

Female-Teacher Gender and Sexuality in Twentieth-Century Ontario, Canada

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[The Romans] created the cult of the Vestal Virgins, high-minded priestesses of the goddess Vesta, Guardian Angel of Mankind and Keeper of the Hearth. These priestesses were educated in special normal training schools, were forbidden to marry, were subjected to drastic moral codes, and were accorded social position of preeminence.¹

Spinster teachers were hired so frequently in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that they eventually became an important part of the cultural landscape.²

Single women seem forever to unnerve, anger and unwittingly scare large swaths of the population, both female and male.³

Women teachers commonly faced marriage bans in North America before the 1950s. The influence of organized religion, the belief that husbands adequately supported married women, and widespread agreement that women only worked in the short-term—all these help explain why the female teacher was expected to remain single and chaste. But by the 1950s, career teachers had no longer to be celibate and unmarried, but instead to suit an ideal of heterosexual marriageability. School administrators, mental hygienists, parents, teacher federation leaders, psychologists, and concerned citizens all demanded that Ontario female teachers adopt a gender and sexual identification in keeping with the heterosexual ethos governing the postwar period.

Female teacher masculinity and homosexuality, and the “masculinizing” influence of the spinster teacher, now moved to the forefront. The pressure

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¹Walter S. McColley, “The Vestal Virgins of Education,” *Clearing House* 11 (1936): 195.

²Jackie M. Blount, “Spinsters, Bachelors, and Other Gender Transgressors in School Employment, 1850-1990,” *Review of Educational Research* 70:1 (2000), 87

³Betsy Israel, *Bachelor Girl: The Secret History of Single Women in the Twentieth Century* (New York: W. Morrow, 2002), 2.

to conform to normative gender and heterosexual identities pervaded postwar discussions about the institution of marriage, professional literature published by the Ontario teacher's federations, archival sources for these organizations, psychological studies of female teacher sexual deviance published and publicized in North America and Britain, mental hygienist's writings about "wholesome" family values, and in female teacher oral history testimony.

Sexologists like Havelock Ellis and Richard Von Krafft-Ebing wrote about a phenomenon they called gender inversion and their writings seeped into public consciousness in the early twentieth century. The gender invert was thought to have characteristics regularly attributed to the "opposite" sex. Female masculinity, like male femininity, revealed an inverted gender identity and the spinster teacher was, sometimes, thought to be such an invert. Gender inversion was also associated with a homosexual object choice by sexologists influenced by Freudian psychoanalysis and so gender identity transgressions by a spinster teacher were sometimes associated with homosexuality. As noted by contemporary scholars, such as Lucy Bland and Laura Doan sexologists collapsed gender and sexuality into one larger phenomenon.

The spinster-like (or masculine) demeanor of some career teachers in the postwar period triggered anxieties about female homosexuality in North American schools. While economic necessity, coupled with a teacher shortage in the 1940s, led to the demise of the marriage bans as educational historians have argued,⁴ worry also existed about the mannish woman characterized as female homosexual in the promarital discourse of the period. The following discussion elucidates the changing relationship of the female teacher to the institution of heterosexuality in postwar Ontario, Canada, to more fully understand how local perceptions of female teacher gender and sexual identity affected teacher-work.⁵

This study relies on oral history testimony taken from a large-scale, female-teacher-life history project. All of the interviewees taught in the

⁴See: Frieda Forman, Mary O'Brien, Jane Haddad, Dianne Hallman and Philinda Masters, *Feminism and Education: A Canadian Perspective* ed., (Toronto: Centre for Women's Studies in Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1990); Mary Kinnear, "Mostly for the Male Members: Teaching in Winnipeg, 1933-1966," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 6, 1 (1994):1-20; Alison Oram, "Embittered, Sexless or Homosexual: Attacks On Spinster Teachers 1918-39," in *Not a Passing Phase: Reclaiming Lesbians in History 1840-1985* ed. Lesbian History Group (London: Women's Press, 1989), p 99-118; Alison Oram, "Serving Two Masters? The Introduction of a Marriage Bar in Teaching in the 1920s," in *Not a Passing Phase* 134-148; Cecilia Reynolds and Harry Smaller, "Ontario School Teachers: A Gendered View of the 1930s," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 6: 3 (1994):151-169; Cecilia Reynolds, "Too Limiting a Liberation: Discourse and Actuality in the Case of Married Women Teachers," Forman, O'Brien, Haddad, Hallman and Masters, 145-165; Cecilia Reynolds, "Hegemony and Hierarchy: Becoming a Teacher in Toronto, 1930-1980," *Historical Studies in Education/Revue d'histoire de l'éducation* 2:1 (1990): 95-118.

⁵It is prudent to focus on the Ontario, Canadian case before larger, international comparisons can be made.

province of Ontario at some point in the twentieth century. The retired teachers had diverse levels of training and certification, varied in ages, and taught in either rural or urban school districts (sometimes both). Most were white, middle class, and relatively successful in their teaching careers. The subjects spoke about the marriage bar and of having to resign when seen to be pregnant in the postwar period.⁶ Some recounted stories about women who had alternative “lifestyles.” Although most evaded interview questions relating to homosexuality, they did talk about how male principals made heterosexual overtures to female teachers.⁷ Almost all interviewees spoke about how dress codes changed over the course of the twentieth century.

In this essay I first describe the cultural ethos of the Federation of Women Teachers’ Associations of Ontario (FWTAO), with its primary commitment to the never-married teacher. I then trace the declining status of the single, female teacher in the postwar period. Coupled with this decline is an emphasis placed on the importance of marriage and motherhood by the educational community. Second, I now examine the postwar sociological and psychological literature to show how traditional gender roles and heterosexual identity cultures were both regulatory and normative. The importance placed on heterosexual adjustment by educational administrators became intricately tied to the worry about female homosexuality, masculine identified, and independent women. I argue that married women teachers attained the professional stature originally held by single female teachers. The newly formed allegiance to the marriageable and heterosexually attractive woman (whether married or unmarried) caused difficulty for single females wanting to pursue administrative positions. The call to embrace a heterosexual ideal of beauty worked as an obstacle to tenure and to upward career mobility for female teachers who could not or would not adhere to these regulatory ideals.

⁶The oral history testimony used in this paper is taken from a larger teacher-life history project on Ontario woman teachers completed in the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Rebecca Coulter is the principle investigator and Sheila Cavanagh, Helen Harper, Suzanne Majhanovich, Goli Rezai-Rashti, Aniko Varpalotai and Janice Wallace are co-investigators. Over 150 interviews have been completed with retired teachers who worked in both urban and rural school districts across the province, providing an exceptionally rich assortment of interview data on a number of topics relating to teacher life and work.

⁷Overt discussion about (homo)sexuality and masculine gender identifications by genetic females is often thought by former teachers to be inappropriate and so the interview data used comes from a small minority of teachers who talked openly about gender and sexual identity transgressions. This group of women tended to have personal friendships with former colleagues who were lesbian identified or to have had family members who were homosexual and were, thus, more thoughtful and vocal on the subject. The interview data has been supplemented with archival case studies, professional education and popular magazines articles, teacher federation reports, academic journals, and newspaper reports relating to teacher dismissal to ensure that the oral history testimony is compared to other primary source materials.

