

CHAPTER 1

The Gender and Sexual Transformation of School Work

In 1911, tensions between men and women ran high in the New York City schools. Women headed most classrooms in the system and some even had become high-ranking administrators. Grace Strachan, a feisty district superintendent in the city, dared to lead a campaign demanding equal wages for women and men teachers. In turn, male educators despaired about losing their already diminished places in the schools. They resisted equal pay by sex, arguing that if women received the same salaries as men, the few remaining male teachers would leave in disgust.¹

A headline from the *New York Times* captured the male teachers' concerns: "Appeal for Men Teachers—Boys Too Effeminate, Say Principals, When They Haven't Male Instructors." The article explained that "principals and men teachers are making an urgent appeal for more men teachers in the elementary schools, saying the lack of supervision and instruction by male teachers is a distinct loss to the boys." Worse still, the male educators interviewed in the piece contended that "under the present order of things, such boys end their school days without ever having had instruction from a man teacher. This . . . is a distinct discrimination against boys at an age when they most need instruction by men."² Male teachers had forwarded other arguments earlier in the equal pay campaign, ones that largely focused on the needs of men in the classroom. Such rhetoric did not sway public sentiment. This time, however, male teachers appealed not to their own welfare, but rather to that of their students. The tactical shift generated a positive response. Over the remainder of the twentieth century, many others would make similar appeals to the welfare of students as they promoted their own gender- and sexual orientation-specific policies in schools.

Despite the pleas of male educators and the effectiveness of this new rhetorical maneuver, however, Strachan and her supporters eventually

won the battle for equal pay. And as the male educators had predicted, men's already scanty representation among schoolteachers continued declining. Men avoided school work in part because of poor pay. For some, the harrowing, increasingly regimented conditions of the work served as a powerful disincentive. Undoubtedly for most, however, the work also repelled those who wished to maintain a conventional middle-class masculinity in which men earned enough to support families, they exerted clear authority over women, and their work granted them independence. These men did not just fear that *boys* were becoming effeminate, but also, at a more fundamental level, they worried that the public regarded *male educators* as effeminate because they practiced a profession thoroughly reconfigured as women's work.

Before the invention of homosexuality and heterosexuality as distinct categories in the late 1800s, it is difficult to pinpoint precisely what is queer in the history of school workers in the United States. The categories employed before then vary substantially from those understood today. However, what is clear is that during the 1800s, profound changes occurred in the gender association of school work as well as in the range of sexual behaviors allowed of female and male school workers. To place developments over the twentieth century in context, a brief examination of nineteenth-century shifts in the expected sexuality and gender of school workers is necessary.

The protests of the New York male teachers effectively ended a remarkable century that had brought a fundamental change in the face and character of teaching. During the early 1800s, men performed virtually all paid teaching and tutoring work. Most did not view teaching as a life-long mission, so schoolmasters usually taught for a few years to make ends meet following college. Then, after establishing reputations in their communities through teaching, men commenced their intended professions in law, commerce, medicine, or the ministry.

Even with the long-standing tradition of male schoolmasters, however, thousands of women began teaching during the mid-1800s, quickly outnumbering men. By 1900, women accounted for over two-thirds of all teachers. The upward trend continued into the 1920s when women claimed five of every six public school positions.³ In this dramatic demographic shift, not only did women choose the toils of the classroom, but men also actively avoided it, eschewing any connection with "women's" work.

On one level, when teaching shifted from work done by men to that done by women, the change was simply demographic. At a deeper level, however, fundamental changes in the gendered nature of the work also

occurred in parallel with this demographic shift. Teaching, although never well paid, once had allowed men opportunities for independence, to recruit students and manage school business, create curricula, expand scholarship begun in college, and associate with other respected men of the community. However, as women filled the ranks, a new class of school personnel emerged—male administrators—who, in turn, took on the duties of running schools requiring independent thought and action. Teachers lost independence and authority to the same degree that administrators gained it. Teaching became “feminized” in other respects as well. While early male teachers desired salaries allowing them to support families, though modestly, female teachers received a fraction of the meager pay of their male counterparts. Moreover, school boards generally expected female teachers to remain single—or to resign immediately upon marriage. While early male teachers had pursued liberal studies in college, female teachers, with limited college-level opportunities available, typically enrolled in normal schools. In these institutions they pursued a curriculum emphasizing pedagogical studies and only enough content knowledge to stay ahead of their students. As the 1800s began, men taught, but not women. By the end of the century, women taught, but few men remained. Within 100 years, the gender identification of teaching had reversed.

