

Beyond the “Motherteacher”: How Teaching Became Women’s Work

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Journalist Dana Goldstein reported in 2014 that 3.3 million Americans were schoolteachers. While polls indicate that the public views them as “highly respected professionals,”* they have endured repeated attacks. In particular, teachers with tenure have been accused of pouring tax dollars into their pension and health care plans while largely ignoring the needs of schoolchildren. Such conflicts are not new. Common school reformers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries both lauded and castigated schoolteachers. Relying heavily on the writings of reformers, historians have defined teaching as an idealized role that required women to act as both teacher and mother. According to historian Redding Sugg, the ideal was a “motherteacher.” In this paper, Nicole Green moves beyond the ideal teacher as defined by reformers to a more nuanced, complex view of schoolteaching based on the lives and writings of eight nineteenth-century women.

—Eds.

*Dana Goldstein, *The Teacher Wars: A History of America’s Most Embattled Profession* (New York: Anchor Books, 2014), 2, 5.

In her 1845 pamphlet, “The Duty of American Women to their Country,” Catherine Beecher, educator and activist, turned to her fellow American women for help: “American woman, whose eye may be resting on this page, are you willing to commence an effort to aid in saving your country from the perils of ignorance?”¹ She wanted them to join the growing number of women entering the profession of teaching in the nineteenth century. Not only would this shift in the composition of the teaching force benefit women, but also society: “This is the way in which a profession is to be created for woman—a profession as honourable and as lucrative for her as the legal, medical, and theological are for men. This is the way in which thousands of intelligent and respectable women, who toil for a pittance scarcely sufficient to sustain life, are to be relieved

and elevated. This is the way, and the only way, in which our nation can be saved from impending perils.”²

Thanks to activists like Beecher and thousands of American women who chose to enter the classroom, teaching became feminized in the mid to late nineteenth century and has remained that way ever since. In 1800, just one in ten American teachers was female. By 1880, that number had jumped to over 80 percent.³ By the time of the Civil War, in New England, 84 percent of all rural teachers were women; in the Middle Atlantic, 59 percent; in the South, 36 percent.⁴ This trend continues to the present: according to the latest data, taken in 2011-12, some 76 percent of public school teachers were female.⁵ Women began teaching in common schools, which were expanding rapidly starting in the 1830s. The common school, the precursor to the public school in the nineteenth century, was different from previous schools because it provided one location for all of the local students to learn, in hopes of preventing social conflict stemming from class, ethnicity and religion. Horace Mann, “the father of the common school,” claimed that these schools were to be a means of “social salvation.”⁶ Common school reformers believed that education was the means to spread Protestant Anglo-American culture, and thus to create a better society.

The goals of the common school were structured around resolving social, economic and political issues, as school reformers believed this would neutralize the ill-effects of social division. There were three distinctive features of the common school movement, the first being that children were to be educated in one common schoolhouse to reduce social class conflict. Secondly, the common school movement aimed to end crime and poverty, create equal opportunity, and improve morality. Finally, the common school movement spurred the creation of state agencies in order to control local schools.⁷

In addition to laying the groundwork for public schooling, common schools also laid the groundwork for women in the profession. Many school reformers championed the work of female teachers. Henry Barnard, for example, a school reformer and educationalist from Connecticut, claimed that educated female teachers “might send forward the common school train in higher style than it has ever moved before, in this country or any other.”⁸

Today, historians use the term “motherteacher,” introduced by Redding Sugg, to represent the stereotypical and idealized view of the female teacher that was widespread in the nineteenth century.⁹ The development of the “motherteacher” ideal can be attributed to a shift in opinion of

women by the public, as well as to the reinforcement of this shift by school reformers. Women were deemed perfect for teaching because of their stereotypical domestic qualities: motherly, emotional, and nurturing.¹⁰ Reformers considered women to be ideal for the profession because they would instill moral values in the children. As Jo Anne Preston suggests, “As the teacher, she . . . had committed herself to love as her professional principle in place of authority and power to enforce it.”¹¹ That is, women would approach their teaching jobs not as positions of power but rather as extensions of their loving personalities. Reformers believed that women could simply extend their motherly duties outside of the home and into the classroom.

Women teachers were expected to be mothers within the classroom, exemplifying the standardization of human emotion. In the motherteacher model, teaching comes closely entwined with emotional labor, a labor that “requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others.”¹² Women teachers were expected to induce feelings of affection in their students and adopt the ideals of the reformers. However, as Arlie Russell Hochschild explains, “[t]o manage private loves and hates is to participate in an intricate private emotional system. When elements of that system are taken into the marketplace and sold as human labor; they become stretched into standardized social forms.”¹³ The reformers believed in the standardization of teacher love, where, in this view, teachers would serve as loving, maternal figures so there would be no separation between the woman’s domestic life at home and her job at school.¹⁴ But the potential side effect of this, as Hochschild’s theory suggests, is that women teachers were expected to manufacture emotion in their work lives that could negatively affect their feelings in their personal lives.