The FWTAO and the Married Woman Teacher

In the beginning of the twentieth century the FWTAO celebrated the image of the single, woman teacher as professional *par excellence*. Her claim to celibacy indicated her overriding commitment to education. As social historian Martha Vicinus wrote of Great Britain, there was to be seen an “empowering...[element to] freely chosen chastity, demonstrating how women embraced their unmarried state as a special advantage and virtue. Intense homoerotic friendships replaced the marital union for many career women and those bonds gave them emotionally rich lives while validating self-control and spirituality as sources of personal strength.”⁸ Ontario’s schools employed the single, female teacher en masse until the marriage bans began to lose their force in the mid-twentieth century. The United States also celebrated the image of the spinster. She was thought to be a “high-minded, upstanding pillar of the community who selflessly devoted” her life to the school. One Canadian teacher interviewed for this study said “I married my job, I mean, I think if I had been married I could not have done this, it would have been impossible. But I think I married my job.”¹⁰ As with sexual and marital sanctions applied to women religious, female teachers had to adhere to social and professional directives to remain unmarried. Whether or not all teachers acceded to that pressure is another matter.¹¹

The capacity to renounce sexual passion became a virtue to many working women and this renunciation became evident in dress codes. As Vicinus observes, in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century “strong bodily control, invariably expressed as heterosexual purity, was an especially important part of community life”¹² for independent working women. Recalling her normal school training, one retired Canadian teacher said that the candidates “had to be prim and proper. We had to...be dressed just appropriately, almost...nun-like...we had to be very well dressed and covered up”¹³. Another teacher interviewed agreed that “women were expected to...dress neatly...to be clean of person...sound in all moral and

⁸Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 289.

⁹Blount, “Spinsters, Bachelors, and Other Gender Transgressors in School Employment, 1850-1990,” 87.

¹⁰“The Woman Teacher in Twentieth-Century Ontario,” [hereafter Woman Teacher] a four-year oral history project, sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, transcripts held by the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada.

¹¹Many women did not adhere to professionally enforced marriage bars and successfully hid their marital unions from school trustees.

¹²Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 42.

¹³“Woman Teacher,” (ACPID069)

physical ways and [to wear] skirt[s] and blouses, dresses, stockings, proper shoes...[and skirt length was] definitely below the knee, probably mid calf. You didn't wear anything shorter than that at that time and nobody thought anything of it."¹⁴ In her discussion of British boarding schools, Vicinus also notes that "Headmistresses had a distinct notion of proper behavior and little compunction about invading a teacher's classroom or private life."¹⁵

The Ontario educational community embraced a professional enculturation model dependent on strict discipline and moral regulation in the early twentieth century. Outlandish taboos restricted out-of-school activities. As one retired female teacher interviewed explained, it was forbidden to be seen "carousing, going to a dance and dancing too close to your partner...[and] you were not seen in unseemly places like the local tavern"¹⁶ by the community in which you taught. At this time, women teachers, were dismissed for boarding in socially "inappropriate" houses, for moving between boarding houses, and as one teacher explained, for being "out late...smoking, or drinking or whatever. Your life wasn't your own. So, if they could find anything you shouldn't be doing, it was no good."¹⁷ Another interviewee spoke about a teacher who was living in a "boarding place [that] wasn't suitable, so she rented an abandoned farmhouse, and lived there. And the board said she couldn't live there without a chaperone, because she had a boyfriend. So she had to hire a young girl who wasn't going to school to be her chaperone."¹⁸

The married female teacher by contrast was thought to be an occupational transient, underqualified, uninterested in professional development, and torn between divided loyalties to her family and the school.¹⁹ She could not be looked upon as having a true professional calling because of her existing commitment to a husband or fiancé. Members of the FWTAO believed that married women teachers hampered professional growth. Federation leaders introduced resolutions at their annual meetings designed to restrict married woman teacher's employment in Ontario's schools.²⁰

¹⁴Ibid, (ACPID092)

¹⁵Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 179.

¹⁶"Woman Teacher," (ACPID092)

¹⁷Ibid, (ACPID017)

¹⁸Ibid, (ACPID017)

¹⁹See: Sandra Gaskell, *The Problems and Professionalism of Women Elementary School Teachers in Ontario, 1944-54*, (Unpublished Ph.D. Diss., Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, 1989); Doris French, *High Button Bootstraps* (Toronto: Federation of Women Teacher's Associations of Ontario, 1968); Mary Labatt, *Always a Journey: a History of the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario, 1918-1993* (Toronto: FWTAO, 1993); Pat Stanton and Beth Light, *Speak With Their Own Voices: A Documentary History of the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario and the Women Elementary Public School Teachers of Ontario* (Toronto: FWTAO, 1987).

²⁰FWTAO Archives, Annual Meeting Minutes, 1934-1960.

United States and British schools began to drop marriage bans by the 1930s, but the Ontario women teachers' federation remained insistent upon the bars. For example, teacher historian Elizabeth Graham contends that the "Federation urged boards to give preference to the unmarried woman except in cases where the married woman teacher [was] the sole support of the family and that only during wartime, and periods of teacher shortage, did they relent upon their opposition to her marital stature."²¹ This also proved to be the case in Manitoba, Canada. Married teachers in this province "had public opinion more on her side...[but] ironically the [Manitoba] organization of Women Teachers did not see the issue [of the marriage bans] as a priority."²² Apolonja Maria Kojder also observed that the Saskatoon Canadian Women Teachers' Association supported the marriage bars until the teacher shortage forced them to let go of their preference for the single female teacher.

As the 1950s progressed, it became increasingly evident to the FWTAO executive that married women were already, despite their pleas, employed throughout the province in substantial numbers. Married women dominated Ontario rural schools. One district reported that 72 percent of the teachers were married.²³ As one interviewee reflected upon her teaching career, when "I moved out of the city in the early 50s, and came up here [to a northern Ontario community]...there were more married women in the profession [than in the city schools]....And these married women were leftovers from the war, where married women were called upon to come into the classroom and take over due to the shortage of men."²⁴ The Canadian census also confirms that in "1931 only 3 per cent of all women teachers were married....By 1951, 28 per cent of women...in teaching were married."²⁵ This represented the most significant demographic shift pertaining to the Canadian teaching population in the twentieth century.

The Fall of the Vestal Virgin

FWTAO leaders did not accept married women as true professionals, but the teacher shortage caused by the baby boomers (now entering Ontario's schools) led them to admit married women to membership. Provincial Department of Education representatives, at their annual meetings, also urged federation leaders to involve married women in their organization.

²¹Elizabeth Graham, "Schoolmarm and Early Teaching in Ontario" in: *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930* (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974), 196.

²²Kinnear, "Mostly for the Male Members," 10.

²³FWTAO Archives, Annual Meeting Minutes, 1954, 10.

²⁴"Woman Teacher," (ACPID044).

²⁵Reynolds, "Too Limiting a Liberation", 151.

For example, Ontario Chief Inspector V. K. Greer attended the federation's 1943 meeting and stated, on behalf of the Department of Education, that "due to the aid of married teachers and teachers from other provinces, Ontario was not suffering from [teacher] shortage to any great extent."²⁶

The Canadian federal government insisted that the contributions of married women in the profession should be recognized and that they should not encounter tenure obstacles. In 1954, for instance, the Women's Bureau of the Federal Department of Labour was established to facilitate a "greater understanding of the contribution of women in the labour force,"²⁷ with particular focus on married women in the occupational realm. The Ontario Minister of Education requested that women continue with their teaching appointments after marriage in Circular 174 and the *School Master*, the ministry's official organ subsequently printed this request. The Working Party on the Supply of Women Teachers reported in 1950 that "despite bold efforts to estimate requirements for four years ahead and to provide additional training places"²⁸ the supply of women teachers still fell short.

