Manly Men and Womanly Women: Deviance, Gender Role Polarization, and the Shift in Women's School Employment, 1900–1976

JACKIE M. BLOUNT
Iowa State University

Drawing on historical data, Jackie Blount argues in this article that explanations for shifts in employment patterns of women educators for most of the twentieth century have overlooked the impact of homophobia and gender role stereotypes. As Blount notes, although women teachers, more than half of whom were single, outnumbered men by more than two to one in the early 1900s, this trend shifted radically in the fifteen years following World War II, when the percentage of single women in the teaching profession fell to half its pre-war levels. Similarly, the number of women superintendents also declined rapidly. Blount analyzes school policies and practices, events, and publications from the turn of the century to the 1970s to uncover the practice of sexually stigmatizing women who defied narrowly defined gender roles. She describes events and theories that led to increasing gender role polarization after World War II that pressured women into assuming gender-specific roles, attitudes, and appearances, and that led to campaigns to identify and dismiss those in schools who were thought to be homosexual. Blount cautions that homophobia continues to hold sex discrimination practices in place, particularly those connected with women seeking power in schools. She concludes with the thought that until gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender educators are valued in public education, the powerful forces that maintain gender role barriers are unlikely to be erased.

Teaching in the United States was considered men's work until the mid-1800s; however, by the turn of the twentieth century, women held seven teaching positions for every three held by men.[1] Of these women, 70 percent were single.[2] In the hopes of further widening their sphere of influence, hundreds of women

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also sought and won positions as school superintendents between 1900 and 1930. This led Chicago superintendent Ella Flagg Young to predict in 1909 that women would soon dominate the male-identified superintendency, just as they had teaching.[3] In the fifteen years following World War II, however, two dramatic changes occurred in women's educational employment. First, the percentage of single women teachers dropped precipitously.[4] Second, the number and percentage of women superintendents also declined rapidly.[5] While many factors contributed to these shifts, this article explores one that has traditionally been overlooked: the practice of sexually stigmatizing women (and men) who defy narrowly defined gender roles. This stigmatization has taken the forms of labeling individuals as sexually deviant; of creating environments where so-called deviant persons are not tolerated; and of punishing such individuals through social, legal, and economic means. In this article I examine the experiences of teachers and superintendents by analyzing school policies and practices, events, and publications from around 1900 to 1976, to identify the ways in which sexual stigmatization contributed to these changes in women's employment in education.

The Preference for Single Women Teachers

In the mid-1800s, Catharine Beecher argued that women were well suited for teaching because of their natural maternal skills. Single women, she maintained, were a particularly good choice, since market forces supported their lower wages and thus they were cheaper to hire than men, who might have families to support. She explained that single women would only work until they got married; once married, they would be occupied taking care of their homes and families. Until such time, teaching would serve as preparation for marriage and motherhood rather than as a substitute for them.[6] On the other hand, Beecher left open the option for women to choose celibacy over marriage when she wrote that marriages built upon necessity rather than "pure affection" were "productive of much of the unhappiness of married women, of many sorrows, sickness, and premature decay and death."[7] Beecher herself remained single. Inspired by the possibility of economic independence, many women took advantage of the opportunity to choose teaching and to avoid marriage by default. Those who opted for marriage were expected to leave the classroom unless critical teacher shortages necessitated their employment.[8]

As the number of single women teachers climbed through the nineteenth century, the public came to accept their celibacy as a respectable life choice; nevertheless, some questioned why so many teachers remained single.[9] Catharine Goggin, president of the Chicago Teachers Federation, explained in 1899 that because of the independence of school teachers, a large percentage of them chose to remain spinsters because a female teacher "learns to govern, not to be governed. . . . Her ways become fixed and set; she cannot be molded to suit any man. Her individuality has become too strongly developed."[10] Commenting on her own refusal to marry, she said that she simply could not face having a man call her "ducky," a pet name that would have connoted her subordinate household status.[11]

From the Civil War through World War II, single women were readily available and relatively inexpensive school employees. School boards and administrators offered a variety of public rationales for hiring them instead of married women teachers. For example, an Ohio school board described its preference for single women teachers: "Why should we allow two-income families when there are single women without jobs?"[12] Grace Strachan, New York City district school superintendent and a married woman, explained: "A woman teacher who marries and who retains her position as teacher, assumes obligations to two masters, and, I agree with St. Luke's gospel, which says: 'No servant can serve two masters: for he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold the one and despise the other.'"[13] Some school systems preferred single women simply because, as one superintendent explained, "I know that the married woman teacher is a source of friction."[14] For reasons such as these, the practice of hiring single women teachers proved so popular that in 1900, when women accounted for around 70 percent of all public school teachers, over 95 percent of them were single, divorced, or widowed.[15]