This lack of division between home and school created a vision of an ideal woman teacher that has progressed into the twenty-first century. We have since inherited this rhetoric, but we need to be cognizant that this is not necessarily the reality. There is an abundance of writings from the women themselves that we can draw upon to understand the experience of nineteenth-century teachers more deeply. I seek to analyze the gap between the visions of the women and the cultural prescriptions of the time.

I have found that in their personal writings, women teachers of the nineteenth century did not describe themselves primarily as motherteachers. Although school reformers would claim otherwise, discourses on motherhood do not dominate these writings. As Catharine Beecher’s own rhetoric suggests, women pursued teaching for reasons other than mother-love, including

professional aspirations. Thus, it is imperative that we breathe life back into historical sources and listen to the teachers' own voices. We can do so by analyzing memoirs, diaries, and other primary texts—texts that are suffering from critical neglect. It is important to note that the primary texts produced by the teachers are journals and memoirs, which are not entirely factual. In addition to this, they have been filtered through time, were intended for different audiences, and are not exclusively records of their teaching lives, but rather of their daily lives. However, given that I aim to draw conclusions about these teachers' self-fashioning and personal responses to cultural prescriptions about teaching, such personal life writing is the ideal medium to analyze, despite these limitations. Whether keeping journals for themselves or aiming to publish their work, these women recorded their personal responses and reactions to widespread ideas about teaching, including the motherteacher ideal.

The works of the women teachers I have included in my archive were selected based on geographic diversity and current availability. As I read these texts, the descriptions of the teacher's relationships with the students, instruction and discipline, motives for teaching, the backgrounds of the teachers, and the location were analyzed and compared to the dominant school reformers' views of female teachers. In order to ensure a variety of perspectives, memoirs and journals of a diverse selection of teachers who taught throughout the nineteenth century were chosen.

I focused particularly on teacher memoirs by eight women: Laura M. Towne, Charlotte Forten Grimké, Mary Ames, Arozina Perkins, Mollie Dorsey Sanford, Henrietta Miller, Amelia "Jennie" Akenhurst Lines, and Irene Hardy.¹⁵ They are not viewed as exact duplications of thousands of nineteenth-century women who taught, yet their writings do reflect to some degree the actions and thinking of a much larger group of teachers. These women hailed from different backgrounds and different geographical locations. Laura M. Towne opened and taught in the first freedmen's school in the Sea Islands of South Carolina. Her letters and diary were written from 1862 to 1884.¹⁶ Charlotte Forten Grimké was a free black woman who taught in Salem, Massachusetts, and then relocated to the islands and mainland of South Carolina to teach freed slaves.¹⁷ Towards the end of her career she taught in Washington, D.C.¹⁸ Mary Ames was a teacher from Massachusetts, who travelled to the South to teach for the Freedmen's Bureau in Edisto Island, South Carolina, from 1865 to 1866.¹⁹ Arozina Perkins was born in Vermont, but after teaching in multiple locations throughout New England, she made the decision to teach

in Iowa for the National Board of Popular Education.²⁰ Mollie Dorsey Sanford journeyed from Indianapolis with her family in 1857 to teach in Nebraska City.²¹ Henrietta B. Miller was a teacher in Pennsylvania in the Presbyterian and German Reformed Sabbath-schools.²² Shortly after, she entered Linden Cottage Seminary for Young Ladies in order to become a teacher.²³ After moving to Adamstown, she taught in a private school in her house in between engagements in the public schools. In 1872, she became a teacher at Fairview school, and remained there until her death in 1875.²⁴ Amelia “Jennie” Akenhurst Lines was a teacher in New York and Georgia before teaching at Southern Female Masonic College in Covington, Georgia.²⁵ Irene Hardy attended Antioch College in order to become a teacher and then taught in Ohio. In 1894, she became a professor at Stanford University in literature, composition and short story writing.²⁶

I compared these memoirs to school reform literature of the time in order to reexamine the sentiments of nineteenth-century teachers and give them a new identity—one that is created from their own thoughts and not those of others. By doing this, I hope to challenge the centrality of the “motherteacher” model in order to better understand the work of women teachers, past and present. These texts don’t exclusively focus on teaching; it’s just a part of these women’s lives rather than their core identity. And, unlike ideal motherteachers, they prioritized a number of different motives for teaching over feelings of affection, including religion, financial exigency, and personal independence. Even when they did reference motherly love, they modified the dominant cultural discourse to make it their own.

Labor Omnia Vincit: Religious Motives for Teaching

Religion, morality, and teaching at this time went hand in hand. These women often entered into the profession with the hopes of improving the morality of their students, in keeping with Christian values and the rhetoric of much of nineteenth-century American society as well as the reformers, who felt that the teaching of morality was part of the mission of the common school movement. Their entrance into the profession was seen as in line with the Christian beliefs of society, as expressed by leading school reformer Horace Mann. In the *Eighth Annual Report of the Board of Education* Mann argued that if “public opinion” could “be rectified, and brought into harmony with the great law of Christian duty and love,” Americans would quickly accept the “thousands of females amongst us, who now spend lives of frivolity, of unbroken wearisomeness and worthlessness.” The women, in turn, “would rejoice to exchange their days

of painful idleness for such ennobling occupations,” not only because of the “immediate rewards of well-doing” but also because teaching promised “the consolations of a life well-spent, instead of the pangs of remorse for a frivolous and wasted existence.”²⁷ Mann believed that society should accept the idea that teachers are fulfilling their *duty* as the body of Christ. He claimed that women would finally have a chance to escape their mundane lives and find reward in teaching. He painted teaching as a worthy and honorable profession, one that would bring purpose to the lives of women. In this profession, women would serve as missionaries to Christ, transforming the morality of American children while doing so. As Nancy Hoffman explains: “If common schools were to form character, the untrained, temporary male teacher was inadequate.”²⁸ Women were destined to right the state of public education, and, in turn, the state of society.