Influenced by the pressure to better understand the married-woman teacher phenomenon, the FWTAO conducted a large-scale survey of the general policies and working conditions of married women teachers in Ontario public schools in 1955. That survey revealed that Ontario school boards tended not to adopt discriminatory hiring practices and eagerly to appointed married women to meet the escalating need for teachers. One woman interviewed recalled that she got married shortly after her first teaching appointment and was not forced to leave the profession: "The secretary of the board came almost on bended knee, would I please come and teach? They couldn't get a teacher."²⁹ By 1958, the FWTAO found that "52 percent of women teachers [in the province] were single, 41 percent married, [and] 6 percent in religious orders."³⁰ As a result of this finding, the women teachers' federation came to accept that married women teachers made an important contribution to the profession. In 1952, the federation status committee prepared an influential report with a significant section devoted to the married woman teacher. The report read as follows: "The committee observed that married woman were greatly needed and had a valuable contribution to make, that the attitude of some teachers, trustees and inspectors was somewhat upsetting; and that married status has nothing to do with professionalism. It was advised that this group suggest to some

²⁶FWTAO Archives, Annual Meeting Minutes, 1943, 3.

²⁷Mair Davies, "Women Under the Microscope," *Food For Thought* 17:6 (August 1957), 384.

²⁸*Journal of Education*, 1950, 434.

²⁹"Woman Teacher," (ACPID017).

³⁰FWTAO Archives, Annual Meeting Minutes, 1961, 9.

of their own number the advisability of procuring home help when necessary and that married status is not an excuse for evading responsibility nor for neglecting professional reading.”³¹ In the same year, the FWTAO’s educational finance committee presented a report to the annual meeting which stated that there “should be no discrimination against married women teachers in regard to salary or terms of employment — married women should be engaged on the same basis as single teachers. However, if a Board has a policy in effect at the time the teachers are employed or when they marry, the teachers are necessarily aware of it and therefore accept it. If a change in policy is desired, the salary committee should approach the Board.”³²

Acceptance of married women teachers among the FWTAO was evident in the late 1940s. For instance, in 1949 the federation, along with the Ontario Public School Men Teacher’s Federations (OPSMTF), published an article entitled “When a Teacher Weds: Are Marriage and Teaching Incompatible?” in the *Educational Courier*, a joint publication of the two associations. The essay by acclaimed United States author Lucille Ellison began with the personal statement that she “wished marriage to play the same part in my life that it does in the life of a man, and before marriage to be prepared for a possible incompetency on the part of my husband, as well as for widowhood.”³³ Arguing that married women teachers were more normal and emotionally well adjusted sexually than their single counterparts, Ellison condemned the once sanctified ideal of the vestal virgin. Historian Alison Oram also notes in this period that the British increasingly saw single-female teachers as abnormal and their childless state unnatural. “Spinster teachers’ lack of participation in motherhood was not only inauspicious for the future of the state and of the race but, if they didn’t watch out, it could also be psychologically harmful to themselves.”³⁴

In the United States, spinster teachers were sometimes recognized as “mannish lesbians,”³⁵ and this recognition began to permeate the Canadian public imaginary as the mid twentieth century grew near. Vicinus points out that “Although the single woman’s sexuality — active, failed, or denied — was most frequently discussed in code, it was always an issue for the opponents of women’s single-sex communities and institutions”³⁶ in the early twentieth-century British context. Sexologist Richard von Krafft-

³¹FWTAO Archives, Board of Directors Meeting Minutes, December 1952.

³²FWTAO Archives, Finance Committee Report, 1952.

³³Lucille Ellison, “When a Teacher Weds: Are Marriage and Teaching Incompatible?,” *Kansas Teacher* (1937), Reprinted in *The Educational Courier* (June 1949), 13.

³⁴Oram, “Embittered, Sexless or Homosexual,” 104.

³⁵Blount, “Spinsters, Bachelors, and Other Gender Transgressors in School Employment, 1850-1990,” 89.

³⁶Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 32.

Ebing, whose work in the budding field of sexology proved influential in postwar North America, equated lesbianism with feminist initiatives in the workplace. Single-sex societies like female teachers' associations were looked upon with new wonderment and suspicion. Concern about the all-female composition of the FWTAO was expressed as a need to promote "wholesome" living, a code word for normative female heterosexual adjustment.

The Female Teacher and the Pupil as Forbidden Fruit

Expected to present themselves as vestal virgins, single-female teachers sometimes channeled their desires toward older students. British teacher historian Alison Oram explained that women's "sexuality in the interwar period, as in the nineteenth century, to a large extent, conflated with maternal instinct."³⁷ As long as desire was seen to be an expression of maternal love, the teacher could focus it on a student. The paradox, as Vicinus conceptualizes it, was that

Bodily self-control became a means of expressing self, or the fulfillment of desire. Love itself was not displaced but focused upon a distant object, while nonfulfillment — sacrifice — became the source of personal satisfaction. The emotions were focused upon a distant, inaccessible but admired student or [associate] teacher, or even the headmistress; differences in age and authority created a distance that intensified desire. The loved one became the object of desire that found its expression through symbolic acts rather than actual physical closeness or even friendship in an ordinary sense of daily contact and conversation. Distance was a means of deepening a pleasure that preferred nonsexual fulfillment.³⁸

The same kind of symbolic love and intense friendship was permitted between adult women in education and there is evidence of this well into the mid twentieth-century North American context.³⁹

Female desirability became an identified professional advantage for gaining appointment in Ontario's city schools. The Toronto Board of Education Chairman, W. R. Cockburn, celebrated the ideal of heterosexual attractiveness: "We want on our staff girls who are attractive to men—for if that is the case they are more likely to be attractive to children. In short, we like to get the marriageable type of girl as teachers. They may not desire to spend all their lives in the schools, but they are likely to give us five or

³⁷Oram, "Embittered, Sexless or Homosexual," 103.

³⁸Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 188.

³⁹See: Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Quill William Morrow, 1981) and Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

six years of useful service. The girl who looks forward to a bachelor life and a maximum salary of \$3,300 in my view is not as likely to have that 'richness of personality' that we define as glamour."⁴⁰ A retired teacher, who taught in the mid 1940s, believed that female teachers should be attractive to children. She said that the "kids liked you to be dressed nicely, interestingly and...[recalled that she had] a black dress that the kids liked and they would say, it's about time you wore that black dress again....[The teacher replied:] I thought you didn't like black dresses [recalling that they complained about their previous teacher's black attire and subsequently learned that] it was the colour of the dress and that sort of thing and whether you wore it all the time [that was unappealing to adolescent children]."⁴¹ Commenting at length about how the appearance and desirability of the teacher was important to students, the same teacher told a story about a pupil who questioned her about the meaning of the word "virgin" in a class on hair design. The instructor "explained that it was hair that had never been touched and so forth and then...[the student] said, are you a virgin...[and the teacher replied] oh Mary I've had my hair permed many number of times."⁴² The story serves as a not uncommon tale about the single-female teacher and her ability to outwit an inquiring student, but it also suggests that pupils were interested in teacher sexuality.

Vicinus, speaking of symbolic courting rituals between female teachers and girl students in Britain, goes so far as to suggest that "the admiration of a young girl or teacher for an older prefect or teacher in authority was a crucial element in school life that often continued into other all-female institutions."⁴³ The virtue of abstinence represented the key to understanding such desire. "Fantasies of self-service and self-sacrifice were fostered by the very distance between the lover and the loved one. For most young girls emotions focused on the head girl or...a favored young teacher — all remote, yet familiar and publicly admired figures."⁴⁴ United States sociologist Willard Wallard, writing in the 1930s about the carefully disguised erotic dimension to the pedagogical encounter, understood opposite-sex crushes between teacher and pupil to be normal and same-sex infatuations to be abnormal: a "report based upon sex attraction frequently arises between teachers and students. Usually it is cross-sexual and entirely normal...because of the taboo upon affectional interchange between teachers and students, teachers usually attempt to suppress or to disguise such feelings."⁴⁵

⁴⁰W. R. Cockburn, "Can't Get Glamour Girls," *Toronto Daily Star*, 30 March, 1946.

⁴¹"Woman Teacher," (ACPID093).

⁴²Ibid, (ACPID093).

⁴³Vicinus, *Independent Women*, 187-188.

⁴⁴Ibid, 190.

