

SOCIAL IDENTITY AND GENDER INEQUITIES  
FOR MALE ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

by

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Abstract

For the last 10 years, the California Department of Education has reported that female teachers in California outnumbered male teachers two to one. The imbalance in teacher gender is a problem that affects elementary-age students and teaching staffs because the educated and caring male teachers who could be role models are largely absent from elementary schools. Male educators have a shared identity as teachers, but are often treated differently when they choose to work at the elementary grades. Because of this isolation, male teachers may not feel they are part of the social identity of being an elementary teacher to the same extent that female teachers do. This case study considered the question What are the professional socialization experiences of male elementary teachers? Male elementary teachers from a mid-size urban district were interviewed to gain insight into their experiences as a male teacher and the gender biases they have may encountered in their careers. The four themes that emerged from the interviews were the influences on the men's choice to become an elementary teacher, their social identity as a teacher, how their gender has had an effect on their career, and the belief that they are role models for their students. The study revealed the social identity and socialization the participants experienced as male teachers at the elementary level and gave insight into the gender gap for males in the profession. Some participants felt they were viewed and treated differently from their female counterparts, which resulted in a different social identity for these men. All of the men felt they could make a difference in the lives of young students. Analyzing the experiences of male elementary teachers gives educators

and school districts valuable information for recruiting males into the profession and supporting males in choosing to work in elementary education.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, leaders in the field of education in the United States have heard the call for more male teachers as role models for young students. However, the elementary grades are often not a place where men choose to teach. Because social traits of elementary teachers are tied to the identity of female educators in the U.S and abroad, men are often not deemed as social actors who are equipped to teach students in elementary school (Martino, 2008). Although educators, researchers, and parents have stated that they want male teachers in classrooms, inequities and gender bias continue to keep men out of elementary level teaching. The purpose of this research was to identify and explain the presence of these inequities and bias and to encourage change within schools.

Parents and guardians often employ information such as standardized test scores, awards earned by the school, and the experience of the teachers, when deciding where to live so their child can attend certain schools. Information about how many male or female teachers work at the school is not readily available or listed on district and informational websites across the United States. In some cases, this results in students who do not have a male teacher during their time in elementary school. This has been my experience as a student and educator.

As the child of a single mother, I did not have a male role model in my immediate life. I also did not have a male teacher until grade 7 in middle school. The only men who were on my elementary kindergarten to 6th-grade school campus were the custodians

and the principal. Although, like most of us, I did have a favorite teacher, as an adult I wonder if that teacher would have been different if I interacted with a male teacher at my elementary school. The principal was a positive figure in the school as far as I can remember, but he was not part of my personal education.

As an adult, I have worked at both an elementary site with several male teachers and a site that had only had a single male teacher. At the site with a staff with male teachers, only eight of 50 teachers were males. Those male teachers gave great insight to the rest of the staff about the experience of boys at our school and were positive role models for both boys and girls at our school. At the site with only one male teacher, that teacher was definitely isolated and did not spend much time in the staff lunchroom. As a doctoral student, I began to think about what I would study and considered my experiences as a student and as a teacher. I wondered why so few males taught in elementary schools. How would my experiences and social development as a young girl have been different had I been in a male teacher's classroom at my elementary school? What role would that male teachers have played in my education and social development as the child of a single mother?

### **Background Relevant to Gender Balance and Gender Bias in Educating Elementary Children**

Elementary school teachers play an important role supporting a child's growth and development. Research has indicated that students benefit from having positive female and male role models as teachers (Martino, 2008). The social characteristics, gender, and even race of a child's teacher can influence a child's development and self-concept. However, little effort has been made within education to change the fact few males teach at the elementary level (Cameron, 2001). If the social identity (Hogg, 2006)

of male elementary teachers is seen as having status and support within school districts and schools, perhaps the number of male teachers will increase to support the growth and development of young learners. Yet in the United States and other countries, most men do not choose teaching as a profession, resulting in a significant gap between the numbers of male and female teachers in classrooms. In the 2014–2015 school year for example, of the 295,800 teachers in California, only 79,500 were men, and the gap was even larger at the elementary level (California Department of Education, 2015a). Male teachers at the elementary grades can serve as positive role models at a time when children are developing their own identity and social traits, yet few are in the profession, as indicated by the low number of men in classrooms in California (Cameron, 2001).

Cameron (2001) noted that having more male teachers would benefit boys and children with absent fathers. While many studies support Cameron's point of view, an argument can be made that having male role models in the classroom is not crucial to elementary students' academic or social success. For instance, Sevier and Ashcroft (2009) argued that being a male role model does not have a clear connection to being a good teacher. The issue that men are needed as teachers at the elementary grades was not the core of their argument; rather, the basis for their study was the perceived need for male teachers as role models at the elementary grades. None of the participants in the study by Sevier and Ashcroft could clearly define what a male role model should be in the classroom, but all agreed that men should teach at all levels of education and that a good teacher is not the result of gender.

In their research on gender inequities among male teachers in the elementary classroom, Hansen and Mulholland (2005) cited reasons to feel urgency in recruiting more men into elementary teaching. These reasons included restoring gender balance and diversity to reflect the wider society, offering children a more balanced education through the different experiences of male and female teachers, providing male teachers

who model learning and respectfully cooperate with female teachers, and breaking down traditional gender stereotypes expressed by boys in their classes. The arguments expressed by Cameron (2001) and Hanson and Mulholland support the argument that male teachers are necessary to offer balance in schools and to be a role model of a caring, respectful adult figure.

Factors that can play a role in the absence of male teachers at the elementary school level include low salaries for beginning teachers compared with the starting salaries for other professions, negative public perception of males working with young children, the belief that females are better suited than males to work with elementary-age students, and the feminization of the teaching profession (Brookhart & Loadman, 1996; Cushman, 2005; Erden, Ozgun, & Ciftci, 2011; Hansen & Mulholland, 2005). Additionally, educational policy to support the active recruitment of male teachers for the elementary grades has been lacking (Brookhart & Loadman, 1996; Cushman, 2005; Sumsion, 2005). This study examined how professional socialization and social identity influence males entering the teaching profession, resulting in few males choosing primary teaching instead opting for or being directed toward the intermediate and upper grades in K–12 school in the United States.

Low starting salaries prevent many from entering the teaching profession. All beginning teachers, both male and female, must consider the low starting salary even if they feel that the teaching profession is their calling. In many other professions where a salary gap exists between men and women, teaching salaries are not based on gender; rather, salaries are based on education and years of experience. Low salaries can be an immediate deterrent for starting teachers who lack years of experience. Opting out of teaching is evident among men throughout the United States as well as in other countries. For instance, in New Zealand, low salary was among the top three reasons men did not enter the teaching profession (Livingstone, 2003). Additionally, low salaries may

deter young graduates from taking their first teaching position in the United Kingdom (Cushman, 2010).

Going into teaching may be an even more difficult decision for men than for women because they have traditionally been seen as the breadwinner of families and would not be able to fulfill that role with a low starting teaching salary (Farquhar, 1998; Sealey, 2010; Skelton, 2002). In California, low starting salaries contribute to the low number of male teachers in part because of the high cost of living in the state. The average starting salary for school districts in California ranged from \$38,150 in a small district to \$41,760 for a large district during the 2012–2013 school year (California Department of Education, 2014). These low salaries can make it difficult for teachers to live in most large cities with a high cost of living within California.

On any given day at an elementary school site in the United States, one would see a woman at the head of the classroom. This is true in the state of California. For the last 10 years in California, data from the California Department of Education indicated that female teachers outnumbered males two to one throughout the state. In Alameda and Contra Costa counties in Northern California, females outnumbered males two to one, and in San Mateo County the ratio was three to one in 2012–2013 (California Department of Education, 2013). An even larger gap was discovered in a mid-size elementary district of about 13,000 in San Mateo County, which reported 462 female teachers and 73 males in the 2012–2013 school year, a ratio of six to one (California Department of Education, 2013). Moreover, the overall number of male teachers steadily declined over that 10-year period in California. This is consistent with the trend of declining numbers of male teachers that has occurred nationwide for several decades.

Teaching has historically been a female-dominated profession in the United States, and the gender gap for teachers has increased over the years. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) reported that of the more than three million elementary



and middle school teachers, 81% were women. This statistic results in a multifaceted problem for elementary education and the teaching profession in general. These data indicate that the gap between male and female educators occurs at both the state and federal levels. Male teachers are needed at the elementary grades as well as in education overall, but they often face gender bias in a female-dominated profession (Coulter & McNay, 1993).

### **Problem: Identifying the Social Identity of Male Teachers**

The general public perceives that teachers in the elementary grades provide a nurturing environment in which children engage in art, play, and learn to read and write (Brookhart & Loadman, 1996). In kindergarten through 5th-grade classrooms today, students not only are learning basic social skills, but also are being challenged with algebra equations and writing short stories, as required in the California Common Core State Standards (California State Board of Education, 2015). Although most people might say that teaching is an honorable profession, the California Department of Education and Census data show that few males seek out elementary education as their career. Farquhar (1998) stated that school staff should include male teachers because males can add a different perspective and interests to the teaching team and provide a masculine caring role model for students.

**The academic gender gap and teacher gender gap.** Students in U.S. schools often begin their educational journey with hopes of successfully graduating from high school and going to college. Winters, Haight, Swaim, and Pickering (2013) described students in kindergarten as being on equal footing, but said that by the time students reach high school, a clear academic disparity has developed. These researchers noted that female students typically outperform their male counterparts in reading and writing,

whereas male students outperform females in science and math. Winters et al. made the connection between the academic gender gap for students and the gender gap for male teachers in the classroom. Although many factors affect the academic gap for students, having varied experiences with both male and female teachers can enhance the experiences for students (Farquhar, 1998).

The academic gender gap for students is a concern that teachers, schools, and school districts battle against on a daily basis. The gender gap in education is one factor that continues to influence equity and equal access for all students. The ratio of female to male teachers in the primary grades connects the gender gap for male teachers to young students not having access to teachers of various backgrounds, including gender (Farquhar, 1998; Sealey, 2010). Although simply adding male teachers to the elementary classroom cannot resolve the academic gender gap, interacting with teachers of both genders can give students an expanded experience for social and academic development (Sternod, 2011). The academic gap for students has also resulted in changes in policy at district and federal levels aimed at ensuring that students have equal access to subjects such as science and math. Districts and schools often turn to school-wide reform to address the gender gap and equity issues. School reform strategies include the matching of students with same-gender teachers (Spilt, Koomen, & Jak, 2012). However, due to the few male teachers at the elementary grades, this strategy is often abandoned.

**Need for hiring and retention of more male teachers.** Many elementary schools in the United States have no male teachers, so children at those schools do not have male teachers as role models until they reach the middle school or high school years. An argument can be made that gender does not matter in the hiring of teachers simply to serve as role models (Sevier & Ashcraft, 2009). Research cited in this study has shown that students can be influenced positively when taught by teachers of both genders during their kindergarten through 12th-grade education. For example, Sevier and Ashcraft gave

three reasons male teachers can have a positive influence: providing students with access to alternative modes of teaching, broadening students' conceptions of so-called masculine careers, and serving as role models in homes where fathers were absent.

Cushman (2010) suggested that when districts recruit teachers, they actively seek out qualified males who are prepared to work for social justice. According to Cushman, schools need to figure out what motivates males to join the profession. Moreover, schools that are committed to gender equity should be committed to the tolerance and acceptance of different practices related to the genders of the educators who work for them.

The number of male teachers in early elementary education is less than 5% in most Western countries, but it can be argued that the presence of male teachers makes a difference socially and academically in the lives of students (Cushman, 2010). The staff at those schools would have a different collegial dynamic, and the school could benefit from having male and female perspectives when decisions are made on behalf of the students and staff. Having male and female educators working together for the good of students' experience and education is necessary for the youngest learners (Hansen & Mulholland, 2005).

Some males have chosen to teach at the elementary level. However, even if males do choose to teach in the elementary grades, many leave after a relatively short number of years (Sumsion, 2005). One reason is that they decide to leave the teaching profession altogether. According to Sumsion (2005), many leave after struggling with the low pay or with the perceived wrongness of a grown man wanting to work with young children. Some male teachers choose to move to higher grade levels in K–12 schools, either for a simple change or to avoid the stigma of working with a classroom of young children. Another trend is that males often seek out positions of leadership, which also takes them out of the classroom and into the main office of the elementary school (Brody, 2014). Although being the administrator of a school provides a positive male role model

to children, it does take that male out of the daily classroom interactions with young students that are vital to their development.

In teacher preparation programs, men account for approximately 15% of elementary level student teachers (Oyler, Jennings, & Lozada, 2001). Hiring patterns suggest that upon completion of a teacher preparation program, males are systematically directed toward secondary education. Oyler et al. argued that the public's negative perception of male elementary teachers can be explained by the low status of elementary teaching, which is linked to the point of view that elementary teaching is women's work.

Based on the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001), districts seek out highly qualified teachers to fill classrooms; however, leaders and human resources departments are often overwhelmed by rules, regulations, policies, required practices, contracts, and different cultural needs, which make it difficult to align the best candidate for the job (Hess, 2013). According to Hess, teacher preparation programs only allot limited time for education students to learn about the social and gender identity that are present in school districts and classrooms on a daily basis. The general public may not perceive gender to be an important aspect of a child's education or a teacher's career, but teachers' social background plays a significant role in the success of a student, teacher, school, and school district.

**The need for policy change.** In California, school districts in both urban and suburban parts of the state do not have specific policies that require them to seek out male candidates for the classroom, let alone for male candidates who are committed to teaching for social change and transformation. These districts follow the requirements of NCLB (2001) for a highly qualified teacher and the Equal Employment Opportunity Act (1965) regulations. In an effort to ensure that teachers in U.S. schools meet certain teacher qualifications, the United States Department of Education's policies do not assume that students need both male and female teachers as part of their educational experience.