Had some inherent quality of the work caused this shift in gender association? And what is gender? While sex concerns one’s anatomy and physiology, gender is a set of stories that people tell themselves and each other about what it means to be men and women. These stories are as varied as the individuals and the cultures in which they live. Sex-related anatomy and physiology can vary substantially; therefore a person’s sex is not always as clearly drawn as the polarized female/male model might indicate. Also, in recent decades, transsexuals and the doctors who have assisted them in transitioning to the other sex have done much to shift and complicate cultural thinking about the meaning of sex (as well as gender and sexual orientation).⁴ Gender has always carried the complexity inherent in any socially created quality. Individuals negotiate gender throughout their lives. Despite—or perhaps because of—this, some societies create uniform visions of gender, and then maintain them through promotion and sanction, through individual and group action, through what we tell each other and ourselves over and over again.⁵

Sexual orientation, in contrast with gender, concerns sexual desire. Gendered behaviors, characteristics, or identities assist individuals in navigating sexual choices within their cultures, helping them find others with whom sexual activity may be a possibility. Sexual orientation, like gender, has socially constructed components, and so is not a completely

fixed quality. It can change depending on social contexts. For example, although mainstream media during the 1950s portrayed mainly one sexual orientation—exclusively heterosexual (as well as monogamous, with someone of a similar race/ethnicity and social/economic class)—a range existed at the same time, spanning a continuum of desire from exclusively heterosexual to exclusively homosexual. These divergent sexualities did not receive the same public endorsement, however. Sexual orientation has varied substantially across subcultures and through historical epochs as well.⁶ Sexual orientation and gender are thus intimately intertwined, though separate concepts.

Although gender and sexual desire/orientation are fluid to some degree rather than fixed and essential, elaborate social mechanisms have been created in most cultures to perpetuate norms for both. Religious institutions, communities, and families traditionally have held much of this responsibility. However, as tax-supported schooling spread around the country and eventually became compulsory, schools assumed a greater share of the work of imparting “correct” gendered behaviors and characteristics in the United States. These responsibilities expanded as family and community structures shifted with the industrial-era realignment of the economy. Schools not only assumed much of the work of shaping students’ gender, but they also tacitly aided in defining and regulating sexual orientation.

An important means that schools employed to influence students’ gender was through the selection of school workers who might provide gender-appropriate modeling. As girls and boys began studying together in tax-supported schools during the mid-1800s, school work came to be divided into realms of work performed by men—administration, and that done by women—teaching. By so segregating the work, schools themselves came to resemble traditional male-head-of-household families whose services they had come to supplement. Administrative work, by definition, became what was manly or fitting work for men. Conversely, school teaching became work that was feminine, or fitting for women. Students confronted this unspoken lesson daily.

As with gender, school workers also modeled acceptable mainstream sexual orientation. School districts hired women teachers thought to be chaste and pure guardians of virtue. Not surprisingly, these women were single. Schools typically required women teachers to resign if they married, thus avoiding conflicts in their primary allegiances. Conversely, schools preferred hiring married men—who headed traditional, heterosexual households. Communities viewed unmarried men in school work as suspicious, lacking manliness, irresponsible, possessing poor character, or prone to womanizing. The marital expectations of men and women

thus were inversely related. By hiring individuals who demonstrated conventional sexual desires appropriate for their sex, schools assured that proper models would influence young people. Later, schools would supplement modeling with curricula overtly intended to shape young people into properly heterosexual women and men well-versed in middle-class courtship rituals.

Although schools attempted to regulate the gender and sexual orientation of their workers—and by extension students—they also provided fascinating opportunities for supporting unconventional sexualities and gender behaviors, characteristics, and identities. For example, by the early twentieth century, so few men taught that districts hired nearly any man who demonstrated interest or possessed even modest prerequisite skills. So desperate were schools to employ male teachers that they hired those who did not fit conventional notions of masculinity. Women challenged mainstream identities, too. Because most school districts required that women teachers refrain from marriage, and because teaching allowed women to earn enough to support themselves humbly, large numbers of women chose to remain single. Some even decided to live with other women or otherwise to center their lives on communities of women without raising suspicion. This represented a radical departure from the tradition requiring middle-class women to structure their lives around men—either husbands or other male relatives.