While school boards typically preferred hiring single rather than married women, high unemployment rates during the Great Depression induced them to formalize the practice and to bar married women from the classroom. Married women did not need the jobs, boards reasoned, since their husbands, theoretically, could support them. In 1928, the National Education Association (NEA) surveyed 1,532 cities with populations above 2,500 and found that 29 percent required the instant resignation of women who married. An additional 25 percent of city school systems dropped women at the end of the year of betrothal. The same survey also found that over 50 percent of cities with populations over 100,000 required married women to resign immediately. These marriage bans spread quickly during the Depression, leading historian Howard Beale to explain in 1936 that "Many young schoolma'ams have refused to consider marriage. . . . New school rules [have] appeared to keep school teaching a spinster's profession."[16]

Single Women Administrators

In the early decades of the twentieth century, women educators moved increasingly into positions of broader administrative influence than the classroom. Nonetheless, they were sometimes still affected by policies aimed at teachers. For example, in 1903 the New York Board of Education instituted a policy barring women school administrators from marriage:

> No woman principal, woman head of department, or woman member of the . . . supervising staff shall marry while in the service. It shall be the duty of a District Superintendent to bring to the notice of the Board of Superintendents the marriage of any such person in his district, and such fact shall be reported to the Board of Education, which may direct charges to be preferred against such teacher by reason of marriage.[17]

Many women administrators either refused to marry or assumed their duties when their marriages ended. Ella Flagg Young's husband, for example, died soon after their marriage. She later served as the superintendent of Chicago schools from 1909–1915. Shortly after Susan Dorsey bore a son, her husband, a minister, abandoned her, taking their son with him. Dorsey eventually entered school administration, becoming the superintendent of the Los Angeles schools in 1922. Other women superintendents, such as Mildred Doyle (superintendent of schools in Knoxville, Tennessee, from 1946 to 1976),[18] Julia Richman (New York City district superintendent, 1903–1912), and Ira Jarrell (superintendent of Atlanta, Georgia, 1944–1960) chose to remain single throughout their lives.[19]

As with teachers, policies aimed at banning administrators from marrying did not apply to men. Men were, in fact, informally held to an opposite standard. School boards expected to hire only married male administrators. This employment practice originated before the Civil War, when school boards first selected school superintendents, and has continued through modern times.[20] One superintendent wrote in the mid-1800s:

> A broad-minded, judicious, and cultivated gentleman is needed at the head of every large school. . . . To secure and retain this increased number of men of this excellence, it would be necessary to pay them liberally . . . *for men of the right character* and ambition for the work they are to do *will have families which they must support.*[21]

Men of "right character" were assumed to be married. Periodic surveys of the superintendency produced by the NEA Department of Superintendence, later the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), have regularly demonstrated that virtually all of the men who have served as school superintendents during this century have been married.[22] Generally, in education, a profession numerically dominated by women, male superintendents have demonstrated their character by marrying in significantly greater percentages than the general population of men. They have thus affirmed their authority in the private realm, where women traditionally have been expected to obey while receiving economic support in return.[23]

The Perception of Deviance

From the 1920s to the 1940s, the nearly unquestioned acceptance of the single woman educator began to erode, despite policies that supported their presence in schools. These years witnessed what Joe Dubbert calls a "masculinity crisis," or a perception that men were losing their traditional places of power in a gender-stratified society. He argues that such social phenomena as declining marriage and birth rates among educated, middle-class White women, the challenges posed to masculine gender roles by the suffrage era women's movement, and the popular perception that women were taking control of such social institutions as the schools all fueled this crisis.[24] A virulent backlash movement soon emerged that took aim at economically independent and educationally privileged women, including teachers.

Critics followed several lines of attack. First, they portrayed single women teachers as threats to the masculinity of male students and educators. Second, they accused spinster teachers of contributing to the demise of the (White) race. Their third and perhaps most powerful attack conflated spinsterhood with lesbianism, thus creating a climate where single women teachers seemed socially dangerous.[25]

Threats to Masculinity

From the late 1800s until the middle of the twentieth century, single women constituted the majority of schoolteachers. Fearful of being identified with a profession dominated by women, a Massachusetts superintendent complained: "What we need is more of strong manly character in our schools. . . . In the development of character, the influence of woman is indispensable; but she alone would make boys womanish and girls not altogether womanly." Critics found receptive audiences when they created the specter of effeminate, public school educated boys.[26]

Other critics used the opposite approach, worrying that since women worked in schools as teachers and increasingly as administrators, they were becoming masculine. Said one critic, "By the very act of working, something has happened to her. . . . She has become, in important psychological elements, a man. Most significantly they absorb, with their jobs, the masculine attitude toward sex."[27]

For male educators, however, the chief threat to masculinity was to their own. G. Stanley Hall, psychologist and perennial member of the NEA's ruling power clique early in the century, wrote in his widely read book, *Adolescence:*

> The progressive feminization of secondary education works its subtle demoralization on the male teachers who remain [in the schools]. . . . It is hard, too, for male principals of schools with only female teachers not to suffer some deterioration in the moral tone of their virility and to lose in the power to cope successfully with men. Not only is this often confessed and deplored, but the incessant compromises the best male teachers of mixed classes must make with their pedagogic convictions in both teaching and discipline make the profession less attractive to manly men of large caliber and of sound fiber.[28]

Hall argued that male teachers would lose their sense of virility if they worked alongside female teachers. The existence of large numbers of women who stood beyond the reach of heterosexual marriage certainly must have exacerbated the threat to the masculinity of these men. Some male teachers responded by leaving education, while others worked their way into positions viewed as more "manly," such as newly created vocational education programs, school athletic programs, or school administration. Around the turn of the century, schools added vocational and varsity athletic programs, in part to keep adolescent boys from dropping out.[29] These programs also served the purpose of attracting "manly" men into schoolwork in areas that completely excluded women.