California followed suit with a focus solely on academic and experiential qualifications, whereby teachers are required to have appropriate credentials, deep understanding of the content, and instructional strategies (California Department of Education, 2015b). When a school district has complied with the federal equal opportunity policy, state mandates or policies, and NCLB guidelines, that district does not have to consider the impact of educators of both genders in the classroom. Regarding the recruitment of more men to teach elementary school, Snyder (2008) stated,

A coordinated effort to recruit male teachers is lacking, in part because some education experts remain unconvinced about the added value male teachers bring to the classroom. If we want more men in the classroom, we'll need to see some data about the benefits of a gender-balanced teaching corps. (para.7)

Snyder's statement further shows that the U.S. educational system has focused solely on the qualifications of a teacher, instead of also considering the benefits of actively seeking out male teachers to not only teach students but to act as positive role models. While the Elementary and Secondary Act of 2001 claimed to "leave no child behind," the policy on hiring highly qualified teachers does not take into account the social identity development and the socio-emotional needs of the child and the importance of male and female role models to support the whole child's educational experience.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The question of why few men choose to be elementary teachers has been debated and researched, and the failure to recruit male teachers into the early grades has been documented (Cushman, 2005). However, little has been published about

the real-life experiences of male educators and the inequities that may prevent some men from choosing the profession. Cushman cited four main factors contributing to the steady decline of male teachers in primary education and to the number of males entering the teaching profession: experiences and attitudes related to status, working in a predominately female environment, salary, and physical contact with children. These factors not only influence male teachers' experiences, but also influence students' and parents' perceptions of males in the teaching profession. Without male teachers who could be role models of diversity in the teaching profession in elementary and high school classroom, young men may be dissuaded from entering the teaching tract in university (Cushman, 2010; Farquhar, 1998).

In addressing the question of why so few male teachers choose to work at the elementary grades, the goal of this study was not only to describe the current state of the phenomenon, but also to understand how the absence has had an effect on the sparse number of male teachers in the primary grades and the working conditions that male teachers may experience.

The overarching research question that guided this study was *What are the professional socialization experiences of male elementary teachers?* To answer the question, subsequent questions were addressed:

1. In what ways do male elementary teachers feel their gender influences how they are perceived in the profession?
2. When choosing a grade level or discipline to teach, why do few male educators choose the elementary grades?

Interviewing male teachers at the elementary grades who had varying seniority in the profession can shed light on their experiences of socialization and identity and how gender has made a difference their career choices. The information gathered from the

interviews guided the findings of this study about how gender has effected and influenced male elementary teachers' careers in education.

### **Significance of the Study**

Understanding the experiences of male teachers who chose the elementary grades can provide rich data for use in education. The results can be used to inform schools and districts about how they might improve the strategies they use to recruit and retain male teachers. The results also can serve as a base for further research to determine how to increase the small number of male teachers in education, especially at elementary schools. Information is needed to address the climate of school sites and what inequities exist for men who teach at the elementary grades, allowing school and district leaders to make changes in policy and practices.

### **Conclusion**

As a profession, leaders in education must consider what is best for students and teachers. There can be no argument that male educators are an important part of the education and socio-emotional development of students in the United States. However, they are often absent from the ranks of the hard-working teaching force, especially at the elementary level. All students, including those at the elementary levels, need male and female role models as they develop into young adults and members of society. This study offers insight into the experiences of male teachers at the elementary grades and how their gender may influence those experiences. With this insight, we can better determine how to encourage college graduates, both male and female, to pursue the teaching profession and provide the positive role models students need.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In many cultures and throughout much of history, teaching has been seen as a revered and respected profession. In recent years, however, some have come to view the teaching profession as a fallback career, following the adage “Those who can do and those who can’t teach.” The teaching profession has always welcomed female teachers, especially at the elementary grades. Today, teaching is still dominated by female teachers, while men often opt out of the profession altogether.

#### **Professional Status of Teachers**

The public’s stance in the United States toward teachers in the elementary levels has generally been negative (Cushman, 2005). Prestige associated with the teaching profession occurs primarily at the university level, and to some degree at the high school level. The majority of men who choose careers in teaching do so at the university level.

The perception of status within teaching dates back to reports on education from the early 20th century (Cushman, 2005; Skelton, 2001). Skelton referred to a British government report from 1925 on the training of primary school teachers that described teaching as a “field of effort for the girl of average intellectual capacity and normal maternal instincts” but cautioned that “for a man to spend his life teaching children of school age is to waste it in doing easy and not very valuable work he would not do if he was fit to do anything else” (p. 122). Although these reports did not have a direct



influence on research in the United States, they did influence studies in Australia and New Zealand.

The low status of primary school teachers in comparison with the status of other occupations in Western countries has been repeatedly alluded to in the literature (Cushman, 2010). It also appears that the higher the grade at which an educator teaches, the greater the perceived status of that educator. Thus, not only have male teachers in elementary education been perceived as having low status, but their role in education has been perceived as a waste of valuable intellect. With perceived status in mind, it is vital to conduct research to better understand why men do not choose elementary education as a career path upon completing their university education, and what can be done to reverse the trend.

### **The Status of Males in the Teaching Profession**

Johnson (2008) reported in an education policy brief for the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy on the status of male teachers in public education in the United States that the number of male teachers was one-quarter of the nearly three million teachers and that the percentage was steadily declining. Moreover, the number of males at the elementary grades was only 10% of the total teaching force. The increasing imbalance in number of male and female teachers can be traced back to the 1870s, when male teachers were as much as 40% of public school teachers in the United States (Table 1). Table 1 also identifies the decrease of male educators within education as the years progressed.

School year	Total teachers (in thousands) <sup>1,2</sup>	Male teachers (in thousands) <sup>1,2,3</sup>	Percentage of male teachers
1870	220	90	40.9
1880	294	123	41.8
1890	368	123	33.4
1900	432	126	29.1
1910	534	110	20.5
1921 <sup>4</sup>	723	118	16.3
1931 <sup>4</sup>	872	154	17.6
1941 <sup>4</sup>	859	183	21.3
1951 <sup>4</sup>	963	235	24.4
1960	1,408	235	16.6
1970	2,059	676	32.8
1980	2,184	708	32.4
1990	3,051	669	21.9

<sup>1</sup>Select years prior to 1951 include small number of librarians and other non-supervisory instruction staff.

<sup>2</sup>Censuses prior to 1938 cited number of different persons employed rather than number of positions.

<sup>3</sup>Estimated, 1970-1990.

<sup>4</sup>Data not available for starting year of decade.

Source: Historical Statistics of the United States, 2006

*Table 1: Proportion of Male Teachers, by Decade, 1870–1990*

Johnson (2008) veered away from the old-fashioned notions and stereotypes of teaching as a profession for women because young children are involved. Instead, Johnson argued that the lack of male teachers undermines gender equity and social justice in schools. He identified the lack of male teachers in education as a component of school improvement. His report did not focus on the relationship between the underachievement of male students and the need for male role models. However, the report raised questions about the relationship between teacher gender and student achievement, and whether boys not having male teachers as role models will be a continuing obstacle in education. At the very least, according to Johnson, the absence of men in the teaching profession continues to perpetuate gender divisions within the profession.

Most parents want to see male and female teachers in public school classrooms and trust them to be role models for their young children in the elementary grades (Jonsson, 2013). It is especially important for children in single-parent households to have positive male role models at school. There is a perception socially that a male teacher is the logical choice to be the “normalizer” or masculine example for absent males at home (Sternod, 2011). Educators have widely agreed that teachers are the catalyst for learning and development in children in schools, and are the role models with whom students spend several hours per day interacting.

Although female teachers are predominant in classrooms across the country, male teachers’ positions as role models increase engagement and academic achievement for both male and female students (Cushman 2010). Teachers are role models and play a significant role in the lives of elementary-age students, which suggests a need for more males at the elementary level. Researchers need to examine if male teachers can have an impact in the lives of young children who come from a single-mother household by providing those children with enriching interactions with an adult male (Cameron, 2001; Martino & Kehler, 2006).

In the United States, citizens are promised a Free and Appropriate Education, also known as FAPE (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Most educators believe that all students deserve that free and appropriate education in a rigorous and equitable way. All students can learn, and educators’ job is to teach, challenge, and support students with whatever resources they need to be successful (Cammara & Romero, 2006). However, Cameron (2001) pointed out that teachers often do much more than impart knowledge to students; they play a bigger role in the lives of students, both directly and indirectly. Cameron stated that male teachers of young children can be especially beneficial not just for boys but for all children with absent fathers because the teacher’s job is to educate the whole child. Additionally, without male teachers, children will continue to view teaching

as a female occupation (Farquhar, 1998). According to Farquhar, compared with a staff of only female teachers, a staff of both male and female teachers of all races can better support equal opportunities for boys and girls and can create an environment that respects every individual. Many studies have shown that the gender and racial background of teachers make a difference in the academic achievement and social development of their students (Ehrenberg, Goldhaber, & Brewer, 1995; Terry, Flenbaugh, Blackmon, & Howard, 2014).

While it is true that teachers who are properly prepared with the necessary materials and knowledge are better equipped than are teachers without that preparation to provide the comprehensive education students deserve, they often also serve as unofficial counselors, mentors, and role models for students (Cameron, 2001). In this way, they provide a rigorous and relevant educational experience for students that address more than just the academic aspect of students' development (Cammarota & Romero, 2006). Cammarota and Romero discussed the need for teachers to incorporate critical pedagogy, authentic caring, and social justice curriculum into the classroom to engage students in their education. The use of pedagogy and caring are essential in providing a well-rounded and comprehensive education for all students. Having teachers who are both male and female can also help by providing positive role models who are also culturally knowledgeable, care about students' well-being, and understand the social aspects of gender in school (Hubbard & Datnow, 2005).

Skelton (2003) studied male pre-service teachers to address male teachers as role models and the gender differences in the experiences of males in elementary education. Skelton noted that the topic of male teachers was being debated across most of the Western world in 2003. She reported that males in the classroom have a direct connection to the achievement of students, especially for boys. The focus of the study was to inform teacher education programs and the government in the United Kingdom

about the disparity in the number of male teachers in the classroom, especially at the elementary grades, and the need to make drastic changes in recruitment, support, and policies for change. The pre-service teachers interviewed cited the equal importance of both males and females in the classroom. One key finding regarded the treatment of males in traditionally female occupations. Other studies have also shown that males who enter professions such as elementary education and nursing are often scrutinized more closely than are women in similar jobs (Hansen & Mulholland, 2005; Oyler et al., 2001). The phenomenon of men staying away from teaching can be directly connected to male teachers' social identity in the teaching profession (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg, 2006; Tajfel, 1982).

### **Theoretical Framework**

*Social identity* refers to how a male teacher is connected to the teaching profession and to the teachers with whom he works (Hogg, 2006). Social identity theory, introduced by Tajfel in the 1970s in the United Kingdom, was described by Hogg (2006) as the role of self-conception in group membership and intergroup relationships. The individual's social identity can be determined not only by the organization to which he or she belongs, but also to a subgroup within that organization. Within the context of education, teachers belong not only to the larger district group, but also to age- and grade-specific subgroups at those elementary and secondary schools. Social identity theory can be applied to the dynamic that men experience in the female-dominated teaching profession. According to Hogg, social identity theory embraces interrelated concepts and sub theories that focus on social-cognitive, motivational, and social-interactive aspects of the group experience—in this case, the group of teachers. As social identity defines a group cognitively, it shapes the group member's self-conception. (Hogg, 2006)

Thus, social identity theory addresses phenomena such as prejudice, discrimination, ethnocentrism, stereotyping, intergroup conflict, conformity, normative behavior, group polarization, crowd behavior, organizational behavior and group cohesiveness which is evident in the experiences of men teaching at the elementary grades. (Hogg, 2006)

The concept that men should identify as an equal part of the teaching staff is crucial to understanding why men do not enter the profession. One example of social identity for male teachers was detailed in a study by Oyler et al. (2001) that chronicled the experience of Philip Lozada as a student teacher in a 1st-grade classroom. After being discouraged to teach 1st grade, Lozada found himself being evaluated and treated differently by his supervising teacher, cooperating teacher (whose students he was teaching), and other teachers—all of whom were female. They scrutinized his interactions with students much more critically than they did with female student teachers, which made him question his decision to go into teaching at all. The host teacher and administrator admitted in a conference with Lozada that they did look at his performance, discipline, and personal connection with students differently than they would for a female student teacher. Lozada's experience is representative of research on male teachers, who typically are not seen as part of the teachers' social group.

Researchers have reported a disconnect between the perceived role of teacher as nurturer and caring person and the perceived role of a male teacher: men are not seen as congruent when they exhibit nurturing traits with young children (Cushman, 2005, 2010; Hansen & Mulholland, 2005; Oyler et al., 2001; Skelton, 2003). The social identity of the female teachers at Lozada's school site exhibited the group prejudice, stereotyping and crowd behavior mindset. (Hogg, 2006) For example, Philip Lozada was advised that he must exhibit maternal traits to interact with students and to consider how he would interact with his own children. However, his supervisor said she would not ask a female teacher who did not have any children of her own to do this (Oyler et al., 2001). It is

socially acceptable for female teachers to care and nurture their students (Hansen & Mulholland, 2005; Oylar et al., 2001; Skelton, 2003). In this case, the staff at Lozada's school went through the social identity process of making comparisons among the teachers and determined that he did not fit into their idea of the traits of the teachers there. (Hogg, 2006)

Teacher socialization is the process whereby the individual becomes a member of the "society of teachers" (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). It is the means by which a teacher forms his or her social identity as a teacher. Zeichner and Gore indicated that socialization can begin well before a teacher enters a university teacher education program. The socialization begins for some when they are in school and influenced by their teachers over the course of their education (Lortie, 1975). Thus, forming the identity of a teacher can begin in the elementary grades and can be highly influenced by a male teacher as a positive role model in the classroom (Farquhar, 1998; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). Simply being in a positive environment in their educational career from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, students are more likely to consider continuing their education and possibly pursuing teaching as a career. (Zeichner & Gore, 1990) Lortie (1975) theorized that students can have a predisposition to becoming a teacher that is a more powerful socializing influence to their identity as a teacher than are later influences at a university or in the workplace.