Initially, opportunities for unconventional gender or sexual orientation among school workers were not widely discussed. In time, however, public concern mounted. Some critics worried that spinster teachers might compel girls to scorn marriage. Others contended that effeminate male teachers brought sexual abnormalities into the schools. In response to such concerns, schools scrutinized the gender and sexual orientation of their workers even more closely. Schools, then, have both nurtured transgressive gender and sexual orientation, and, just as surely, endeavored to contain such transgressions.

Mainstream notions of gender changed over the nineteenth century along with the economic, political, and cultural contexts of the nation. Early in the 1800s, white male-headed families formed centers of economic productivity, engaging in farming, craftwork, or other small commerce. Women often partnered in running family businesses, but typically their duties aligned with gendered expectations of the time, including domestic responsibilities. Men represented the public interests of the family, serving in community governance and controlling family capital. Men earned respect by the degree to which they preserved community welfare and brought honor to the family name. Meanwhile, the slavery-driven economy of the South disrupted family

structures. Plantation owners often bought and sold African American slaves without regard for keeping families intact.⁷ Similarly, Native American families also faced profound interference because of geographical displacement, genocide, and, later, forced boarding schooling. Consequently, notions of gender roles within families are bounded by historical conditions of racial oppression.

As the economy shifted toward industrialism with its attendant expansion of the working and middle classes, notions of exemplary white manhood changed. Anthony Rotundo argues that this shift fostered the rise of “self-made manhood,” an idealized notion of masculinity based on individual hard work and achievement rather than on family name and the accomplishments of others. Masculine identity would no longer be contingent on a man’s heritage alone, but also by his personal success and works.⁸

To achieve self-made manhood, white men increasingly required independence in their actions and social relations. They needed freedom from the constraints of strong mutual obligation that existed in small communities. They also required relaxed religious oversight. Rotundo describes this as a shift allowing men more freedom to indulge their passions. Their desire to rise above their station of birth and their willingness to compete aggressively fueled what became a system of rugged individualism. In this system, men learned to channel their passions rather than to deny or suppress them. Reason provided one important mechanism with which they directed these passions. At a time when the economy increasingly rewarded individual initiative and competitiveness, the virtue of independence grew more important. White men were expected to guard their autonomy and resist being controlled by others. In a society in which men competed vigorously with one another, those who sought to dominate others were regarded as virtuous.⁹

As the 1900s approached, Rotundo argues that combativeness and ambition became even more important virtues for men, and that tough, aggressive competitiveness was accepted and tenderness derided. He contends that prevailing notions of men’s sexuality changed as well. Where sexual desire previously had been regarded as a passion over which men had limited control, the early 1900s brought increased acceptance of men’s sexual desires. Indeed, men’s bodies became symbols of manhood in which muscular build, proven strength, and sporting ability mattered greatly.¹⁰

Before the rise of “self-made manhood,” men’s public roles in small communities had helped ensure strong mutual bonds. Individual men regulated communities, but, in turn, communities regulated them. Where neighbors and townspeople failed to control men’s behavior, religious

groups exerted tremendous influence, urging men toward virtue and a sense of community obligation. However, as townships grew and public sector work intensified, community regulatory functions waned. Instead, moral regulation increasingly took place in the home—and became part of women’s duties. While the new manhood encompassed gradually more independence, competitiveness, strength, and expression of sexual desire, women supposedly became moderating influences tasked with reining in the excesses of these qualities.¹¹ Consequently, women’s roles changed along with men’s. Women came to be regarded as the moral exemplars of the household, as upholders of virtue. As such, women’s supposedly “natural” moral sense was thought much stronger than men’s; thus women were to control men’s immoderation, essentially stepping into the regulatory void formerly occupied by communities and religious institutions.