Said one man about school vocational programs: "The establishment of industrial and trade schools will, we think, bring a considerable number of men

back into the teaching profession. The curriculum of these schools will, by its nature, require the total exclusion of women."[30]

The Eugenics Argument

A particularly effective attack on educated, single women involved implicating them in "race suicide." Critics charged that White, middle-class women were abandoning their responsibilities to marry and reproduce the (White) race. Edward Thorndike explained that "the . . . harm done by the present use of educational funds to hire women rather than men lies in the prevention of gifted and devoted women from having and rearing children of their own flesh and blood."[31] Statistician Louis Dublin lobbed a typical attack at the International Congress of Eugenics in 1921:

> I am trying to find out why educated women do not marry. . . . There is the curriculum, which is clearly not developing an inclination on the part of young women to marry early, if at all. The courses educate girls away from matrimony rather than toward it. . . . There is relatively little opportunity for meeting young men and, in many cases, especially among the girls of strong personality, there is developed a desire to make good in a career. . . . She would try out her wings at teaching. . . . Her friendships with men suffer because of her preoccupation. . . . By the time they realize that marriage is desirable, they have lost their attractiveness and cannot compete successfully with the younger and fresher girls who are willing to take the step without so many reservations. The whole situation is crystallizing in the impression on the part of many men that college women do not make desirable wives.[32]

Dublin's statements are typical of public commentary at this time. He begins rhetorically, asking to understand why many women remain single. He then offers as a reason that these women are lacking in attractiveness as mates, and are remiss in maintaining their appeal to men. Dublin sums up: "The education of women is today a disgenic influence. It is leading women away from matrimony and childbearing."[33]

Other critics employed psychological theories as support for their contentions. For example, in 1916 Walter Gallichan wrote *The Great Unmarried,* a collection of essays about the social problems caused by the existence of large numbers of single persons. He cautioned that

> typical celibate women, approaching the neuter order, are becoming more common in the middle and better-educated classes. . . . A large number enter the teaching profession. . . . The repressed life of the celibate school-mistress is an instance of the general effect of enforced celibacy upon women. . . . They have specific difficulties, trials, and bodily and nervous maladies. Upon many celibacy is compulsory.

Gallichan continues, referring to single women as psychologically deficient:

> They pass the greater part of their lives in a feminine community, segregated, and debarred from frequent intellectual association with the opposite sex. . . . Love, conjugality, and maternity, with their deep emotions, their felicities, pains, and

> disciplines, are beyond the limited boundary of their experience. A species of psychic sclerosis may be diagnosed in these cases.[34]

Other critics were more overt, linking gender to illness and, in turn, to character and temperament. A writer for the *Eugenics Review* in 1919 stressed that

> unmarried female teachers are the worst tempered and spiteful individuals of all mankind, chronically suffering generally from anaemia, neurasthenia, hysterics, neurosis of all kinds, rheumatism, stomach and bowel trouble, and more or less sexual diseases. It is due to the "Zolibat" condition of this class of women, which is highly injurious to their health. Every married woman with another occupation can freely exercise it in her leisure time when her economical circumstances demand it, but a schoolmistress is not *permitted.*[35]

Clearly, for women to be kind spirited and physically healthy, they should have regular sex with men. Although the author did not explicitly draw the connections between personality traits, physical health, and heterosexual activity, it is clear that he believed women who positioned themselves outside of conventional heterosexual practice not only suffered disproportionately from serious maladies, but also were somehow suspect.

The Spinster/Lesbian Threat

After the enactment of suffrage and as the Eugenics movement gained in popularity, two concurrent developments in the understanding of human sexuality filtered into American popular culture. First, translations of Freud's groundbreaking theories on the relationship between repressed sexuality and neuroses, as well as his extensive analyses of women's sexuality, stirred great public interest.[36] Second, Havelock Ellis and Kraft-Ebbing published their theories suggesting that women were capable of sexual response and were not the asexual persons previously believed. Even more titillating, or perhaps troubling, was the revelation that women could experience sexual relationships with other women.[37] To many, this notion seemed beyond possibility, since women had generally been regarded as passionless and lacking in sexual energy, and therefore would be unable to find sexual satisfaction with other women. Yet with the "morbidification" of these relationships, which essentially equated them with disease, the public perception of single women shifted. This shift eventually affected women educators greatly.[38]

