). This was done in order to determine which stage of representation (exclusion, complementary representation, bi-focal representation, feminist representation or multifocal representation) comprises the Ontario curriculum’s treatment of women.
WOMEN IN SOCIAL STUDIES

The study of curriculum materials was compared with the participating teachers’ responses on their views of the curriculum and any needed changes or improvements in order to gain a well-rounded understanding of the issue of women in K-6 social studies education.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedure

This research study followed the ethical review procedures outlined by the Master of Teaching program at OISE and the University of Toronto. Participants were contacted prior to data collection and provided with a copy of the interview questions for review (see Appendix B). A letter of consent (see Appendix A) was given to participants to sign before going forward with the interview process; one copy was retained by the participants and another by the researcher. Participants were informed in advance by email and again in person of their right to withdraw from the study at any point.

The primary ethical consideration is that of confidentiality and protection of the participants’ identity. Participants were supplied with a pseudonym to maintain anonymity, and the names of any students, schools, or colleagues were likewise protected. Any individual-specific information, such as places of employment or specific roles, were omitted, and all other identifying information was removed. During the interview, the researcher attempted to foster an atmosphere of trust and professionalism to ensure that participants felt at ease. After the interview, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw, and were offered a copy of the interview transcripts for review.

The second consideration is that of transparency. Interview questions were sent to potential participants ahead of time so they could review the schedule and be somewhat prepared for the questions; participants were also informed of the semi-structured/informal nature of the interview, where it was explained that some questions would come organically from the discussion. The interviews were recorded for maximum accuracy, and transcribed by the researcher during the data analysis process. Once transcriptions were complete, participants were contacted and asked whether they wished to see a copy of the transcripts. Participants were offered the opportunity to review their interview so that any and all information provided was done so with their unconditional consent. The remaining participant consented to move forward and allow their data to be part of the analysis process.
Throughout the interview process, participants were informed of their right to withdraw consent to any portion of the study at any stage in the research process. Participants were also offered access to the completed study after publication.

3.6 Methodological Limits and Strengths

This section discusses the various limitations of the study and the attempts to ameliorate them, as well as areas of strength.

3.6.1 Validity

The chief limitation of this study is the limited scope and sample size. Given the lack of time and resources permitted to complete the project, data collection in the field was limited to interviews with one participating teacher. The teacher discussed her own personal beliefs, experiences and efforts with regard to teaching practices and use of curriculum materials to provide the most expansive representation of women to students. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method of data collection to provide the researcher with the freedom to follow up on any statements of particular interest or relevance in an attempt to gather as much detail from each participant as possible. A multisite approach was intended in order to provide a greater variety of experience, however only a single participant agreed to the interview process. The small number of participants means that this study is restricted to the use of typical case sampling, where data can only be compared to itself, not extrapolated to the general population (Lund Research, 2012).

In order to reduce the limitations of the study and improve validity, this study used a multimethod approach to data collection, using multiple sources which allowed the use of between-method methodological triangulation of results (Bryman, 2011). Triangulation involves “the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question in order to enhance confidence in the ensuing findings”, particularly in the case of social research, where qualitative methods often result in limitations; methodological triangulation involves using multiple methods to collect data (p. 1142). This research study involved two phases: theory-based, involving the examination and analysis of existing literature, and field-based, involving interviews with classroom teachers. This resulted in three sources of data: a literature review of existing research material in the field of feminism and social studies education; an in-depth, qualitative
analysis of the Ontario Social Studies Curriculum document and ministry-approved textbook materials currently being used in Ontario elementary classrooms; and the semi-structured interviews with a practicing elementary school teachers making an effort to include increased portrayals of women in her classrooms. The data from these sources were used to compare with each other in order to identify common themes and strengthen any conclusions that arose from the findings.

3.6.2 Researcher bias

Avoiding bias is also an important factor in qualitative research, as the lack of quantitative data and the nature of the research and its relationship to the researcher run the risk of creating skewed data. Efforts were made to reduce the possibility of bias, including: generation of interview questions to avoid leading questions (either through wording or the order/flow of questions themselves) or misunderstandings through unclear phrasing; conducting anonymous, single interviews to reduce the risk of participants tailoring their answers to be in line with the perceived thoughts or consensus of a group; and researcher transparency through an open discussion of positionality as presented in Chapter One. It is impossible to provide an entirely objective view of the research given that the qualitative researcher is part of the study itself, however, the above steps involve a conscious effort on the part of the researcher to minimize any negative effects from personal bias on the results of the study.

3.6.3 Strengths

Despite the above limitations, the following study nevertheless builds upon several strengths of the research process. As mentioned above, the multimethod approach (Bryman, 2011) allows for increased triangulation and thus validity of data. The mixed-method approach combines the benefits of research in the existing literature, qualitative analysis of in-use materials, as well as semi-structured interviews with teachers. In particular, the semi-structured interviews worked to create an informal, conversational approach to data-collection that allowed for the development of a rapport between the researcher and the interviewees; for topics to be explored beyond the framework of the initial interview guide; and for thematic analysis to be drawn from the resulting transcripts (Pathak & Intratat, 2012). The interview process allows teachers to formulate their own answers while speaking in a natural conversation setting, which may encourage
them to speak more freely and articulate their thoughts and beliefs more than answering an online survey where their interaction is restricted to text boxes on the screen. These in-depth interviews create a deeper level of interaction and codified themes despite the small sample size; this, when combined with the actual qualitative analysis of the course materials following the work of Schrader and Wotipka (2011), works to offset the limitations.

3.7 Conclusions

This chapter discussed the research approach and procedures used in the creation and execution of this study and provided the rationale. This study uses qualitative research methods in order to gain the unique perspective, insight and experience of the teacher participant, as well as to perform a deep, holistic analysis of curriculum materials in order to examine the portrayal of women in K-6 social studies education in Ontario. The case study approach was selected in order to examine this individual perspective, particularly necessary given the difficulty finding participants.

Research was conducted from a participatory-action and feminist standpoint in order to take the knowledge gained from these findings and use them to transform the researcher’s own pedagogy and the existing system of education regarding women. A semi-structured interview was used to gather real-world, interpretive data from the participant by creating a rapport and allowing for a flexible, conversational atmosphere to ensure the participant felt encouraged to share their true and unfiltered perspectives.

The participant was chosen based on their self-identified interest in including women in their social studies curriculum, with consideration given to full-time status and years teaching.

The ethical considerations of confidentiality and transparency were discussed and made explicit in this chapter and during the interview process. Limitations of the study such as sample size, generalizability and researcher bias, and attempts to alleviate these issues and improve validity were discussed, as well as the strengths of the multimethod approach and use of interviews as data collection tools.

The following chapter provides an overview of the research findings, including the themes that arose from the collected research and any commonalities or departures from the existing research.
Chapter Four: FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter comprises the research findings from this study, gathered from a qualitative analysis of the Ontario social studies curriculum and sample chapters from ministry-approved textbooks, as well as an interview with an Ontario elementary educator. The curriculum document and resources were analyzed using an adaptation of the five stages of inclusion as posited by Schrader and Wotipka (2011), and were used along with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 to supplement the data generated from the sole interview. The data analysis process revealed five main themes as challenges or factors involved with the inclusion of women in social studies:

1) Potential: The curriculum documents are open so as to create the potential for multifocal representations of gender, but this does not necessarily translate to the in-class resources.

2) Priority/Interest: Due to the nonspecific nature of the curriculum and the lack of visible female examples in textbook materials, teachers must make broader inclusion a personal priority in order for this to occur.

3) Time/Initiative: Ontario teachers face a great deal of pressure and are not given copious amounts of time for finding alternate resources or materials, therefore any teachers wishing to incorporate more inclusive gender representation must do so on their own with little support.

4) Resources/Knowledge: Teachers who do wish to expand the gender representation in their classrooms face a shortage of available resources, and thus must have previous knowledge to seek out materials on their own.

5) Teacher-Initiated Programs: Teachers who do manage to navigate the above challenges are managing to implement a number of strategies in their classrooms that could be used by future educators.

Each theme contains sub-themes including relevant data from interviews, curriculum resources, or the existing pool of literature in order to fully support the analysis. Finally, while the lack of multiple participants means this data cannot be extrapolated across the province, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of initiatives implemented by the
participant as an example of the possibilities. Implications and avenues for future research will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.1 Potential

The textual analysis and interview with the participant revealed that the curriculum documents contain a wide potential for inclusive representation of gender. However, while the Nelson textbooks contained the framework for the Big Ideas and concepts of critical analysis that could be used to direct student thinking toward the issue of multiple perspectives, the actual content is often lacking in diverse representation. The scope of this study does not allow for a comprehensive review of all potential resources and materials available to teachers; thus, this research restricts itself to texts officially approved and listed on the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Trillium List. It will analyze the inclusion of women in these documents, not simply from a quantitative perspective of are women mentioned or not, but rather how they are portrayed. This section will use a framework adapted from that used by Schrader and Wotipka (2011) to categorize the curriculum and resources into five stages of inclusion:

1) Exclusionary: no women represented.
2) Complementary: women included but always alongside men, or only when having contributed to traditionally male-centric domains, such as war or economics.
3) Bi-focal: women’s contributions discussed against men’s in “dualist categories” of “male and female, private and public”, where systems of inequity are introduced but women are often depicted as “passive agents” in their oppression, not actors of change (pp. 73-74).
4) Feminist: women’s lives discussed in a broad, meaningful way as having contributed significantly to society, validating women’s experiences “independent of men’s history” (p. 74).
5) Multifocal: men and women’s contributions working together to create “a holistic view of human experience that profoundly alters historical understanding” (p. 74) and involving the intersection of groups traditionally presented in opposition.