⁴⁵Willard Waller, *The Sociology of Teaching* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1932), 144.

Whether or not female teachers sublimated their sexual impulses is an open question, but retired Ontario teachers had numerous recollections of their encounters with interested students in the decades leading up to and including the postwar period. One teacher who taught in the 1940s fondly remembered a dance organized by the ratepayers to welcome her to the community and said that she recalled vividly "...a cute little fellow. He was eleven or twelve, a little blonde guy and he comes over and stands up and he bows over, may I have this dance Miss...and I thought, dear God what am I reduced to [I] have to dance with a kid that...but oh, was he ever a good dancer."⁴⁶ The same teacher, in her twenties, had also been asked out on a date by one of her seventeen-year-old male students. "He did ask me for a date. I don't know what he had in mind because, it was...[a desolate community and] unless you went for a walk on the railroad track, there was no place to go."⁴⁷

Sexologists, psychologists, and psychoanalysts alike thought teacher-pupil crushes emotionally immature, insignificant, and benign. Educational authorities must have agreed because they reserved the most severe penalties for adult heterosexual relationships until the 1950s. Ontario normal schools, for example, continued to frown upon the marital option for their female candidates well after the school boards began to relax their marital restrictions. One Canadian teacher recalled a female "Normalite who, when she got married, was let go. I know of others who didn't reveal they were married, in order to continue teaching."⁴⁸ Quite a number of women "were married to servicemen, and when the men were sent overseas, they just went on living, as if they hadn't been married. Didn't tell anybody"⁴⁹ and found employment along with the single teacher candidates. Even in the 1950s some normal schools did not accept marriage. One retired woman teacher reflecting on her Ontario teacher training said that she could "remember it being very frowned upon...if you became engaged. I remember a girl getting a ring at Christmas and she actually hid the fact. Now, it was never said...but it was implied. The undercurrent was if you got engaged, you would get married, then you were going to have a family, so the school board hired you with the idea that you were going to be there for a few years, and you wouldn't be."⁵⁰

Postwar Fear of the Female Homosexual and the "Mannish" Woman

The postwar *Zeitgeist* embraced the ideal of heterosexual marriage. Traditional gender roles relegated women to monogamous familial units

⁴⁶"Woman Teacher," (ACPID091).

⁴⁷Ibid, (ACPID091).

⁴⁸Ibid, (ACPID017).

⁴⁹Ibid, (ACPID017).

⁵⁰Ibid, (ACPID043).

where motherhood, marriage, and household domesticity shaped their identities. Female employment in the public sphere was often discouraged. This was especially true for married women workers, who presumably had a working husband. Educational advancement for women raised suspicion and romantic female friendships forged over the war years now appeared abnormal. Females would find happiness in companionship marriage, and their sexuality would blossom within the confines of the matrimonial bed.

In this period, champions of traditional female gender roles viewed the working woman with contempt because of her marital status. Her presence in the occupational sector revealed an unacceptable “masculine” orientation. In the words of American historian Bonnie Smith, “The professional woman was an imprecise entity, a paradox, a blur.”⁵¹ Carolyn Strange argued, in her study of the single female worker in the early twentieth century, that “Both the New Woman and the working girl conjured up fears of sexual disorder,”⁵² and the married working woman became both a threat and an anomaly despite the need for her service in many occupational sectors.

The popular Canadian woman’s magazine *Chatelaine* asked: has the married woman worker “rejected her own role as a woman? Is she becoming one of those masculine women? Will she end up as a battle-axe?”⁵³ One contributor to the magazine’s special issue on marriage told a cautionary tale about a woman whose “job outside the home had simply and gradually replaced her marriage and family as the main interest in her life. She was a schoolteacher when she married Fred, an accountant, fifteen years ago. They lived in an apartment, but after they had two boys they decided to buy a house. That was when Rita started to work in an office ‘to help pay for the house.’ She has helped pay for many things in the eight years since then. She likes office work and leaves most of the housekeeping to her husband and sons.”⁵⁴ The story illustrated how the husband suffered when his domestic partner worked in the public sphere. It is also a moral cautionary tale about gender roles turned upside down in the nuclear family.

Higher education for women became associated with an unattractive, spinster-like persona, and teachers found themselves cautioned against attaining advanced degrees. For example, one Canadian teacher expressed surprise by her male principal’s attempt to dissuade her from taking university

⁵¹“The Shortage of Women Teachers,” *The Journal of Education* (August 1950): 435. Bonnie Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 197.

⁵²Carolyn Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 9.

⁵³Sidonie M. Gruenberg and Hilda Sidney Krech, “The Many Lives of Modern Woman: A Guide to Happiness in Her Complex Role,” *Chatelaine*, (August 1952), 48.

⁵⁴Dorothy Manning, “I quit my job to save my marriage” *Chatelaine* (June 1955), 17.

courses because he felt that “the men won’t be able to keep up”⁵⁵ and that this would thwart her attempt to find a husband. When questioned about the impact of her principal’s comments, this teacher revealed that she did take him somewhat seriously because at that time a “single woman was a nobody.”⁵⁶ Speaking of the 1950s in particular, she recalled with disdain a single woman teacher who “had no intention of marrying, but she was very clever, and was very stupid at the same time. She was [one of] the first woman teachers in Ontario to get her Ph.D. in education, but she couldn’t carry on a conversation with anybody. People avoided her. She’s just not approachable.”⁵⁷

Popular writing on marital unhappiness documented concern about women deviating from their socially assigned roles as mothers and wives. For instance, an “expert” on divorce, who wrote for *Chatelaine* magazine, revealed that marriage breakdowns are often caused by wives “who are not really in love when they marry.”⁵⁸ In another magazine article, a doctor suggested that there was a “current mood of nameless longing that is sweeping modern housewives.”⁵⁹ Gerald Anglin, a writer for *Chatelaine* asserted that “Even this modern Eden has its own particular snake in the grass, however. It isn’t anything venomous, dramatic or soap-operaish...it’s the sniggling little wriggler of discontent that troubles almost every intelligent, well-adjusted, happily married and child blessed Canadian woman at least occasionally—and sometimes steadily.”⁶⁰ Yet another writer for the popular women’s journal believed that husbands deserted their wives because the women in unhappy unions did not care to beautify themselves for their men. Outlining what he claimed to be an all-too-common scenario, the columnist wrote: “What a frightful sight a woman is made to look before retiring for the night. I can’t help thinking that this may be the cause of many marriage breakdowns. The hair is gathered up in a kind of net strapped under the chin, and the face and neck are smeared with hideous cream.”⁶¹

Popular advice and expert opinion in the postwar era suggested that if women no longer wanted to please men aesthetically or in the marriage bed, then they would have to find an extracurricular trade or job to make themselves socially useful. This sentiment can be seen in the attitude expressed by one columnist for *Chatelaine* magazine who revealed a worry about the beauty and desirability of the aging housewife to her husband: “The change

⁵⁵“Woman Teacher,” (ACPID044).

⁵⁶Ibid, (ACPID044).

⁵⁷Ibid, (ACPID044).

⁵⁸Mary Jukes, “I Learned to Live with a Man” *Chatelaine*, (April 1950), 7.

⁵⁹Marion Hilliard, “Stop being just a housewife,” *Chatelaine*, (September 1956), 11.

⁶⁰Gerald Anglin, “Who has won the war between the sexes?,” *Chatelaine*, (June 1955),

66.