Teachers’ journals and memoirs confirm that women were often inclined to enter the teaching profession for religious motives, though they did not always frame those motives in the same way that reformers like Mann and Beecher did. Morality and religion loom especially large in the diary of Arozina Perkins, who taught from 1850, presumably until her death in 1854. Perkins was born in Vermont but knew from a young age that she would end up in the West during her lifetime. She believed that it was her mission to be a teacher, and after teaching in Johnson, Marshfield, Fair Haven and New Haven, she made the decision to teach in Iowa for the National Board, a voluntary program founded by Catharine Beecher that certified teachers from the Northeast to teach in the West and Midwest.²⁹ Perkins addresses her parents: “Now be lenient, and kindly permit your daughter to go out and devote her life to the cause of education and truth and religion in the far west. Who knows what she may be the means of accomplishing with the blessing of Heaven—at least the motive will be a sacred one, and may, like Abraham’s faith, be imputed for righteousness.”³⁰ She describes her motives— education, truth and religion— all in one breath, not valuing one over the other. Her reasoning for teaching is clear: she was going to spread her faith to others. She alluded to Romans 4:22, comparing herself to Abraham, the patriarch who led God's chosen people, asserting her own leadership abilities. Her religiousness did not make her submissive, but bold instead. By teaching, she was not only spreading her faith, but also proving that she had it.

She continued, “There was something so high and holy in the idea of a life consecrated to so laborious a cause—in leaving home.” Her dedication is clear in her willingness to leave home, despite the weight of this decision. She went on, praying that the “God of strength” would

provide “zeal and firmness and encouragement to fulfill every duty of his mission of love to those destitute, error bound regions of our native land.”³¹ She saw great appeal in leaving home to take part in something so important, excited by the prospect of teaching and the opportunity to serve as a missionary for God.

Amelia “Jennie” Akenhurst Lines was a teacher in New York and Georgia, and her language mimics that of Arozina Perkins.³² There was a surplus of teachers in New York, so Jennie sought the opportunity to teach in Georgia in 1857.³³ She taught in a number of locations in Georgia before teaching at Southern Female Masonic College in Covington, Georgia.³⁴ When leaving her teaching position, she echoed similar beliefs to those of Perkins, despite the geographical differences. “I hope my labor within thy walls has not been in vain. . . . I trust I have felt some little desire to do good to the children and youth who have been under my care; but now I must leave them to receive instruction from others. . . . O! that I could feel the sweet assurance that I had made some good impression upon their young minds that should be like good seed sown upon good ground, and resulting in their eternal well-being in the honor of my God, with whom I will leave my little flock.”³⁵ She likened herself to Jesus, serving as the shepherd to her flock of students, asserting her power over them even while expressing doubts about her ability to affect change. In the introduction to Henrietta Miller’s memoir, the editor echoed similar beliefs: “The cause of education and of piety lay near her heart, and she seemed fervently desirous to do all in her power to promote them.”³⁶ Women like Jennie, Arozina and Henrietta wanted to be successful in their careers in hopes of serving as a vehicle to Christ and helping their students to do the same.

At the same time, these teachers did not always view themselves as capable of this mission, and strayed away from the reformers’ views of them as flawlessly righteous. Jennie later reflected in her journal that she had learned from her experience and no longer felt like she could “be a missionary and go among the heathen as a teacher.” She no longer thought that she was “benevolent, self-sacrificing and meek enough to take up that cross” and felt that she did not “possess the spirit of a missionary.” Having felt that she “could not content [her]self and find happiness for a few months in trying to do good to the children of ignorant unlearned people in this my own enlightened land,” she asked: “[w]hat could I do in a distant land, among savage nations”? She determined that she was “not like my Savior,” able “to teach his gospel to the dying heathen.” Despite Jennie’s desire to fit into the religious expectations of the reformers, she

believed that she was hardly doing enough where she was. Such insecurities, echoed by many of the women, divert from the narrative of the school reformers. These women were driven by subserviently spreading the word of God, but worried that they could not do it, all the while wanting to claim an integral role in God's plan.