Once they are teachers at elementary sites, many male teachers realize that they are the gender minority, and this realization can affect how they perceive themselves. How male teachers see themselves in the profession and how those outside the profession perceive male teachers have a profound effect on the level at which they choose to teach or whether they enter the profession at all (Cushman, 2005, 2010). When male teachers feel uncertain about how they are perceived by others, this feeling can dissuade them from even considering teaching young children. Cushman (2005) discussed the

experiences of young males who had just entered the university having serious concerns about primary school teaching as a career due not only to the low status of the teaching profession, but also to issues related to their physical contact with children. This is an example of perceived social identity overtaking the actual identity that current male teachers have about themselves.

The absence of male teachers in the elementary classroom is not solely evident in the United States education system; it is a global phenomenon that has affected school systems in England, New Zealand, Sweden, and elsewhere (Cushman, 2010). According to Cushman, in New Zealand, the overarching concern is about the shortage of males in the primary grades and the effect of this shortage on the high number of children from single-parent homes. Many studies have found that males as teachers and role models in the classroom have a positive effect, especially in the social emotional development of students for whom that role model is not present in the home (Cushman, 2005, 2010). Cushman (2010) called on the education system to adopt

a global emphasis on gender equality and to ensure that teacher education institutions to engage pre-service teachers in a debate and critical reflection on gender-related matters so they might be well prepared for their role as agents of change in the classroom. (p. 1217)

Cushman's statement suggested that the lack of recruitment of male teachers is a worldwide problem to be addressed. Cushman also urged,

Recruitment drives designed to address the shortage of male teachers need to consider the motivation underlying the appeal for more male teachers and what types of male teachers they are appealing to. Increasing the number of male teachers has the potential to compound current issues around gender and achievement unless the term "best candidate" is reserved for those men who are



prepared to work for social justice and who have the skills and motivation to challenge gender-related issues and deconstruct stereotypes. (p. 1218)

According to Cushman (2010), schools that are committed to gender equity should be committed to the tolerance and acceptance of different practices related to the genders of the educators who work for them. This has resulted in changes in policy at the district and federal level to try to ensure that students have equal access. Districts and schools often turn to reform to address the changes in policy, the gender gap, and equity. Versions of school reform include the plan of matching students with same-gender teachers, which can be proposed on a class-by-class basis or as an entire school (Spilt et al., 2012). However, this movement of school reform has not had much success because it does not address the low number of males entering the profession.

Many factors can dissuade young males from entering the teaching tract in university. Historically, the public has had a negative stance toward teachers, especially those in the elementary levels. Several studies have shown how men perceived they were treated within the elementary school environment (Cushman, 2005, 2010; Oyler et al., 2001).

Prestige associated with the teaching profession occurs primarily at the university level, and to some degree at the high school level. The majority of males who choose careers in teaching do so at the university level. This perception of status in teaching dates back to reports on education from the early 20th century (Cushman, 2005; Skelton, 2001). Teaching has been thought of as a stepping stone to other more prestigious and higher paying careers (Martino, 2008). Males who enter the teaching profession often leave it for more male-dominated fields, leaving women to fill their teaching positions. This and other trends have led to the perception of teaching as a job for women (Martino, 2008); thus, the social identity of the teaching profession does not attract many males.

Studies have documented the lack of male teachers in elementary education. In her study about why males may not choose to teach elementary grades upon completing their education, Cushman (2005) focused on whether the attitudes and experiences of practicing male teachers reflected a wider opinion about male teachers. Cushman's aim was to describe the phenomenon from the point of view of males who were teaching at the elementary level.

### **Conclusion**

Previous studies have identified a gender gap in elementary classrooms and the possible effect this may have on students who need male and female role models in the classroom (Hogg, 2006; Tajfel, 1982). Drawing on the literature review, this study gathered information about the experiences of male teachers in the elementary classroom and identified adversities or inequities they experienced in their career as an elementary educator. The goal of the study was to investigate the social identity of male teachers.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This study of the perceptions of male elementary teachers about their minority status and social identity addressed the professional experiences of male teachers. Studying the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of male elementary teachers within the teaching profession can aid in explaining the growing gender gap for those who choose teaching as a career, especially at the elementary grades. It can lead to understanding about why men do not choose elementary education or why choosing to remain in elementary education could help schools, school districts, and university teacher education programs solve the problem of missing male educators in the elementary classroom. This study involved the collection of data through interviews with male elementary teachers. The interviews were conducted one on one with eight participants who volunteered to discuss their career in education.

#### **Research Design**

Although quantitative research is often thought of as more accurate or more objective than qualitative research (Pole, 2007), many educational researchers use qualitative methods because of the more personal aspects of the method. Thinking in a qualitative way involves using different lenses or filters when studying social life or interactions to discover new perceptions about the humans studied. Qualitative research includes a variety of approaches and methods for a study of natural social life (Saldana,

2014). The five approaches to qualitative research are ethnography, field research, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study. Case study is the method used for this study (Synonym, 2016)

A qualitative design that features a case study was deemed appropriate for this research. Within a case study, the researcher can develop an in-depth analysis of a program, social phenomenon, or activity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2014). In this case study, the analysis focused on a group of male elementary teachers. Case studies took place within a set period of time and used prescribed activities for the collection of data (Creswell, 2014). This process created the optimal conditions to study educational topics because the data were collected from those within the profession. For this study, data were collected through interviews. Supporting demographic district, state, and national data were used to provide the context of the study.

This study served a descriptive purpose by posing questions that led to descriptions of participants' experiences. As a result, I garnered information to explain the area of interest (i.e., the minority status of men in teaching). Similarly, Trujillo (1997) established a descriptive profile of entry-level male teachers in a Texas teacher certification program and identified what led to their career satisfaction or dissatisfaction. He also identified their perceived concerns about the underrepresentation of males in the teaching profession. Trujillo disseminated a survey questionnaire that addressed his four research questions to the students in the credentialing program. With the information he gathered, he was able to gain valuable insights into males and their underrepresentation in the female-dominated teaching profession and to generalize about the wider effect on the larger education system. Trujillo used a case study methodology to study this specific group of teachers and their beliefs, perceptions, and concerns as they entered the teaching profession. While Trujillo (1997) studied beginning teachers, the teachers who participated in this study included teachers of varying experience in the profession. The

information and data collected, however; resulted in similar themes which are discussed in detail in chapter 4.

A qualitative method has an open-ended approach that makes it compatible with educational research about social issues (Creswell, 2012). It documents the human experience of the participants in their social environments (Saldana, 2014). This approach can be molded to fit the type of information that needs to be collected to reach a conclusion to a problem or trend. The use of an interview format was appropriate for gathering information in this educational case study.

The choice of approach for this study can be understood through what Creswell (2014) described as “a general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study” (p. 6). Creswell focused on four types of worldviews (i.e., postpositivism, constructivism, transformatism, and pragmatism) that can explain how a researcher picks a study’s methodology. Creswell (2014) uses the term worldview to describe a set of beliefs that guide action. One worldview that supports the use of qualitative method is constructivism. The constructivist worldview aligns with a qualitative research approach due to its use of observation to provide an understanding of a phenomenon within the context in which subjects live and work. Constructivism focuses on not only understanding a phenomenon, but also considers multiple participant meanings, social and historical context and the generation of a theory connected to information collected. (Creswell. 2014)

### **Rationale**

This study focused on the experiences and interactions of male teachers with other teachers. It was important to capture the points of view of male teachers at the elementary level because this not only helped clarify why males may not choose to teach in the

elementary grades, but it also provided a closer look at the social identity and gender inequities men face when they go into teaching (Hansen & Mulholland, 2005; Oyler et al., 2001). The focus for this case study was an in-depth look into the professional socialization experiences of male elementary teachers. The teaching profession warrants special study because its culture differs from that of other professions. Moreover, the teaching profession encompasses various subcultures (e.g., groups of elementary, secondary, and postsecondary educators, and of male and female educators). Each culture may influence why many male teachers do not choose to work in the elementary grades and may influence the identities of those who do choose to teach from within the profession (Hogg, 2006; Trepte, 2006).

The interviews were cross-sectional in order to collect all data at a point in time, although some responses described the past experiences of participants. Data were taken from the interview transcripts. The one-on-one interviews were approximately 30 minutes long for each participant. Responses were recorded for future analysis. The information gained from this cross-sectional study was used to generalize the beliefs, attitudes, and opinions of the study's sample (Creswell, 2012). Questions were comprehensive, clear, and of acceptable length for respondents (Creswell, 2012). The open-ended interview questions elicited more in-depth answers about content described in the interview. Questions for the interview can be found in Appendix A.

### **Sample for the Study**

This case study focused on the social identity and experiences of male teachers at the elementary grades. It included eight male teachers from the total number of males in the target district, with varying career lengths to create a more valid analysis of the broad spectrum of experiences of the teachers surveyed. The study focused on

the elementary grade levels, including kindergarten through grade 5, within the school district. Identification of participants within the selected kindergarten through grade 5 school district was done through standard mail and email. Participants were asked to sign a consent form that ensured their confidentiality in the study (Appendix B). The eight men that were interviewed ranged in years of service from 2 years to 37 years and taught at a variety of grade levels. Table 2 and the participant profiles, which can be found in chapter 4 give more details about each of the participants in the study.

### **Setting of the Study**

This study took place in a suburban elementary school district in California, within Alameda County. The district is a preschool through 8th-grade elementary school district in the Bay Area of Northern California. This unified school district has 15 schools and serves students from preschool to adult, with more than 9,000 students attending its schools. It is a diverse district, with multiple races and cultures within the student and teacher populations. Although the culture and race of the teachers was not part of this study, it was important for me to gather information from a diverse group of teachers within a school district.

### **Instrument and Questions**

I developed a series of interview questions for the study's one-on-one interviews that addressed the research question about male teachers' perceptions about how their gender shapes their identity as an elementary teacher. The opening of the interview included questions to allow for demographic data sorting and questions to provide data for a comparison between the male teachers interviewed (Appendix A). I was then able

to generalize or draw inferences from the data collected to better understand the broader population of male teachers (Creswell, 2012).

Questions were generated for use in the study, based on the purpose of the study (Creswell, 2014). In qualitative studies, the use of a central question or hypothesis is essential to focus the study. One source of inquiry is through an explanatory focus, which in this case can help to explain patterns associated with males not choosing to teach in elementary grades (Creswell, 2014). Open-ended questions allowed the male elementary teacher participants to address this line of explanatory inquiry and provide rich responses related to events, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions. I asked these questions to elicit data about the steady decline of males in the profession, especially at the elementary level.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

After permission was given by the district and by the participants, teachers were interviewed about their experiences as an elementary teacher that addressed the research question *What are the professional socialization experiences of male elementary teachers?* Teachers were able to answer questions with the knowledge that their responses would be identified only by an anonymous identifier, as stated on their signed agreements. This allowed the teachers' identities to remain hidden. In addition, the interviews were done in private and in nonthreatening locations to help maintain confidentiality. These locations were predetermined by the participant and me. Participants were asked a series of closed-ended and open-ended questions. Responses for close-ended questions included questions that were used for classification and demographic purposes.

I then evaluated the information and data gathered through the interviews to determine if the research question and sub-questions had been addressed. The responses



and data were used to evaluate the experiences and beliefs of those male teachers at the elementary grades.

### **Limitations**

In conducting this case study, the personal biases of the participants and I could have an effect on how responses were expressed by the participants and how they were interpreted by the interviewer. I am not part of the district where the teachers work, which was a point I made to the participants to make them feel comfortable about giving details about their experiences without fear of reprimand. It also meant that I did not have a stake in the policies and treatment of employees within the district where the teachers worked.

Gender also may have played a role in how the men engaged with and answered the questions posed by a female researcher. They could have felt some discomfort in being interviewed by a woman about their experience of being a man in a female-dominated profession. None of the men who were interviewed expressed any concern about my gender. However, they indicated they were happy that someone was finally asking about their experiences as an elementary teacher.

Limitations associated with individual interviews included the limited number of teachers available to interview within the school district. The low number of male teachers was also affected by each teacher's willingness to participate in the interviews. Out of the 50 male teachers at the elementary schools in the school district, only eight agreed to be interviewed for this study.

Another limitation was the possibility that participants would not be completely honest in answering the questions posed in the interview. If a participant in the study felt his responses could have a direct effect on his job, that participant may have felt reluctant to state his true experiences. To address the limitations, the information was first taken

verbatim, and then an analysis was made after all the interviews had been completed in which the data were evaluated to determine if biases affected the results.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this case study was to gain in-depth knowledge about the professional socialization experiences and social identity of male teachers at the elementary grades. Interviews were done to gather the data needed to explore any biases male teachers face and how perceptions about them shaped their professional choices. The data collected were used to determine why so few male teachers choose to teach at the elementary grades.