⁶¹Fred Bodsworth, “Runaways From Marriage,” *Chatelaine*, (January 1951), 61.

in her appearance, which had counted for so much, makes her unsure and so she must acquire a skill to compensate for her loss.”⁶²

Psychologists, in writings about female homosexuality, believed that women must adopt a trade to compensate for an aesthetic loss. One psychiatrist concerned with female homosexuality suggested that work in the public sphere, for women, was sometimes a refuge for those who had “unwholesome” sexualities. “By becoming deeply engrossed in their work, in a hobby, or in some special activity, many...women have inhibited their homosexual tendencies and have re-directed their energies into more socially approved channels.”⁶³ Mental hygiene specialists in Canada also urged homosexuals “like all unmarried folk, [to] learn to find satisfaction for their needs for affection and belonging in a more diffused manner in a circle of good friends who care for them and take responsibility for them.”⁶⁴ School teaching became, in mental hygiene circles, a socially acceptable means to sublimate female homosexuality.

The Freudian defense mechanism of sexual sublimation through work lead not to the repression of female homosexuality but to the spread of what came to be recognized as lesbianism. Social historian Lillian Faderman has argued that education, and occupational cultures heavily populated by women, allowed the single, financially independent woman to meet and build lives with other women similarly inclined toward same sex desire.⁶⁵ Likewise, educational cultures enabled large numbers of women to reside together in boarding houses, apartments, and in teacherages. As a result, single female teachers would be free to live with other professional woman in what came to be known as a “Boston” or “Wellesley marriage.”

Faderman and Vicinus correctly argued that the postwar period brought with it contempt for occupations dominated by women and “Boston Marriages” in particular. However, psychologists, resigned to the inevitability of female homosexuality, continued to assert that such networks proved socially beneficial and this, ironically, allowed for the continued development of such communities and liaisons in some educational contexts. For example, it was thought that “unmarried women teachers who are close friends may find a considerable degree of companionship in sharing living quarters”⁶⁶ and so such an arrangement was recommended as long as it did not become “unwholesome.” In a separate discussion about female teacher personality development, W. F. Bruce and A. J. Holden recommended a “mature form

⁶²Hilliard, “Stop being just a housewife,” 91.

⁶³John K. McCreary, “Psychopathia Homosexualis,” *Canadian Journal of Psychology* 4:2 (1950), 74.

⁶⁴Samuel R. Laycock, “Homosexuality — A Mental Hygiene Problem” *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 63 (September 1950), 249.

⁶⁵See: Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, and Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*.

⁶⁶Laycock, *Mental hygiene in the school*, 81.

of 'chumming' in the form of a close and wholesome friendship with a fellow-teacher or other friend may be helpful to teachers of both sexes."⁶⁷

Mental hygienists and psychoanalysts alike, believed that when single women make healthy adjustments to the unmarried state they can avoid emotional sensitivity and what they called "oldmaidish compensatory behaviour."⁶⁸ As earlier argued by psychoanalyst Karl Abraham, celibate women "deprived of normal genital gratification tend to surliness as a rule. A constant tension of the line of the nostril together with a slight lifting of the upper lip seem to me significant facial characteristics of such people."⁶⁹ Because the marital union represented the only legitimate space for sexual expression, the single female, often thought to have been denied sexual gratification, became vulnerable to unflattering images of the (pent-up, sexually frustrated) spinster.

The importance placed on heterosexual availability was evident in Ontario normal schools. For example, one Canadian interviewee was impressed by a music teacher at normal who "talked about how we should dress, we should wear high heels, and of course there was no such thing as slacks in those days, and makeup, and she talked about nail polish. She said it should be very light or clear, but if you're going to wear the bright red, make sure it's neat, and not have it all chipped and so on. And then she went into lipstick, and she said girls looked better with lipstick on, and they should wear some. And so, if you had a problem about clothes or anything like that, you felt you could go to her, and talk to her."⁷⁰ The need to make the normal hospitable to the marriage-minded teacher candidate also appeared evident in the *Journal of Education*. It proclaimed that "Girls take less readily to segregation during training or do not submit to the circumstances which compel the single, more mobile, teacher to take up work in an area remote from home and highly expensive in necessary travel and services."⁷¹ One retired teacher recalled the emphasis on marital availability when she sought guidance about her practicum placement at an Ontario normal school. Her instructor did not coach her on the finer points of pedagogical methods but encouraged her to apply make-up. The instructor asked: "You ever thought of wearing lipstick and a little bit of rouge? That was her comment to me. I'm thinking, No! I'm not here for you to tell me I should be wearing make-up."⁷²

⁶⁷W. F. Bruce and A. J. Holden, *The Teacher's Personal Development* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1957).

⁶⁸Samuel R. Laycock, *Mental Hygiene in the School* (Canada Copp Clark Press, 1960), 81.

⁶⁹Karl Abraham, *Selected Papers of Karl Abraham* (New York: Basic Books Inc, 1927), 391.

⁷⁰"Woman Teacher," (ACPID044).

⁷¹*Journal of Education*, 1950, 435.

⁷²"Woman Teacher," (ACPID010).

Contemporary experts on marriage believed that a “woman’s vanity is an important thing. Getting married is one of the high points in her life.”⁷³ Master teachers of education sought to cultivate a new, more attractive heterosexual image for the teacher. An interviewee gave the most outlandish example of the new focus on marriage, recalling a psychology master at normal who “used to fuss with the girls over their diamonds. Lots of the girls got diamonds while they were there....[The psychology instructor] had a little place on the blackboard. He gave the girls that got diamonds stars...So I can remember...[the female candidates] going in there after Christmas, “Oh!...See my diamond!...And he’d put on a little star.”⁷⁴ Although the Ontario Canadian normal schools increasingly accepted engagement rings, one woman recalled being “told to take off your ring a few days ahead [of a school interview] if you happened to have one, so your finger didn’t show a sign that a ring was missing.”⁷⁵

The emphasis on heterosexual marriageability did not go unencumbered by contradictions for women. Popular perception suggested that females wanted to marry and they wanted to present themselves as heterosexually desirable and available to eligible bachelors, but it also held that too many women did not offer themselves to their spouse in the marriage bed. For example, Morgan Winters wrote about the problem of unconsummated marriages and suggested that the phenomenon should be attributed to the many women who failed to see heterosex as normal, healthy people.⁷⁶ Such women acted as “spoiled and thwarted children.”⁷⁷ The belief that women were childlike was, sometimes, used to argue that they were either sexually immature or homosexual. Sexologists believed that homosexuality signaled an arrest in early adolescent development. Samuel R. Laycock, a medical doctor and key player in the Canadian mental hygiene movement, asserted “Many individuals who never develop a wholesome sex life are insecure persons who are immature emotionally. Most sex deviations are an immature expression of the sex impulse.”⁷⁸ Women, were sometimes designated “polymorphously perverse,” meaning that their sexual capacities were not confined to adult genital contact in a heterosexual union. Sketching the prototype of the female homosexual, Laycock wrote that “many female homosexuals are masculine in their characteristics...[and explains that failure] to identify with the womanly qualities of their mother” incites an arrest in

⁷³Fred Bodsworth, “Runaways From Marriage,” *Chatelaine*, (January 1951), 62.

⁷⁴“Woman Teacher,” (ACPID002).

⁷⁵Ibid, (ACPID002).

⁷⁶Morgan Winters “Four Crises in Marriage,” *Chatelaine*, (March 1951), 54.

⁷⁷Ibid, 54.

⁷⁸Samuel R. Laycock, “How to Protect Your Child from Sex Deviates,” *Chatelaine*, (April 1956), 93.