Though she differed from Arozina Perkins, Henrietta Miller, and Jennie Akenhurst Lines in race and background, Charlotte Forten Grimké likewise relied on religious rhetoric in her memoir. Charlotte was an African American woman who grew up in a politically active family.³⁷ Her father, Robert Forten, wanted her to become a teacher in order to “aid her race, for there were few well-trained teachers available to the black community.”³⁸ She believed that God had chosen her to improve her race through education.³⁹ She taught in Salem, Massachusetts during the beginning of her career. She then relocated to the islands and mainland of South Carolina to teach freed slaves. Toward the end of her career she taught in Washington, D.C.⁴⁰ Her motivations to teach mirrored many women teachers of the time; she wanted to do good. When she first began to teach, she wrote in her journal, “May I be granted strength to do my duty in the great field of labor upon which I have entered.”⁴¹ Charlotte’s motto, *Labor omnia vincit*, meaning “work conquers all,” exhibits her dedication to the work she has set out to do. She acknowledged that, despite the struggles of teaching, she would have faith. Later in her journal, Charlotte felt inspired after reading a novel, claiming that it, “[s]trengthened my own aspirations for something high and holy.—My earnest longings to do *something* for the good of others.”⁴² Through her reading, Charlotte was reminded that her work is a form of service, but her need for a reminder shows that this was not her main motive for teaching. Religion gave these women a sense of mission that sometimes competed with their other reasons for teaching.

Obligated to Wear a Blanket: Teaching for Financial Freedom

Women often entered the profession for the opportunity to earn their own wage, affording them financial independence most women had not experienced previously. No longer were these women reliant on a man for money because they could earn a wage on their own. Reformers believed that women were key to the common school movement because they were less expensive to employ than men, thus providing more teachers for the schoolhouses. Teaching was a financially symbiotic relationship: women could earn their own wage, and society could use them for cheap labor, as they were paid 40 percent less than male teachers.⁴³ Horace Mann made

the case that women were equal in effectiveness compared to men and therefore preferable because they were the cheaper option of the two: “[J]ust so fast and so far, as they establish their qualifications for teaching, their cheaper services will command employment.”⁴⁴ He explained that the number of women teachers would rise as they were trained and qualified to teach.

The rise of women teachers has both economic roots and economic consequences. The appeal to allowing women into the profession stemmed not only from their domestic qualities but also from the affordable aspect of their employment. This was useful to them because at this time there wasn’t a large budget for education, and taxes were, as always, unpopular. Given the financial situation, Catharine Beecher, a school reformer and advocate for women teachers, agreed with Horace Mann, asserting that women were “the cheapest guardian[s] and teacher[s] of childhood” as well as the best.⁴⁵ The necessity of cutting costs was exacerbated by the transformations the United States underwent at the time, namely industrialization, immigration and the radical increase in the population of children.⁴⁶ Beecher claimed that two million “destitute children” would need sixty thousand teachers and fifty thousand schoolhouses to meet their needs.⁴⁷ With this increase came the need for more funding to build new schoolhouses or accommodate existing ones, purchase textbooks, and pay teacher salaries. Hiring women as cheap labor allowed schooling to expand.

Hiring women also benefited the women themselves. Women were finally given the option to be financially independent from others. In this way, teaching served as a liberating career choice for middle-class women, one of the only occupations that did not involve a degradation in status. Amelia “Jennie” Akenhurst Lines was a teacher in New York and Georgia, who, “[d]espite the many social and economic constraints imposed on women by a male-dominated society, had a powerful conviction that social and economic achievement would come to those who were diligent and worked hard.”⁴⁸ Jennie described teaching as a necessity: “It will be doing better than I have ever done before but I do not anticipate much enjoyment. [I]t is not such a situation as I should choose if I could have my choice but you know I have got to support myself and cannot do as I will but as I can.”⁴⁹ Towards the end of the narrative, she says, “I feel quite relieved now that I can throw off the burden of a teacher once more; my situation here however has been a pleasant one; but I have taught so many years I am quite willing to give [up] my profession, unless necessity compels me to resume it.”⁵⁰ Jennie was aware that she needed to teach in order to support herself, and felt relief when she was finally financially independent

enough to stop teaching unless she needed the money once again. She also made it clear that even a good teaching job at this time did not pay enough.

Mary Ames, a teacher from Massachusetts, travelled to the South with her friend Emily Bliss in order to teach for the Freedmen's Bureau.⁵¹ They taught in Edisto Island, South Carolina, from 1865 to 1866.⁵² While teaching, she describes a time in which she paid another teacher her first wages as "the first money she ever earned or handled."⁵³ Teaching gave these women the ability to achieve financial independence. Almost all of them mentioned money in their works. Being a mother was conventionally unremunerated work, whereas these women consistently focused on the financial benefits of teaching, one of the major ways their work *differed* from domestic tasks. These women contrasted with the reformers' ideals by foregrounding their financially exigent motives to teach.