4.1.1 Ontario social studies curriculum document

The Ontario K-6 Social Studies curriculum underwent revision in recent years, following a call for a more diversified and inclusive approach to Canadian education
(Clark, 2005). The resulting 2013 curriculum involves a much broader focus, stressing the importance of critical thinking through the “six concepts of social studies thinking — significance, cause and consequence, continuity and change, patterns and trends, interrelationships, [and] perspective” (The Ontario Curriculum, p. 58), and an emphasis on the inclusion of aboriginal perspectives. Clark (2005) had also called for reform in the way women and gender were represented in the Canadian curriculum, following a review of the textbooks used in British Columbia classrooms. The new curriculum was designed with the goal of inclusivity in mind:

By drawing attention to the contributions of women, the perspectives of various ethnocultural, religious, and racial communities, and the beliefs and practices of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, teachers enable students from a wide range of backgrounds to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. (p. 45)

The important point here is not just the inclusion of various perspectives, but also the reason for it; the curriculum is not seeking simply to tick off boxes on a diversity checklist, but to ensure that all students are able to see themselves reflected. This is a valuable distinction that speaks to a rich multifocal approach.

The curriculum promises a multi-layered, intersectional approach to diversity through the materials taught to students in the social studies classroom. From a purely quantitative perspective, the search term ‘women’ appeared 5 times in the 2004 document for Grades 1-6, and 27 in the 2013 document. While not indicative of quality or content, this at least shows an improvement in terms of sheer numbers. This front matter focus and the increase in including women in the expectations corresponds directly with the beliefs of the participant, who was asked her thoughts on the representation of women in the core curriculum document:

The curriculum itself is neutral and open, well as much as anything can be neutral. Of course no document is neutral, but really, I think all of the differences come in terms of resources and not the curriculum itself. When you look at [the document] […] roles of women are mentioned at almost every single grade level in the first part of the expectation.

When asked about where the curriculum falls on the Schrader and Wotipka (2011) scale, the participant stated her belief it is “multifocal, for sure.” She referenced the six big
concepts of social studies critical thinking and spoke to the potential of socially-educated teachers to make the most of the curriculum: “if you’ve taken any sociology course you’re pretty good in terms of being able to read it and understand it and then move on and interpret through that lens.”

When examining the mentions of women in the curriculum expectations through a qualitative lens, it becomes clear that the focus lies on examining the lives, hardships and contributions of women throughout Canada’s history. For example, a Grade 3 expectation for the category “Life in Canada – Then and Now” states, “Describe some of the similarities and differences in various aspects of everyday life […] of selected groups living in Canada between 1780 and 1850,” with ‘women’ as one of their suggested groups (p. 86). Another expectation is that students will “compare some of the roles of and challenges facing people in Canada around the beginning of the nineteenth century with those in the present day”, again specifying ‘women’ in their list of examples (p. 86). The expectation surrounding the colonial period involves the question, “How did men and women in some First Nations work together to ensure the survival of their families?” (p. 89) which allows for a multifocal approach rather than taking a separate “men’s roles” and “women’s roles” attitude.

The Grade 4 expectations include comparative studies, inviting students to “compare social organization (e.g. […] the status of women) in two or more early societies (e.g., […] a matriarchal First Nation and a society in medieval Asia)”, providing the sample question “What were some differences in the position of women in ancient Greece, medieval France, and Haudenosaunee society?” (p. 98). It goes on to compare groups of different social strata and power, suggesting, “What differences were there in the education of men and women in ancient Greece?” (p. 98) as a research focus. This presents students with the opportunity to critique the social structures in place within specific societies and between them, which could then easily be applied to present society. These questions easily reach the feminist stage of the Schrader-Wotipka scale.

The Grade 4 curriculum also specifies an expectation where students will “describe the social organization of some different early societies […] and the role and status of some significant and work-related groups in these societies” (p. 101). This provides the opportunity for students to examine social practices and study the structures that created
them, and indeed the curriculum gives a specific example: “What does the foot binding of women in China tell you about the status of women and social organization in that society?” (p. 101). These questions direct students toward the systems of power and social “norms” that can result in oppression and inequity, but the way the teacher chooses to frame the discussion determines whether it will be bi-focal (focusing on women as without agency) or able to reach a higher stage.

Grade 5 focuses on the First Nations and early settlers to Canada, with the examples of female representation occurring in these demographics (e.g. First Nations women, filles du roi) and focusing mostly on the roles of men and women. This falls mainly under the complementary or bi-focal stages, where men’s and women’s roles are described as separate and not interacting, with the phrase “the role of men, women and children” appearing at several points throughout the chapter (pp. 108-115). However, two notable exceptions present the case of women’s roles contributing to a broader scope in Canadian history: the role of women in decision-making under the Haudenosaunee government, and the role of First Nations women on the Canadian fur trade (p. 110). These provide specific examples of women as agents and actors of change, with influence going beyond the traditional focus of domestic work.

The Grade 6 curriculum begins to examine the issue of women’s rights and the status of women, which involves women taking agency in fighting their own oppression and thus moves the focus from bi-focal to feminist or even multifocal. The specific expectation of “Diversity, Inclusiveness, and Canadian Identity” (p. 120) states that students will “explain how various groups have contributed to the goal of inclusiveness in Canada (e.g., the efforts of women’s rights […] )” (p. 121). One example given is, “What was the role of women’s groups in ensuring that gender was included in the Charter of Rights?” This is important because it puts women and other marginalized groups at the forefront of the struggle for their rights, which places this section of the curriculum past the bi-focal and to the feminist or even multifocal stage. Another example is the expectation for “Understanding Context: Canada’s Global Interactions,” which states:

[Students will] identify some significant political, social, and economic interactions between Canada and other regions of the world, and describe some ways in which
they affect these regions (e.g., [...] change in the status of women as a result of education projects in a developing region). (p. 126)

This takes the discussion of women in social studies to the global scale, which has the potential to be a multifocal approach, but the example question makes this somewhat tricky. It would be easy for a teacher to focus on Canada’s efforts to improve the status of women abroad while ignoring that of women in Canada, as noted by Crocco (2012). In fact, this issue will be discussed later in this chapter in the discussion of the Nelson textbooks.

As the participant noted, the curriculum document itself is easily multifocal, with many opportunities for teachers and students to explore the status of women throughout history in Canada and in other early societies. While not every specific inclusion of women reaches the multifocal stage — a fair number of the above examples fell under the bi-focal umbrella — it would not be difficult for a motivated teacher to push the level of student inquiry a little further. Moreover, this study only examined instances where the curriculum specified women or gender issues by name; other expectations may also be adapted to include women. However, teachers who are rushed and perhaps not as focused on the representation of women may not do so without the specific prompt, as the participant stated: “I don’t think that the average teacher knows what this means in terms of being able to confidently interpret the significance of an event.” She also said, “While the curriculum expectation itself is broad enough that you could use texts that feature women and still hit that curriculum expectation, [women are] not consistently listed in one of the examples.” This is why the instances where women are mentioned specifically are a crucial win for diverse representation in the classroom. The potential, therefore, is clear in the curriculum document; the issue is whether this translates to the resources used to teach the material presented in the document.

4.1.2 Ministry-approved curriculum resources (Nelson Social Studies, Grades 3-6)

In 2005, Penney Clark wrote: “Textbooks present an approved and even ‘official’ version of how young people are intended to understand their world [...]” (p. 259). While the curriculum documents provide the ideals created by the ministry, textbooks and other resources exist as the reality of what is actually offered to teachers and students for use in their classrooms. “What is most striking,” Clark writes, “is how meagerly the textbooks
reflect both feminist scholarship and societal changes” (p. 259). While a plethora of resources exist on the Internet and are available for teachers to purchase, the Ministry of Education chooses to list and endorse only the Nelson Social Studies texts. Thus, they provide the focus for this analysis.

The Grade 5 “Government and Citizenship” text (2014) contains a section on First Nations communities, and splits up the roles within into “Elders,” “men,” “women” and “children” (pp. 19-20). According to the text, Elders taught and led the community; men fished and hunted, built the structures used by the community, traded with other groups, farmed, and fought wars. Women “generally prepared the animals that the men hunted”, “hunted small birds and mammals”, including gathering plants and eggs for cooking, and occasionally “planted and harvested crops” (p. 20). The gender makeup of Elders is left unstated, which runs the risk of defaulting to male in students’ minds. No mention is made to any political, authoritative or cultural role held by women in First Nations communities. This contrasts with what the participant stated about the curriculum providing a space to talk about women’s issues through First Nations studies, including “the whole idea of women being the head of tribes, the matrilineal societies.” This also directly contradicts the Ontario curriculum document itself, which gave the Haudenosaunee as an example of a First Nation where women were directly involved in decision-making (p. 110). This treatment of women in the Grade 5 text exists at the complementary stage of female representation, only one step above exclusion.

The Grade 6 course text demonstrates a situation mentioned by Crocco (2012) and discussed in Chapter 2, wherein North American educators tend to view female inequality as a foreign problem that leaves western countries unaffected (pp. 181-183). The issue of women’s rights and gender discrimination is presented as an international problem, one that Canada is working to help other nations overcome, but that does not exist within a Canadian context. This can be found in the Grade 6 text (2014), “Communities Past and Present”, Chapter 1 (Human Rights): “Gender Discrimination: In some areas of the world, women and girls do not have the same opportunities and freedoms as men and boys because of gender discrimination,” such as, “They may earn less money than males for work they do” (p. 22). While the text does not explicitly say that the problem only exists outside of Canada, the ambiguous phrasing could easily lead
students to that assumption and the text does not attempt to clarify. Teachers would have
to expressly counter it with examples, otherwise students run the risk of accepting this
elision of truth as fact. Soon after, the text describes a program initiated by the Canadian
government to increase gender equality in China (p. 22). In both cases, the issue of
gender discrimination is posited as the reason for inequality, rather than a product of it;
there is no context or discussion as to the actual power structures inherent in the societies
which create these imbalances. The text also does not provide any information about
women acting to empower themselves. This falls under the bi-focal stage of
representation.