It is important for the teaching profession in general and for male teachers more specifically to seek answers to these questions. This study addressed how elementary male teachers are perceived, which may have an effect on their chosen profession. If male teachers are influenced not to teach at the elementary grade levels or if they seek the opportunity to leave teaching jobs in the primary grades, then students in elementary schools may fail to benefit from having valuable male role models in their developmental years, and male teachers may continue to feel as if they do not belong in the elementary classroom.

## CHAPTER 4

### OUTCOMES AND ANALYSIS

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to understand the social identity of male elementary teachers and to unearth which, if any, experiences or biases connected to their gender shaped their experiences and decisions with regard to their teaching career. Social identity in the workplace can be an important aspect to job satisfaction and have an effect on career decisions, especially in the teaching profession (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The secondary purpose was to identify ways for districts and schools to support male teachers at the elementary grades, to know the motivating factors for those teaching at the elementary level, and to identify the reasons for male underrepresentation in the profession. The research addressed the following question and sub-questions:

*What are the professional socialization experiences of male elementary teachers?*

1. In what ways do male elementary teachers feel their gender influences how they are perceived in the profession?
2. When choosing a grade level or discipline to teach, why do few male educators choose the elementary grades?

This chapter will display and analyze data gathered through the one-on-one interviews described in chapter 3. The analysis will focus on addressing the social

identity and beliefs of the male teachers who participated and the biases they may have experienced in their careers.

### **Review of Methodology**

Male teachers in prekindergarten through 5th grade were interviewed in a one-on-one setting of their choice. For this case study, interviews shed light on the social implications of the elementary teaching profession for men. The constructivist view used the subjective experiences and stories of the teachers interviewed to inform the larger topic of male teachers within the educational system (Hesse-Biber, 2010). This approach allowed me to look at the social world of the elementary teacher through the lens of males within the profession (James, Waring, Coe, & Hedges, 2012). The data were analyzed to identify factors that contribute to the social identity in the teaching profession for male teachers. The information collected could then be used to generalize about the population. This perspective was particularly important for this study because male teachers at the elementary level sometimes encounter obstacles that dissuade them from working with young children.

The settings of the interviews varied, but were private to ensure the anonymity of the participants. Interviews averaged 30 minutes each, during which I recorded the participants' responses and took notes. Participants were provided a copy of the questions if they requested to examine the document before the interviews.

Teacher participants were contacted by email and paper invitation, based on the availability of their contact information. The correspondence included a brief explanation of the study, with a request for the teachers to contact me if they were interested in being interviewed. The invitations can be found in Appendices C and D. Eight participants contacted me by email or phone to schedule appointments. Of the approximately 50

male elementary teachers in the district, only eight chose to participate. Closed-ended questions were included to identify the demographics of the participants, such as years as a teacher, current grade taught, and other grades taught in their career. Other questions inquired into their experiences as a teacher and their perceptions of those experiences. All participants agreed to allow additional questions for clarification at a later date. The interview questions can be viewed in Appendix A.

### Participants

The teacher participants work in an urban prekindergarten through 12th-grade school district in Northern California. The teachers had a range of grade-level experience in prekindergarten through 5th grade, as well as varied years of experience in the profession. The interviews allowed the teachers to express their perceptions about their social identity as a male teacher in a female-dominated profession, as well as give examples of how their identity as a teacher and as a male teacher had affected their career. A brief summary of the demographic information about the participants is shown in Table 2.

Teacher identification	Current grade-level	Grades taught	Years in profession
Teacher A	5	5	5
Teacher B	5	2, 5, 6, MS, HS	37
Teacher C	5	5, MS	19
Teacher D	4	2, 4, MS	16
Teacher E	3	K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5	20
Teacher F	5	4, 5, MS	20
Teacher G	1	K, 1	2
Teacher H	5	3, 4, 5	10

*Table 2: Study Participants' Demographics*

Demographic questions were asked at the start of the interview to determine what grade level the teachers currently taught, which grades they had taught over their career, and how many years they had been in education. The participants had been in the profession for 2 to 37 years. This range of experience provided varied points of view, based on when the men had entered the profession. These educators had also taught a range of grade levels, from kindergarten through high school. The majority of the male teachers interviewed for this study were currently teaching at grades 4 and 5 (six out of eight) or had taught at grades 4 and 5 (seven out of eight), which are considered the upper grades at the elementary school site.

### **Teacher Profiles**

Teacher A was currently teaching 5th grade and had taught 5th grade for his 5-year teaching career. In his interview, Teacher A stated that he was assigned to the upper elementary grades and chose to remain there because he liked working with students who “appreciate learning and understand my jokes and get my sarcasm.” He chose to teach elementary specifically because he felt he could “light a spark in [my] students about the power of education, before the middle school attitudes set in.” Teacher A knew that becoming an elementary teacher meant he would be working mostly with women. What he did not think was that he would be the only man on campus, which he will be next school year when the other man on campus leaves for a position in middle school.

Teacher B was currently teaching 5th grade. He had taught at several other elementary grades and also taught in middle school and high school over his 37 years as an educator. He wanted to try out teaching a single subject for a while, but eventually wanted to move back to the elementary grades. Moving back to the elementary grades

was important to Teacher B so he could “make more of a difference with the younger kids, you know, before they get to high school.” At the start of his career, Teacher B was encouraged to teach at the elementary grades because his friends and family told him “they need men in elementary schools.” However, some did not agree and told him teaching young children is not a “real job” because he would simply be playing all day. He believed that his 37 years of teaching have proven them wrong. At the end of the current school year, this teacher will retire and travel across the United States in a Winnebago.

Teacher C was currently teaching 5th grade, but had also taught at the middle school level. He had remained at 5th grade for many of his 19 years of experience because he was looking for a change after having taught middle school for several years. Teacher C said he decided that he liked the curriculum and the age of the students better in 5th grade. He remembered being told that most people expect men to teach secondary grades, which was one influence on his choice to start his career in the middle grades. Although he did not explain what being a good role model meant to him, Teacher C said that his presence was a good opportunity for the students to have a male teacher because most of their teachers up to that point had been females and many students needed positive male and female role models.

In his 16-year career, Teacher D taught 2nd and 4th grade before moving to middle school. He moved back to 4th grade after layoffs in the district placed him in his current position. Teacher D did not say whether he was “happy” to be back in the elementary grades, but he did like his class this school year. His friends and family did not influence his choice to teach at the elementary grades, but they did express their preconceived notions about what elementary school teachers do all day. He was told that he would “do fun stuff all day, like arts and crafts,” which Teacher D said he had told

his friends was completely wrong because elementary school state standards are quite challenging in 2016.

Teacher E was currently teaching 3rd grade and had taught all of the elementary grades from kindergarten through 5th grade in his teaching career. He had remained at the elementary grades for all of his 20 years as an educator because he felt that was “where I can make the most difference as a teacher and soon as an administrator.” Before getting his teaching credential, Teacher E was a substitute, which he said contributed to his decision to work at the elementary grades. He said he felt that “more male teachers are needed at the elementary level because the elementary grades are a crucial time for children for many reasons and [I feel] they need to have both a positive male and female influence.” For this reason, he had continued working with students at the elementary level and will continue as an elementary school site principal.

Teacher F was currently teaching 5th grade and had worked in 4th grade at his current school site and in the middle school grades. Over his 20 years in education, he had focused his job choices on teaching English language learners in urban and rural schools. Teacher F spent a few years in the middle of his career working as a program manager for the National Science Foundation. However, he did not stay away from education for long, and returned to teaching at 4th grade in his current school district. Teacher F had focused his own learning on technology in the classroom and how he could use technology to support students of low socioeconomic status and English learners who may not have otherwise had educational experiences with technology. Teacher F was inspired by other male educators whom he saw in the media because they did “whatever it took to provide high quality education for their students,” and he continued to do that for his students each school year. Teacher F noted that although he felt a connection to famous teachers such as Jaime Escalante and Ron Clark, he also found inspiration from female teachers he called “just as amazingly inspiring as their male counterparts.”



Teacher G gave the shortest answers of all of the participants during the interview. He also had the shortest career of all the teachers interviewed, having just finished his second year as a full-time classroom teacher. Teacher G picked the elementary grades because he enjoyed the fact that teachers “see the dramatic development quickly” at the primary grades. He was currently teaching 1st grade and had experience as a substitute in kindergarten through 5th grade. Teacher G was influenced to teach younger children by his wife, who is a 2nd-grade teacher, so he saw in her students what effect he could have on young children. He felt inspired by his young students and intended to continue teaching at the elementary grades for many years.

Finally, Teacher H worked in 5th grade this school year and had taught 3rd and 4th grades over his 10-year career. He worked as a paraprofessional at the high school level before becoming a teacher. Teacher H chose to teach younger students because he felt he could “have a bigger impact or help set them up on a better track.” The impression that his friends, classmates, and family had about elementary teachers was that they get paid to babysit, get summers off, and only work half of the day. Teacher H was not influenced in a negative way about these opinions before entering the profession. He said that he continually told those people that those views were “absurd” and that his work has “never simply started at 8:30 am and certainly has never ended at 3:00pm.” Teacher H planned to continue in education for now, but was not sure for how many more years because of the negative view of teachers and the low salary for the profession.

### **Review of the Limitations**

Every effort was made to make the participants feel safe to give extensive details about their experiences as a male teacher. With the limited number of male teachers available to interview in the district who teach at the elementary level, only eight men

agreed to be interviewed, which was a small sample. Finding teachers to participate was extremely difficult due to the low numbers within the school district. The reality that very few men were teaching at this level was not only connected to the research question, but also created a significant limitation to gathering data for this study.

I do not work in the school district where the participants work. Therefore, the participants were assured by me that their identity would be secure and their responses would not be seen by their school district. The fact that I am a school administrator did not have a negative influence on the participants because they only knew me as a doctoral student conducting a research study.

My gender did not appear to influence the participants from giving honest and detailed answers to the questions that were posed. They were curious, however, about what made me pick the topic. I was happy to share my personal experiences as an elementary school student and elementary teacher (see chapter 1) to them and to help make them feel comfortable answering the questions. I told them that I did not have a male teacher until 7th grade, and that as I was trying to decide what I wanted to study for my dissertation, I wondered why so few men were teaching at the elementary grades.

Interviews were conducted at the location selected by the participant, and participants were again assured that their identity would be kept confidential. All responses were recorded and transcribed by me as the researcher. I took notes in order to capture significant points in the recordings that should be further examined. Some of the participants gave extensive answers and were able to give more details when prompted. In a few instances, participants did not expand or go into detail when prompted. No specific question or series of questions had shorter or longer answers from the participants; some participants just had more details to give than others over the course of the interview. Examples can be seen in the sample quotations for each question.

## Themes Based on Participants' Responses

Interviewing eight male elementary school teachers with varied years of experience addressed the themes raised in the literature review of this study. In order to understand the perspectives of male teachers in the elementary grades and their social identity in the female-dominated profession of teaching, interview questions focused on ways their gender shaped their experiences.

The four themes that emerged were the influences on their choice to become an elementary school teacher, their social identity as a teacher, ways their gender had had an effect on their career, and how male teachers can be role models for students. Those interviewed had many experiences in common, and most were the only male or one of two males on campus.

Some of the men who were interviewed shared experiences as the sole male on campus. Six of the eight participants said they had experienced “awkward” moments in interactions with female staff members. Participants felt they were seen as the disciplinarian on campus and the one to whom other teachers sent their “problem” students to solve discipline issues. On a positive note, all of the men felt they were appreciated and welcomed as part of their school site staff; they were treated as a valued member of their staff.

In the following sections, I explain the themes that came from the interviews and how the participants' responses connected to those themes.

**Theme 1: Social influences in becoming and remaining an elementary school teacher.** Outside influences and perceptions can have a profound effect on the decisions people make about their career (Sternod, 2011). With that in mind, participants in the study were asked questions about their experiences when they were considering entering the teaching profession. All of the men were able to recall many of the details at the time

they became teachers. Questions that revealed this theme asked these teachers about their decision to become a teacher at the elementary grades and what events or opinions, if any, led them to that career choice. The purpose was to determine whether outside influences affected the participants' choice of grade level or a specific reason that led them to pick the elementary grades.

First the teachers were asked, *What decisions led you to teach at your current grade level?* (Table 3). The question referred to their decision to teach at the elementary grades instead of middle school, high school, or university. The participants had similar responses to questions inquiring about what or who influenced them to teach at the elementary grades. Teacher H discussed being influenced to teach young children after being involved with youth groups, summer camps, sports, and “enjoying working with kids that age.” Other teachers interviewed said they had some experience working with young children in various capacities (e.g., sports coach, paraprofessional, and substitute teacher) that influenced their decision to teach at an elementary school site.

Teacher identification	Example summarized quotations
Teacher A	I like working with kids that are old enough to appreciate learning and who understand [my] jokes and sarcasm.
Teacher B	I liked the curriculum and standards, [my] teaching partner and it seemed less stressful than other grades.
Teacher C	I liked the curriculum and the age of the students.
Teacher D	Layoffs within the district caused me to move to my current position.
Teacher E	I am currently in a grade that I enjoy and have taught for several years.
Teacher F	My experience working with English learner students in urban and rural settings and my use of technology to guide instruction and promote student cognitive growth.
Teacher G	I enjoy the primary grades because you see the dramatic development [of students] quickly.
Teacher H	Before teaching, I spent a lot of time working in summer camps, sports programs, after school programs and it was usually with kids in the 10 to 12 age range and I loved it. When I went back to school for my masters and certification, I knew that elementary would be a level where I would have the highest chances of getting hired.