Though many women turned to teaching for the money, payment was not always assured. Often teachers would not receive their salaries immediately, or in some cases, ever. Their salaries depended on the families of students, who would often try to barter or not pay at all. Mary Ames, for example, describes a time in which one of her students pays her in the form of eggs.⁵⁴ On one occasion, Arozina Perkins, constantly concerned about her finances, "can't say whether I shall be able to clear all expenses or not. Expect when I get what clothes worn out that I bro't with me I shall be obliged to wear a blanket, for all things are so dear here that I can never make enough to clothe me decently."⁵⁵ She spoke to the insufficient and insecure pay earned by women at the time. This uncertainty pushed some women to find other ways to make money while teaching. Often they would take up sewing, cooking, bottle washing, or being a milk maid, seamstress or nurse.⁵⁶ Mollie Dorsey Sanford, a teacher in Nebraska City, stated that she "could take the school this fall again, but it is not a paying affair."⁵⁷ She later added, "I have been offered the school, but declined. I believe I prefer sewing, unless I could be a first-class teacher."⁵⁸ It is clear that just because teaching provided these women with financial opportunity, this didn't mean they were only involved for the money and didn't want to be successful and effective teachers. Irene Hardy described one of her teaching stints as "pleasant and profitable" to her.⁵⁹ These teachers were reaping the benefits of the profession in ways the reformers had not anticipated; they also keep their prose here firmly in the realm of the real, not the utopian.

These sentiments were also echoed by Laura M. Towne. Laura, an abolitionist, came from the North to the South to work with former slaves and eventually opened the first freedmen's

school with Ellen Murray in the Sea Islands of South Carolina. Her letters and diary were written from 1862 to 1884. During her roles as both teacher and superintendent of the school, she said, “I don't believe a white man would run the place for love or what money he could make, because there are so few white men, and so much unleased land. If I had nothing to do but plant, I believe I could make it pay, but my superintending no doubt pays better.”⁶⁰ It is evident that she taught in part because it gave her financial freedom. She addressed the gender limitations of the time: a man has the ability to farm cheap land, but because she cannot do this, she taught instead. When she first started teaching, the money was unreliable, an issue many teachers faced at the time. Once she finally reached a sort of equilibrium, she said, “The money comes very promptly monthly now, but I always write to draw it. I have taken one month's full salary, and two months twenty[-]five dollars each, as I taught only half time.”⁶¹ She was able to experience steady pay and a position of power, challenging nineteenth-century gender roles.

Towards the end of her narrative, Laura spoke as a fully independent individual. “As we Townes grow older we have a great propensity to snuggle into retired, homey corners and forego the world.” She continued, “R. speaks just as if I could afford a jaunt whenever I like. Indeed, I must stay at home and put the journey money into roofs, for we are almost drowned out occasionally, and as we have had a very rainy winter, the inconvenience is considerable.”⁶² She was responsible for being smart with her money, a responsibility not afforded to most women of the time. She was realistic and realized that she couldn't afford to take time off and do what she wanted. By the end of her narrative, she claimed that she would no longer take a salary, and instead she reserved it for the other teachers so that the school could stay open for a year or two more. She was now so financially stable that she could work as a volunteer for her own enjoyment. She was also able to continue her activism and abolitionist work, exhibiting that driven, intelligent teachers were needed for schools to prosper, particularly schools for African Americans. She volunteered to ensure that the school would stay in their hands, instead of going to someone that they did not like.⁶³ Laura appreciated the money she had been able to earn, while also genuinely caring for her work.

Although the reformers' desire was to feminize teaching as a form of cheap labor, women ended up reaping some benefits from their public roles. Although they were finally able to earn their own wage and not be subservient to another person, the issues regarding wage inequality and insufficient remuneration have persisted into the twenty-first century. In the nineteenth

century, “[I]t was often repeated that women teachers could live well on less money; that male-female wage equity was unsupportable, either economically or politically; and that only inept men could be hired at women’s wages. Moreover, although men teachers commonly earned 40 percent more than women, the discrepancies in other fields were larger, and teaching paid well compared to other women’s occupations.”⁶⁴ Earning a wage in and of itself was a huge cultural shift for women. It was an important step towards overcoming the ongoing struggle surrounding the wage gap. Women were, at the very least, given the means to support themselves and hopefully become financially stable, earning them a newfound independence.

Betterment of the Condition of Women: Teaching to Gain Independence

Women’s entrance into the profession, albeit due to gender essentialism and financial exigency, provided many benefits which they had not had before in large numbers. As Beecher puts it, teaching was to become “a profession as honourable and as lucrative for her as the legal, medical, and theological are for men.”⁶⁵ Single women were given the opportunity to leave the domestic sphere and enter the working world, instead of having to marry. The entrance of women into the profession, although intended to rectify the pitfalls of common schools, would also revolutionize the personal lives of women. “The “sacred office” gave them public status, the claim to a decent income, freedom to marry only for “pure affection,” and their own institutions of higher education.”⁶⁶ Suddenly women had the opportunity to further their own educations, which they did not have before. With teaching came the opportunity to learn more outside of the household, pursue a position with dignity and power, secure financial wellbeing, and remain single or wait for love.⁶⁷

The independence gained via the female-dominated profession allowed the teachers to show signs of modern-day feminism. When reformers discussed women’s power in the classroom, they framed it largely in maternal and moral terms. Horace Mann, for example, believed that women, who have long been “outlawed from honorable service” and made “the slaves of man,-- the menials in his household, the drudges in his field, the instruments of his pleasure: or at best, the gilded toys of his leisure days,” can achieve “a noble revenge” through the “manifestation of the superiority of moral power” in the schoolroom.⁶⁸ He was appealing to the oppressed women, in hopes that teaching would pique their interest and provide them with a new way of life through the assertion of their moral power. While Mann is trying to persuade women to enter the

field for moral reasons, he unconsciously assisted women in achieving more than they could have before, and they gained power that exceeded the assertion of a gendered superiority in kindness and goodness. His belief in women's moral superiority provided an avenue to those who yearned from freedom on different terms, freedom not unlike that of a woman in the twenty-first century.