The Grade 6 course text also mentions the issue of violence against women, but only
in the context of Afghanistan, once again without any broader cultural or societal context
(p. 17). Later on the chapter does address the issue of female inequality in Canada, but in
a hypothetical fashion: “Do you think that girls and women in Canada are discriminated
against? Survey at least five people you know to discover whether they think so” (p. 23).
Unfortunately, the text does not provide any examples to help direct student thinking, or
address the issue of what to do if students decide that inequality does not exist. What
happens if everyone in the student’s family or social circle believes there is no
discrimination? Are all opinions necessarily educated and worthy of equal consideration?
Should issues like discrimination be settled by popular opinion? What is the gender
makeup of the participants in the students’ surveys? None of these questions are posed by
the text, and indeed no effort is given to explaining the subjective nature of survey data.
In each of the above examples, it would be up to the teacher to realize the limitations of
the content and supplement with additional research or guided questions. This limited
view of the contexts of female oppression straddles both the exclusionary stage — as it
does not discuss the status of women in Canada — and the bi-focal, which frames women
in terms of their oppression and does not allow them the agency to act upon it.

Other criticisms of the textbooks irrespective of gender include problematic
depictions of race and culture, as suggested by Paxton (1999) and Sharpe (2001) and
discussed in Chapter 2. For example, the Grade 5 text refers to First Nations communities
and their workings in the past tense throughout, and uses a photo of a white settler
woman to depict the smudge ceremony (p. 21). Likewise, the Grade 6 text includes a
picture with the caption “actors are recreating life […] at the Black Loyalist Heritage Site”, where two of the three people in the photo are of evident Caucasian descent (p. 14). Moreover, while the curriculum document itself makes a point to identify the various First Nations and “describe their key characteristics” (p. 110), the textbook uses “First Nations” as a blanket term and assumes that all societies were structured the same way in terms of organization, power, religion, and so on. While recognizing that race and gender are intersectional issues, the scope of this paper does not allow for a full examination of the treatment of race in the Nelson texts; however, even this brief glance suggests that further scrutiny could be placed on these resources in this regard.

On a positive note, while it does not discuss any actual issues with respect to women, the Grade 3 textbook (2014) does make a point of using a fairly even balance of men and women in their photographs and highlighted personal bios (p. 28-29) in its discussion of “Living and Working in Ontario”. The Grade 4 text (2014), in its chapter on “Early Societies”, suggests an inquiry unit where students may choose to examine “what artifacts, maps, photos, and images tell about the daily lives of women, men, and children from that society” (p. 13). However, the text itself does not provide any information about these roles, or women’s involvement in any form, in its sections on medieval England, ancient Rome and the Indus Valley. Teachers would have to bring in supplementary materials if they wished to provide their students with a balanced representation of these societies.

The front matter on the Nelson website states: “Aligned to the 2013 Ontario Social Studies Curriculum, this series focuses on inquiry, social studies thinking concepts, citizenship, and spatial skills in one comprehensive resource.” Moreover, the Ontario Ministry of Education Trillium List website states:

In order to meet their local needs, boards are responsible for selecting textbooks from The Trillium List and approving them for use in their schools with the assurance that these textbooks have been subjected to a rigorous evaluation in accordance with the criteria specified in the policy document Guidelines for Approval of Textbooks. Even without an exhaustive review of a scope far broader than is available to this study, the textbooks do not appear to match these lofty goals with respect to gender and women’s issues at anything above the surface level. This puts them largely at Stage 1 or 2.
WOMEN IN SOCIAL STUDIES

(exclusionary or complementary) on the scale adapted from Schrader and Wotipka (2011), with occasional forays into stage 3 (bi-focal). In fact, an educator who wished to remain anonymous described the Nelson texts as “terrible” and advised, “Don’t use them.” Similarly, without referring to the Nelson specifically, the participant believed that class textbooks have “traditionally been bi-focal.” She stated that while in the textbook “there will be a section on roles of women”, in the description of these roles “you’ll get a sentence about intermarriage” but nothing about how “they were translators or their recipes, even, [which] could be used as evidence to show how you could work with your environment to establish something.” While the above are personal opinions, when combined with this study’s analysis of the sample texts they put forth a bleak picture of the official texts’ commitment to gender diversity.

Ultimately, while the curriculum document has the potential to launch a multifocal program, the lack of specific female examples or guided questions leave it up to teachers to create a gender-variant program. Compounding this problem is the fact that the textbooks, given even a cursory investigation, often carry a shallow or misleading representation of women that does not extend beyond the bi-focal stage of female inclusion — and sometimes, not even that. The following sections will discuss the various challenges that befall educators who may — or may not — be looking to expand their representation of women and gender in the classroom.

4.2 Priority/Interest

One of the chief challenges to an increased representation of women — or indeed, advocating for any alternate perspective or missing voice — is whether or not current educators consider this inclusion a priority. This study, while necessarily limited in scope and means, revealed that the lack of priority toward women’s issues could well play a part in its absence as a focus for Ontario elementary education.

As mentioned under the “methodological reflexivity” section in Chapter 3, securing participants proved to be the most challenging aspect of the research. Multiple teachers, principals, and members of the Ontario Ministry of Education and affiliated diversity-related groups were contacted regarding participation, with potential participants ranging from not responding, claiming a personal lack of knowledge or expertise, or disavowing a need for the concept. The most common response to an interview request, given either
over email or during personal conversations, was “I am not and don’t know anyone doing this work”. When the topic of this research was raised at a number of educational and professional conferences, the response shifted generally to puzzlement and the question, “Why?” The strongest dismissal involved the assertion that the issue of women in education is no longer relevant given that society and education are moving away from the concept of the gender binary. Others believed that women were already represented enough in the classroom through the proliferation of picture books depicting characters of diverse origins in school libraries.

This attitude is pervasive throughout social studies education in Canada. As Clark (2005) wrote: “Canadian history textbooks […] resonate with the silences related to women and women’s lives” (p. 257). The following sections will examine some of the potential reasons for this lack of priority.

4.2.1 “Feminism is over”

When asked whether the current trend in education favours the topic of women’s issues and bringing more female content and contribution into social studies, the participant believed that this was not a priority for most educators: “It’s almost as though that battle was won […] I feel like, because enrolment [of female students is up] in terms of science and law, it’s kind of like, ‘well we’re done there, moving right along’.” This appears to agree with the general tone of responses to this research topic, which often stated that we have moved beyond the need for women’s issues.

Given the limitations of this study, it is not possible to provide a fully nuanced and exhaustive examination of common resources made available to teachers in Ontario with respect to the inclusion of women and representation of gender (binary or no). It is also beyond the scope of this research to fully deconstruct the notion that all the existing work on women’s issues has been completed and we must move on to other issues. Regardless of the validity or evidence toward these beliefs, however, this is a concept that affects the mindset of both educators and policy-makers and thus affects what material is focused on in the classroom.

Moreover, the implication of this extends beyond social studies classroom content. This attitude is the one noted by Pennycook (2011) in her examination of the boys’ literacy movement and the “re-engendering” of current elementary pedagogy (p. 9). The
lens that educators use when looking at student achievement often takes the form of a deficit model: rather than celebrating female students’ achievement when scores improve in a given subject (e.g. math), teachers see it as a failure on the part of the education system to cater to male students. Pennycook describes this belief:

It’s not that the girls are pulling ahead due to improved or perhaps even superior math skills, but rather the boys are disadvantaged by the language expectations embedded in the new math program allowing the girls to pull ahead of them (p. 16)

This framework leads to the model where women’s issues are a thing of the past, and that any focus on girls is an inefficient use of class time. The results, however, has the potential to be severely detrimental: “The overwhelming assumption that girls’ achievement is not an issue has led to a massive neglect of girls’ experiences in school and a failure to allocate resources to girls’ needs” (Pennycook, 2011, p. 13).

The issue of female representation in social studies is part of a holistic failure of gender diversity in class content and pedagogy that is not currently being prioritized in Ontario education, partly due to the conceit that feminism is no longer an issue worth considering.

4.2.2 Teacher experience

The other issue raised by the participant and by those who refused a request for an interview is the lack of experience or personal knowledge teachers believe themselves to possess. Inclusion of women or a broader spectrum of gender in the curriculum depends on a teacher’s ability to talk about these issues, and if the teacher does not have a personal stake in the issue, it is easy to avoid making it a focus. The participant believed that, while relevant current events might bring women’s issues to mind for teachers, this does not happen in the day to day:

I do think that women’s issues come to the forefront of teachers’ — classroom teachers’ — minds when there is a pop culture event. So, the shooting of Malala, that will precipitate a lens on it. But of their own devices? I would say it doesn’t rank on the list.

On one hand, it does show that the issue of women’s rights or inclusion of women into the curriculum is happening, if only when precipitated by a news event. On the other, the participant’s statement suggests that only those stories which reach the massive global media scale are the ones that make it into the classroom; the issue of women’s rights is
relevant to people all around the world on a daily basis — such as the ongoing murdered and missing indigenous women across Canada — but these are not thought important enough, or perhaps not out of place or notable enough, to make it into the classroom.