That single women educators experienced sexual relationships with other women was documented by Katharine Bement Davis in her pioneering investigation, *Factors in the Sex Life of Twenty-Two Hundred Women* (1929). Davis surveyed 1,200 unmarried college-educated women to determine patterns in their sexual experiences. Teachers and superintendents accounted for 52 percent of the sample. Almost half of the single women educators reported having experienced one of the following: 1) "intense emotional relations with women unassociated with consciousness of a sex experience and unaccompanied by physical expression other than hugging and kissing" (22 percent); and 2) experiences of a sexual nature defined by Davis as either "intense relationships accompanied by

mutual masturbation, contact of genital organs, or other physical expressions recognized as sexual in character," or "intense relations recognized at the time as sexual in character, but without expression other than hugging and kissing" (25 percent). Finally, 53 percent of the women in this study group indicated that they had never had "intense emotional relations with another girl or woman," thus accounting for all of the single women educators' mutually exclusive choices.[39]

The public recognition that some spinster teachers may have experienced same-sex sexual desires and relationships transformed older visions of single women educators as virtuous, selfless, asexual pillars of morality into those of sexual and mannish deviants. Attacks aimed at these women who stood outside of heterosexuality eventually became implied or overt broadsides against lesbianism, a category of persons created largely by the sexologists. As such, many came to view spinster educators as dangerous threats to the social order.

Scholars, policymakers, and public figures offered three main reasons for regarding single teachers with suspicion. First, sexually ambiguous persons or those who seemed to flout gender appropriate behavior were regarded as deviant yet influential role models for children developing gender and sexual identities. The eminent sociologist Willard Waller explained in his classic 1932 text, *The Sociology of Teaching,* that "there remains a large and pitiful group of those whose sex life is thwarted or perverse. The members of this group, often consciously and usually with the best of intentions, carry sex problems into the schools, and transmit abnormal attitudes to their pupils because they have no other attitudes." Students under the tutelage of these persons might then grow up with abnormal gender qualities. Boys might develop effeminate characteristics and behaviors or girls masculine ones.[40]

The second threat posed by single teachers included the possibility that they might influence future generations to pursue a similar vocation and lifestyle. Spinster teachers were viewed as recruiters of their successors. In order for young women to be educated in the direction of marriage and motherhood, feminine teachers were needed. In 1932, one writer warned:

> We think we can ignore these women [spinsters] when we are the safely married ones, happy in our children. We cannot. For some of them are teaching our daughters. They are responsible for the next generation of mothers. . . . Can womanhood be taught by women who, in the main, have grown old in a bewilderment of sterility, who have not themselves been trained to face and acknowledge the despair that is on them, who communicate through the very air of their schools a disillusion that is still half a dream? Can it be taught by those who consistently belittle the feminine mind-stuff of their pupils? This belittlement we have all sensed. It is chiefly noticeable in the insistence that a promising child should become a teacher and in the unconscious drop-by-drop poison of suggestion that marriage is a flippant and accidental thief of useful women.[41]

Perhaps the greatest fear that many expressed was that sexually suspect teachers might prey on children and cause them to become homosexual. Without evidence, yet receiving wide and uncritical acceptance at the time, Waller con-

tended that "nothing seems more certain than that homosexuality is contagious." Homosexual teachers would create homosexual students; it followed that it was a matter of public concern that teachers be carefully selected. Waller believed that screening candidates was essential and that "one technique would probably depend . . . upon such personality traits as carriage, mannerisms, voice, speech, etc." With this screening technique, women and men who betrayed traits commonly ascribed to the opposite gender would likely be stricken from the application process. Waller summarized, "If the schools ever decide to take their task of character education seriously, they will need to set it up as one of their major objectives to produce individuals normally heterosexual." Clearly, there was mounting concern about offering students proper heterosexual gender role modeling by teachers.[42]

The growing criticism of teachers who crossed traditional gender lines provoked closer scrutiny of teachers' personal lives. Lifestyles among single women educators that a generation earlier had been accepted and respected now were perceived as deviant. For example, around the turn of the century, single working women commonly lived together in "Boston marriages," or long-term, romantic relationships between two women. Historian Lillian Faderman explains that these female relationships made sense:

> They afforded a woman companionship, nurturance, a communion of kindred spirits, romance (and undoubtedly, in some but not all such relationships, sex) — all the advantages of having a "significant other" in one's life and none of the burdens that were concomitant with heterosexuality, which would have made her life as a pioneering career woman impossible.[43]

Chicago school superintendent Ella Flagg Young maintained a longtime relationship with Laura Brayton, a woman who had once worked as a teacher under Young, then later served as her personal secretary. The two lived together for many years, traveled together, and when Young died in 1918, she left Brayton the huge sum of $12,000. The public view of Young was that of an upstanding, pure, selfless, and dedicated educator who had served as the first female president of the NEA. I argue that prominent women educators living a similar lifestyle only a generation later would likely have been severely criticized. These single women faced the challenge of carefully managing their images, living in the shadow of suspicion, altering their personal lives, or leaving the profession.[44]

The Change of Fashion

Directly or indirectly, the public responded to the newly created deviant image of single women educators. School systems dropped their marriage bans for women teachers during and after World War II. The NEA encouraged this practice by arguing that married women should be hired as teachers since "marriage and parenthood are likely to enrich a teacher's understanding of childhood and family life and thus will help her to be a better teacher." Ironically, this argument inverted Catharine Beecher's contention a century earlier that teaching would provide single women with excellent preparation for marriage and motherhood.