“normal” female psychosexual development characteristic of the female invert.⁷⁹

One interviewed teacher recalled a debate in the school community about sexual deviance in the 1950s. Frustrated with the discussion, this teacher explained that administrators “wanted people who were certified sexual deviants to be given the heave ho by the profession and...remember[ed] standing up and saying, asking [sarcastically], where do you get a sexual deviant certificate?”⁸⁰ The OPSMTF also expressed concern about male homosexuality. That organization received a report from the chairman of the Counselling and Relations Committee outlining profiles of the sex deviant in the mid 1950s. Throughout the report, the executive to the men teachers’ federation learned that a “certain proportion of our male and female population will always be homosexuals.”⁸¹ Suggesting that the “problem” was a matter for the church and the state, the report advised the executive to regard the sexual pathology as a “private matter unless it involves force or is an affront to the public.”⁸²

One retired teacher reflected on a lesbian colleague in her teaching days and surmised that you “had to keep...[your sexual orientation] hidden up to recent years.”⁸³ This was the case for many homosexual teachers, male and female, who wished to avoid community scandal and professional castigation. Another female teacher interviewed confirmed that “if you happened to be homosexual...that was not accepted. If it was found out, you were gone or your life was made so miserable that you left because nobody would have the guts to stand up and say, we will not accept this but they made your life so miserable.”⁸⁴ Another woman interviewed recalled a disturbing case of a teacher who had to leave her teaching post “technically” because of a bad accident [and was put on Workman’s Compensation], but even before the accident occurred the School Board “had been trying to get rid of her. She was very mannish, homosexual and I really think she was probably persuaded to leave.”⁸⁵

In some instances female teachers covered for their homosexual colleagues in the hope of preventing dismissal. One teacher spoke fondly about a female colleague who had been dismissed for homosexuality. The maligned teacher allegedly engaged in relationships with both men and women, drank excessively, and because of her alcoholism often arrived late

⁷⁹Ibid, 94.

⁸⁰“Woman Teacher,” (ACPID110).

⁸¹Ontario Teachers’ Federation Archives, 1956, 2.

⁸²Ibid., 2.

⁸³“Woman Teacher,” (ACPID092).

⁸⁴Ibid, (ACPID092).

⁸⁵Ibid, (ACPID052).

or missed work. The interviewed teacher offered the following description of the situation: “we all really liked her, it was funny, and she was...She knew her English, I’m telling you, she was just...She...I think she had her M.A. and I don’t know whether she maybe even got her Ph.D., but she was just a character. We used to cover up for her all the time. She’d be drunk and she’d.... We’d have to.... We’d call up, and we’d send somebody down to get her to school.”⁸⁶ This teacher was also reportedly drawn to a senior female student who “did jump shots automatically playing basketball.”⁸⁷ Another teacher employed at the same school also described the same lesbian teacher as “brilliant...and [surmised that] maybe [she] had other problems too....Back in those days, you know, nobody talked about lesbians and homosexuality.”⁸⁸

Given the strong social expectation to partake in courting rituals leading to marriage in the postwar period, those women uninvolved in matrimonial pursuits were more likely to be designated abnormal than in earlier decades. Although some women who opted out of heterosexual family units would not be considered lesbian by contemporary standards, all long-term unmarried women teachers became vulnerable to innuendo or accusations of latent homosexuality. Closely knit friendships between women who lived together, platonic or otherwise, were likely to be rendered pathological, not because they were visibly homoerotic but because they represented a rejection of heterosexual familial structures and traditional gender roles. Some single, female teachers who may have had homosexual predilections maintained the convenience of living alone or with another woman given the demands of the teaching profession.

The Rise of the Married Female Teacher: Heterosexuality and Domestic Bliss

By the 1960s the status of the married woman teacher had changed. This was especially apparent in the organizational culture of the Ontario women teachers’ federation. For example, Kay Dwyer, a regular writer for the *Educational Courier*, a joint publication of the FWTAO and the OPSMTF, wrote that school boards now understood the married woman teacher with children to be an “integral part of our present day classrooms.”⁸⁹ She was now believed to be a psychologically well-adjusted mother and housewife with only “wholesome” inclinations. Dwyer then proceeded to write that “Popular ideas are that many teach to escape household drudgery or to supplement a husband’s marginal income—or that some are thwarted wives

⁸⁶Ibid, (ACPID004).

⁸⁷Ibid, (ACPID004).

⁸⁸Ibid, (ACPID005).

⁸⁹Kay Dwyer, “The Married Woman Career Teacher Is Here to Stay,” *The Educational Courier* 24:2 (November/December 1963), 14.

and mothers who feel the classroom will give them a power over destinies which they cannot experience in their own homes."⁹⁰ Dwyer argued that "most [married women teachers] come from happy, well-run homes and are teaching to enrich their own lives, the lives of others, and to raise their family's standard of living."⁹¹

A will to self-sacrifice was believed to drive the professionalism of the married teacher. The single, female teacher designated spinster became martyr-like and, as Vicinus argued, she "transformed this passive role into one of active spirituality and passionate social service."⁹² This is similar to the newer caricature of the married, woman teacher. This more recent portrayal depicts the married, female teacher as selfless, altruistic, and philanthropic. This construction proved necessary to garner social approval of the married woman teacher and to assure skeptics that she is not selfish and, thus, unfeminine. As described by Dwyer, the married woman teaches purely from a "love of children and a desire to help them, force of habit, or that they just couldn't be happy without teaching. Some felt there was a scarcity of teachers and that they should help. Others said they became more interesting people when they could teach and take part in the many extramural activities of the school."⁹³ Another married woman is said to "help deserving students supplement their meager [financial] resources to get high school and university educations. Another gives a good part of her salary to educate a priest in Japan. Others had relatives who needed financial help, and taught school because they didn't think it fair to burden husbands with the responsibility."⁹⁴ The discussion concluded with a call for psychologically well-adjusted married teachers. The loss of the more "mature" married woman from the profession was described in yet another context as "wastage...[and] in the United States...this phenomenon is described as 'female fallout.'"⁹⁵

The heterosexual woman no longer appeared to be hidden from school children. This is evident in the growing acceptance not only of married, female teachers but of pregnant teachers. Confirmed by a substantial majority of teachers interviewed, female teachers felt less pressure to resign upon pregnancy. School policies dictating that married women should leave their post when "pregnancy becomes apparent" were challenged.⁹⁶ An article on "anti-mother" discrimination argued that "Whether pregnancy is apparent

⁹⁰Ibid, 14.

⁹¹Ibid, 14.

⁹²Vicinus, *Independent Women* 5.

⁹³Dwyer, "The Married Woman Career Teacher Is Here to Stay," 14.

⁹⁴Ibid., 14 -15.

⁹⁵"We look divine as we advance, have we seen ourselves retreating?," *The Educational Courier*, 35, 2, (1964), 11.

⁹⁶Ibid, 11.

or not is not the business of busybodies. Neither is pregnancy anything to hide from children. More, the systematic conspiracy of yesterday to hide from children the fact of pregnancy contributed not a little misery to many children as they grew up. It helps children to have a wholesome attitude towards pregnancy if they see that teacher, as well as mother, takes it as a normal thing and carries on with her work.⁹⁷ The insistence on portraying pregnancy as “normal” and “natural” became interspersed with concern about those women teachers who could “manage the children of other mothers but were not having children of their own.... This group of teachers with phobic illnesses encountered difficulty in producing children, largely as a result of...[unhealthy] identifications with their mothers.”⁹⁸

Many Ontario women teachers in the 1960s refused the image of the spinster teacher because of the strong negative connotations associated with spinster teacher gender identity. As one narrator explained, she did not adopt the older teacher persona with the “glasses on your nose and the bun in the back of your head and...oxfords.”⁹⁹ Another teacher interviewed said that she had “many spinster aunts who are teachers and I swore I would never teach.”¹⁰⁰ Reticent about the image her aunts embodied, this retired teacher explained that she perceived her aunts to be “bossy and domineering...[and that she] didn’t want to see...[herself] that way.”¹⁰¹ Speaking about British fiction, Vicinus writes that “foolish maiden aunts were confined by comedy with remarkable ease, but in real life they could be frightening portents of a world upside down,”¹⁰² and this sketch also proved salient in the postwar Canadian context.