A significant implication of this gender redefinition is that women were accorded a separate place alongside men. This separate-spheres ideology not only indicated a sharp delineation between acceptable gender identities for women and men, but it also resulted in different physical spaces that they inhabited. Men spent much of their working and social time in places occupied primarily by other men. Women devoted much of their time to activities with other women or to solitary endeavors in their homes. Social groups of women clustered in other’s houses or socially approved extensions such as schools, churches, or community organizations. Through the ideology of separate spheres, women and men not only assumed different gender identities and kinds of service, but they occupied different spaces and otherwise maintained homosocial worlds—men with men and women with women.¹²

Family size and structure shifted during the 1800s along with approved gender identities and socially assigned spaces. The rapid growth of urban centers and the industrial economy spelled the decline of family farms and some small businesses. Families no longer needed to bear as many children to support these domestic enterprises. Consequently, married couples found ways to reduce their family sizes. They employed new contraceptive devices and practices they had seen in catalogs, read in books, or otherwise heard about from friends and family members. Young married women commonly received contraceptive information in the mail—until the 1873 Comstock Law prohibited the distribution of such information through the postal system. Euphemistic labeling in published media and informal, word-of-mouth networks filled the gap afterwards.¹³ Doctors and others who performed abortions offered their services, but some abortion methods did not work or carried extreme risk. A number of women died as a result of botched procedures. Taken

together, these practices contributed to a decline in the size of families in the United States.¹⁴

As the birthrate dropped, conventional sexual activity became associated more with sexual desire and less with procreation. Romance assumed greater significance in intimate relationships. When men and women chose marriage partners, they increasingly valued romantic love—expecting to love someone before deciding to marry them, rather than the reverse: marrying someone deemed suitable and then learning to love them. Choosing a partner became a matter of finding a person about whom one could feel passionate. And sexual expression was often an important component of that passion.

Shifting gendered identities affected how such intimate relationships unfolded. Men, who valued independence and autonomy, felt freer than women to engage in a variety of sexual experiences. They sought to satisfy their strong passions. Women, however, were expected to confine their sexual activity to fiancés or husbands. Those whose sexual expression ventured beyond these bounds risked ostracism, a drop in social status, or impoverishment. Such sanctions carried different risks for women depending on their social class. Because women of privilege had much to lose, they tended to limit their sexual activity. Working-class and poor women, however, sometimes felt more at ease about pursuing their sexual passions outside marriage. Generally, though, communities expected women to constrain men's desire for relatively free sexual expression and help control their "baser instincts."¹⁵

Women were to restrain not only men's sexual behavior, but communities also expected them—as mothers—to teach their children proper sexual mores. However, over the second half of the 1800s as tax-supported education spread, teachers assumed growing responsibility for assuring both the proper gender and sexual development of children. Communities ensured this by carefully selecting school workers who might serve as exemplars for children. The kinds of women and men hired to work in schools indicated much about how communities defined acceptable gender and sexual desire.

Before women taught in appreciable numbers, male schoolmasters earned grudging respect only after years of exemplary service. Cultivating that respect was difficult because some schoolmasters, struggling with poor wages and difficult conditions, remained in the classroom only because they could find no other gainful employment. These pedagogues occasionally drank heavily, inflicted cruel discipline, or maintained slovenly grooming habits, all of which contributed to unflattering stereotypes. In Walt Whitman's 1841 story, "Death in the School-Room," a

sadistic schoolmaster brutally flogged a student who, it turned out, was already dead.¹⁶ Washington Irving's schoolmaster in *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1819), Ichabod Crane, lacked the cruelty of Whitman's character, but instead demonstrated a clown-like ineptitude:

He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves, feet that might have served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely hung together. His head was small, and flat at top, with huge ears, large green glassy eyes, and a long snipe nose, so that it looked like a weather-cock perched upon his spindle neck to tell which way the wind blew. To see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day, with his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield.¹⁷

Subsequent writers capitalized on this stereotype.¹⁸ One scholar, in his 1928 dissertation on male teachers, contended: "The common assumption was that anybody could teach school, and all too frequently the schoolmaster was very inadequately prepared for his work. . . . Failures, and even town charges, were given the post of schoolmaster so that they might earn their keep. In the middle states bond-servants were frequently chosen as instructors to the youth, and . . . in early Georgia the schoolmaster was little better than a vagrant wandering from community to community."¹⁹