*Table 3: Participants' Responses to the Question What decisions led you to teach at your current grade level?*

Some of the participants had practical reasons for choosing the grades they did. Teachers B and C stated that they chose their current grade because they liked the curriculum standards and the age of the students at that level. Teacher D said he chose the grade due to layoffs at the middle school level where he taught previously, which resulted in his return to the elementary grades. Teacher H explained that when he went back to university to complete his master's degree and credential, he strategically chose elementary because "I knew that elementary level would be a level where I would have the highest chances of getting hired." Upon further prompting, he stated that he knew more positions were open at the elementary grades and there were few men, so he felt he had the greatest chance of securing a position. The sentiment of having an advantage to get a teaching position was expressed by several of the participants due to the social perceptions that males are needed at the elementary grades and the high number of female applicants vying for jobs in school districts.

Participants were also asked, *Did you seek advice from others what grade level you would teach?* (Table 4). The most common response was that they talked to other teachers about what it was like to teach at the elementary grades. Teacher G said his wife was a 2nd-grade teacher and was a significant influence on his decision to teach 1st grade. Teacher C spoke about his experience as a substitute teacher, which helped him decide which grades he would teach after obtaining his credential. Teacher E, like others in the study, looked into the curriculum and standards before selecting the elementary grades.

Teacher identification	Example summarized quotations
Teacher A	No, I was basically assigned to upper elementary grades, so I didn't have much of a choice. I may have liked teaching kindergarten through 3rd grades if I could have tried those.

Teacher identification	Example summarized quotations
Teacher B	I wanted to work with a specific teacher, so we both moved from middle school in 6th grade to 5th grade.
Teacher C	I did not really seek advice from others. But I did substitute for about a year before completing my credential, so I had experience with several grade levels.
Teacher D	No. (no examples or details given)
Teacher E	I didn't seek advice from others, but I spoke to teachers to get an idea of the curriculum at each grade level. My experience as a substitute helped me to select the grade level I thought I would enjoy teaching the most.
Teacher F	No. (no examples or details given)
Teacher G	My wife teaches 2nd grade, and I talked with her somewhat regarding teaching in elementary school.
Teacher H	I was working as a paraprofessional at a high school in special education. I spoke with a lot of teachers at the school and they all agreed that elementary would give me the best chance of being hired.

*Table 4: Participants' Responses to the Question Did you seek advice from others what grade level you would teach?*

None of the men gave any indication that they had been encouraged in their undergraduate university program to teach at the elementary grades. Several studies discussed in the literature review cited this kind of encouragement as important for recruiting male students into teaching at the elementary grades (Cushman, 2010; Oyler et al. 2001). Although none of the participants were specifically discouraged to teach in kindergarten to 5th grade, none were guided or encouraged to pursue that path when selecting their credential program.

When they were asked, *Have you ever considered leaving the elementary grades? Why?* four of the eight teachers stated that they had considered or were considering moving out of the elementary school grades (Table 5). They gave several reasons for this consideration, including demands from the district, time spent on planning and preparation for all subject areas, maturity level of the students, and extracurricular events. Teacher D also discussed being frustrated by the perceptions from outside education, including an unsupportive public and political attacks, which made him feel teaching

elementary school was too hard. Teacher H said he would like to move to higher grade levels to work with more mature students, who were “more capable, both academically and emotionally” than the students he currently worked with at the 5th-grade level.

Teacher identification	Example summarized quotations
Teacher A	Yes. I thought it would be interesting to see what it would be like to only focus on one subject instead of having to teach everything.
Teacher B	No. (no examples given)
Teacher C	I actually did leave the elementary grades for a few years. I prefer the older students and I like just teaching one subject better. Cuts in positions brought me back.
Teacher D	Yes, the federal, state, and district demands make teaching elementary too challenging. Between teaching almost every subject, preparing, planning, grading, assessing, testing, field trips, meetings, fundraisers, and trainings, an unsupportive public, political attacks, and parents that are out of control, teaching elementary has become too exhausting.
Teacher E	I have never considered leaving the elementary grades because I feel that is where I can make the most difference as a teacher/administrator.
Teacher F	No. (no examples given)
Teacher G	No because I enjoy working with my team and the students are inspiring.
Teacher H	Yes. After almost a decade of teaching 5th grade, I feel like I want to work with slightly older kids. I don't feel like I could ever work below the level I'm currently at—that I'll only work my way up the grade ladder. Maturity [of the students], or lack thereof, can be frustrating at times. Working with older kids means having students who are more capable, both academically and emotionally.

*Table 5: Participants' Responses to the Question Have you ever considered leaving the elementary grades? Why?*

In contrast, the other four teachers reported they had not considered leaving the elementary grades. Teacher C actually did leave for a few years to teach at the middle school grades, but returned to the elementary level, where he currently taught. Teacher E had never considered leaving the elementary level because he felt he could make a bigger difference there as a teacher or administrator.

**Theme 2: Social identity as a teacher.** The second theme that emerged from the interviews was how teachers “belonged” to the teachers’ social identity. *Social*

*identity* refers to how a person is connected to a social group; for this study, the identity was a teacher (Hogg, 2006). Socialization of teachers occurs when teachers become a member of the society of teachers (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). Teaching is not a for-profit business or a government entity, but the students served can be viewed as customers, and a strict set of policies is determined by the state and federal government. Organizational identification is a critical part of behavior and job satisfaction, which is important for the identity of teachers remaining in the profession (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

For many male teachers, social identity can have a significant effect on whether they feel part of an elementary teaching staff and on the decisions they may make in their career as an educator. The result can be that a male teacher leaves the elementary grades for middle or high school to teach where more male teachers are present and can reinforce the identity of male teachers. Perceptions of male teachers from within the profession and from the public outside the profession can play a role in the identity and acceptance of male teachers who choose the elementary grades. The teachers were asked questions that yielded answers that connected to the larger teacher identity and their identity within the teacher community.

Participants were asked, *Can you give examples of messages you received before or during your teaching career about social characteristics of elementary teachers?* (Table 6), and they stated that some of the comments they received were very encouraging and others made them seriously consider a different path. The concept of social characteristics was associated with the social identity of teacher because the perception of what an elementary teacher is supposed to be is tied to the profession being predominantly female. The predominant identity of the elementary teacher is female (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg, 2006).



Teacher identification	Example summarized quotations
Teacher A	Most people would tell me that if you are going to teach elementary [school], you're going to be working mostly with women.
Teacher B	Some told that they need more men in elementary and some said that I would play all day, that it is not a "real" job.
Teacher C	When I told people I would be teaching 5th grade, they said that elementary teachers are nurturing, caring, and good at designing bulletin boards.
Teacher D	I am often told elementary teachers just do fun things, arts and crafts. Also, while in college, many male friends said they would like to become teachers, but they were not interested in entering the profession because of the low pay.
Teacher E	I can't think of any at this time.
Teacher F	My family has always been supportive, but expressed concern with the low pay compared to the amount of work it takes to teach.
Teacher G	Some advice I got was to not try to be an expert at everything because elementary teachers have to know every subject.
Teacher H	If we are talking about stereotypes here, I guess one big one is that teachers have it made. That we get paid to play all day or babysit kids. That's absurd!

*Table 6: Participants' Responses to the Question Can you give examples of messages you received before or during your teaching career about social characteristics of elementary teachers?*

Teacher B said he was given both encouragement and criticism by family and friends. An example of encouragement was that "they need men in elementary school," which as stated in chapter 1, is a common opinion held both educators and those outside academia. He also received criticism for choosing the elementary grades. One criticism Teacher B received ("Don't you need a real job? All you will do is play all day") fit the stereotype of elementary teachers.

Common vocabulary in participants' responses about social characteristics expressed by others to them included "nurturing," "caring," and "good at organizing bulletin boards." All of these characteristics are socially connected to women teaching at the elementary grades. Participants also mentioned that elementary teachers are known for doing arts and crafts, playing all day, and other "fun things." Teacher D and Teacher

H strongly disagreed with these characteristics. Teacher H expressed his anger at the false social perception in the United States that teachers have “it made” with summers off, a short workday, and getting paid to “babysit kids and play all day.” He said he responded to people who said this by saying it is “absurd. Our jobs do not start at 8:30 or end at 3:00.” This vocabulary does not match the participant teachers’ identity, which included spending long hours planning or preparing to teach, and challenging students academically.

Another common response referred to a topic addressed in chapter 1. Low starting salary was mentioned by a few participants as a consideration for entering or remaining in the profession. Salary is not connected to gender in terms of unequal pay for men and women, as it is in other professions; rather, it is connected to gender because one social identity males have is as the breadwinner of the family. The low starting salaries for teachers are often seen as not enough to support a family. Teacher F and Teacher D mentioned this in relation to comments that family, friends, and college classmates made when they talked about becoming a teacher. Teacher D mentioned this as a specific reason some of his college friends went into other professions.

The participants reported several different experiences when they were asked, *What effect, if any, did social perceptions about men as minorities have on your decision to teach at the elementary level?* (Table 7). Several of the participants said many “female” characteristics were associated with teaching at the elementary grades. They again used words such as *nurturing*, *sensitive*, and *compassionate*. However, the teachers felt the perception was that people were likely to assign those characteristics to female teachers, and not necessarily to them. Some of the teachers stated that this could be the reason so few males are at the primary grades: people do not believe they “belong” there. Teacher E talked about parents being “cautious” around male teachers with regard to their

female students. This public perception of male teachers in elementary classrooms can dissuade males from entering or staying in the profession (Cushman, 2005).

Teacher identification	Example summarized quotations
Teacher A	I think some people think it's weird for a guy to be an elementary teacher. For example, it would be harder as a man, to teach kindergarten. Those kids like to hug the teacher, and these days, that could be misinterpreted. I'm sure people think male teachers won't be as nurturing as their female colleagues.
Teacher B	People say strong disciplinarian, good at math and PE, strict or mean, or a good influence. Also, I think there is some suspicion on why you're in a woman's job and the expectation that you will become a principal.
Teacher C	Obviously, there are more female teachers in elementary school. I think people expect male teachers to teach secondary grades. I think most people perceive elementary teaching as more of a female job. Just like in preschool you almost never see any male teachers.
Teacher D	District officials often place males in grades 4 to 6 because they believe male teachers are more authoritative and can deal better with behavior issues in those grades. Thus males are often prevented from teaching K to 3.
Teacher E	There are many more female teachers than male teachers at the elementary level. Although men are welcomed and may be seen as positive role models for students at this level, I feel that men are definitely scrutinized more than women. In general, it appears that female elementary teachers are viewed as more nurturing while parents are more cautious around male elementary teachers, especially with female students. In regard to the profession, I don't believe that gender influences whether or not you are perceived as an effective teacher.
Teacher F	A great deal. As a male teacher in the elementary level I was (less now, but it still happens) I was constantly relied on to be the disciplinarian or authority figure. Oftentimes, students that would have behavioral problems in other classrooms would end up in my class.
Teacher G	I have no idea.
Teacher H	Because I'm a male, it is often assumed that I'm a great disciplinarian, that kids with behavior issues will automatically do well in my class. Also, I think some parents assume that because I'm a male, I'm not as sensitive or compassionate as a female would be.

*Table 7: Participants' Responses to the Question What effect, if any, did social perceptions about men as minorities have on your decision to teach at the elementary level?*

Teacher B, Teacher D, Teacher F, and Teacher H stated that male teachers were characterized as the disciplinarian. Several of the participants talked about this identity in response to multiple questions during the interviews. According to these teachers, this identity was assigned to them by others. This identity is in opposition to that given to many female elementary teachers. Several of the participants talked of accepting this role. Yet, they also felt they embraced other characteristics associated with female elementary schoolteachers, such as being kind, caring, and nurturing.

**Theme 3: Gender and inequities as a male teacher.** Another theme that emerged from the interviews was how male teachers were treated differently from their female counterparts. Cushman (2006) discussed how men navigate through different types of scrutiny and treatment, and how this can make them leave the elementary classroom. Men in education are not subject to inequities that are present in other industries (e.g., unequal pay), but can experience other inequities in a female-dominated profession. Many men who teach at the elementary school site can feel isolated if they are the only male on the staff. They are often placed in the upper elementary grades because the administration thinks they can “handle” the classroom discipline of students and because older students do not require the “nurturing” required in lower grades. For example, Teacher A did not seek out advice when becoming a teacher; however, he was placed in the upper elementary grades even though he felt he “might have really liked teaching kindergarten through 3rd grade.”

Isolation as the only male teacher or one of a few male teachers can make male teachers feel they are not part of the school community or part of the staff’s social identity (Hogg, 2006). The teachers reported being singled out as the person on campus to teach the older students or be the disciplinarian for students in other classrooms. Participants were asked questions connected to their gender and how they were treated differently than the female teachers.

Participants' responses to the question *How does your gender influence how you are perceived as an elementary teacher?* (Table 8) were varied. While Teacher A, Teacher C, Teacher D, and Teacher E reported that their gender did not influence how they were seen as a teacher, the other participants responded that it had made a difference in their experiences. Teacher A wanted to be at the elementary level not because he was a man, but because he wanted to “light a spark in my students about the power of education.”

Teacher identification	Example summarized quotations
Teacher A	Not much of an effect. I think I chose elementary because I felt I could light a spark in my students about the power of education, before the middle school attitudes set in, more than I thought about what my coworkers would be like.
Teacher B	I was very comfortable. I had a male elementary teacher. I always enjoyed working with children. I prefer interacting with women.
Teacher C	No real effect.
Teacher D	None
Teacher E	It had no effect on my decision to teach at the elementary school level.
Teacher F	None negative. I found people like Prof. Jaime Escalante and my own male teachers during my school years to be inspiring. Larger-than-life educators who would do whatever it took to provide high-quality education for their students. However, I would like to point out that many of my female teachers were just as amazingly inspiring as their male counterparts.
Teacher G	I was met with enthusiasm about working in the primary grades and told that male teachers are needed.
Teacher H	Huge. I felt that I would probably go to the top of the interview list because I was a male. We're a minority at this level, and I often hear from parents how great it is to have a male teacher early on. I knew I'd have a great chance of getting hired in K through 5.