Further, the participant stated that this lack of focus on women’s issues extended to professional development from boards or the ministry in terms of which issues to cover: “If you looked at a PD schedule, […] if you got copies of what are the issues that we’re gonna fund, I don’t know that it would rank.”

For many teachers, the issue of female representation is unfortunately not one of personal significance. If teachers do not come at education from a specific social justice or gender-responsive lens, and the majority of professional development sessions do not set aside time for sessions on how to educate in this regard, it follows that including women will not be a priority for many teachers.

4.2.3 Practical considerations

The other challenge with regard to priority, in purely pragmatic terms, is that teachers must cover a great deal of material in a short amount of time, and thus the focus falls on what is explicitly referenced in the textbook and classroom resources. Teachers must constantly use their professional judgment to determine what they are or are not able to focus on. This was referenced in the participant’s interview, where she spoke of the tendency for overworked teachers to focus on academic achievement as the marker for student need, and thus prioritize based on a ‘gap-filling’ mindset:

I think, just because you’re so busy as a classroom teacher […] you go to fill the voids. And so, if you’re not noticing performance problems [with girls], you’re not going to seek to fill that because there are so many other gaps to fill. And so it becomes one of those plugging situations rather than something intentional.

Of course filling gaps and meeting the needs of under-served students is an integral part of education, but the issue here is how teachers identify and prioritize these gaps. If academic performance is used as the benchmark, then the participant argues that girls tend to be ignored by educators in this regard. The participant observed that “if your girls are doing well in your class, you’re not worried about them,” which results in a lack of focus on girls and women in the classroom. In fact, in terms of gender, the participant argued that the education system has shifted much of its focus to boys: “We had this ‘boy
crisis’, and we spent 5 years where there’s like, boys’ conferences every year, boys’ literacy,” all coming out of the notion that “we’re losing our boys.”

This connects to Pennycook (2011)’s research on the perception of boys being at a greater disadvantage in education than girls. If teachers do not perceive the need for increased female representation, or do not consider the issue in the first place, then they will focus on areas they believe to be more relevant to student achievement. This effect, where teachers prioritize based on what they believe is important to cover in their limited amount of time, connects to the second theme (“Time/Initiative”) and will be discussed in the following section.

4.3 Time/Initiative

Elementary school teachers are not blessed with a plethora of free time for extra research and resource creation, which means they end up prioritizing what they can cover in the course of the school year. Given the limited gender portrayals in the official Nelson textbooks, teachers who wish to improve representation must locate any resources and create lessons themselves. As a result, teachers without an existing interest in bringing a more diverse gender representation into their classroom may be deterred from trying by the heavy investment required, and even teachers who are enthusiastic may be worn down and discouraged.

4.3.1 Time

A teacher’s time is divided across many elements of the classroom and beyond, which means that any extra content that cannot be easily slotted into the existing curriculum requirements is unlikely to be adopted by teachers already struggling to fit in what they need in the time allotted. As discussed in the previous section on priority, teachers are not led to focus on the need for girls to see themselves in the class content. Rather, teachers tend to direct any focus on girls toward the social emotional scale, such as classroom dynamics. During her interview, the participant addressed this issue of focus and representation with female students:

You may be worried about all the drama among the girl friendships, like that’s where you spend all your time, navigating girl friendship drama in the classroom, so like, self-esteem issues, body image. I would say that the time and attention when it comes
to the girls in your room goes to those kind of aspects more so than academic or representation.

Dealing with social issues may be at the forefront of teachers’ minds, and when attempting to navigate the complicated social dynamics involved with girls in the classroom the idea of spending more time on female representation could be exhausting. Alternately, teachers may assume that if they’re giving this much attention to the social issues, it is not necessary to devote any more time to curriculum elements.

Even though the participant makes an effort to include women in her classes, she still finds it difficult to make time to find new resources, and spoke of the benefits of premade resources to ease her workload. When she wants to create a new unit, the participant said, “Without a resource that’s framed in this way, I don’t have the time to go and [find one].” This problem occurs even with the participant prioritizing women’s issues in her teaching, so for other teachers who are just beginning to diversify their gender representation and who may not have built up their own personal resource bank, the barrier may prove too strong.

As a suggestion for teachers intimidated by the time requirement, the participant suggested adding one element at a time; if teachers “get in the habit of just tacking that one in, just as a habit, you know, first one what’s your main idea, second one some content-y thing” then that reduces the time required and breaks down the process into manageable chunks. According to the participant, it is less about finding multiple resources than it is “the way you structure your work.” She added that “there are so many priorities in every single day at you in your face” that getting the students involved through critical thinking is an easy way to begin examining gender issues without requiring a great deal of time searching for content-based resources.

4.3.2 Initiative

The other related challenge is that bringing gender diversity and women’s issues into the classroom relies largely on teacher initiative. Limited time and resources and lack of official practical support means that teachers who wish to increase the representation of women must create these programs alone. The participant stated that oftentimes it is “up to the teacher to gather those resources on his or her own,” which can be daunting for teachers beginning this practice.
Sharpe (2011) writes that teachers may avoid teaching problematic subject matter due to a number of reasons, including a lack of appropriate resources, unfamiliarity with inquiry-based courses, inadequate teacher training, and the tendency in society to avoid anything “inflammatory or controversial” (p. 54). All of these challenges tie into the issue of teacher initiative; to overcome them, teachers would have to search for resources on their own, familiarize themselves with new methods of learning or attend professional development sessions, and take it upon themselves to deal with any pushback from parents or colleagues over the material. With so much else to focus on during the day, it is much easier for teachers to stay within safe or already focused-upon domains.

The curriculum document also relies on the initiative of teachers in order to meet its full potential with regard to women. While women are included as examples within the specific expectations, as explained earlier in the chapter, women are only one of many, and it would be easy enough for teachers to choose not to go in that direction. For expectations that do not specify women as an example, it would take even more effort and attention on the part of the teacher to bring women in when it is not given to them. In addition, since teachers cannot expect to cover every expectation in the curriculum, many may choose to opt for less complicated subject areas.

Another challenge with initiative is not just that of the teacher, but also that of the students. In inquiry-based curriculum, the students direct their own research based on their interests and suggestions by the teacher; if the teachers do not provide the resources or suggestions, it is possible that students will not choose to look at women’s issues on their own. The participant stated that, outside of hot-button topics such as Malala or recent media franchises, “it’s not something that’s going to happen on its own.” She continued, “Teachers really have to be leading that, and directing that. I don’t find that the whole class would default to it unless there is like a Malala situation […] at their age.” This is not an overwhelming obstacle, but like inertia, when the difficulty is initiative the trouble lies with getting started.

The restrictions of time and the necessity of teacher initiative provide additional challenges to increasing the representation of gender in the classroom. These are not insurmountable obstacles, but they require effort on the part of the teacher as opposed to being externally imposed, which depending on the teacher may be more or less difficult.
to overcome. As the issue of initiative is tied so directly with that of missing resources, the following section will discuss this challenge in more detail.

4.4 Resources/Knowledge

One of the biggest challenges for educators attempting to broaden the representation of women is the lack of resources available that feature women or gender issues. Teachers cannot create lessons out of nothing, and thus it is up to the teacher to seek out and vet appropriate materials to bring into the classroom. Resources are extremely important in social studies education in particular; research cited by Ross (2012) states that “about half of all social studies teachers depend upon a single textbook and about 90% use no more than three” (p. 26), highlighting the importance of textbooks and their influence on what teachers teach. This problem is compounded when teachers do not have personal knowledge of women’s issues, which creates an additional difficulty of obfuscating the starting point. As evidenced by the curriculum analysis earlier in the chapter, the Nelson social studies textbooks listed by the ministry do not have much in the way of female or diverse gender representation, which means that the responsibility for bringing women to the students lies entirely on the teachers. This ties into the other challenges discussed above, and creates a multilevel set of barriers to improving the representation of women.

4.4.1 Missing resources

The first and most obvious issue related to resources is the lack of materials available to teachers. In her interview, the participant stressed the importance of distinguishing between the curriculum document and the textbooks used by teachers, not only by definition but also in terms of their content and social justice focus. Regarding the representation of women, the participant stated, “I think all of the differences come in terms of resources and not the curriculum itself,” which aligns with the analysis of both curriculum and course texts earlier in the chapter.

When women are absent from the social studies classroom, it means a problem far more serious than simply limited portrayals of history. As Crocco (2012) writes, “silence and/or denial about women of the world in social education produce a climate of ignorance that provides tacit support for perpetuation of conditions that harm women worldwide” (p. 186). Crocco argues that a social studies education without a rich,
accurate portrayal of women works to legitimize and perpetuate the abuse of women in society; at the elementary level, it normalizes the unimportance of women as actors upon the world at large and denies girls the ability to see themselves in the content they are taught.

When students are taught a predominately male-centric history, the above problems are likely to continue. While a lack of available resources provides a convenient and even understandable excuse for educators not to include broader representations of women and gender in their teaching, the danger of doing so is clear. The way to combat missing resources, if a teacher does not have the knowledge or the support to find additional sources to fill these gaps, is to teach students to examine the existing texts and analyze the exclusion of women and the possible reasons for it. This will be discussed in more detail in the final theme.

The participant did point out one potential benefit to the lack of resources on women: when a teacher is in charge of finding all resources, it means the teacher is in control of what gets shared in the classroom. “That’s almost the benefit of having no resources, is that there’s not one status quo […] No one is telling you, use this reader, which is one of those things which systemically I think perpetuated those stereotypes.” The issue of problematic resources is discussed directly below.