A number of young men entered teaching only for the short term, hoping to earn a modest sum of money before pursuing their chosen careers. As such, teaching was regarded as youth's work in a number of states and territories.²⁰ While W. E. B. DuBois attended Fisk University as an undergraduate, he spent two summers teaching in a nearby rural Tennessee school. He described the sight of his students: "There they sat, nearly thirty of them, on the rough benches, their faces shading from a pale cream to a deep brown, the little feet bare and swinging, their eyes full of expectation, with here and there a twinkle of mischief, and the hands grasping Webster's blue-back spelling-book." The schoolhouse itself was a "log hut where Colonel Wheeler used to shelter his corn," rather than a prim building with the usual neat rows of seats that nearby white children attended. And the young DuBois boarded with the families of the children he taught, some meticulous in their housekeeping and others where "untamed bedbugs wandered."²¹ Many school districts could ill afford to pay teachers wages allowing them to live independently. Thus, the work failed to attract many men past their early adult years.

Not surprisingly, those who became schoolmasters sometimes suffered barbs and their neighbor's wariness at first. Many wondered why men

would seek such daunting, unremunerative work that ill afforded them essentials like clothing and shelter. Making matters worse, few schools recruited or hired teachers in a systematic way. Rarely was there adequate assurance that schoolmasters had prepared in a manner fitting them for service. Despite these significant challenges, some schoolmasters pursued their work with vigor and every intention of teaching students well. These individuals had prepared for the work first by studying in European or New England colleges. Eventually, those who proved to be gifted pedagogues earned community esteem second only to ministers.²²

Even in the cases of the most well-respected schoolmasters, though, contradictions in the gender appropriateness of the work abounded. Americans popularly regarded scholars and schoolmasters as effete. In a rugged young nation, men who had devoted much of their lives to study—especially in Europe, men from socially prominent families, and men who had cultivated a sense of refinement seemed peculiarly out of place.²³ During a time when Manifest Destiny compelled young men to carve out niches in rustic territories, practical rather than academic knowledge was prized. And despite the fact that school teaching required much ingenuity, independence, and entrepreneurial skill, the work still involved close association with children. Many regarded nurturing and working with children as duties fitting for women, not men. As separate-spheres ideology gained credence, the association of children with women's work deepened. Male schoolmasters found themselves in the uncomfortable position of performing most school teaching before the Civil War, even though the work failed to accord them a strong, unambiguous sense of manliness. In his classic novel, *The Hoosier Schoolmaster*, Edward Eggleston describes the experiences of one such young man, fresh with his college education, who settled into an Indiana community to teach during the 1850s. Immediately, the schoolmaster faced a challenge from a grizzled man standing nearby: "Want to be a school-master, do you? . . . Well, what would you do in Flat Crick deestrick, I'd like to know? Why, the boys have driv off the last two, and licked the one afore them like blazes. . . . You see . . . we a'n't none of your saft sort in these diggin's. It takes a man to boss this deestrick. . . . But if you git licked, don't come on us." During the remainder of the novel, the clever schoolmaster found ways to teach well, endear himself to the community, and avoid the violence and corporal punishment typically expected from male teachers. Even with his education—which made him a "saft sort"—he proved his manliness and worth to the community.²⁴

Around the mid-1800s, however, women began entering teaching in breathtaking numbers. Hundreds, then thousands enrolled in newly established women's seminaries and academies, pursuing some of the earliest

formal educational opportunities allowed young women beyond primary instruction. With diplomas in hand, they eagerly sought teaching positions, one of the few avenues open to women for which their studies were necessary. Their services were urgently needed too, as common schooling spread across the continent. Educated young men could not be enticed into the work in sufficient numbers to satisfy the growing demand. Moreover, early women teachers quickly proved that they could handle the challenges of setting up and running rural schoolhouses and teaching their motley students. After these early demonstrations, communities eagerly sought motivated and pioneering women teachers. Because they could be hired at a fraction of the cost of male teachers, a number of communities expressly sought out women teachers without first attempting to locate willing men. This practice spread quickly in the end because many women simply wanted to teach, to work outside the home, to earn their own money, and to live independently.²⁵

The shift of women into the ranks of schoolteachers did not proceed trouble-free, however. For some, the work involved tricky changes in social standing. Before teaching was available as a job for women, the only socially approved work outside the home involved domestic service in other homes. As such, only women of humble means engaged in paid labor. Women of greater means looked after their own households, supervising domestic servants. For these women, entering the realm of work outside the home entailed a loss of social status and implied that male heads of households could not provide well enough to cover their needs. By convention, men, not women, worked outside the home. Law dictated that men control household property, including that possessed by any female family members. Separate-spheres legal ideology of the time supported these practices.