*Table 8: Participants' Responses to the Question How does your gender influence how you are perceived as an elementary teacher?*

Teachers gave several reasons to explain how their gender played a role in their experiences as a minority at their schools, including how others perceived their role in the elementary teaching staff. Teacher F stated that his gender made for a positive experience in some ways. He said he was inspired by other male teachers in his past and

by those portrayed in the public media to become “one of those teachers who provide a quality education for their students.” Teacher H felt gender had an effect when he made the decision to teach at the elementary grades. He said he strategically picked elementary because he knew men were needed at that level, and also because he knew that as a male he would have a greater chance of being hired. The advantage of being a male teacher in a pool of female applicants was expressed by several participants as one of the many reasons they picked the elementary grades.

Teacher B spoke of the expectations he felt others had of him as a male teacher, such as being a strong disciplinarian, being good at teaching physical education, being a strict or mean teacher, and being a good influence. He also talked about how he felt some “suspicion” about why he would want to be in a “woman’s job.” People at his site and within the school district expressed to him their expectation that he would become a principal, which he chose not to pursue.

Participants’ responses to the question *Has your gender affected your experience as part of an elementary teaching staff that mostly consists of females? In what ways?* (Table 9) indicated some of the ways they had experienced the inequities of being the minority member of an elementary school staff. The teachers talked about feeling uncomfortable in the staff room or at the lunch table when female teachers talked about personal issues with guys or the “cute fire fighters that visited the school,” and this made them stay away when teachers gathered for lunch or a break. Teacher F talked about a time he was singled out as the sole male on the teaching staff, and others said it was rare to see male elementary teachers. He felt people might have thought it was wrong for a man to want to teach at the elementary grades.

Teacher identification	Example summarized quotations
Teacher A	It can get uncomfortable in the lunch room. Sometimes you're the only guy at the table, and the female teachers will talk about their perfect guy, or who's hot, or how great it was when the firemen visited campus. Also, when female colleagues find out you're single, they immediately want to set you up with their single friend, cousin, neighbor, roommate, etc., which can make things difficult.
Teacher B	I saw respect given to both men and women teachers—sometimes based on age and experience, but mostly earned by performance in classroom, on committees, and in community.
Teacher C	No. (no examples given)
Teacher D	University and social science studies demonstrate that women in the workplace often are not assertive, do not ask for wage increases, and will take on more work without complaint. The teacher union is mostly made up of women members; therefore, the union does not often ask for pay raises or cost of living increases. The union usually waits for the school board to make offers and then accepts what is offered.
Teacher E	Being a male teacher in a school that mostly consists of female staff has been an interesting experience. I have been able to see how differently male and female teachers may handle the same situation. It has helped me to become more aware of how I speak to the staff. I feel as if I have a better understanding of how to interact with the staff as a whole.
Teacher F	Yes. This is something that did not occur while I taught here in California. However, when I taught in Florida, this was the elephant in the room. Oftentimes I would get comments like "It is so rare to get a male teacher like you in elementary." It made me wonder at times if there was something wrong with being a male teacher in the elementary grades. Other times, I had to be the mediator or alpha male in trying to negotiate between clashing personalities of my teaching team, in which I happen to be the sole male.
Teacher G	I work well with females, so my experience has so far has been positive.

Teacher identification	Example summarized quotations
Teacher H	From a professional standpoint, I often get the boys with behavior issues in my class because it's assumed that all they need is "a good, strong, male role model." I feel like I wouldn't have had the same classes/combinations of students if I was the exact same person, just female. On a social level, for the most part, I stand out when I'm together with my colleagues since I'm one of the few males on campus, and often the only male in the room. Also, I'm 6' 2". But it's not always a bad thing. There are times when my colleagues are gathered and talking about "mom" or "female" things, where I feel like either I might be hindering their conversations because they realized a man is among them or like I'm kind of left out of the conversation. But those times are few and far between and I don't sweat it.

*Table 9: Participants' Responses to the Question Has your gender affected your experience as part of an elementary teaching staff that mostly consists of females? In what ways?*

Teacher D's narrative focused on how the profession comprising mostly women affects the low number of males in the job. The reason he gave was that according to "university and social science studies," women are not assertive in the workplace, so they rarely ask for a raise. He said that because women make up the majority of the bargaining unit of the union, they do not ask for the raise they want, but simply accept what is offered by the district. The result is low pay for teachers, and thus many men do not seek out the profession because they can get higher paying jobs with the same degree.

The teachers also felt that they were respected and valued as a teacher in the elementary grades, and that they were not judged by their gender but by their performance and veteran teacher status. Teacher E said he had learned over the years how to speak with the staff of mostly women. He said it helped to understand how staff interact, and that this knowledge would help him when he becomes an administrator.

To continue the conversation about how their gender affected their experiences at their site, participants were asked, *If you are on a staff where males are the minority,*



*does that status present you with particular challenges or opportunities?* (Table 10).

In response to previous questions, some of the teachers said their gender helped create the opportunity to get a teaching job at a time when it might have been difficult to get a teaching position in middle school or high school as a single-subject teacher. Teacher B, like the others, talked about interactions with principals and other teachers and the hope that they were judged based on their performance and not solely their gender. Teacher G also talked about feeling appreciated as a member of the staff.

Teacher identification	Example summarized quotations
Teacher A	If you're one of the only males, you are kind of expected to literally do the heavy lifting, like deliver books or teach P.E. when you're teaming with a coworker. Also, as a male, it's strange to see your female colleagues cry at work. That has happened more times than I would have imagined. I don't think there were many opportunities... just more challenges.
Teacher B	I've worked with male and female principals. I like to think their opinion of me, positive or negative, was based on my performance, behavior, and contributions.
Teacher C	I don't think there are any challenges. I think it is a unique opportunity for the students. They are used to having mostly female teachers, and I think it is nice for some of them to have positive male role models.
Teacher D	Some female teachers and parents have the opinion that males are not able to multi-task.
Teacher E	I am on a staff where males are the minority. This presents with a particular challenge in how you interact with other staff members. Men and women do not always speak the same language, so I feel that I may need to be more careful/sensitive when speaking with a female on staff than a male. In my experience, being on a staff where males are the minority has not presented with any particular opportunities.
Teacher F	In the last school I worked, I felt that female teachers did not have very positive views of their male counterparts. There had been a few instances prior to me arriving to the school [and while I was there] where my male counterparts would conduct themselves in an unprofessional manner. This would then create a perception of males to be incompetent, ignorant, or lazy.
Teacher G	The staff seems to appreciate having males around, from what I have been told.

Teacher identification	Example summarized quotations
Teacher H	Like I said, the biggest thing is that I'm perceived to be the enforcer or magic corrector of all negative student behaviors because I'm a male.

*Table 10: Participants' Responses to the Question *If you are on a staff where males are the minority, does that status present you with particular challenges or opportunities?**

The teachers reported some challenges related to their experiences as the minority of their school's staff. Teacher A talked about frequently being asked to lift or move things simply because he was the man on campus at the time. Teacher E said he felt he had to be mindful of how he spoke to his female counterparts, and that he had to be more "careful" or "sensitive" when talking to the female staff members. Teacher H brought up being placed in the role of disciplinarian, or "enforcer" of student behavior. This identity was cited by several of the other teachers in response to other questions.

Teacher F brought up a more serious challenge that some male elementary teachers face. Male teachers are sometimes treated differently by female staff members simply because they are male. He mentioned that the female teachers did not have "positive views of their male counterparts." Teacher F said that previous male staff members at this particular school had conducted themselves in an "unprofessional manner," which had a negative effect on how the female teachers treated him. Being a minority at the site, he was treated based on the opinions formed by staff who had a negative past experience. He said they treated him as if he were "incompetent, ignorant, or lazy," before getting to know him personally or professionally.

Participants were asked to talk about how their gender was connected to their job with the question *Do you believe teachers' gender influences how they teach?* (Table 11). Several of the teachers talked about the differences between male and female teachers. Teachers A and B talked about some general perceptions about the differences between male and female teachers. Characteristics such as being "motherly" or "nurturing";

dealing with crying students; being more unconditional with positive responses or being creative with bulletin boards, room décor, and art were some of the traits associated by the teachers with their female counterparts.

Teacher identification	Example summarized quotations
Teacher A	Yes. Female teachers, in my opinion, have that motherly gene that makes them want to tie kids' shoes and help them blow their noses. Male teachers don't usually want to deal with that or with crying. I think female teachers, mostly, have nicer room environments than their male colleagues: prettier bulletin boards, more cutesy-poo crap on the desks, wrapped Christmas presents for the kids, etc.
Teacher B	Here comes a big generalization. I think male and female teachers are both nurturing, but I think women are more likely to be unconditional, and male teachers' positive responses have to be earned. Men usually have more rapport with naughty boys.
Teacher C	It could, but I don't think it's a major factor. I think personality differences are a more important factor.
Teacher D	Sometimes gender does influence teaching. Male teachers are often more likely to be involved in school sports and games. Often it is more personality traits, philosophy, and upbringing that play a larger role.
Teacher E	I do believe that teachers' gender may influence the way that they teach, to some extent.
Teacher F	Yes, but being aware of this gender bias is key. Constant reflection on my approach to teaching students through the lens of gender has allowed me to be more thoughtful about being more equitable in my instruction.
Teacher G	Yes. (no examples given)
Teacher H	It's hard for me to answer this. I feel like personality has a stronger effect on teaching style than gender. I'm a pretty high energy person who likes to create connections with others and make them laugh, and I teach that way. I don't think that's necessarily because I'm a male.

*Table 11: Participants' Responses to the Question Do you believe teachers' gender influences how they teach?*

Teachers D and H talked about how their personality had more an influence on their teaching style than their gender did. They discussed how their energy level and sense of humor played a big role in their success. Teacher F talked about how gender affected his teaching in a more general way. He said it was important for teachers to understand gender bias. He stated that “constant reflection on my approach to teaching students through the lens of gender has allowed me to be more thoughtful about being

more equitable in my instruction.” Thus, he acknowledged not only the bias he faced but also the bias students might face in the classroom.

Male teachers leave the profession for various reasons. Participants were asked the question *Have you ever considered leaving the teaching profession? Why?* (Table 12) to find out why males might leave the teaching profession. Teachers C and G reported they had not considered leaving the profession, which was not the experience of most of those interviewed. Low pay, political attacks, and frequently changing policies cause many male as well as female teachers to consider leaving the profession, according to Teachers E and H. Teacher H mentioned that he worried about providing financially for his children in the expensive Bay Area, but said he really liked teaching. Teacher E talked about the lack of respect and public “attacks” teachers endure and the frustration teachers feel because they would like more support.

Teacher identification	Example summarized quotations
Teacher A	Yes. Usually after getting a really challenging class, discouragement sets in.
Teacher B	Once or twice I thought about administration, but I didn’t want to lose the student-teacher-parent relationship and collaboration.
Teacher C	No. (no examples given)
Teacher D	Yes. (no examples given)
Teacher E	I have considered leaving the teaching profession on a few occasions. I don’t always feel that teachers/administrators get the respect they deserve or the support they need from the public, or even their own district. There is constant negative publicity surrounding the teaching profession. Plus, it seems that as each year goes by, teachers/administrators are being asked to the same job at a consistently high level, with dwindling support and resources.
Teacher F	I did once. I left teaching to be a program manager for research being sponsored by the National Science Foundation. The position paid much more than being a teacher. However, what really made me take initiative was the poor leadership of the school where I was working. I had administrative training, and witnessing my administrator being unable to lead with vision and disregard the expertise of the staff was unbearably disappointing.
Teacher G	No. I enjoy the pace of teaching and the goal-setting aspect of it.

Teacher identification	Example summarized quotations
Teacher H	<p>Not seriously yet. Although I can't imagine being in a classroom when I'm 55 years old (I'm 36 now). I've thought about getting an administrative degree, although I have no wishes to be a principal. Teaching is an emotionally and mentally exhausting job, and I just can't see how people do it effectively for so many years. Kudos to them! Also, I have a wife and two small kids (2 and 4 years old), and the income I make as a teacher (even while tutoring on the side) does not provide me with enough to live as comfortably as I'd like in the Bay Area. I'm not talking about a lavish lifestyle, but I worry about being able to pay for extracurricular activities and things for my kids as they get older. It's hard to do that on a teacher's salary.</p>

*Table 12: Participants' Responses to the Question Have you ever considered leaving the teaching profession? Why?*

Teacher F discussed having left the profession when he was a few years into the career. He was at a school site where he felt the administration was lacking in “leadership and vision” and did not respect the professionalism of the staff. Another reason for Teacher F leaving for a short time was the pay difference and his difficulty supporting his family as the breadwinner.

**Theme 4: Men as role models at the elementary grades.** The studies in the literature review cited the importance of males in the classroom at the elementary grades (Cushman, 2010; Farquhar, 1998). Farquhar concluded that it is important to have males as teachers and role models in the elementary grades to show both male and female students examples of males in a caring role and working well with women in the same job. An important issue to address with respect to the term *role model* is that it has not been clearly defined (Sevier & Ashcraft, 2009). What teachers should be modeling and whether their modeling is related to gender characteristics or to their character and actions remain unclear (Farquhar, 1998; Sevier & Ashcraft, 2009). Teacher C mentioned that he felt he had a unique opportunity to influence students in a positive way and that the staff and principal appreciated having him as a positive role model on campus.