The NEA also argued that "to abolish the celibacy rule . . . would do much over a period of years to remove the 'old-maid school teacher' cliché which is so distasteful to many teachers and so injurious to the morale of many of the younger members of the profession."[45] A Kentucky school bulletin in 1937 bluntly offered its assessment of single teachers: "The attractive woman who finds it easy to marry and establish a home is the kind of woman that the schools need and cannot secure or retain under regulations against marriage. . . . Married women tend to have a saner view on sex, and are less likely to become 'queer.'"[46] Essentially, the public's changed view of single women teachers outweighed the benefits accorded their school systems by hiring them.

Many school systems resisted dropping their marriage bans, however. Some systems refused to hire married women teachers as long as the effects of the Depression lingered and two-income families were thought unfair. The social premium placed on employment during these years, when eleven million men remained jobless, left married women with little clout in arguing for their places in schools. Other school systems sought to maintain their marriage bans because they feared, at least in part, that their schools would become "dumping grounds for married women."[47] One superintendent explained that "non-employment of married women is excellent socially . . . and [unmarried women] make less trouble than married teachers."[48] The NEA countered this argument by explaining that since the percentage of unmarried women teachers was almost the same as that for women "professionals and technicians," then the proportion of married women teachers would likely remain unchanged if marriage bans were removed.[49]

When the United States entered World War II, however, perceptions as well as realities changed. Millions of men abandoned their civilian jobs to join the military effort, leaving vacancies in numerous sectors of the economy. Under these conditions, single women enjoyed relatively lucrative employment opportunities they could not have imagined earlier. Many teachers left the classroom for higher wage jobs in war-related and other industries. The ensuing shortage of teachers meant that some school systems had to drop their marriage bans or face disruption and even closure.

When the war drew to a close in 1945, school systems did not tend to reinstate marriage bans. First, the post-war baby boom produced swollen school enrollments and the need for more teachers. Second, women's opportunities in other employment areas widened during and after the war. Despite government advertising campaigns urging women to leave their wartime jobs to make room for returning male veterans, newly created feminized vocations such as clerical work provided women with alternatives to teaching. Third, marriage rates increased during these years, creating a smaller pool of single women. Fourth, school boards and administrators around the country eventually agreed with arguments made against marriage bans and came to regard them as impractical, if not unfair. Finally, the stigmatization of single women made them less desirable teaching candidates than married ones, especially for a profession anxious to shed its reputation for producing spinsters.[50]

TABLE 1
Percentages of Married Women in the Labor Force Compared with the Percentages of Married Women Teachers, 1920–1960

Year	*Married Women in U.S. Labor Force (%)*	*Married Women Teachers (%)*	*Single Women Teachers (%)*	*Widowed or Divorced Women Teachers (%)*
1920	9[a]	10	86	5
1930	12[a]	18	77	5
1940	17[a]	25	69	7
1950	25[a]	47	43	9
1960	31[b]	59	29	13

Note: Statistics derived from Folger and Nam, *Education of the American Population,* p. 81, unless otherwise noted.

[a] Statistics from Lynn Weinner, *From Working Girl to Working Mother* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 1985), p. 89; cited in Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 183.

[b] Statistics from U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Labor Force Statistics Derived from the Current Population Survey: A Data Book,* vol. 1 (September 1982), Bulletin 2096, table C-11; 1985: BLS News Release, USDL 85-381 (September 19, 1985), table 1; total from unpublished tabulations.

For these reasons, the percentages of single women teachers plummeted after 1940. Where single women had accounted for 69 percent of women teachers in 1940 (76 percent if widowed and divorced women are included), they held fewer than 30 percent of these positions just two decades later (42 percent with widowed and divorced women). While the NEA had speculated in 1942 that lifting marriage bans would not cause the number of married women teachers to rise, in fact, within only two decades the percentage of married women in teaching had doubled the percentage in the work force. Teaching had changed from a single to a married woman's profession (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

The percentage of married women superintendents also increased after school districts lifted marriage bans. While definitive statistics have not been compiled for superintendents as they have for teachers, the marital status changes of women superintendents in Kansas might shed some light on national trends. Between 1943 and 1962, the percentage of women county superintendents listed in *Patterson's American Education* with "Mrs." in front of their names (indicating marriage, widowhood, or divorce) increased from 23 percent (13 out of 57 women) to 77 percent (53 out of 69 women). While this percentage is not generalizable, it suggests that marriage rates among women superintendents might have paralleled those of teachers.[51]

From these data it is plausible to suggest that married women had long sought school positions and, with the lifting of the bans, they finally enjoyed a fair chance at such employment. The supply of qualified married women may simply