4.4.2 Problematic resources

As discussed in Chapter 2 and earlier in this chapter, even when resources do exist it is not a guarantee that they will include varied and diverse representations of gender. The content analysis section of this chapter demonstrated that the Nelson textbooks listed on the Ontario Ministry of Education site rarely move beyond the bi-focal stage of inclusion and often do not even manage that much.

Clark (2005) describes some of the common portrayals of women found in textbooks examined in her study. She wrote that women in early textbooks are often portrayed as “remoras, parasites on the host body of the male” (p. 247) with little agency of their own. The filles du roi, for example, “can be counted on to embark from their ships into the eager arms of the young male inhabitants of New France, and then fade away, while the texts move on” (p. 247). This correlates with the participant’s discussion of the filles du roi; she stated that textbooks might include “a sentence about intermarriage” but not what
the women did after, ignoring what influence they may have had as “liaisons” or “translators” between peoples. These limited portrayals rob women of agency, and the messages they send to all students serve to perpetuate the false assumption that only men can contribute meaningfully to history.

The participant also discussed the harmful effects of lazy, stock portrayals in textbooks; the interview discussed the issue of women appearing in textbooks as photos (such as a pioneer woman with a butter churn) without any context or discussion of her as a person. She used the example of trying to find resources about Black Loyalists, saying that “sometimes when you try to go and get a Black Loyalist point of view there’s like a, I don’t know, there’s an artifact of a chain link or something” and mimed chaining her wrists. “That’s the image that they’ve got for that time period in history, and there’s no words to go along with it,” she added, underscoring the lack of context or the carelessness that went into this shallow and often hurtful representation. While not a female example, the Nelson text using mostly white reenactors to portray Black Loyalists is an example of this sort of thoughtless inclusion.

The other challenge with existing resources is whether they are representative or only portray a certain facet or aspect of minority society, particularly women. The participant discussed the problem whereby, because women are traditionally excluded from historical records, what does survive tends to be diaries or personal accounts from a particular subset of women. She argued that these accounts are “just one woman’s experience and she just happened to be wealthy, so she doesn’t really represent women of that time because she had the luxury to write — or she was able to go to school to learn how to write.” This connects to Schrader and Wotipka’s (2011) work with the analysis of female inclusion, where the inclusion of a woman in a text does not legitimize it or necessarily mean that the account is an accurate representation. The participant continued by saying, “I think it still has to maintain the rigours. Like, it can’t just be, oh a woman wrote it, let’s include it,” as these may not be representative and should not be used to extrapolate beyond the individual. Without examining sources in context and analyzing them within the greater social structures or oppressive hegemonies that often create the dominant narratives, the checklist approach to inclusion rarely works to achieve anything in terms of true representation.
4.4.3 Teacher knowledge

The unavailability of official resources requires that teachers go out of their way to find materials on their own; unfortunately, it can be very difficult to research if the teachers do not know enough to have an idea of where to start. Most of the initiatives used by the participant and discussed in the following section rely on the teacher having preexisting knowledge, as this is the most effective way to overcome the other challenges.

The issue of teacher knowledge extends beyond content to issues of pedagogy and critical thinking regarding missing voice, perspective and point of view. Ross (2012) argues that while ministry-mandated curriculum objectives are important, what actually reaches the students goes beyond that which is specified in curriculum documents. Ross cites other authors who state that “[the] teacher’s beliefs about schooling, his or her knowledge of the subject area and of available materials and techniques …” (p. 30) are what shape social studies education in the classroom. To tie this into the study of women’s issues and diverse gender representation in particular, if teachers are not aware either of the gaps in the portrayals of gender or of how they can find resources to help fill those gaps, they will be unable to improve this problem in any meaningful way. This can be as simple as not knowing the names of any famous women to research in the first place. On a more complex level, this ties in with the participant’s belief that the general teacher may not be skilled at deep critical thinking: “I don’t think that the average teacher knows what this means in terms of being able to confidently interpret the significance of an event.”

While gaps in teacher knowledge could hypothetically be solved by professional development, women’s issues are not a common focus for these sorts of events according to the participant’s interview. She stated that while the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario may offer support, it is “self-selected” and “not interwoven within the regular lunch and learns” or other events that would be attended by a wider audience. “In terms of the actual culture itself,” the participant argued, “there is a disparity I would say, in terms of the professional development.” This disparity refers to the fact that regular professional development sessions might focus on women’s issues for a single session when attached to a larger issue, such as the new sexual health curriculum, gender
representation and ways to bring women into the classroom are rarely the focus of their own sake.

The issue of resources and teacher knowledge can be the most pressing for teachers whether they have an existing commitment to increasing gender diversity in their classrooms or not, even worse because they also impact the other challenges mentioned earlier. The following section will discuss several teacher-initiated efforts used by the participant to bring more women and critical thinking regarding gender into her classroom.

4.5 Teacher-Initiated Programs

Despite the above challenges, it is possible for teachers who do make the effort to seek out and develop lessons and resources to create a media-rich and critically literate representation of gender in their social studies classes. The participant interview revealed several strategies she used during her classroom teachings in order to bring more women into social studies lessons.

4.5.1 Official initiatives

The first, and often easiest place for teachers to find inspiration and information on women in social studies is official initiatives such as Women’s History Month or the Day of Pink. This is most helpful for teachers who do not have extensive knowledge of historical women or women’s issues, as mentioned in the previous section. These initiatives do not provide a large amount of resources to teachers, but at the bare minimum, schools often receive posters with a selection of notable women; this then can provide an entry point for further research. As the participant stated, these efforts tend to be “tokenistic” and “shallow”, acting more as a diversity checklist than any sort of deep or meaningful exploration of gender inequality, but “it’s a start”. “You have to start somewhere,” said the participant, referring to the importance of having a starting point.

The benefit of this to teachers is that it helps to combat the earlier challenges regarding the lack of time and knowledge. Rather than beginning with nothing, the participant explain that teachers who receive a poster with female exemplars “suddenly [have] names to go to”. She went on to stress the value of this starting point for a busy teacher: “[By] putting in front of me key names that I can go explore when I want to, you’ve already done my work for me.” The participant then pointed out that many
elementary teachers are “generalists” who command a great deal of knowledge over various subjects. However, as discussed previously, they may not have specialized information about women’s issues. For them, these initiatives can be extremely helpful in formulating gender-focused lessons.

The challenge then becomes what to do with this information, as simply hanging a poster in the classroom might improve visibility but does not bring in new content. Utilizing the resources in a way that benefits students remains subject to the teacher’s initiative, but the possibilities are myriad. Teachers could invite students to choose one of the women on the poster and engage in a self-directed research project with a variety of possible culminating tasks; students could also be invited to find other notable women in the selected fields and bring this information back to the class. If students were previously unaware of these women, class discussions could be had on why this might be so. Like the curriculum documents, the potential for use of these simple, shallow materials is quite varied, but requires teachers to expend their efforts on their own time in order to make them meaningful for the students.

4.5.2 Current events

The second easily accessible starting point for teachers is to make use of popular culture and current events that involve women’s issues. As far as pedagogy is concerned, this ties in with the issues-centric approach, where the goal of social studies education to act as a means to critique the world and existing power structures, as argued by Ross (2012). In this framework, the study of current issues involves a focus on “moral dilemmas and values clarification” (p. 22), which provides a range of applications, such as “social criticism or activism” or “a way to help students adapt to the society” (p. 23). The Ontario curriculum document itself (2013) states that the use of current events can “help students make connections between what they are learning in class and past and present-day […] events” (p. 36). Using current events also helps “keep the curriculum a relevant, living document” and allows them to deepen their critical thinking skills and engage with the material in a very real way (p. 36).

Other than the curricular connections, using current events for women’s issues specifically is a useful way to tap into student interests and create immediate relevance. The participant warned that in her experience students are unlikely to latch onto issues of
women and gender as a class without prompting, with the exception of important pop culture or world events. Her pop culture example was Katniss Everdeen from The Hunger Games, where “the action girl female protagonist was like a thing — for once!” For current events, she talked about the power of Malala, whom she described as being “so hot, everyone wants to read Malala.” She also referred to Elizabeth May as an “exemplar” in lessons on politics. In these cases, it is easy to connect the lessons in the curriculum with events that the students are seeing in their lives, and students may even request or direct this topic of their own initiative. Current events also bring with them tremendous amounts of resources, as experts write about these issues and many online sources provide links to information about the event. This helps ameliorate the challenges discussed earlier in the chapter.

4.5.3 Community resources

One method that works particularly well for expanding the representation of gender in the classroom is to make use of people as resources, or in the participant’s words, “the idea of community resources for inquiry.” The most direct way to find an authentic voice is to go directly to the source; in an area where primary text sources may be difficult to find, bringing in guest speakers creates a text-to-world connection that the students can interact with in real-time. As the participant stated, people “are a primary document, too”. She also pointed out that creating this space for speakers and their stories helps to validate storytelling as a resource in general, and female voices in particular: “as soon as storytelling becomes a valid form of research, getting someone’s story, you can have a guest speaker in who’s a woman.” She gave the example of bringing in a female lawyer to speak to the class during a unit on government and laws. This would allow for a whole new avenue that could enrich the social studies curriculum and allow a more diverse range of voices to be heard in the classroom: “Instead of looking at an artifact or older things that exist for those aspects of the social studies curriculum, we can really open up women’s voices by using the interview […] or the guest speaker [as a legitimate source].” This strategy is in line with Hart’s (1997) work on the use of women’s voices in teaching history, as well as Paxton’s (1999) writing on the importance of storytelling and narrative, as discussed in the second chapter.
The participant also discussed the value of local resources, such as books from a particular region that cover legends, historical actors or events in that area. The participant talked about her trip to Halifax, where she found a number of local resources created by people in the community. The first was a picture book about Evangeline centred on the *filles du roi*, which was “beautifully detailed, […] the most detailed piece that I’ve ever found” and “unique to the region”. She also bought a number of books and poetry collections about Africville, which were also published by a small, local press and not available outside of Halifax. Many more well-known historic sites in Ontario (such as Dresden, home of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or Thamesville, site of a major battle in the War of 1812) which have a strong tie to Canadian history do not often have a large focus on women. However, teachers could still conduct outside research and make a particular effort to find some. As the local resources are connected directly to the community, they provide a rich, authentic addition to other, more removed works.