Jennie Akenhurst Lines was able to experience independence in the form of leadership by obtaining a position of power within the field. In reference to another schoolteacher who criticized how she taught, Jennie asserted: "I consider myself competent to make and enforce my own rules."⁶⁹ She had ultimate control in her classroom and voiced her opinions about her profession as though she were a man of the nineteenth century.

Arozina Perkins also experienced freedom in the form geographic mobility and adventure. In the introduction to her journal, Polly Welts Kaufman explains that, "In counterpoint to her deep convictions derived from evangelical Protestantism, two themes appear in the early part of her diary that combine to lead Arozina to make the decision to go West: a sense of loss of home and freedom, and a sensitive nature and a tendency to dream."⁷⁰ Despite Arozina's faith, she was more heavily driven to go west to teach by her desire to be free and pursue her childhood dreams.

I was in the centre of a wide Western Prairie, and one of the many dreams of my early days was being realized; and for a time I was happy. I tho't how often, when a schoolgirl, I had traced out on the map the very spot upon which I now stood, while my mind was filled with the imaginings of its wildness, and tho'ts of future devotedness to the cause of Truth and Education here. I was *happy* in the exercise of that foreshadowed *devotedness now*.⁷¹

Teaching not only allowed Arozina to fulfill her childhood dreams, but to be happy. Part of the independence afforded by teaching came in the forms of emotional freedom and geographic mobility.

The teaching profession also allowed women like Irene Hardy to experience intellectual freedom. Born in Eaton, Ohio, Irene attended Antioch College in order to become a teacher. She travelled west to teach and in hopes of improving her health. She published a textbook for public schools and wrote poetry. In 1894, she became a professor at Stanford University in literature, composition and short story writing.⁷² Being a teacher enabled her to pursue higher education, which she might not have if she had married. She had local and regional prestige because of

poetry and teaching activities—something that was considered rare for women of the time. Irene was able to advance to a position in higher education because she went to college in order to be a teacher. Historian Geraldine Clifford asserts, “[w]hile nineteenth-century feminists might have seen teaching as wholesomely engaging the female mind, the occupation was generally presented as useful, nondistracting training for home life.”⁷³ Despite the light in which reformists painted teaching, women were able to use teaching as an avenue for self-improvement and intellectual engagement outside of the household. With Irene’s ability to access education came a desire for more for her gender. While teaching in California, she had the opportunity to listen to Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, the latter of whom was a teacher. She reflected on the event saying, “I could not look at these women and hear their voices without feeling deeply the earnestness of their plea for the betterment of the condition of women.”⁷⁴ The feminization of teaching allowed women to begin to subvert the gender norms of the time by licensing intellectual and even political pursuits.

Often, these women felt torn between their duties to the classroom and their opportunities to improve themselves. When she first began to teach, Charlotte Forten Grimké wrote in her journal, “The weather is hot; the children restless, and I find a teacher’s life not nearly as pleasant as a scholar’s. But I do not despair.”⁷⁵ She preferred being a scholar to teaching but continues to teach anyway. This internal conflict towards self-improvement is seen in Charlotte as well: “I know that I am very selfish. Always the thought of self-culture presents itself *first*. With that, I think I can accomplish something more noble, more enduring, I will try not to forget that, while striving to improve myself, I may at least *commence* to work for others.”⁷⁶ Charlotte felt that self-improvement was selfish and tried to compromise by balancing both. She used teaching to justify her motives for self-improvement.

Reshaping the “Motherteacher” Ideal

With the opportunity to teach came the prospect of moving up the ladder within the field. From Irene Hardy’s entrance into the profession, she was able to start teaching and progress to be superintendent and principal of a high school. She experienced advances in the workplace that were extremely uncommon for women at that time. She was given a position of power. “There was very little oversight by the principal and the school board. I was absolute mistress in my own room.”⁷⁷ She did not have to be submissive, as women were expected to be at the time. She also

became a professor, which was extremely rare for a woman to do in the nineteenth century. Irene exemplifies a progressive woman of the time—she was able to further her education, obtain leadership positions, and support herself.

Though her advancement was relatively unique, Irene’s experiences resonate with the other women teachers as well—they all teach for a variety of reasons: having religious motives, wanting financial freedom or independence, as well as having a desire to care and be cared for. Not only did these women’s memoirs highlight a variety of motives besides mother-love for teaching, they also responded to and rewrote the cultural prescriptions surrounding teacherly love. The omnipresent views of the reformers were not ignored, but used for the teachers’ own devices. They were able to shape these into their own ideals, clearly incongruent with those of the reformers. These women exhibit diversity in their experiences—there is no type that fits them, nor is there a single label that suffices to accurately describe their identities and experiences.