FIGURE 1
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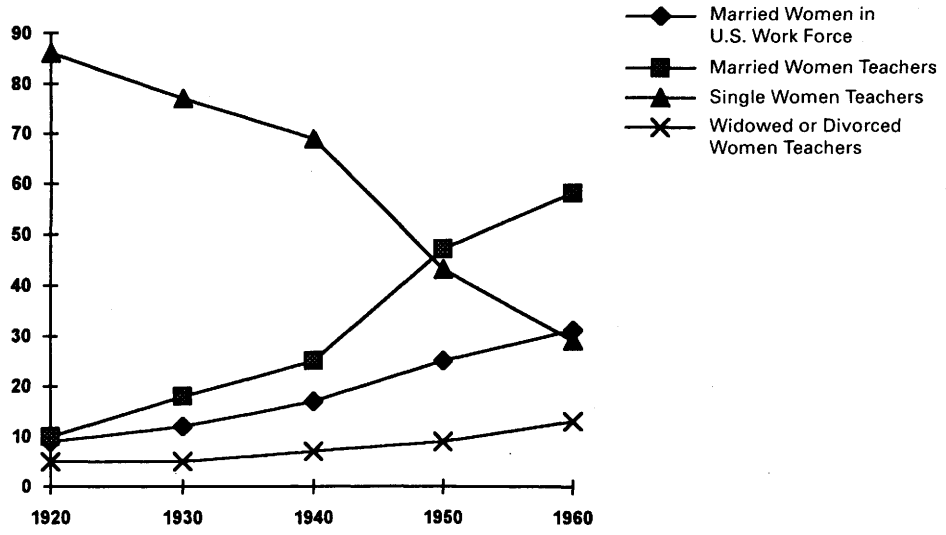


have filled the available vacuum. It is also reasonable to posit that married women might have sought employment in schools over other sectors because the hours and nature of the work were considered more compatible with family responsibilities. However, these factors alone fail to explain sufficiently why married women not only came to dominate the ranks of educators, but also to double the percentages of married women in the U.S. labor force over such a short time period, especially since by that time teaching had enjoyed a century-long legacy of celibate female practitioners. I argue that other factors were at work to effectively reverse the marital status characteristics of women educators.

The Post-War Homosexual Menace and Heightened Gender Role Polarization

While single women educators had already suffered damage to their employability during the years of the spinster/lesbian "threat," the damage escalated to unprecedented heights after the release of what proved to be a popular and important study on human sexuality. The year 1948 saw the publication of Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male,* a remarkably detailed, careful, and what was considered surprisingly candid study for the time. The book quickly sold out of several printings and remained on the *New York Times* bestseller list for months. So widely influential was the book that George Gallup estimated one of every five Americans had read or heard about it.[52] Academics, professionals,

and media figures actively discussed this study, which was joined in 1953 by Kinsey's companion volume, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female.* To complete these volumes, Kinsey and his staff collected the sexual histories of 12,000 men and women from every state, but primarily from residents of the northeastern quarter of the country. He indicated that "the ultimate sample shall represent a cross-section of the entire population."[53]

One of the most unexpected and shocking revelations in these works concerned the incidence of homosexuality among men. Kinsey reported that a full 50 percent of all males admitted having some attraction to other men; over a third had experienced at least one orgasm through homosexual contact; and 4 percent engaged in homosexual relationships exclusively. Kinsey explained that these experiences did not occur within segregated portions of the population, but rather that "persons with homosexual histories are to be found in every age group, in every social level, in every conceivable occupation, in cities and on farms, and in the most remote areas of the country."[54]

Kinsey's studies encouraged significant open public discussion about sexuality, a discussion for which many Americans were enthusiastic and ready. While his work was widely applauded, incensed critics accused him of everything from improper research methods to aiding communism.[55] Politicians used his results for purposes beyond those he had intended. They hailed the unexpectedly large figures on the incidence of homosexuality as proof that the homosexual menace in society loomed larger than anyone had feared and that something needed to be done to remedy the situation. Shortly after the publication of the volume on male sexuality, the search began for the perpetrators of supposedly rampant and immoral sexuality in society.[56]

The military, in the midst of its efforts to downsize after the war, became one of the first institutions to hunt for homosexuals, launching investigations to rid the rank and file of all lesbian and homosexual activity.[57] By 1950, reports emerged in Congress that cells of homosexuals had infiltrated *all* areas of the U.S. government, not just the military, and that they posed serious threats to national security and integrity. "One homosexual can pollute a Government office," one congressman warned.[58] To demonstrate Congress's commitment to the elimination of this peril, the *Congressional Record* printed counts of homosexuals in each government department along with the numbers investigated and purged.[59] Organizations and businesses working with the government were encouraged to follow suit. Eventually, the hunt for homosexuals extended to all segments of the population as the FBI, the Post Office, local police forces, and other agencies conducted investigations to identify and turn them in.[60] It is estimated that thousands lost their jobs in these investigations and many thousands more adjusted to lifestyles filled with profound terror at the prospect of the total economic and social ruin that usually followed such actions.[61]