The difficulty with community resources is that acquiring them can be difficult. Many teachers do not have the means to travel to various communities in the hopes of purchasing local materials, and this sort of resource gathering is most effective when the teacher knows what already exists in an area and travels there expressly for that purpose. With the resources on Evangeline and Africville in Halifax the participant stated, “I bought as much as I could get my hands on […] because I knew it that was going to be from a small press, that wasn’t gonna be widely shared.” Likewise, bringing in people to act as storytellers and living resources can be difficult unless the teacher has a very thorough knowledge of the community. Still, with effort and involvement with various communities, teachers have the potential to bring diverse gender representation directly into the classroom.

4.5.4 Online resources

When local resources are difficult to come by or constant educational travel is not feasible for teachers, the Internet provides a valuable point of entry for finding materials that teachers can use in the classroom. This comprises physical materials that can be purchased online, digital media and online-hosted information. Websites may also include lists of potential resources that can be found elsewhere, thereby removing the physical search element and thus reducing the pressures faced by teachers to find their
own materials. The participant stressed that teachers are busy and do not have time to go out and purchase many items, so the Internet can be extremely useful in this regard. She specifically mentioned a resource by the TDSB called Medianet, “collections of videos, print and DVD resources based on all the themes in science and social studies that become part of a kit”, and spoke of the possibility of adding some of those local resources to them. These kits can be provided to teachers to supplement their classrooms, and as the participant stated, “If you can get these titles in the kit, they’ll be used.” This would help to increase the use and visibility of local resources that may be difficult to obtain otherwise, as well as help promote materials such as Scholastic’s Dear Canada series.

The participant also uses Internet sites to supplement her work with current events, as news articles and stories are readily found online and easily accessible to students and classrooms. She gave the example of an article from a university, where the issue of the lack of incentive for female coaches and funding for female sports affecting performance at the Olympics allowed the students to explore “what happens to a community when its rights are denied.” Interestingly, this article allowed the participant to see what biases the students had managed to retain even despite her teaching, as several male students in her class took the article to mean, “The reason we don’t have these Olympic athletes is that the girls aren’t good enough.” Her students had not previously demonstrated this sort of restrictive, literal-minded thinking when discussing texts in class in a historical context; having access to real-world current events outside of the lens of a classroom resource provided insight into their thinking that had not been possible before.

The challenge with online resources is the ubiquity of information on the Internet, which can make it difficult to track down useful or quality materials. The issue of citations and the tendency of websites to borrow information without double-checking the source or giving credit or attribution can make verification difficult. Many blogs and other aggregate sites collate information on famous women throughout history and provide links or biographies about their lives, which would allow teachers to find names they could bring into the classroom, but finding them involves a specific search and certain keywords might not return the proper results.
4.5.5 Media literacy

The final strategy employed by the participant is one that can be used by teachers regardless of knowledge, experience, resources or time, as it ties directly with the students’ own critical thinking and the social studies curriculum focus on critical pedagogy. When asked about ‘go-to’ methods when starting a new unit or a new year, ways to bring women into the classroom without an excessive amount of preparation required, the participant revealed that she brings in elements of media literacy to social studies texts. The method itself is simple: add one single question to any set of comprehension questions about any text: “Whose voice is missing?”

The participant described her strategy of always prompting her students to focus on the issue of point of view and perspective as well as missing voice, both of which are imbued in the 2013 curriculum document as central to social studies education. When examining a text or comparing multiple texts, she made “an explicit point of missing voice and point of view, and the whole idea of stakeholders,” which can easily be used to discuss and critique women’s issues. The follow-up questions recommended by the participant fall into this category as well: “Who might have something to say?”, “If they’re not here, why might they not be here?”, “Do you think this was intentional?” and “What does this tell us about [the text/authors/etc]?”

For specifically teasing out the issue of women’s rights or gender roles, the participant would choose texts centred on female characters (providing examples like Yeh-Shen, a Chinese Han dynasty fairytale similar to Cinderella, or Mulan, or Evangeline, or Marie Angelique) and ask questions about their portrayal. Example questions included examining the roles of women as represented in the text, and why the students think they were constructed that way. Rather than choosing a particular book or female figure to include each year, the participant chooses to “pick a text, deconstruct it in terms of who made it, what is this telling us about the people who were involved, why this version of them, and then what might others have to say.” This is a simple, holistic way of approaching inclusivity to education that could be tailored to any missing or marginalized voices, and very effective in improving the gender representation in the social studies classroom.
While it might be easy to focus on the challenges and feel them overwhelming, it is clear that teachers in Ontario are doing important work in their classrooms, and that other teachers who make a dedicated effort can replicate that. Using official initiatives, current events, community resources and online resources as springboards, and bringing questions of point of view and missing voice from media literacy into social studies work are all methods teachers can employ to diversify the gender representation in their classrooms. The question is how to balance this work with the challenges discussed above.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter reported the findings of this research study, gathered from a qualitative analysis of the Ontario Social Studies curriculum and ministry-approved textbooks found on the Ontario Ministry of Education Trillium List, and an interview with an Ontario educator. The original aim of this research was to analyze the ways in which women were represented in the curriculum (here used as a term that comprises the curriculum document and available textbooks and supplementary classroom resources) and what improvements teachers felt could be made. However, following the interview and analysis of the resultant themes, the focus shifted to the challenges teachers face when attempting to implement a more balanced approach to gender inclusion in the social studies curriculum, as well as those that might keep teachers from considering the issue in the first place. The following themes were collected from the data: potential of curriculum, teacher priority/interest, teacher time/initiative, available resources/teacher knowledge, and teacher-initiated programs.

Analysis of the Ontario curriculum document revealed the potential for a multifocal approach to gender inclusion, but without explicit instruction or more specific female examples for teachers to include in their questioning, overlooking these opportunities remains easy. Likewise, the available resources on the Ontario Ministry of Education approved textbook list rarely make more than a cursory surface effort to include women in their content. Despite initiatives to improve pedagogy with respect to its treatment of gender diversity, this does not appear to extend to how students see themselves reflected in the social studies classroom.
The interview with the participant revealed that, despite the potential within the curriculum document to launch a fully gender-balanced and enriched social studies program, teachers must amass a certain amount of personal knowledge and materials in order to overcome the lack of time and resources officially available. While programs such as Women’s History Month provide a starting point for teachers wishing to improve the representation of women, the lack of professional development and training means teachers must engage in this work largely without support. Teachers must develop their own materials and conduct their own research, which requires a high amount of initiative and therefore does not always result in female inclusion being a priority for the everyday classroom teacher. For teachers who do prioritize and make the effort, however, a broader representation of gender can provide a much richer classroom experience and help students improve their critical thinking, while ensuring that class content mirrors the experience of a wider range of students.

When asked about the reality of implementing this sort of work, the participant had words of excitement and encouragement for teachers wishing to broaden the gender representation in their classrooms: “Oh, totally easy. Oh my god! You have so much control! Once you close that door, you get to draft all of [the students’] experiences. […] You get to have your personal convictions bleed through everything that you do.”

The following chapter provides a discussion of the implications of this research for the classroom, teachers and curriculum development, and suggests areas for further research and consideration.
Chapter Five: IMPLICATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This research study focused on the representation of women and gender in Ontario elementary social studies education from the perspective of educators, as well as through a brief qualitative analysis of the curriculum document and ministry-approved textbooks. The study consisted of a literature review, a textual analysis and a semi-structured interview in order to categorize the portrayal of gender in social studies and discuss the position of teachers who may wish to engage in a rich depiction of women and gender in their classes. The previous chapter contextualized the research alongside the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, and correlated the analysis of the curriculum and textbook materials with the insights provided by the participant through the interview data. The findings illustrate that while the potential for diverse gender representation exists in the curriculum, the available materials and various strictures placed on teachers often result in a deficiency in this area.

This chapter summarizes the key findings of the research and discusses their implications on the current climate of diversity, women’s issues and gender representation in Ontario’s classroom. It also puts forth recommendations for the educational community as a whole and the researcher’s own personal practice, providing suggestions on policy as well as practical strategies for teachers interested in diversifying their portrayal of women and gender in the classroom. The chapter then reviews the limitations of the study and proposes ways in which additional research could build on the current study in the future. The chapter concludes with final comments on the importance of providing students with rich representation of women and gender in the classroom and in supporting teachers as they engage in this vital work.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings

The previous chapter analyzed the representation of women and gender in Ontario’s elementary social studies education, and the realities faced by teachers wishing to engage in this work, through a qualitative analysis of the 2013 curriculum document and a number of ministry-approved classroom texts, as well as a semi-structured interview with a current Ontario elementary educator.
5.1.1 Curriculum analysis

The curriculum and textbooks were analyzed using an adaptation of Schrader and Wotipka’s (2011) framework for categorizing the stages of representation of women in postwar history textbooks on a continuum from no representation to a rich, varied and integral integration in the material. The five stages adapted and used for this research were: exclusion, complementary inclusion, and bifocal, feminist and multifocal representation. The curriculum document was found to have the potential reach the multifocal level at several points, which aligned with the participant’s views on the classification of the curriculum. By contrast, the Nelson textbooks used in this study were analyzed and found to lie between the complementary and bifocal stages, with primarily shallow portrayals of women and gender. This also confirmed the participants thoughts that classroom resources had “traditionally been bifocal” in Ontario. The data from the curriculum analysis comprised the first theme in the results: potential.