And besides, married women who ventured into salaried employment discovered that they were required to submit to the authority of their superiors. However, women already needed to submit to male family members in the home. Theoretically, then, working married women had to obey the wishes of two different authorities: their employers and their male heads of household. Such a conflict was thought untenable. Catherine Beecher, a staunch supporter of women teachers, offered a clever way to resolve this tricky problem. Beecher, herself a single woman, strongly recommended that single, rather than married women should teach. The conflict of authority could thus be avoided because single women only owed allegiance to their superiors at work. Beecher further convinced skeptics when she argued that teaching prepared single women for marriage and motherhood. Their preparation and teaching experience would therefore not be wasted. When women married, they could step down

and be replaced by other eligible single women. There would be plenty waiting to do so.²⁶

For some skeptics, the greatest problem with women teachers concerned their supposed inability to manage students, especially older boys. Reflecting a common sentiment of the time, one superintendent maintained that “while I believe that women when they possess the scholarship and the necessary training can instruct as well as men, I doubt whether they can properly govern school or exert the proper educational influence over large boys and girls. We can not close our eyes to this condition of things. There are certain things which women, because of their sex, can not do and should not be made to do. I, for one, have always considered it cruel to place an innocent girl all by herself in a country school there to watch over the large boys.”²⁷

Despite this fear of women’s supposed frailty in the classroom, women teachers proved to be more than a match for the challenges posed by young male students. Typically they used persuasion and other nonviolent means of maintaining discipline. Experts eventually conceded that women generally seemed to have as good, if not better, results with their disciplinary practices than many men who resorted to corporal punishment and intimidation. Word quickly spread that women teachers governed their classrooms effectively. Within a few years, even the most hardened critics of women teachers had to concede that the experiment was succeeding.²⁸

Single women teachers faced a final significant hurdle in their quest for acceptance and appointments. As women accounted for greater portions of the teaching force, earning wages, living independently, and exerting authority in a public space, their detractors worried that they were becoming too independent, that they may not need men, or, perhaps worse, without the gender-regulating presence of men, women might assume traits customarily more desirable for men. School district officials assuaged these concerns by hiring male supervisors to oversee women teachers. These men initially traveled to district schoolhouses and performed maintenance tasks as needed. They also paid bills and observed the women teachers. Most of these early “superintendents” knew little about school work.²⁹ However, as men they seemed natural authority figures to whom women teachers would report. The presence of male superintendents averted the potential crisis of women teachers overstepping their gender-appropriate bounds—even as they inched beyond the domestic sphere.

In the years following the Civil War, women quickly dominated the work of school teaching numerically.³⁰ New England women’s academies and seminaries continued graduating women who pursued teaching. Due

to the efforts of common school advocates Horace Mann, Catherine Beecher, and others, these institutions were joined by a variety of others in preparing teachers. Northern, midwestern, and some southern states established normal schools to meet their growing needs. These institutions offered women formal education beyond the primary level. More important, they provided women with a means to an acceptable career outside the home. Many women reasoned that, by teaching, they could earn enough to support themselves without depending on their families. This financial security would free them from pressure to marry men they found unacceptable. Teaching also offered women career justification for pursuing formal education. They could answer incredulous skeptics who asked why they needed an education. And a few young women wanted to teach so they could carry on in the spirit of their own beloved and admired teachers, emulating them to the extent possible.

