

# Women’s and Gender Studies in New York State High School Curriculum



Researcher: Alexa Picciano; Faculty Advisor: Dr. Anna Sorensen

Research Questions:

- Where and how is gender discussed in New York State social studies curriculum and standards?
- Would teachers like to involve more women’s and gender studies materials into their lessons?
- What are teacher’s perspectives and concerns about teaching women’s and gender studies materials in the United States?



Previous Research:

- Catharine Stimpson discusses resistance to women’s and gender studies
  - Hesitation to include women as colleagues, scholars, thinkers, etc.
- Director and Co-Founder of Be Her Lead, Edith Johnson, in “Why We Need Feminism in Schools.”
  - “Rather than skirting around issues like gender inequality, which affects the fabric of our society and therefore every student’s life experience, we need to embrace feminist values and thinking as important tools in the re-shaping not only of our curriculum, but of our whole education system” (2020).
  - Calls for: adjustments to teacher recruitment and training methods, hierarchies of power withing schools, and creating a different narrative surrounding education.
- Teachers Christy Cartner and Emily Warren published “Integrating Women’s Studies into the High School Curriculum.”
  - “Classes focusing on women’s issues can reinforce content and skills learned in other classes, with the opportunity to explore topics such as the history of feminism, body image, gender roles, politics, media, health, economics and pop culture” (2017).

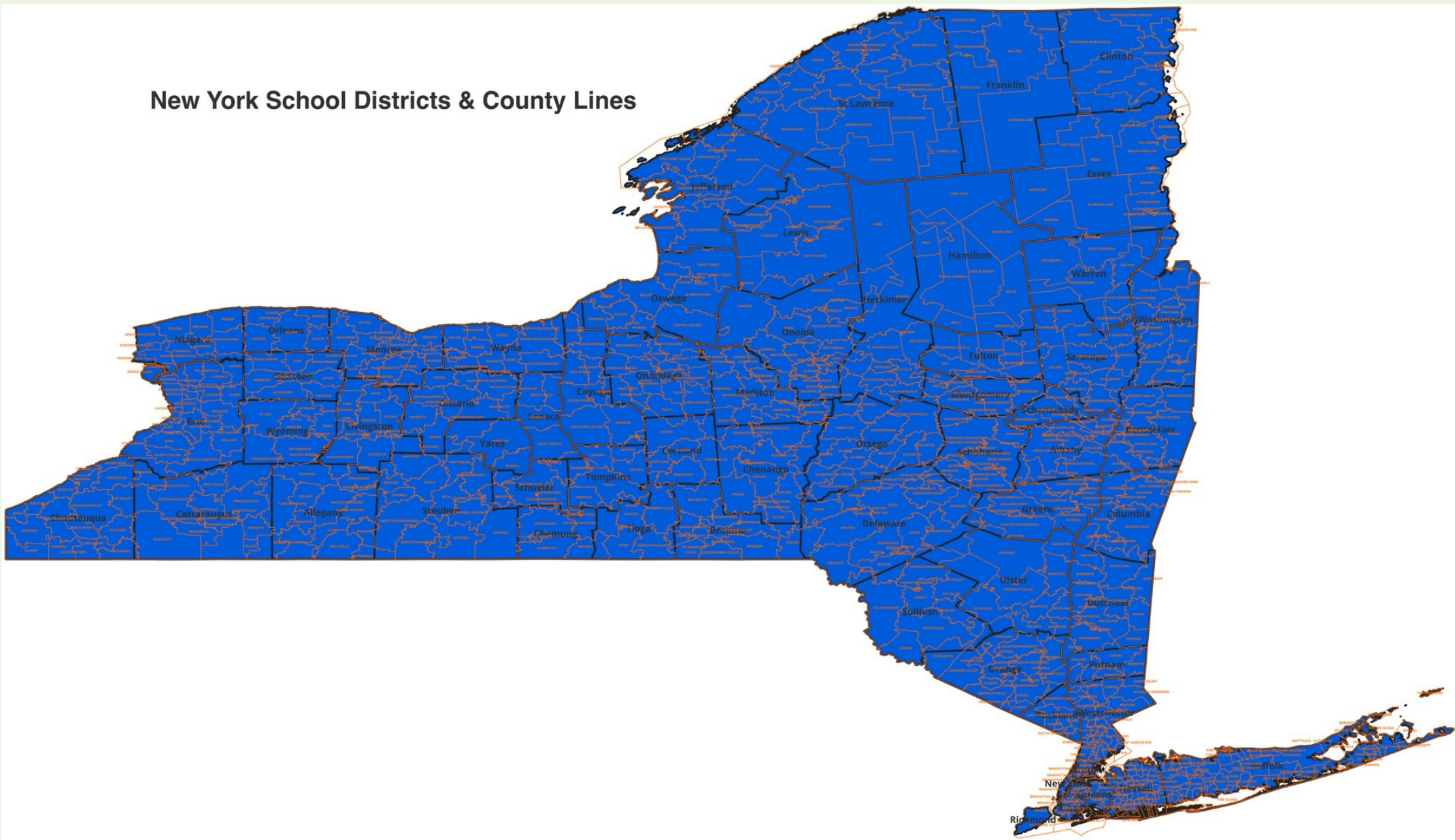
Methods:

- Analysis of New York State social studies standards and framework for women’s and gender studies materials
- Analysis of previous research of women’s and gender studies in classrooms, the implications, and benefits of such.
- Set of semi-structured interviews with high school social studies teachers from a CNY high school with questions concerning women’s and gender studies in standards and classrooms.

*“As is often the case with the perspectives of the marginalised in our society, feminism is all-too-often included in our education as a curiosity, an add-on, a take-it or leave-it extra.”*

Semi-Structured Interviews:

- Done with two World History teachers from a Central New York High School
- One teacher also teaches sociology
- Results:
  - Decided lack of women’s and gender studies content in the standards and curriculum
  - Both teachers include additional information related to women’s and gender studies into their lessons
  - Parent pushback
  - Funding limitations to having a women’s and gender studies class
- Teachers are willing to teach women’s and gender studies and see the benefit of students having access to that information



Conclusions:

- There is an overall lack of women’s and gender studies formally included in New York State social studies framework and standards.
- Teachers use their own initiatives to teach women’s and gender studies materials in their classrooms.
- Research stemming from the 1970’s shows an overall resistance to women’s and gender studies which reflects some modern attitudes
- Teachers and activists outside of New York share similar sentiments regarding the inclusion of women’s and gender studies materials in classrooms

Findings from analysis of NYS social studies framework:

- Gender is mentioned in few sections of the standards- Belief Systems: Rise and Impact (9.2); Enlightenment, Revolution, and Nationalism (10.2); Tensions Between Traditional Cultures and Modernization (10.8); Social and Economic Change/Domestic Issues (1945-Present) (11.10); and Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (12.G2)
- Most mentions of “gender” are in reference to “inequality” or “roles.”
- Mentions of gender are brief, and across grades 9 through 12, occur a total of 5 times.

Findings from analysis of NYS social standards:

- Two mentions of gender in the standards, both in the intermediate World History standards.
- Five sets of standards for social studies in New York- History of the United States and New York, World History, Geography, Economics, and Civics, Citizenship, and Government. All Standards are split between three levels- elementary, intermediate, and commencement.
- There are other mentions of women’s and gender studies topics and materials, but gender is explicitly mentioned significantly less than any other topic.

Learning Standards for Social Studies at Three Levels	
Standard 1: History of the United States and New York	Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in the history of the United States and New York.
Standard 2: World History	Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in world history and examine the broad sweep of history from a variety of perspectives.
Standard 3: Geography	Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the geography of the interdependent world in which we live—local, national, and global—including the distribution of people, places, and environments over the Earth’s surface.
Standard 4: Economics	Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of how the United States and other societies develop economic systems and associated institutions to allocate scarce resources, how major decision-making units function in the United States and other national economies, and how an economy solves the scarcity problem through market and nonmarket mechanisms.
Standard 5: Civics, Citizenship, and Government	Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of the necessity for establishing governments; the governmental system of the United States and other nations; the United States Constitution; the basic civic values of American constitutional democracy; and the roles, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship, including avenues of participation.

References:

Cartner, Christy & Emily Warren. “Integrating Women’s Studies into the High School Curriculum.” Kentucky Teacher. Kentucky Department of Education, March 9, 2017.

Johnson, Edith. “Why We Need Feminist Schools: Part 1.” Be Her Lead, April 02, 2020.

New York State Education Department, “New York State Grades 9-12 Social Studies Framework,” (The University of the State of New York: The State Education Department, 2017).

Stimpson, Catharine R. “What Matter Mind: A Theory About the Practice of Women’s Studies.” *Women’s Studies* 1, no. 3 (1973): 293-314.