Participants were asked, *Do you feel more male teachers are needed at the elementary grades? Why?* (Table 13). All eight participants stated in some way that it is important for males to be teaching in elementary schools because they are role models for students in that age range. Teacher H said that when he became a teacher after working with high school students as a paraprofessional, he “felt like if I was working with kids at younger grade levels, I could have a bigger impact academically and socially.” He reported that the sentiment that he could make more of a difference was echoed by many of his colleagues when he started teaching.

Teacher identification	Example summarized quotations
Teacher A	Yes. Having male teachers helps students learn that they have to work with all kinds of people in real life, so by having a variety of experiences in school with different genders, personalities, and orientations, kids learn good life skills from us.
Teacher B	Yes. Role models, different perspectives, and a better reflection of the community. I also think there should be more ethnic diversity.
Teacher C	Yes. As stated before, many students, especially boys, need positive male role models. I think more male teachers are needed at all grade levels. I think pay is a major factor when people, especially males, are considering the teaching profession. Many maybe feel like they cannot support a family on a teacher’s salary.
Teacher D	Yes, most teachers throughout time were males. After WWI and WWII, the males came back, and their teaching positions were gone. The pay is low, so many males do not consider it. Men and women teachers bring various perspectives and ideas to the classroom and learning. Both are needed.
Teacher E	I feel that more male teachers are need at the elementary grades. The elementary grades are a crucial time for children, for many reasons, and I feel that they need to have both a positive male and female influence. As elementary school teachers tend to be mainly female, more males are definitely needed.
Teacher F	Yes. Particularly in the upper grades—4th and 5th. This is a stage in the students’ lives when they are noticing gender. A male teacher can define what is the etiquette and approaches to working with female teachers and students. Most importantly, the idea of being a male teacher in the elementary grades becomes more relevant in low-socioeconomic and high-crime environments. These were the places where I taught, and my presence there always made a difference.
Teacher G	I believe having both male and female teachers is beneficial to the school. I do not feel more male teachers are needed, though elementary grades should not only be subject to having female teachers.

Teacher identification	Example summarized quotations
Teacher H	To a degree. I feel like males at the elementary level are always principals, PE teachers, or 4 <sup>th</sup> -/5 <sup>th</sup> -grade teachers. I think kids benefit from seeing different genders in all different positions. As cool as it is to have a male kindergarten teacher, a female PE teacher is just as necessary. I feel it is important for kids to not see education, or any profession really, as gender specific. I understand that the most important thing is hiring qualified teachers, regardless of gender, but I feel that a better mix of genders across all grade levels should be something that administrators aim for on some level.

*Table 13: Participants' Responses to the Question Do you feel more male teachers are needed at the elementary grades? Why?*

Teachers A and F talked about how children at the elementary grades should have experiences with teachers of different genders, orientations, personalities, and cultures. They said this is important to help students interact with a variety of people in college, the workplace, and the world. Specifically, Teacher F expressed the value of having both male and female teachers at the elementary grades because students start to notice the differences between genders and develop their own social identity as a student. Teacher H said it is important for students to see both males and females in the different roles on campus—from principal to physical education teacher to office staff. He said students should not see jobs as gender specific.

A reoccurring theme that came up with this question was low pay. Teacher D described how more males were in the profession before World War II, which is when he believed females took on the role of teacher. When men came back from the war, they found teaching jobs for men were no longer as available, and the pay has remained low. The theme of low pay was a concern for all the participants in this study and played a role in their experiences as a teacher—from university to the current point in their career.

## Summary

This case study analyzed the interviews of eight male elementary school teachers and described the experiences of these teachers over the course of their careers. The teachers shared details about how their gender had an effect on their choice to become a teacher, their identity as a teacher, and the inequities they face as a minority on campus, and how they felt as a role model in the teaching profession. The interview questions identified how male educators saw themselves in a mostly female profession, especially at the elementary grades, and how teachers viewed their self and social identity (Hogg, 2006).

The study was also designed to identify any social biases that may contribute to the gender gap that exists for male teachers at elementary school sites. The data collected may lead to a better understanding about why males do or do not choose to teach at the elementary level, and if they do, whether they stay there for long. Obtaining the teachers' experiences and opinions was crucial to understanding the themes that emerged from the story of male teachers at the elementary grades. Analysis of the data gave clarification about public perceptions of males teaching young children and the roles they play in the lives of children and staff members at their schools.

In chapter 5, I will discuss conclusions and recommendations based on the themes discovered from the interviews. I will also discuss how the themes connect to the research questions, unexpected themes, and implications for future actions or research based on the information in the themes.



## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors can deter males from teaching at the elementary grades, to explore the social identity of male teachers, and to find out if men experience inequalities in the profession. In a *New York Times* article, Rich (2014) discussed some of the reasons more men do not go into the overwhelmingly female profession of teaching. The teacher at the heart of his article, a newly graduated and certificated 5th-grade teacher named Tommie, was told by professors that he would not have a problem getting hired because he was “a guy teaching elementary.” This was also the experience of several of the teachers who were interviewed for this study. The experiences shared by the male educators interviewed for this study hold important information for use by researchers for further study and those in education for consideration of policy and practices in school districts.

#### **Overview of the Findings**

In chapter 4, I presented the experiences of male elementary schoolteachers. The one-on-one interview format allowed male elementary teachers’ voices to be heard. The themes that emerged from an analysis of the data from the individual interviews revealed how male teachers make meaning of their experiences as elementary school teachers. These themes included influences on how they became elementary teachers and remained there, their social identities as teachers, the impact gender has had on their experiences

as an elementary educator, and what they thought about being a role model for their students. The focus of the study was on analyzing the following questions:

*What are the professional socialization experiences of male elementary teachers?*

1. In what ways do male elementary teachers feel their gender influences how they are perceived in the profession?
2. When choosing a grade level or discipline to teach, why do few male educators choose the elementary grades?

The questions used in the interviews with the male teachers were developed to gain understanding of the impact of many male teachers playing a marginal role in elementary classrooms. The participants gave insightful and often similar details about both the advantages and disadvantages of their experiences as the isolated gender at their elementary school sites.

To understand how men experience being the minority in a female-dominated profession, I used the theoretical lenses of social identity theory (Hogg, 2006) and teacher socialization (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). The theories positioned me to analyze the answers the study participants gave during the interviews. Together, these theories and the review of literature provided a clearer understanding of why the participants perceived their experiences the way they did. The themes that emerged from the interviews were somewhat expected based on the review of literature and my personal knowledge from working for 18 years with male elementary teachers. The literature and state data predicted that the men who were interviewed would be a minority on campus, the only man or one of two. The literature also predicted that the men would experience different treatment by other staff or by parents (Cushman, 2010; Martino, 2008). Studies by Cushman and Martino showed that men were viewed and treated differently from their female counterparts at the elementary level during their student teaching and early

teaching careers. The result was men not entering the profession or not staying in the classroom at the elementary level for long. The knowledge of this treatment and the stereotypes connected to being a male elementary teacher were evident in the stories relayed by the participants.

In contrast, participants unexpectedly brought up issues not directly connected to the questions they were asked in the interviews. Low teacher salaries are a negative reality of the profession; however, this issue was not directly asked in a question to the teachers. The ability to support their family financially did come up in the interviews as a reason they considered not entering the profession, considered leaving the profession, or considered a move into administration.

### **Theme 1: Social Influences in Becoming and Remaining an Elementary School Teacher**

The small number of men who choose to teach at the elementary grades make that decision under the shadow of much outside influence. Most of the study participants were the minority in their teacher preparation university program, and all had the knowledge that they would work with very few men in the elementary school setting. The participants' responses revealed that their gender did affect the level at which they chose to teach. Socially, they were supported and marginalized by peers, family members, and colleagues when they elected to teach in elementary classrooms.

The men revealed that they encountered common stereotypes associated with being an elementary school teacher. Several of the participants stated that people questioned their choice to teach at the elementary grades and whether it would be appropriate for a man to do the job. These outside influences made all of the teachers consider their choice of career carefully after completing their bachelor's degree. None

of the men allowed negative influences to change their choice of the elementary grades, with the exception of one teacher who moved to the elementary grades after budget cuts eliminated his middle school position.

Several of the men based their decision to become an elementary teacher on working with young students in other capacities, such as camp, tutoring, or coaching athletics. All of the men said they had been influenced in a positive way by teachers they had as students, teachers who were also family or friends, and positive teachers they knew about from society and media. However, several of the men thought their gender would be an advantage in getting hired as a teacher at the elementary grades because historically so few men have taught at those grades. Male educators often choose high school and university levels, so it is not surprising that the men in this study considered teaching the elementary grades a “strategy” to get hired when they entered the profession.

Although mentioned by some of the participants, the low status of teachers in the public’s perception did not deter these teachers from entering the profession. This status also appeared in studies by Cushman (2005), Skelton (2001), and other scholars in the literature review. Some of the participants made a conscious choice to become an elementary educator, while others’ decisions emanated from circumstances. They all commented on liking the content they would teach at the elementary grade; however, most participants were driven to become an elementary educator because they wanted to make a difference in the lives of students.

## **Theme 2: Social Identity as a Teacher**

Teachers belong to a special workplace group—in many ways unlike any other—wherein they are part of a specific identity (Hogg, 2006). Members of the general public have both positive and negative memories of teachers throughout their education. Most

teachers are remembered by people either as persons of inspiration in their life or as someone who made them dislike school. People can tell stories about how teachers they know spent hours preparing and grading papers, as well as spent much of their already low salaries to buy supplies for their classrooms. Several of the teachers who were interviewed said that having male teachers in the classroom was good; however, some knew people who had the negative perception that teaching is not a “real” job. One teacher referenced a friend who had questioned his choice to be an elementary teacher until he had children of his own in elementary school.

Many of the participants talked about how they received negative messages when considering teaching at the elementary level as a profession and said that had an effect on their identity as a male elementary teacher. For example, Teacher D said that people still tell him “elementary teachers just do fun things, [such as] arts and crafts.” Teacher H remembered that someone told him that teachers “get paid to play all day or babysit,” which anyone who has spent a day in an elementary classroom would know is a ridiculous statement. Teacher H was definitely offended by that statement and others like it.

Most teachers in this study definitely liked being part of the identity socially created for elementary teachers in the United States, as well as part of the teaching profession. Though they felt frustration at times, they remained in the job, and most did not want to leave the profession. Their frustration stemmed from being viewed and treated differently and having expectations placed on them to do what was not asked of some of the female teachers. Teacher A talked of being seen as the person to whom other teachers would send students with conflicts so he would help solve them. This took away from his time teaching, preparing to teach, or taking break time, and he did not have a good way to ask them to stop for fear of not being seen as a team player. Unfortunately, some of the men did talk about leaving the elementary grades. Teacher A, Teacher D, and

Teacher H talked about wanting to move to a middle school or high school, which would give them the ability to focus on teaching a single subject.

### **Theme 3: Gender and Inequities as a Male Teacher**

Male teachers face the stereotype of elementary teaching as women's work (Martino, 2008; Younger, 2015). The perception of elementary teaching as a feminine profession runs deep in the history of the profession and is a prevalent obstacle that men must navigate from the start to finish of their career (Brookhart & Loadman, 1996; Cushman, 2005; Erden et al., 2011; Farquhar, 1998; Hansen & Mulholland, 2005; Martino, 2008). The participants interviewed in this study had endured reprisals for remaining in a female-dominated workplace over their careers and continued teaching at the elementary grades, at least for now.

Many of the participants talked about being treated differently as the minority at their school site. Their gender had an effect on their experiences as an elementary teacher. They talked about feeling uncomfortable in social situations. As a result, some avoided social interaction with their colleagues and frequently ate lunch in their classrooms instead of in the faculty lounge. Others detailed the social pressure encountered when interacting with peers. Teacher A talked about being the only male at the table and not being comfortable taking part in some of the conversations about other men that were personal. This institutional pressure many men experience in elementary schools is unjust because most female teachers do not encounter this pressure in this setting. If the situation were reversed and a single woman was at a lunch table where men were talking about the "cute woman" who came to talk to the students, it likely would not be considered acceptable by an observer. Yet, six of the eight teachers interviewed told stories about experiencing that uncomfortable situation on campus.

Gender was also a factor for the participants when they were asked to perform tasks socially assigned to men. They were frequently asked to be the disciplinarian on campus as well as perform physical tasks such as carrying boxes, moving furniture, and getting things off high shelves. They were often the only male at the school site and recognized that the women on campus were not equally expected to do these things.

#### **Theme 4: Men as Role Models at the Elementary Grades**

The aspect of being a role model was very important to the men interviewed for this study. All felt that men are needed in education in general, but especially at the elementary grades. Teacher H talked about the importance of being able to make a bigger difference in the lives of students at a younger age. Teacher B talked about the importance of showing students the different perspectives of male and female teachers as a reflection of the community outside the school, and how this would have a positive influence on young students, especially boys. They also talked about the value of having teachers of different cultures, orientations, and personalities, in addition to the need for males. Although many educators voice support for teachers' gender diversity, no plans are in place to make this diversity possible by school districts.

As districts in all 50 states struggle to hire teachers, the number of men entering the teaching profession is expected to decrease, as well. If no changes are made to hiring practices and salary levels, the number of male teachers will decline, continuing the trend of the last 20 years—especially in California, where the number of teachers has been on a steady decline (California Department of Education, 2015a). Unless states and districts address the inequities and social justice challenges of male teachers, schools will continue to be challenged to support the inequities and negative experiences of marginalized students during their school day and beyond.

## Review of the Research Questions and Connection to Themes

This study was developed around research questions to aid in explaining the ongoing problem of the lack of males teaching at the elementary grades. The research addressed the following question and sub-questions:

*What are the professional socialization experiences of male elementary teachers?*

1. In what ways do male elementary teachers feel their gender influences how they are perceived in the profession?
2. When choosing a grade level or discipline to teach, why do few male educators choose the elementary grades?