By the late 1800s, the trend toward hiring women teachers accelerated with the growth of graded schools in cities and townships. These schools, customarily built with multiple classrooms lining long hallways, typically employed one male supervisor or principal to oversee the work of many women teachers. Because of women's lower wages and the need for only one male, personnel costs remained relatively low—which satisfied local taxpayers. This arrangement also pleased those who believed that schools needed the gender-regulating presence of men—and that women needed to be supervised by them.³¹

The gender shift of teaching after the Civil War was caused not only by women streaming into the work, but also by men's active rejection of it. When the national economy slumped after the war, communities could pay the wages commanded by schoolmasters only with the greatest difficulty. These wages generally fell far short of what young men could earn in many other endeavors that offered greater social standing as well. Also, as more women moved into teaching, districts and states simultaneously mandated greater preparation and certification. Men reasoned that poor teaching wages did not adequately cover this costly additional study. Then there was the matter of authority and autonomy. Teaching increasingly had become work subject to supervision. The new class of administrators hired by schools assumed greater authority over teachers, demanding obedience, and gradually stripping teachers of their decision-making power in schools. Young men willing to endure these shifts discovered that perceptions of their masculinity had eroded. Finally, male teachers found themselves surrounded by women rather than by other men.³² Gender scholar Michael Kimmel argues that it is men—and not women—who confer a sense of masculinity on each other. If he is correct, then

male teachers no longer could enjoy validation of their manhood as they worked in schools filled with women and children.³³ In the final analysis, male teachers decided to leave the work in droves.

For the few men who continued teaching, the gender shifts of the work grew even more uncomfortable. They found themselves supervised closely by male administrators, hired in part to oversee women teachers. Male teachers disdained this patronizing treatment. One particularly frustrated former schoolmaster, C. W. Bardeen, argued that teaching had become “a hireling occupation” that kept teachers “in a state of dependency.” He insisted that other professions typically pursued by men afforded much greater autonomy and control. Further, he contended that teaching, as it increasingly had been configured, effectively robbed men of their masculinity.³⁴

Ultimately, as women took up the work of teaching, communities shifted the conditions of the classroom to align more closely with societal expectations for women rather than men. These conditions ran afoul of men’s expectations, however. To resolve this seemingly unbridgeable gap, most male teachers simply opted to leave the work. Bardeen captured this prevailing sentiment when he explained that “teaching usually belittles a man. . . . His daily dealing is with petty things, of interest only to his children and a few women assistants, and under regulations laid down by outside authority, so that large questions seldom come to him for consideration.”³⁵ Essentially, as teaching became “women’s work,” men wanted little part of it. As women rushed into the work, the exodus of men accelerated, especially in urban areas. In 1912, an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* summarized the situation: “In cities, the women fill nearly all teaching positions. New York City has 89 percent of women in its force; Boston, 89 percent; Philadelphia, 91.4 percent; Chicago, 93.3 percent . . . and in forty-six towns of 4,000 to 8,000 inhabitants there is no man on the force. . . . In half the cities of the United States there are virtually no men teaching.”³⁶

By the early 1900s, when the male teachers of New York City campaigned against equal pay for men and women teachers, the gendered transformation of the work was nearly complete. Few would come to the defense of male teachers—especially when they appeared weak and unsympathetic by battling women teachers. However, male teachers soon learned to shift attention away from themselves and toward male students. In 1903, a team of visitors from England had studied urban schooling in the United States and concluded that women teachers made boys effeminate.³⁷ New York City principals and male teachers played on these findings to build support for recruiting more men into school work. Because men generally found the work so repugnant by this time,

the remaining male teachers thought that significantly higher wages were necessary. By 1911, when women teachers won the equal pay battle in New York City, this tactic no longer was possible. Besides, school districts scarcely could afford to pay significant numbers of men the salaries that would entice them. In the end, male educators' most effective strategy involved the creation of niches within schoolwork that remained exclusively male. These areas included athletics, manual trades, high school subjects—especially mathematics and natural sciences—and administration.³⁸