The spinster image, once celebrated by early advocates of teacher professionalism, seemed to be unhealthy and associated with latent homosexuality. Female teachers felt compelled to renounce the old-maid persona. One heterosexual teacher recalled that her own teachers remained “maiden ladies...[but that for her generation] marriage was fine” and so she got married in 1962 and some of her students attended the ceremony.¹⁰³ An article on why women teach, published in the Ontario elementary school teachers’ magazine, attempted to differentiate the modern teacher from the spinster now seen as a social outcast. The author wrote:

It may seem strange to parents, but teachers are very much like other people.
We are just as interested as the general run of mankind in fashions, the weather,

⁹⁷Ibid, 12.

⁹⁸Karem J. Monsour, “School Phobia in Teachers,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 31 (1961), 348-349.

⁹⁹“Woman Teacher,” (ACPID039).

¹⁰⁰Ibid, (ACPID072).

¹⁰¹Ibid, (ACPID072).

¹⁰²Vicinus, *Independent Women* 32.

¹⁰³“Woman Teacher,” (ACPID092).

the consequences of nuclear fallout, the arts, and the latest scandal...and when we go to a party we would like to be treated as people and not as a race apart. We are also just as sensitive as other people about the kind of humour aimed at us. Jokes about ethnic minorities are now considered in poor taste, but the teacher is still fair game. We smile politely the first hundred times we hear the joke about the three sexes - male, female, and teacher.¹⁰⁴

City newspapers advertised for a “teacher or lady,”¹⁰⁵ again signaling the distinction made between the female pedagogue and the feminine gender identity of the more prototypical woman.

Social historian Bonnie Smith writes that a “modern sensitivity to the possibility of there being a ‘third sex’”¹⁰⁶ emerged as women entered into professional cultures. Because of rigid gender roles, transgressions of such roles signaled new and distinct gender identities. Of course, the spinster persona predated the mid twentieth-century public concern about female sexual deviance, but never before had the construction of the spinster been recognized as an embodiment of sexual- and gender-identity transgression. This made the spinster teacher identity increasingly difficult to inhabit. Women teachers’ federations refused to speak outwardly in support of the unmarried teacher in both the postwar Canadian and the British context.¹⁰⁷ One unmarried Canadian teacher wrote a letter of complaint to the FWTAO in the 1950s stating that “a great many [younger teachers] regard older teachers—none too secretly alas!—as old hags or bags or squares.”¹⁰⁸

Historians P. T. Rooke and R. L. Schnell speculated that the attitudes held by the morally indignant married teacher about her single colleague “must have annoyed all those other single women who had pioneered in the work force earlier in the century and proven themselves steady, resourceful, and responsible while opening careers for married women.”¹⁰⁹ A similar state of affairs can be seen in reports about the animosity between the single and married women teachers in the work place. One interviewed teacher explains: “There were a couple of us that were single...and we were higher paid because we worked our way up the grid by taking courses and there was always comments made about, ‘well you’re single, I mean you can take more courses than we can because you know, we have family responsibilities.’ And I remember at one point, we said well you chose that. That was your

¹⁰⁴“Why Teach?,” *The Educational Courier* 35: 5 (1965), 15.

¹⁰⁵“Rooms for rent,” *The Educational Courier*, 24: 2 (November–December 1963), 26.

¹⁰⁶Bonnie Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 185.

¹⁰⁷Oram, “Serving two masters?” 134–148.

¹⁰⁸Cited in Pat Stanton and Beth Light, *Speak With Their Own Voices: A Documentary History of the Federation of Women Teachers’ Associations of Ontario and the Women Elementary Public School Teachers of Ontario* (Toronto: FWTAO, 1987), 125.

¹⁰⁹T. Rooke and R. L. Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart: Charlotte Whitton, A Feminist on the Right* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), 200.

choice and we chose to go this route.”¹¹⁰ A very successful art teacher, married at the time, relayed that her students “got quite a lot of prizes in art and so . . . we got a prize for the best display . . . and some of those married ladies who’d been teaching for a long time were quite angry. They had got those prizes before.”¹¹¹ Elizabeth Edwards also identified animosity between married and single women teachers in her research and suggested that “many of the unmarried staff disliked married women and envied their social and sexual status.”¹¹²

Another example of the problem posed by the single, female teacher is observable in dismissal cases arbitrated by the Ontario teachers’ federations. As explained by the executive assistant of the FWTAO: “On the first Friday evening in September...[a single woman teacher] and a friend went to “beer call” in the Officers’ Mess. The atmosphere was very cold; very few spoke and no one danced with them. She attributes this to the feeling of superiority of the officers at Metz and that most of them are married men.”¹¹³ Although far from prim and proper in the tradition of the Victorian spinster, the women in the Officer’s Mess Hall demonstrated an unusually provocative heterosexuality which, to the educational community, seemed to be deviant and, thus, not unlike the female homosexual. The single career woman who embraced her sexuality could be heterosexual and seductive in the tradition of the flapper or a mannish lesbian in the tradition of the maligned homosexual. These caricatures were neither socially prudent or professionally sanctioned.

The Female Heterosexual Ideal of Beauty and the Lecherous Male Principal

In the 1960s female teachers had to dress in ways that appealed to heterosexual men. At this time, one Canadian teacher recalls “we couldn’t wear pants, we could wear a miniskirt but we couldn’t wear slacks...which seems strange, and there was one Superintendent who had the reputation of not liking pantsuits, so the idea was, well make sure that your pantsuit, your tunic top, could pass as a miniskirt, and if so and so arrives, take your pants off.”¹¹⁴ Some women who refused to adopt the heterosexual feminine ideal of beauty became social outcasts. For example, a single Ontario woman teacher found herself shunned by her colleagues for not making herself look pretty. She wore “Very dowdy clothes, like...if you remember Eaton’s catalogues, and women’s house dresses, she’d wear one of those. A string

¹¹⁰“Woman Teacher,” (ACPID074).

¹¹¹Ibid, (ACPID007).

¹¹²Elizabeth Edwards, *Women in Teacher Training Colleges, 1900-1960: A Culture of Femininity* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 129.

¹¹³Ontario Teachers’ Federation Archives, Official Letter of Correspondence, 1964, 2.

¹¹⁴“Woman Teacher,” (ACPID026).

around the back. And she was quite wide in the hips, so that didn't do her any good either."¹¹⁵ Although "actually quite attractive,"¹¹⁶ the teacher interviewed explained that her choice of dress most unfortunate.

Despite the appeal to conventional femininity, women teachers began to protest the no pantsuit policy for both practical and principled reasons having to do with equity. One teacher confirmed that they "couldn't wear trousers to school. You could wear a miniskirt and high heels, but you couldn't wear trousers. And I can remember being the...[first in my school]. I wore a trouser suit to school, and got away with it, then everyone started doing it."¹¹⁷ Another teacher in the same community recalled that "Part of the transition [governing dress] was being able to wear slacks to school and the principal that I was teaching for at the time that transition happened [and the principal] wanted approval of what you were going to wear so you had to bring in and show him what you were wearing...this is the pantsuit I'm going to wear to school."¹¹⁸

Many interviewed women identified sexism to be the problem with school administrative culture. Having had enough of what she referred to as the "chauvinist" environment, one daring teacher decided to cross-dress at her principals' meeting. "My first principals meeting, there's me and the thirty-nine guys, so they all come in their suits, so I thought, I'm going to go in a suit too. So away I go to Toronto and buy this wool suit" which she wore to the shock and bewilderment of the men in attendance.¹¹⁹ As confirmed by Faderman, many professional women "felt themselves forced into dress and behavior that was also characterized as 'masculine'...[and so they wore] 'man-tailored suits,' shirtwaists, stiff collars and four-in-hand ties to work" not always because they preferred to cross-dress, but because they needed to repudiate "feminine furbelows" in order to be taken seriously.¹²⁰ Because pantsuits were discouraged it was difficult for female teachers to pursue administrative roles that required a "masculine" presentation of self.