Schools were not spared. *New York Daily Mirror* columnist Lee Mortimer claimed that homosexuals were organizing in high schools to recruit young students.[62] In response to this threat, school systems around the country began formal and informal means of identifying and purging anyone rumored to be

homosexual. For example, the state of Florida recommended in a 1964 report that personnel in the Teacher Certification Division of the State Department of Education should handle charges of homosexuality among teachers. Anyone suspected of homosexuality would lose their teaching certificate.[63] In addition, some local school systems hired investigators to gather evidence on allegations of homosexuality among teachers.[64] Changes in Florida and California state penal codes in the early 1950s allowed school boards to use illegally obtained information to fire suspected homosexuals.[65]

Many teachers lost their jobs in these orchestrated sweeps. When named in such campaigns, teachers had little recourse, regardless of the veracity or relevance of the charges.[66] Teachers suspected of homosexuality also were often dismissed on other grounds to avoid publicity and, as Karen Harbeck explains, to protect school boards "from costly litigation concerning burden of proof, defamation, and discrimination."[67] The personal punishment exacted on these teachers is difficult to fathom, so damaged were their reputations, relationships with their families, support networks, and means of economic survival, in addition to their hope and self-esteem.

Teachers who remained in their positions also paid a price. In an atmosphere of fear and intimidation, teachers felt they had to stay in line. A 1970 study funded by the National Institute of Mental Health reported that 77 percent of Americans believed that homosexuals should not be allowed to teach.[68] School districts sometimes dismissed teachers who were merely rumored to be homosexual or who did not fit stereotypes of masculinity or femininity. It is likely that to avoid these and other possible dangers, teachers endeavored to portray gender appropriate behaviors at work, to live beyond the shadow of suspicion. Women accentuated their femininity by crafting a soft, "womanly" appearance; maintaining a submissive countenance; pretending to have active heterosexual relationships; and sometimes marrying for the sake of appearance.[69] They avoided curricular areas that would raise eyebrows such as high school physical education or coaching, and some resisted efforts toward advancement into male domains. Male teachers gravitated toward instructional areas regarded as appropriately masculine, feigned interest in sports even when there was none, and carefully guarded their manner so as not to betray any effeminacy. The homosexual menace in schools essentially provoked educators to maintain consciousness of their own and others' gender appropriate appearances and behaviors.[70] Essentially, this heightened awareness and the justifiable fear that held it in place created an atmosphere where gender role identities became deeply polarized.

The Double-Edged Sword

This increased gender polarization affected jobs in schooling differently. Women pursued gender appropriate work when they taught in classrooms, worked with children, and took orders from their superiors. On the other hand, women who desired to move into school administration found that their ambitions could be viewed as masculine, aggressive, ambitious, and inappropriate.

Women administrative aspirants, then, increasingly contended with gender role conflicts.[71]

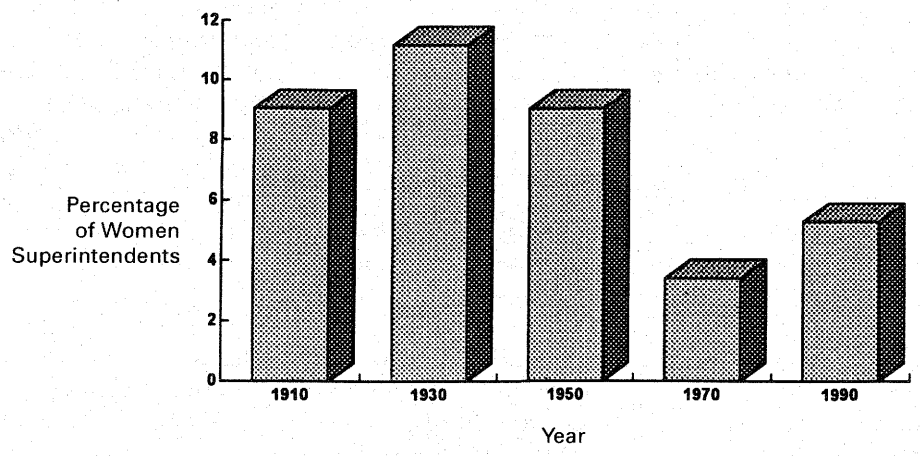
Some women resolved these conflicts by dismissing any interest they may have had in seeking careers in the male-dominated administrative realm. Some women pursued these opportunities anyway, but adjusted their wardrobes and behaviors to seem more feminine and therefore less threatening and gender role deviant. Women who were or had been married seemed safer because marriage was regarded as proof of heterosexuality, an important facet of appropriately feminine character. One expert, commenting in the 1960s on women administrators, particularly elementary school principals, explained:

> Some researchers have identified some of the important psychological characteristics of administrators. Among these are the ability to work cooperatively with people, a love of children, a factor of flexibility, a psychological factor of open-mindedness. When you describe these ideal psychological characteristics of an elementary school principal, you are also describing the ideal mate, and in the case of a woman, the ideal wife. Women who possess these characteristics have a strong urge to marry, to become part of a family, and so on.[72]

