

Abstract

There is presently an imbalance in our education system. A significantly larger number of women are teachers, compared to men. This is especially visible in elementary education. There are many changes and elements throughout history causing this imbalance. In the 1800s, the United States faced a strong industrial change in production and work. Gender roles at this time became pronounced. These historic gender roles created a nation where women flocked to work in education, resulting in the present imbalance between men and women in the teaching profession.

How Did Gender Roles in the 1800s Influence Teaching?

According to Snyder and Dillow (2015) of the U.S. Department of Education, in the 2011-12 school year, 76 percent of public school teachers were female, with an even larger percent working in public elementary schools. There are many elements that have contributed to this imbalance both presently and in history. These elements include rapid industrial growth, gender expectations, and child-parent interactions in the nineteenth century. The 1800s in America saw great change, especially in male and female gender roles. It is proposed that the gender roles of this era strongly affected teaching and education.

This paper begins with discussion of the industrial growth of the 1800s and the resulting female role changes. Several pieces of literature published in the nineteenth century are then discussed as a means for describing female gender roles and responsibilities. These are compared with current viewed teacher responsibilities as a means for describing the impact 1800s gender roles had on teaching.

Discussion

In the nineteenth century, the United States faced rapid expansion into a business industry. Industry revolutionized, and, as a result, production switched from the home to factories (Whicker & Kronenfeld, 1986). Before the 1800s, farms and family-owned businesses had once dominated industry. The focus of production was on food products and handmade goods. The 1800s saw a dramatic rise in factories where products were mass-produced. These factories employed millions of men nationwide, and wage work was the primary source of breadwinning (Carroll (Ed.), 2003). Where men had once worked in the home, they now had to report to factories daily. The American male faced changes in the 1800s, such as a shift in father-son relationships, increased dependency of their wives, and an increased hands-off approach to child rearing.

In the nineteenth century, the American male faced changes in his role. The identity of a male was defined by his ability to provide for the family. Though he once could provide from the home, he now had to leave for work daily. This, combined with long workdays, made connecting with children far more difficult (Carroll (Ed.), 2003). Father-child relationships became dramatically different, especially with sons.

Before this massive industrial growth, men were able to provide for families from home and, in doing so, set an example for sons. In daily work, such as farming or maintaining a family business, men had the ability to shape their sons' lives. However, because most men had to leave their homes in the 1800s, women began to influence their sons' lives significantly more (Carroll (Ed.), 2003). As roles shifted, men and women had to rely on each other. Fuller (1994) describes the relationship between man and wife in the nineteenth century as a "household partnership," where the man furnishes the home and the woman regulates it. The role of a woman in the home shifted as she gained new responsibilities in the nineteenth century.

Before the 1800s, women had little responsibility in shaping the careers of their children. It was considered a father's duty to direct his child to the appropriate career suited to his child's gender, skills, and talents. As men had to leave the home more in the nineteenth century, this responsibility fell to mothers. Women were now responsible for introducing children to possible careers and molding them for successful futures (Carroll (Ed.), 2003). With this change, mother-son relationships grew dramatically closer. Where fathers had once been solely responsible for teaching sons skills and trades, women now had to nurture and aid the development of their sons' careers on their own. This shift in responsibility had not occurred before the nineteenth century. Though the role of women to have the majority of care for children was not new, it clearly became more pronounced in the 1800s.

Why was it that the role of child-care fell to women? According to Bluemen-Lipmen (1984), nineteenth century culture believed women to be nurturers by nature. It was not only expected, but also natural for women to be responsible for the care of children. The home was regarded as a woman's domain, and this included children. A woman's work was centered on the home, where it was not possible for her to earn money for the family. As a result, women became dependent on their male providers. Moreover, women were not welcome in the blossoming industrialized work force of the 1800s (Carroll (Ed.), 2003).

Studley's book, *What Our Girls Ought to Know*, was published in 1889. This book closely accounted reasoning for why women belonged in the home as opposed to the industrialized world of working. Not only were women not welcome to work outside the home in "masculine jobs," but Studley (1889) proposed that women should have expected to be judged harshly for stepping out of their roles in "women's work." When a woman adhered to this work, she had the potential to be considered a perfect woman. Being classified as the perfect woman was dependent on a female caring for her children properly. She was responsible for teaching her children all that they needed to know in order to become successful individuals. Studley (1889), suggested that a mother was a teacher and that these roles went hand in hand. Wright's (1881) book, *The Complete Home: An Encyclopedia of Domestic Life and Affairs*, details additional responsibilities of a woman in the nineteenth century. Each chapter in this book described a duty of women in the 1800s. Every single one of these duties was in the home. A woman's life was her house, husband, and children. The primary focus of this book is how a woman's actions and duties affect her children.