In psychological studies, women who repudiated their femininity could be distinguished by the way they "refrain from wearing attractive clothes, dancing, and participation in general in anything in the sphere of the erotic."¹²¹ For psychoanalyst Karen Horney, the frigid woman (read homosexual) often displayed "distinct masculine attitudes and strong feelings of aversion for the feminine role. The secondary sex characteristics—voice,

¹¹⁵Tbid, (ACPID044).

¹¹⁶Tbid, (ACPID044).

¹¹⁷Tbid, (ACPID042).

¹¹⁸Tbid, (ACPID089).

¹¹⁹Tbid, (ACPID070).

¹²⁰Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* 20.

¹²¹Karen Horney, *Feminine Psychology* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1967),

hair, bones—of some of this group tend toward the masculine, but most of them have an absolutely female habitus.”¹²² This drew an unmistakable parallel between the spinster teacher and the female homosexual. Both were, in various ways, described to be masculine in appearance, to have unusually rigid facial features, disturbing complexions, as well as unfeminine dispositions and habits of mind.

Although an ideal of heterosexual desirability permeated the educational community, people continued to be suspicious of sexualities that appeared to be foreign, wanton, or fetishistic. For example, one Canadian woman who had joined the Women’s Institute was told that she was “too worldly because...[she] wore earrings.”¹²³ Another white woman who immigrated to Canada was asked if women in “Britain all wear their skirts that short? [The teacher replied]...well yes...and he said well you know we’re a Catholic system and would you mind lengthening your dresses before September?”¹²⁴ One teacher interviewed recalled a male principal who had a concern about women’s open-toed sandals: He refused to allow teachers to wear them because “toes could be a fetish for somebody.”¹²⁵ As Carolyn Strange points out in her historical study, “working girls’ alleged hyper-heterosexuality drew the attention not only of psychiatrists but of club-women, medical experts, the police, and the courts,”¹²⁶ and school administrators also became pensive and troubled by salacious female garments.

Inappropriate references to female sexual practices were used to dismiss professional accomplishments and to prevent upward career mobility. For example, one female administrator reflected upon the frustration she felt when male administrators would “make disparaging remarks [about how she]...got...[her position]....Who did you sleep with and then things now that would never be allowed were allowed at that time and you wouldn’t dare say boo. And I know it affected my whole career that I never wanted it to be said that they couldn’t fire me because I was the sole support for three children. I was going to be the very best teacher that you could possibly be and so that I would get there by my merit not because someone was sorry for me that I had three children to bring up.”¹²⁷ A trustee approached another teacher about her administrative aspirations in the 1960s. The teacher explains: He asked “did I want to become a vice-principal, and he’d make sure I got one, and I found out afterwards that he’d had a relationship with a woman teacher, and she’d got a vice-principalship out of it.”¹²⁸ Another

¹²²Ibid, 165.

¹²³“Woman Teacher,” (ACPID041).

¹²⁴Ibid, (ACPID072).

¹²⁵Ibid, (ACPID002).

¹²⁶Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem* 10.

¹²⁷“Woman Teacher,” (ACPID040).

¹²⁸Ibid, (ACPID023).

retired woman teacher knew “of one case...were there was an affair between the principal and one of the teachers, and he helped her up the ladder....And then she had to move, which was so often the case. If any trouble occurred between a male and female, or if she got married, then it was the female who moved on and the man who stayed.”¹²⁹

Some teachers adopted masculine traits to move up the administrative ladder. As one teacher revealed, “The only female administrators in the board that I met...[in the mid-1960s] were all single women. Never married. Very tight, very proper, very unwomanish...you almost had to adopt the male way of operating in the world.”¹³⁰ The same woman recalled that female teachers were not heard when they spoke at school meetings because the men were too busy “looking them up and down. So, almost if you were pretty, you’d want to put a bag over your head if you wanted to have credibility.”¹³¹ Female teachers who pursued administrative positions found themselves caught in a double-bind: denounced for their masculine presentation of self or reduced to a sexual object for heterosexual male, administrative visual pleasure.

Retired women teachers often recalled episodes of sexual harassment from male principals. Because male administrators evaluated female teachers on conventional beauty it was difficult to refuse unwanted advances without professional castigation. One former teacher said that she “just went by the furnace room and the vice-principal called me in...[and] he made a real, tried to make a real pass with me and um, I refused, you know, I refused totally and oh he was insistent that he would kiss me and all this kind of stuff and I said, no way...[and] I got out of there and I [reported the incident to the principal] who...always gave me a glowing report, said that under the conditions that they thought they better move me to a junior school.”¹³² This same teacher further reported that most women who experienced sexual harassment kept the incident to themselves, evaded questions, or relocated to another school to avoid “talk.” One interviewee claimed that in the mid 1960s the male administrators she worked for would “stand at the bottom of the stairs and look up our skirts, because in ’65, ’66 that’s when we all had mini-skirts and we were all young and female.”¹³³ Another retired woman teacher spoke of “a good friend, who was teaching in a school over here, a nice looking young girl. She was being harassed by the principal. She rebuffed his advances, and he made it very miserable for her. And she came to me for help. I referred her to Federation. I don’t know just what

¹²⁹Ibid, (ACPID014).

¹³⁰Ibid, (ACPID041).

¹³¹Ibid, (ACPID041).

¹³²Ibid, (ACPID041).

¹³³Ibid, (ACPID041).

went on, but she was moved to a school just up the road.”¹³⁴ Reflecting on the period leading up to the 1970s, the same retired teacher said that she felt that “One of the worst problems we had in our schools would be romantic affairs with women teachers and principals, and that is really tough, because again the power...and what is a woman to do if the principal is hitting on her. If she denies his affections, he can make her life hell, so that was often...an innocent woman would be transferred because a principal had started the affair.”¹³⁵

The sexualization of the female teacher was, in the 1960s, unfortunately associated with newer, more rigid injunctions to partake in the institution of heterosexuality, whether it be in marriage or in a clandestine affair with a lascivious administrator. Conventional ideas about female beauty (and heterosexual availability) did not serve teachers well, particularly when they received unwanted sexual attention from male principals. Much like the earlier caricature of the spinster-teacher, the “glamour girl” soon to be or already married demanded that the female teacher be subservient and, in some instances, sexually available to male administrators. The masculine identified female teacher may have, in some instances, attained higher, administrative positions but she also became subjected to ridicule in the Ontario education community.

Conclusion

The eradication of the marriage ban in education was not as an unmitigated feminist gain for female teachers. Although married women could work, mother, and wed without fear of dismissal the single, female teacher fell from professional grace and enjoyed fewer protections in the postwar period. The never-married teacher was more likely to be seen as “unwholesome,” a social outcast in the postwar period. The marriage bars enabled women to opt out of heterosexual family structures without fear of persecution; their calling was to education and they were permitted to live independent lives or with women of their choosing. They also had more room to depart from traditional expressions of femininity. In the post-war period the teacher who chose—for whatever reason—to remain unmarried was marked as a social and psychological enigma.

The educational community saw the gender and sexual identity of the lesbian or lifelong, single female teacher as an anomaly, a peculiarity to be explained in the postwar period. The postwar emphasis on heterosexual marriage, femininity, and motherhood made unmarried women into social

¹³⁴Ibid, (ACPID017).

¹³⁵Ibid, (ACPID042).

outcasts. The burgeoning knowledge of female homosexuality and female gender inversion in professional societies dominated by women, developed by European and North American sexologists and psychologists, functioned to construct the single teacher as a pathology. Mental hygienists and advocates of teacher professionalism in Ontario contributed to the denigration of the lifelong, single female teacher as latent homosexual, as “mannish” woman, as emotionally maladjusted and as social deviant in a period inhospitable to variegated gender and sexual identifications.