5.1.2 Participant interview

The interview with the participant revealed four emergent themes: priority/interest, time/initiative, resources/knowledge, and teacher initiatives. The first three themes discussed by the participant pertained to issues faced by teachers which may act as barriers to bringing a more diverse representation of gender to the classroom.

The participant identified a lack of priority on behalf of teachers, administration, the ministry and/or professional development organizers as a chief explanation for the lack of female representation in social studies; with education currently built around a “gap-filling” paradigm with achievement as the focus for attention, teachers often choose to focus on student populations they believe to be underserved. Given the overall achievement level of girls in the classroom, this means that specific female representation does not often cross teachers’ radar, and if teachers do not already have a personal desire to improve the portrayal of women, there is little incentive for them to do so.

The lack of time faced by all teachers is a very real problem, which the participant stated provides a key impediment to increased gender representation. With everything else that teachers must cover in the course of a lesson, unit, semester or school year, anything that requires additional work on behalf of the teacher is unlikely to be brought into the classroom without additional impetus. Due to the lack of readily available
classroom resources, teachers must use their own initiative to research, gather materials and develop lessons. This leads to a lack of women in the classroom beyond what is already present in the existing textbooks made available to teachers by the school.

This lack of resources, combined with the average teacher’s minimal knowledge of women’s issues or diverse examples to use in social studies, creates a feedback loop which affects the above challenges as well. The participant noted that not only do classrooms rarely have appropriate materials for a rich portrayal of women and gender in social studies, but the existing professional development or outside teacher resources do not often take this focus. If teachers are provided with resources then this ameliorates the need for them to have prior knowledge on the subject, and this would help to ease the challenges above.

The final theme revealed by the participant interview concerns initiatives already being used in classrooms that could be adopted by future educators. The participant uses a combination of media literacy techniques revolving around perspective, point of view, missing voice and stakeholders to enrich discussions of existing class texts, and brings in current events and popular media as a springboard for discussions. She continually adds to her collection of personally curated materials to create a starting point for bringing more women into the social studies classroom., including materials include a mix of online, local, and community resources. The participant also stressed the importance of connecting with the community through narrative and storytelling as a way to bring an authentic voice to these issues.

5.2 Implications

The previous chapter revealed several issues regarding the representation of women and gender in the curriculum and resources, as well as with the attitudes of teachers, the ministry and the educational community toward efforts to expand this portrayal. The general consensus from reviewing the literature, conducting a textual analysis of the existing curriculum and select textbooks, and interviewing an Ontario educator, is that the work of diversifying the representation of gender is not being done, and that the responsibility for doing so lies in several directions.
5.2.1 The educational community

The current reality is that teachers do not feel supported or encouraged in their work to provide a more enriched gender representation through their social studies lessons. The ministry support is strong on paper but does not translate to practical solutions or real-world assistance, and the materials provided for classroom use often do not meet the standards laid out in official documents. Regardless of intent at many levels, the findings from this study have shown that the work is not being done, and moreover, that this does not appear to be changing. Rather, the focus has been moving away from girls’ education and representation, believing it already complete, or beyond to an idealistic view of society that seeks to skip past restricted thinking to a utopian post-gender future without actually doing the work of dismantling oppressive practices.

Despite rhetoric to the contrary, the current practices in many Ontario schools and in the materials present in their classrooms reveal a discomfort with pushing boundaries and moving against the status quo. Many practical and reasonable-sounding arguments (time, cost, priority) can be made for excluding women or using resources that rarely go beyond the standard (often white, male, heterosexual, cisgender) exemplars. This duality of ideological progressivism at odds with regressive reality lies at the centre of Ontario’s education system, and requires a massive overhaul not only of the way we think about gender education but of the tools we give our students and teachers. It is definitely the responsibility of teachers to take up this work and pass it on to students, but we cannot expect them to do it alone.

5.2.2 Personal practice

Perhaps the most sobering realization is how many teachers may begin with the best of intentions but become weighed down by the reality of classroom demands and the lack of available support and resources provided. It is unlikely that any teacher sets out to deny representation to specific groups, particularly one as large a demographic as women, but this is what ends up happening; as a new teacher it is easy to make grandiose claims of change and reform, and another to bear them out. At OISE, professors often warn that a vast number of new teachers burn out with in 3-5 years; while this is generally framed around the discussion on self-care and mindfulness, it also applies to social justice. Seeing the whole systemic picture can be draining and overwhelming, and
when combined with the almost-inevitable pushback for engaging in social justice work, could also explain why teachers may fall away from actively pursuing more equitable representation.

In order to carry out this work, research shows that teachers must make a point to prioritize gender representation and seek out the necessary materials on their own. Without official support or collaboration with other teachers, this could easily result in a Sisyphean endeavour where each teacher, regardless of how high they have pushed the boulder at the end of the day, must start each day back at the bottom of the mountain. In my own professional practice, I aim not only to do the work but also to share it, perhaps through online databases or social media such as blogging, Tumblr, Twitter, or new, emergent media. I recognize the very real danger of exhaustion and compassion fatigue, and will make an effort not to abandon my work bringing women into the classroom but also to help other teachers do the same.

The implications of this study also go beyond the context of the classroom to the future of the children in it and the world at large. As discussed in Chapter 4 and by Crocco (2012), education, particularly social studies, is the means by which future generations will be taught acceptance or dissatisfaction with the status quo, and it is these children who will be agents of future change. This involves not only female or non-binary students but male-identifying students as well; it is also important for young boys to see women as actors of change and agents in history and onward, in order to dismantle the harmful stereotypes and ideas that have permeated the education system and society at large. The teaching and learning of incomplete or problematic narratives does not only affect the marginalized groups being misrepresented, but also the majority groups who take in these same messages.

The next section puts forth several suggestions for how to best use this research to inform ministerial policy and educational practice, as well as avenues for future study.

5.3 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

The current climate of gender representation in Ontario’s elementary education system, in terms of policy and official resources as well as the support given to teachers who wish to engage in this work, has resulted in a system where teachers are encouraged at the ministerial level to diversify and expand the portrayal of women and gender in their
social studies classes, but are not often given the materials or assistance to do so. This chapter provides some recommendations at both levels to improve content and support for teachers at the ministry level as well as in individual classrooms.

5.3.1 Ministry recommendations

The main concern raised by the participant in her interview touched upon a perceived lack of support from the Ministry of Education, either in terms of resources or professional development. Ministry publications and policy documents often focus on the importance of increasing diversity, but the follow-through regarding training and materials is not always so forthcoming.

The first recommendation is for an increase in professional development workshops, seminars, or conferences with regard to specific, practical applications for bringing women and gender into the forefront of social studies education. These sessions should focus on direct, applicable strategies that teachers can bring directly to the classroom, preferably with concrete lists of names and example resources to lessen the amount of preparation and research teachers have to do on their own. Information sessions on famous women and their contributions, workshops on examining missing voice and multiple perspectives, or keynote talks by women connected to the field would all give teachers the ability to bring a more nuanced gender presentation to their social studies classes.

The second recommendation is a long-term initiative to sponsor textbooks that focus specifically on bringing a more equitable portrayal of women and gender in social studies textbooks, but in the short term, teachers and students all over Ontario would benefit from a central resource collection. A curated online list of materials, including lesson ideas, books, related groups, or sites that collate biographies of famous women in history, and linked through the OERB or the Ministry of Education site, would provide teachers with a one-stop repository of information and close the knowledge gaps keeping many educators from beginning this work. As discussed in Chapter 4, many online resources exist, but the difficulty lies in finding them and sorting out which are reputable or easily accessible. Interest groups or focus websites that already collect this information would have a platform where teachers could find them, easing the dissemination of knowledge.
5.3.2 Recommendations for teachers

Teachers face a number of challenges when attempting to begin expanding the representation of women in their social studies classrooms, and ministry support as outlined above would do a great deal to ameliorate the challenges with the lack of resources and professional development. In the meantime, however, there are some suggestions for teachers who wish to begin the process.

Unfortunately, save a massive and immediate influx of gender diverse materials into classrooms to make the inclusion of women quick and easy, there is no way to overcome the challenge of teacher priority save confronting it directly. Teachers need to prioritize expanding the representation of women and gender in their classrooms and commit to doing the work, but it need not be a daunting task from the start. If teachers make a point to choose one or two strategies to incorporate into their social studies classrooms, this is enough to begin changing the face of education. The participant’s use media literacy techniques to examine texts with regard to missing voice and perspective is a simple method for teachers to get their students to examine historical events, textbooks, popular media or current events in a way that aligns with the curriculum and improves the portrayal of women in the classroom. Directing student inquiry by having them conduct research on famous female figures to supplement the male examples commonly given in textbooks is a way to enrich the given materials without requiring heavy knowledge on the part of the teacher.

The importance of collaboration is also paramount to social justice work, and to women’s issues in particular. The use of community resources, including inviting speakers, finding local publications, or sharing materials between classes and schools, will go a long way toward bringing this content into our schools. If teachers are able to work together to pool their ideas and resources, whether through official channels such as MediaNet, the OERB, the ministry website or other methods such as blogs, newsletters or email blasts, this removes the load on each teacher and allows everyone to reap the benefits of collaborative work.