These teachers often blatantly dissented from the motherteacher model. Irene Hardy, in particular, was aware that she was being asked to do emotional work, but resisted the “standardization,” in Hochschild’s words, of mother love.⁷⁸ Irene’s journal directly engaged with and ultimately reshaped the ideal of the motherteacher. She wrote,

Many of [my students] I came near to in the capacity of teacher and mother; to not a few, I was all the mother the world had for them. To a few, one here and there in the passing years, I became the mother I might have been to my very own, if I had married and had my own. The maternal faculty was large in me, and satisfied itself deeply by this feeling for the motherless and by giving itself out in help to them; to those also who had no relation of confidence with their own parents in the flesh; to those who had never remembered a mother; to those whose unthinking mothers could not know what their children needed. That was my happiness, especially when as a mature woman at thirty I began to understand life better. It was after this time that I lived most profoundly in that side of my nature, and did most for humanity and perhaps grew most myself.⁷⁹

This passage shows that Irene was able to fulfill the maternal desires in her by teaching; therefore, she did not necessarily need to marry and accept the domestic expectations of the time. Without marrying, she was able to engage in self-discovery and pursue her passions academically while also caring for others. As is clear, she was not exhibiting standardized teacher love given effortlessly to all her students. Instead, she singled out a few for special bonds

and discussed being the mother to those who may not have had their own, demonstrating selectiveness in her affection.

Charlotte Forten Grimké likewise revised the motherteacher model. She discussed affection for one Sunday School student in particular: “I am quite in love with one of the children here—little Amaretta who is niece to our good old Amaretta. She is a cunning little kittenish thing with such a gentle demure look. She is not quite black, and has pretty close hair, but delicate features. She is bright too. I love the child. Wish I c[ou]ld take her for my own.”⁸⁰ Charlotte is exhibiting love for one of her students specifically, not all of them. She is describing a one-on-one relationship, where Amaretta is set apart from the rest of the students. If she were exhibiting the motherteacher ideal, she would be expressing love for all of her students and this would be her main motivation in teaching them. She was instead reaching for some sort of personal life, as her need for affection was not met in the classroom, and the life of a teacher was typically a lonely one. Often women teachers complained of being lonely, as teaching took up most of their time. Jennie Akenhurst Lines claimed, for example, that even when she wasn't teaching, she “saw people enough, but they had no sympathies in common with [her]”, echoing this loneliness and lack of understanding from others in regards to the life of a teacher.⁸¹ She demonstrates that teaching disconnected her from others, quite the opposite of how the reformers framed teaching.

Charlotte further shied away from this ideal when she left her position because she was asked to join the soldiers in Florida to teach them. She anticipated, “I shall like that. So much depends on these men. If I can help them in any way I shall be glad to do so. I shall be sorry to leave my dear children and Miss T. [owne] and Miss M. [urray] to whom I am most warmly attached; but if I can really do more good by going, I shall be content.”⁸² Here it becomes clear that she saw the soldiers and children as being interchangeable—that she is involved in caring work, not mother’s work. Even when these women framed their teaching as caring work, they did it on their own terms.

As these memoirs demonstrate, for nineteenth-century teachers care work was just one aspect of the teaching experience. It was a way for women of the time to achieve freedom and still fit into society. Potentially subversive thinking and personal ambition were socially acceptable under the guise of teaching. These women were not motivated solely or primarily by mother love, but instead prioritized many different motives, namely, religion, financial exigency, and

personal independence. They took cultural prescriptions and reshaped them within their own life stories.

Irene concludes her memoir by simply stating, “A friend who has read these pages objects, ‘But you have not after all, in all the chapters in which you have written of your life as a teacher, told how you taught so as to influence character.’ Nor can I, nor, I think, can anyone else tell of her own work as it affects others. I wanted to help them. Some said that I did. That is all I can tell.”⁸³ Her reflections are all written in regards to herself and what teaching did for her. While she hoped to impact society, she could not tell if she succeeded. Just as the reformers cannot speak for these teachers, Irene can only speak for what teaching meant to her. As this essay shows, it’s time that we listen.



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Notes

¹ Catherine Beecher, *The Duty of American Women to their Country* (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1845), 104-105.

² *Ibid.*, 64.

³ Nancy Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession: Voices from the History of Teaching* (New York City: Feminist Press, 1981), 4.

⁴ Joel Perlmann and Robert A. Margo, *Women's Work?: American Schoolteachers, 1650-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 8.

⁵ "Teacher Trends," National Center for Education Statistics, 2016 (accessed Feb. 2017), <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=28>.

⁶ Joel H. Spring, *The American School: A Global Context from the Puritans to the Obama Era* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011), 82.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

⁸ Henry Barnard, ed., *Connecticut Common School Journal*, vols. 1-4, 1838-1842 (Hartford: Case, Tiffany & Burnham, 1842), 243.

⁹ Redding S. Sugg, *Motherteacher: The Feminization of American Education* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1978), 133.