Responses to the question *What are the professional socialization experiences of male elementary teachers?* suggested a connection with social identity. According to Zeichner and Gore (1990), many begin their socialization as a teacher when they are themselves a student. Almost anyone can remember a teacher who made a difference in his or her life, as witnessed in college applications and acceptance speeches. That teacher for me was in 3rd grade, and her name was Mrs. Bass. She definitively put me on the path to becoming a teacher.

The socialization process continues as beginning teachers seek to become part of the teacher identity of their school district and school site staff. Like many other kinds of professionals, teachers want to feel like part of a team. This can prove difficult for males at an elementary school site because they may be the only male on staff. Although male teachers are capable of getting along well with a staff of females, a different kind of camaraderie occurs when men have other men to talk to, in the same way female teachers have a connection with other female teachers. This dynamic was reported by several of the teachers interviewed for this study.



Teachers made specific connections between their gender and their experiences as an elementary teacher, which answered the study question *In what ways do male elementary teachers feel their gender influences how they are perceived in the profession?* While some said their gender was an advantage in obtaining a position as a teacher, most did not necessarily see it as an advantage during their career. Some of the men talked about how their gender may have been a disadvantage for them as teachers. They talked about being put in the position of being the disciplinarian not just for their own students, but for other teachers' students because the students "needed a man to talk to them about their behavior or actions." In most cases, the men did not want to take on this role, but felt the social pressure to do so by their peers.

To discuss the question *When choosing a grade level or discipline to teach, why do few male educators choose the elementary grades?* the teachers were asked about what factors had an impact on their choice to teach elementary students. Several talked of experiences working with students at camps, in organized sports, and at church that convinced them they wanted to work with young students. Despite some of the negative perceptions expressed in the media, in politics, and even by friends and family, these teachers chose to teach in elementary schools (Sternod, 2011). It was clear from the teachers' responses that the decision-making process was different for men than it was for most of the women I know who chose to be an elementary teacher. None of the men had been encouraged to teach at the elementary grades by their university program advisors. Thus, one of the missing links in teacher preparation programs is career counseling for teachers to encourage them to consider the elementary grades (Cushman, 2010).

### **Implications for Practice**

One topic that was present in answers across the themes was low salaries for teachers. This topic was part of the problem stated in chapter 1 with references to studies by Cushman (2005), Farquhar (1998), Livingstone (2003), Sealey (2012), and Skelton (2002). These studies showed that low salaries are not affected by the gender of teachers in the way that occurs in other professions; rather, salaries for teachers are based on years of service for all teachers. For teachers, salary connects to gender through the identity of males as the breadwinner of their family. Several of the teachers interviewed recalled that their starting salary was one of the major aspects of their decision to become a teacher. For Teacher F, low salary for teachers led to a time spent in another profession; however, he returned to teaching at the elementary grades after a few years. Clearly, this is a topic that remains unresolved in the educational system, but it has a greater influence in some areas of the country than in others. California and other high-cost-of-living states will continue to see a shortage of teachers—especially those who are breadwinners—if the problem of low starting salary without any incentives or benefits is not addressed.

Another important topic that came up was the gendered pressures the men experienced in classrooms. The men reported that they felt pressured to play the role of disciplinarian for the school, to lead the teaching of physical education, or to move heavy materials. Some said they felt that they did not have a choice but to comply with these expectations because they were the minority on campus. These types of experiences could be valuable information to school districts, administrators, and teachers. This information could be used to educate those within a school district about how to better provide a supportive experience and work environment for men working on school campuses. This could lead to the recruitment and retention of male teachers at a time in education when teachers are desperately needed throughout the country.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study focused on the voice of male teachers, their views about male elementary teachers, the factors that influenced their career choices, and the experiences that resulted in them entering the teaching profession at the elementary grades. Future research on this topic could initially be expanded to a larger population sample, with a greater number of school districts and represented states. Additional studies could include demographic information, such as ethnicity, race, educational background, teacher social class, and age of participants to explore how these factors affect male teachers' practice, experiences in schools, career choices, and ultimately student outcomes.

Additionally, it is recommended that research be completed in the area of the employment process for districts, specifically related to the active hiring and interviewing of male teachers for elementary positions. Information could be acquired to determine the number of qualified male applicants who applied for elementary teaching positions but who did not interview. Information could also be gained from male elementary candidates who interviewed for open positions and yet were not hired for those positions.

Analysis of the experiences of male teachers within the district could offer insight into why they applied for positions at the elementary level. This information would give a statistical and qualitative baseline for school districts' and administrators' hiring practices. After this information has been obtained and analyzed, recommendations could be made to increase overall awareness of the male elementary teacher employment process. Those data, in turn, would hopefully create more interviewing opportunities for qualified elementary male applicants and a greater hiring rate.

Deeper research could be conducted in the area of elementary male teacher retention rates and specific factors that lead to males staying in or leaving elementary education. This area was briefly analyzed in this study, but the focus was on the

experiences of current male elementary teachers. School districts and universities could use the results to develop and offer proper training and workshops geared to increase retention rates.

This kind of research is crucial to understand the experiences of teachers who support social justice in their practice. Studying the treatment received by these male teachers is necessary to understand how to provide support and professional development to those who work with them. Equity and social justice are an important part of the experience of students, so schools and districts must understand how to retrain and retain teachers who have not been using equitable practices.

Lastly, it is recommended that all postsecondary education students, including males, who are enrolled in teacher educational programs be required as part of their academic program to shadow, observe, or intern in an elementary school for a designated period of time. Research could then be conducted to determine if this practice affected men's interest in elementary education. Research could be conducted to see which colleges and universities offer incentives for male elementary teachers, and which programs require their education students to either enroll in elementary classes or to shadow, observe, or intern at elementary schools. As suggested by Cushman (2010) and Rich (2014), colleges and universities could then find qualified male candidates who are prepared to work with young children, which would help to close the gender gap for men teaching at the elementary level.

## **Conclusion**

The intent of this study was to better understand the experiences of male elementary teachers and the factors that contributed to their career choices and grade-level preference selection, and to understand the reason for the lack of male elementary

teachers. Although the shortage of male elementary teachers has been recognized, this was not a new problem or a problem that is expected to be resolved soon. However, unless school districts, schools, universities, state policy makers, and especially male teachers take action to address and to eliminate this problem, schools may never provide a truly gender-balanced education for students.

Society has placed many stereotypes on the role of a male elementary teacher. Male elementary teachers are often perceived by those outside education as more nurturing, more effeminate, and less respected than are other male teachers. The reality is that male elementary teachers are treated as the disciplinarian, the problem solver, and the mover of heavy objects at their school sites. These stereotypes have played a role in the decrease of male elementary teachers over the years.

The educational system as a whole must take responsibility for the shortage of male elementary teachers and take significant measures to counter the continuing decline of male elementary teachers. The information gathered in this study should be used strategically by colleges and universities, school districts, and schools to help understand the factors that may have contributed to the shortage of male teachers in their systems, with specific focus on the elementary grades. The data and information can be used to help districts and schools provide a supportive environment for men who choose to teach and to not allow the alienation they may feel as the only man on a school campus.

In addition to use for professional development and policy change, basic incentives (e.g., scholarships and loan forgiveness), higher salaries for all starting teachers, and active recruiting of males into preservice teacher programs by universities would aid in encouraging men to pursue elementary education. Without incentives or swift resolutions, male teachers will continue to be the minority in elementary education.

Rich (2014) urged educators, advocates, and lawmakers to shift their focus to the gender imbalance in the teaching force and to achieving a better balance. Doing this

could positively affect the way the profession is regarded by those outside education. Discussion about the problem has increased awareness of this situation; however; this awareness has not yet yielded adequate change. More males are truly needed in elementary education; and this study makes the case that U.S. students urgently need positive male role models in addition to the strong females they currently see in the classroom.

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## APPENDIX A

## QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS WITH MALE ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

What grade do you currently teach?	Creswell 2012; 2014
What grades have you taught?	Creswell 2012; 2014
How many years have you been a teacher?	Creswell 2012; 2014
What decisions led you to teach at your current grade level?	Patrick, 2009 Oyler, Jennings, & Lozada, 2001 Cushman, 2005, 2010
Can you give examples of messages you received before or during your teaching career about social characteristics of elementary teachers?	Oyler, Jennings, & Lozada, 2001 Hogg, 2006 Ashforth & Mael, 1989
Has your gender affected your experience as part of an elementary teaching staff that mostly consists of females? In what ways?  If you are on a staff where males are the minority, does that status present you with particular challenges or opportunities?	Skelton, 2002, 2003 Oyler, Jennings, & Lozada, 2001 Cushman, 2005, 2010 Hogg, 2006 Ashforth & Mael, 1989
Do you believe teachers' gender influences how they teach?	Patrick, 2009 Sumsion, 2009 Cushman, 2005, 2010
How does your gender influence how you are perceived as an elementary teacher?	Skelton, 2002, 2003 Sumsion, 2009 Cushman, 2005, 2010
What effect, if any, did social perceptions about men as minorities have on your decision to teach at the elementary level?	Skelton, 2002, 2003 Sumsion, 2009 Cushman, 2005, 2010
Did you seek advice from others when deciding what level you would teach? Can you give examples?	Oyler, Jennings, & Lozada, 2001 Cushman, 2005, 2010
Have you ever considered leaving the elementary grades? Why? Have you ever considered leaving the teaching profession? Why?	Patrick, 2009 Cushman, 2005, 2010
Do you feel more male teachers are needed at the elementary grades? Why?	Patrick, 2009 Cushman, 2005, 2010 Farquhar, 1998
May I follow up with you if I have further questions?	

## APPENDIX B

### INFORMED CONSENT

#### **California State University East Bay Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

#### **Social Identity and Gender Inequities for Male Elementary Teachers**

##### **A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**

The purpose of this research study is to examine the experiences of male elementary teachers and identify if their gender has played a role in those experiences as an elementary teacher.

The researcher, Dawn River, is a graduate student at California State University East Bay conducting research for a doctorate in Educational Leadership and Social Justice.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a male teacher who teaches in grades transitional kindergarten through fifth grade.

##### **B. PROCEDURES**

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- you will be interviewed for approximately thirty minutes about your experiences as an elementary teacher.

- the interview will be audiotaped to ensure accuracy in reporting your statements.
- the interview will take place in an agreed upon location at a time convenient for you.
- the researcher may contact you later to clarify your interview answers if you agree.
- total time commitment will be thirty to forty-five minutes.

Participants will be interviewed privately by the researcher using prepared interview questions. Teachers will be asked about their personal experiences in choosing teaching as a career and during their time as a teacher. The researcher will contact elementary teachers in the district to request participation in the interviews by inter-district mail or email.

### **C. RISKS**

All information including names and school sites will be kept confidential by the researcher. All names and locations will be coded with a number or pseudonym to protect the identity of the participant. Only the researcher will have access to research data, recordings or notes made at the interviews. Participants will be asked to answer only the questions they feel comfortable answering at the one to one interviews.

### **D. CONFIDENTIALITY**

The research data will be kept in a secure location, and only the researcher will have access to the data. At the conclusion of the study, all identifying information will be removed and the data will be kept in a locked cabinet or password protected computer only used by the researcher.

All materials including audio recordings, transcripts or notes from the study will be kept for 1 year after the end of the study. The results may be published or presented without identifying the participants.

#### **E. DIRECT BENEFITS**

There will be no direct benefits to the participant.

#### **F. COSTS**

There will be no cost to you for participating in this research.

#### **G. COMPENSATION**

There will be no compensation for participating in this research.

#### **H. ALTERNATIVES**

N/A

#### **I. QUESTIONS**

If you have any further questions about the study, you may contact the researcher by email at [driver@horizon.csueastbay.edu](mailto:driver@horizon.csueastbay.edu) or phone at 510-332- XXXX.

Questions about your rights as a study participant, or comments or complaints about the study, may also be addressed to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at (510) 885-4212.

#### **J. CONSENT**

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.



PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to participate in this research study, or to withdraw your participation at any point, without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no influence on your present or future status at California State University East Bay.

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

## PARTICIPATION REQUEST LETTER

## Email/ Letter for Requesting Teacher Interviews

Dear Educators,

I am writing as a graduate doctoral student at California State University, Eastbay. I am currently working on my dissertation and need teachers in the district to interview. As a researcher, I believe Berkeley Unified is a great example to use in my research study. My study focuses on male teachers at the elementary level and their experiences in the profession.

The interviews will be one-on-one with me and will be about 30 minutes at an agreed upon location. The identity and responses of participants will be anonymous with the use of pseudonyms and coded number system. The notes and recordings of the interviews will be stored on a secure computer outside of the school district. Your participation is voluntary and there will be no financial compensation.

If you are willing to participate, please respond by \_\_\_\_\_. I will contact you to set up a time and location for the interviews. If you have any questions, please email me at [driver@horizon.csueastbay.edu](mailto:driver@horizon.csueastbay.edu) or call me at 510-332-XXXX.

With Warm Regards,

Dawn River, M.Ed.

Graduate Student

CSU, Eastbay

## APPENDIX D

## FOLLOW-UP CONTACT EMAIL FOR PARTICIPANTS

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my study.

Based on our previous contact, we will meet on \_\_\_\_\_, 2016 at \_\_\_\_\_  
am/pm. We will meet at your location of choice, \_\_\_\_\_.

Please call or text me if you are running late or need to reschedule.

See you on \_\_\_\_\_.

If you have any questions, please email me at [driver@horizon.csueastbay.edu](mailto:driver@horizon.csueastbay.edu) or call me  
at 510-332-XXXX.

With Warm Regards,

Dawn River, M.Ed.

Graduate Student

CSU, East Bay