Currently it is up to teachers to pursue this work at an individual level, with little opportunity to effect systemic change as each educator is required to reinvent the wheel in their own practice. Additional official support is required if we are to improve the
treatment of gender diversity in social studies classes and in Ontario’s education overall.

**5.4 Areas for Future Research**

The implications of this study are limited by the scope and the number of participants. This research was conducted on a small scale with a set timeframe of three months allocated for data collection and analysis, and the parameters of the study specified semi-structured interviews with no classroom observations or conversations with students. The addition of practical, real-time data in physical classrooms, watching teachers as they attempt to implement a more diverse gender-based curriculum, in addition to observing students and speaking with them about their impressions and learnings, would be an invaluable asset to this research area. A multi-site, long-term ethnographic or narrative approach focused on the experiences of several teachers over time, combined with in-class research and interviews with students, could provide fascinating insights onto the actual experience of teachers as they move through the process of improving gender representation in their classrooms.

In addition, the curriculum analysis performed in this research is a small-scale qualitative study based on sample chapters from Grades 3-6 of the Nelson social studies textbooks. This approach allowed for a brief overview of some of the issues present with the current available texts, but does not allow for a thorough cataloguing of every common textbook found in Ontario classrooms. A large-scale research study similar in scope to the one conducted by Schrader and Wotipka (2011) conducted for the state of California, which included not only the current ministry-endorsed texts but any major classroom resources still being used by social studies teachers, could provide a much deeper analysis of the current situation. Moreover, a mixed qualitative/quantitative study of the resources, involving statistics and specific figures, would help to increase the legitimacy of the issue in the eyes of policymakers who have difficulty spending time and attention on issues whose need cannot be easily justified with numbers. Given the large amount of anecdotal evidence and bias present in discussions on gender issues, having more hard data could very well be invaluable.

Moreover, the literature review in Chapter 2 revealed a substantial gap in the existing research regarding issues of women and gender in Ontario elementary curriculum. Current research has focused on the need for social studies curriculum reform with
respect to racial representation, but little emphasis has been placed on gender (Clark, 2005), and even less following the implementation of the new 2013 curriculum. Similarly, the issue of female inclusion is often discussed in terms of literacy (Pennycook, 2011), or situated within the United States (Schrader & Wotipka, 2011) or elsewhere in Canada (Clark, 2005), but women and gender in Ontario elementary social studies education remains an area ripe for new research. With the Ontario Ministry of Education’s strong push for diversity and gender representation in their policy documents, further research on the current climate and available resources could help close the gap between policy and practice.

5.5 Concluding Comments

This research study sought to explore the ways in which teachers are bringing women into their classrooms, the ways in which women are represented in current media, and what positive changes teachers believe could benefit the Ontario curriculum and classroom resources. Over time, as the dearth of willing participants engaging in this work became clear, the focus of the study shifted away from existing practices and more toward theoretical or potential ones, as well as enumerating the challenges facing educators today.

The undertaking of this research was difficult and often discouraging, as assertions of progressive and inclusive thinking plaster our educational policies but do not always trickle down to individual practice. The lack of participants and the overall attitude of many potential interviewees that this research is necessary but non-occurring or, on the other hand, irrelevant and unnecessary given society’s evolved ways of thinking about the gender binary and gender essentialism, created a large practical barrier as well as providing an emotionally draining mental challenge. Yet, difficult work is often the most important, and if nothing else, the resistance to the research and the echo of an empty room only serves to show how much is left to be done and how necessary it is that we do so.

The research showed that the Ontario ministry curriculum does prioritize the inclusion of women and a broader representation of gender, and that the hearts of those in charge of policymaking are in the right place. Unfortunately, as with many lofty goals, the execution is the weak point, with the text analysis revealing severe shortcomings in
the Nelson textbooks and the participant’s interview demonstrating several challenges that teachers face when attempting to engage in this work, as well as reasonable excuses for those who do not make it a priority.

However, as the interview with the participant and the hopeful tone of the curriculum front matter suggested, it is not impossible to bring women into the classroom, only difficult. Small steps taken on behalf of the teachers to direct students toward inquiry and examination of standard texts can do wonders at the micro level, and ministry policies that provided more educational support, professional development and resources would help create the systemic change necessary to make this widely viable. It is not impossible or overwhelming; the lack of women in popular history is one of ignorance and deliberate erasure, not actual absence, and resources are not missing, only scattered and not widely available.

If we insist that the problem is too difficult to solve — or, conversely, that it is already behind us by virtue of our elevated understanding without tackling the extant effects of hegemonic thinking — then nothing will change. However, by seeking out existing resources and commissioning new ones, by actively searching for and telling the stories of the women whose voices have been erased from the mainstream, we can begin to effect change as educators. Most importantly, the students who grow up inculcated with these stories and perspectives, imbued with a greater understanding of the contributions of women and the potential of diverse gender representation, will go on to transform the world.
References


WOMEN IN SOCIAL STUDIES


WOMEN IN SOCIAL STUDIES


Appendix A: Letter of Signed Consent

Date:

Dear __________________________,

My name is Lora Maroney and I am a teacher candidate in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. The purpose of the present study is to determine the experiences and perceptions of elementary school teachers on the inclusion and representation of women in the Ontario K-6 social studies curriculum. The portrayal of women in the Ontario Social Studies 2013 curriculum documents and ministry-approved social studies texts will be explored, as well as actual teaching practices and perceived challenges, barriers and further steps for inclusion of women in social studies curriculum. I believe your knowledge and experience will provide insight into this topic.

The process involves an interview of approximately 45-60 minutes. During the interview you will be asked questions about your personal experiences with or impressions of incorporating women into the social studies classroom, both through a discussion of the curriculum documents and through relating your own attempts in the classroom. Interview questions will be sent to you via email prior to the interview date, so that you may review the questions in advance and have the opportunity to raise any points of clarification or concern.

Each interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed to paper for accuracy and accountability purposes. You will be assigned a number or alias that will correspond to your interview and transcriptions. Your transcript can be sent to you to read upon your request in order for you to add any further information or to correct any misinterpretations that could result. The information obtained in the interview will be kept in strict confidence and stored in a secure location. All information will be reported in such a way that individual persons, schools, school districts, and communities cannot be identified. All raw data (e.g. transcripts, field notes) will be destroyed five years after completion of the study; until that time, only the researcher and the supervisor will have access.
Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may at any time refuse to answer a question or withdraw from the interview process with no negative consequences, including after the interview process has been completed. You may request that any information, whether in written form or audio files, be eliminated from the project. At no time will value judgments be placed upon your responses, nor will any evaluation be made of your effectiveness as a teacher. Finally, you are free to ask any questions about the research and your involvement with it and may request a summary of the findings of the study.

In order to maintain confidentiality during the publication processes, all identifying information will be excluded from the data and all participants will be referred to using pseudonyms. Data will not be shared between participants save in the final, de-identified research paper. Upon completion, this study will be disseminated through the University of Toronto’s T-Space repository of student research projects. You have the option of receiving a final copy of the research project in either electronic or print format.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Lora Maroney  
[contact information redacted]

Dr. Ken McNeilly  
[contact information redacted]

**Consent Form**

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Lora Maroney and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Name:  
________________________________________

Signed:  
________________________________________

Date:  
________________________________________
Introductory Script: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study, and for making time to be interviewed today. This research study aims to learn about your perceptions of female representation in the Ontario social studies curriculum. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, and I will ask you a series of questions focused on your beliefs and experiences with bringing women into the classroom. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section A: Background

1. How many years have you worked as a teacher?
2. What grade levels have you taught?
3. How long did you teach/have you taught social studies?
4. What are your thoughts on the (new) Ontario social studies curriculum?
5. Do you identify as feminist? Why/why not?

Section B: Impressions

1. In general, what do you think about the representation of women in the (social studies) curriculum? Do you feel women are well represented?
2. In what way/in what forms have you seen women represented?
3. Can you think of any areas of the (social studies) curriculum where women tend to see more representation?
4. Has your impression of women in the (social studies) curriculum changed since you began teaching? Since you were a student?
5. What do you think about initiatives to bring women into the classroom?
6. Current literature lists five stages of inclusion of women in curricula:
   a. Exclusion (no mention of women at all)
   b. Complementary (women are mentioned as accessories to men, e.g. “men, women and children”; includes female exemplars without context)
   c. Bi-focal (women are mentioned, but existing in worlds entirely separate from men; focus on ‘private’ and ‘public’ domain, e.g. women’s roles as mothers, on the home front)
   d. Feminist (women’s contributions seen as important and valuable)
   e. Multifocal (women and men’s history tied together at multiple levels)

Based on these categories, at which stage would you place the Ontario (social studies) curriculum?

Section C: Practice (Optional, if Yes to #1 below)

1. Have you ever taken any measures to improve the representation of women in the (social studies) curriculum?
2. What measures have you taken?
3. What prompted you to begin integrating women into the curriculum?
4. What were some of the effects of introducing more women into the classroom?

Section D: Challenges & Implications

1. In general, do you think female representation in the (social studies) curriculum is an issue that teachers are concerned about? Why/why not?
2. What do you see as some of the challenges that could be stopping teachers who want to increase representation?
3. In your experience, has there been a change in the attitudes toward including women in social studies?
4. Do you feel teachers receive enough support (training, PD, encouragement, resources) if they want to include women?
5. How realistic do you feel it would be for teachers to try to improve female representation?
6. Final thoughts or advice?