¹⁰ Jo Anne Preston. "Domestic Ideology, School Reformers, and Female Teachers: Schoolteaching Becomes Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century New England," *The New England Quarterly* 66, no. 4 (1993): 532.

¹¹ Sugg, *Motherteacher*, 135.

¹² Arlie Russell Hochschild. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. (Oakland: University of California, 1983), 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴ Jessica Enoch. "A Woman's Place Is in the School: Rhetorics of Gendered Space in Nineteenth-Century America," *College English* 70, no. 3, (Jan. 2008): 275.

¹⁵ In this paper, these women will be thought of as characters in the texts, and will be referred to as such.

¹⁶ Laura M. Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne: Written from the Sea Islands of South*

Carolina 1862-1884, ed. by Rupert Sargent Holland. (Cambridge: Riverside press, 1912), 189.

¹⁷ Charlotte Forten Grimké, *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989), xxxvi.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xxxviii.

¹⁹ Mary Ames, "From a New England Woman's Diary in Dixie in 1865," *Documenting the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2004), 125.

²⁰ Polly Welts Kaufman, *Women Teachers on the Frontier* (New Haven, Yale UP, 1984), 56.

²¹ Mollie Dorsey Sanford, *Mollie: The Journal of Mollie Dorsey Sanford in Nebraska and Colorado Territories, 1857-1866* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1959), 2.

²² Miller, Henry. *Memoirs of Miss Henrietta B. Miller: Late Teacher of Fairview School, Who Died at Waynesboro, Penna., December 23, 1874* (Waynesboro: Inquirer P & P Company, 1877), 56.

²³ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 59, 82.

²⁵ Amelia Akenhurst Lines, *To Raise Myself a Little: The Diaries and Letters of Jennie, a Georgia Teacher, 1851-1886*. ed. by Thomas Dyer (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1982), 8.

²⁶ Irene Hardy, *An Ohio Schoolmistress: The Memoirs of Irene Hardy*, ed. by Louis Filler (Kent: Kent State UP, 1980), viii.

²⁷ Horace Mann, "Report for 1848." In *Annual Reports on Education*, 640-758. (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1872), 62.

²⁸ Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession*, 12.

²⁹ Kaufman, *Women Teachers on the Frontier*, 55-57.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

³² Lines, *To Raise Myself a Little*, ix.

³³ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

- ³⁶ Miller, *Memoirs of Miss Henrietta B. Miller*, 68.
- ³⁷ Grimké, *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, 13.
- ³⁸ Ibid., 18.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 24.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., xxxvi- xxxviii.
- ⁴¹ 158.
- ⁴² Ibid., 189-190.
- ⁴³ Clifford, *Those Good Gertrudes*, 49.
- ⁴⁴ Horace Mann. *Annual Reports on Education*. (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1872), 22.
- ⁴⁵ Catharine Beecher. *The Duty of American Women to their Country* (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1845), 63.
- ⁴⁶ Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession*, 9.
- ⁴⁷ Beecher, *The Duty of American Women to their Country*, 62.
- ⁴⁸ Lines, *To Raise Myself a Little*, 1.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 17.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 182.
- ⁵¹ Ames, "From a New England Woman's Diary in Dixie in 1865," 1.
- ⁵² Ibid., 125.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 40.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 31.
- ⁵⁵ Kaufman, *Women Teachers on the Frontier*, 138.
- ⁵⁶ Mollie Dorsey Sanford, *Mollie: The Journal of Mollie Dorsey Sanford in Nebraska and Colorado Territories, 1857-1866*. (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1959), 102.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 93.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 98.
- ⁵⁹ Hardy, *An Ohio Schoolmistress: The Memoirs of Irene Hardy*, 159.

⁶⁰ Laura M. Towne, *Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne: Written from the Sea Islands of South Carolina 1862-1884*, ed. Rupert Sargent Holland (Cambridge: Riverside press, 1912), 189.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 231.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 243-244.

⁶⁴ Clifford, *Those Good Gertrudes: A Social History of Women Teachers in America*, 49.

⁶⁵ Beecher, *The Duty of American Women to their Country*, 64.

⁶⁶ Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession*, 15.

⁶⁷ Clifford, *Those Good Gertrudes: A Social History of Women Teachers in America*, 58.

⁶⁸ Mann, *Report for 1848*, 60-61.

⁶⁹ Lines, *To Raise Myself a Little*, 92.

⁷⁰ Kaufman, *Women Teachers on the Frontier*, 55.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁷² Hardy, *An Ohio Schoolmistress*, viii.

⁷³ Clifford, *Those Good Gertrudes*, 69.

⁷⁴ Hardy, *An Ohio Schoolmistress*, 254.

⁷⁵ Grimké, *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, 158.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 189-190.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁷⁸ Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*, 13.

⁷⁹ Hardy, *An Ohio Schoolmistress*, 240.

⁸⁰ Grimké, *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, 410.

⁸¹ Lines, *To Raise Myself a Little*, 109.

⁸² Grimké, *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, 460.

⁸³ Hardy, *An Ohio Schoolmistress*, 303.