Women who pursued administrative advancement and yet did not carefully manage their femininity usually faced covert as well as overt resistance, sometimes even hostility.[73] Single women could not as readily prove their heterosexuality as married women and therefore seemed sexually suspect. One administrative aspirant stated the problem succinctly: "The image of an administrator in this state is of a married person."[74] As a result of this increased scrutiny of women's sexuality, fewer single women succeeded in attaining administrative positions. As recently as 1988, a study on the superintendency published by the National Center for Education Information noted that proportionately more male and female school administrators were married than the overall population. "While fifty-seven percent of all households in this country are married-couple households, ninety-four percent of superintendents and eighty-seven percent of public school principals are married."[75]

Women who attained administrative positions found their work riddled with conflicts. On the one hand, the nature of administrative work had undergone structural changes after the war to favor men even more than it had previously.[76] For example, the longer hours and heavy responsibilities increasingly required that administrators have a helpmate at home, an expectation for male administrative candidates but a problem for women whose male partners usually worked full time and customarily shared few of the family responsibilities.[77] Women who resolved this problem by choosing a female partner suffered the perception of deviance. Mildred Doyle, who enjoyed a long and distinguished career as the superintendent of the Knoxville, Tennessee, schools, was finally defeated for re-election in 1976 after some political miscalculations and the anonymous circulation of a letter questioning the nature of her relationship with her female, long-time companion.[78] To avoid this fate, women tended to marry and work double shifts by putting in long days at administrative work and then assuming family maintenance responsibilities at night.[79] A number of women endured this

FIGURE 2
Total Percentage of Women Superintendents by Year



double burden quietly while finding themselves passed over for promotion in favor of men.[80]

The numbers of women who held school superintendencies declined rapidly from 1950 to 1970, the steepest drop of any point in this century (see Figure 2). The percentage of women who held all types of superintendencies declined from 9 percent to just over 3 percent. Several conditions affected this decline, such as the consolidation of schools and the newly instituted requirement for administrative credentials from university schools of education that often kept low quotas on the number of women admitted (changes that, arguably, were intended to increase the masculine appeal of the work).[81] However, the profound gender role polarization of school employment that occurred during these years of the homosexual menace pervaded nearly every aspect of the school context and undoubtedly also influenced the decline of the woman superintendent.[82]

Conclusion

When women entered the teaching profession in the early days of common schooling, they widened their sphere of activity beyond the hearth, risking criticism from those who would have had them maintain their traditional roles. The economic advantages of hiring women for teaching positions soon became obvious even to their critics, however. But when women quickly dominated the ranks of teachers and also demonstrated the promise of assuming widespread leadership, both at a time when women were gradually winning suffrage, marrying in lower numbers, divorcing more frequently, and bearing fewer children than previously, traditionalists reacted to these threats. Psychologists, sexologists, educators, and social critics invested considerable energy in the effort to

produce scientifically derived definitions of acceptable White, middle-class femininity. During and after World War II, when school systems ceased to enjoy either the economic benefits of hiring single women (as women's employment opportunities expanded), or the administrative benefits of employing women without troublesome husbands, mounting opposition to spinster teachers found full expression. Politicians and governmental organizations labored to rid the public workforce of suspected homosexuals. Those who defied increasingly starkly delineated gender divisions suffered the burdens of deviance and ostracism. This gender role polarization, as I have argued, contributed to the rapid decline in single women educators and women superintendents.

There are several aspects of this analysis that require further development, however. First, since such an important component of the eugenicists' argument against single women involved their supposed failure to improve the White race, then a critical historical examination of the intersections of race and sexuality is clearly much needed to understand the ways that gender role definitions are created and maintained across borders of race. Second, implicit in the attacks on spinster teachers was an assumption of middle-class ideals and values. Here again, careful exploration of the relationships between gender definitions and social/economic class is in order. Finally, this article has dealt primarily with the experiences of women educators, although obviously men have also been seriously affected by polarized gender definitions. A number of questions are raised here. Have men and women shared equally in the process of gender definition or has unequal social power been manifested in control of the terms of gender? How have definitions of masculinity limited men's roles in schools? What have been the experiences of men who have crossed gender role boundaries in education? Essentially, gender roles are created in enormously complex social contexts that require extensive analysis along a number of different dimensions.

Little attention has been devoted to the demise of single educators. In recent years, however, numerous books, articles, conferences, and symposia have been devoted to discussing the current low numbers of women in educational administration. Barriers to women's participation in positions of power in education remain firmly planted, though, in spite this increased attention. To this point, these studies have largely neglected to discuss the ways that the threat of labeling women as lesbians constrains them in their work. Essentially, homophobia remains a powerful force that holds gender role barriers, and therefore sex discrimination, in place. Little is likely to change until discussions about power broaden to include the role sexuality has played and continues to play in the structure and culture of schooling. Little is likely to change until gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals are welcomed as valued members of the teaching profession and are no longer viewed as vicious threats to society.

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