Of all these niches, administrative work clearly held the greatest masculine appeal. From the start, schools had structured the work to align with gendered expectations for men. Administrative positions only appeared in schools when women began teaching. Early superintendent duties closely matched those expected of men in their households, including structural repair, financial control, and serving in authority over women.³⁹ Administrators received significantly higher salaries than did teachers, allowing them to support families as heads of household. Male administrators essentially could cultivate and maintain a sense of masculinity. For this reason Bardeen admired male administrators, but not male teachers. In describing superintendents, he explained that “the kinds of men chosen for these places are those who are least subject to . . . defects. . . . But the rank and file of men teachers are still seriously deficient.”⁴⁰ The New York school board president in 1916 made clear the kind of men suited to the highest positions in schools: “Let him first be a man. . . . Red blood, hard muscle, virile speech, manly manners seem to me indispensable in the head of a school system. The traditional pattern with spectacles, with the scholar’s stoop, the parchment skin, the painfully proper speech chastely devoid of slang and expletive—the type strictly devoid of variation from the conventional—has had its day.”⁴¹

In the early decades of the twentieth century, men who remained in school work often aspired to the superintendency. Superintendents possessed increasing power as part-time, nonprofessional school board members granted them greater authority for running schools. Simultaneously, school district sizes increased, and along with them the tax bases from which superintendent salaries could be drawn. Higher salaries meant a great deal when economic attainment conferred manliness. A growing administrative hierarchy also allowed male superintendents to direct the labors of many others. Finally, as school districts grew larger, superintendents served in central offices somewhat removed from schools, but near municipal power centers. With proximity to government and business leaders, superintendents could socialize more easily with influential men of the community. School administration, then,

particularly the superintendency, became at times a separate male space physically removed from women's realm of the classroom.⁴²

When school principalships and superintendencies first appeared, school boards did not hire women for them. If they had, women administrators might have exerted authority over men, generally a prohibited condition. If any woman's promotion meant that even one man would become subservient to her, then she would be denied advancement. He would advance instead. However, because the pool of available male teachers had shrunk so dramatically by the early 1900s, many schools employed female school workers exclusively. Midwestern and western states found it particularly difficult to find men—even those without educational qualifications—who were willing to take on the work of the superintendency. To alleviate the shortage, districts in these regions hired women supervisors and superintendents on an experimental basis. As with teaching, women quickly proved that they were, as a class, exceedingly capable in their new duties.⁴³

Hiring women school administrators prevailed only when willing men were unavailable, the demands of the position extreme, the pay relatively low, and lucrative opportunities lay elsewhere. Men consistently commanded higher salaries for the work. Women, however, had few avenues for professional promotion. Some women eagerly sought supervisory or superintendent positions to advance their careers, prove themselves, and demonstrate the civic contributions that women as a class could make. When school districts hired women administrators, they did so because of enthusiastic service at a bargain—and because men chose not to serve.

Arguably, when women entered school administration, they crossed a socially created boundary separating feminine and masculine realms. Some communities found this permissible as long as men's status in schools was not compromised and there was some economic or practical benefit to the district. If, however, women's supervisory work challenged the status of men—perhaps by giving them power over men—then districts deemed this gender transgression as outweighing the benefits women could bring to their positions.

In the end, Grace Strachan and the legions of women and men she inspired to join the campaign for equal pay successfully challenged the long-standing practice of paying women teachers substantially less than men. Her leadership in this battle as well as her position as a district superintendent in New York City required that she maintain a delicate balance of gender and sexuality. As a woman, she had risen to a position of administrative leadership in a large and complex district within the city, a position generally reserved for men. She had fought on behalf of all the women teachers of the city for better wages—in opposition to the

wishes of many of her male colleagues. Women educators at the time were single. She was married, though, as were her male administrative colleagues. However, from her vantage as a female superintendent, she maintained the seemingly contradictory position that women teachers should remain single. She 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.’”⁴⁴ Was Strachan a master or a servant? As a woman, was it proper for her to remain in school work after her marriage, given her views on the matter? Into which set of gendered expectations should she fit—those for men or women? Although rules sometimes were easy to make, the realities of the sharply gender-polarized world of school work often were much messier and more difficult to navigate.

In the years ahead, a large number of women and some men in school work would choose to resolve these and a variety of new and equally vexing questions by centering their lives on members of their own sex. Eventually, the public would grow more aware of the existence of such school workers. It also would come to conflate same-sex desire with gender non-conformity. In response, the public would strictly regulate the proper gender roles of school employees and students. An important means of regulation involved hiring only those persons who exemplified acceptable gender qualities and apparent sexual desire, and excluding persons who did not.