According to Wright (1881), children in the nineteenth century were the center of the home. It is the responsibility of a woman to train her children and train them to lead successful lives. This includes a mother maintaining a clean and healthy home, helping her children choose

acceptable friends, appropriate books, and reading materials. Mothers were also responsible for teaching their children how to handle emergencies and stay calm and relaxed in dangerous situations. Wright (1881) firmly believed that the education of a child began at birth. She described children as flowers who must be tended to carefully. This included weeding away poor friendships and pruning children with appropriate influences. These influences included proper reading materials and religious guidance. They also must be watered with care and nurturance. Above all, Wright (1881) compared a mother to a teacher.

Throughout her entire book, Wright (1881), described a woman's interactions with her children as "training" and "teaching." It appears as though a woman was naturally a teacher to her children. In fact, mothers who did not train their children properly were considered selfish, because her life was supposed to be devoted to her children rather than herself (Wright, 1881). How did these responsibilities and roles affect the teaching profession? Women and men in the nineteenth century clearly had specific roles to which they belonged. Not only were they not welcomed in roles of the other gender, but they also had the potential to be ridiculed when they did not fulfill the roles prescribed to their gender by society. Each gender had clear distinctions in the roles they were to fulfill. These roles have a clear bearing on today's education system.

The roles teachers play presently in students' lives are similar, if not identical, to the roles mothers played in the lives of their children in the 1800s. Jansen and Merwe (2015) define several key components to the modern-day teaching profession, many of which can be traced to the gender roles of the nineteenth century. One of the first and foremost aspects Jansen and Merwe discuss is the importance of a teacher being available to students. Students must be able to turn to their teachers at any time when they need assistance. Just as students turn to their teachers in the twenty-first century for help, children turned to their mothers in the 1800s (Wright, 1881).

Because fathers had to leave home to go to work daily, mothers provided the emotional support children needed growing up. Students frequently turn to teachers for emotional support in schools when in need of advice or comfort. Providing emotional care is an essential duty to twenty-first century teaching as well that cannot be ignored (Jansen & Merwe, 2015). Just as teachers care closely for students' emotional needs, they also pay close attention to the social aspects of their students' lives.

Schools provide children with countless social situations that can affect them significantly. Students can thrive or fall short socially. This frequently determines how their interactions in school will progress for years to come. Jansen and Merwe (2015) describe a teacher's involvement in this aspect of development as crucial. Teachers monitor social situations in their classrooms on a daily basis. They are in a role where they can interrupt unhealthy interactions and guide children to interact more positively. Teachers also instruct children in how to handle emotions and feelings when dealing with others. Similarly, mothers in the nineteenth century were constant observers and mediators in the social interactions of their children (Wright, 1881).

Twenty-first century teachers monitor students' social wellbeing as well as friendships formed in school. Wright (1881) discussed the importance of a mother helping her children choose appropriate friends in the 1800s. Jansen and Merwe (2015) also describe the valuable role

a teacher can play in twenty-first century schools when guiding students in forming friendships. Teachers encourage students to find similarities in other classmates and build healthy, sustained relationships.

Conclusion

The present disproportion of female teachers in the America is deeply rooted in our nation's history. The rapid industrial expansion of the 1800s affected the responsibilities of men and women in different ways. Women's lives became devoted to the care of children, whereas men devoted their lives to the workforce. The responsibilities of these gender roles have rooted themselves in our modern education system. Gender roles of the 1800s are still affecting the teaching profession and education system and provide an explanation as to why so many schoolteachers are female.

References

- Bluemen-Lipman, J. (1984). *Gender Roles and Power*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Carroll, B. (Ed.). (2003). *American masculinities: A historical encyclopedia*. New York, NY: The Moschovitis Group, Inc.
- Fuller, M. (1994). *Women in the nineteenth century and other writings*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Jansen, C. & Merwe, P. (2015). Teaching practice in the 21st century: Emerging trends, challenges and opportunities. *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 3(3). Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1056080.pdf>
- Snyder, T.D. & Dillow, S.A. (2015). *Digest of education statistics 2013*. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015011.pdf>
- Studley, M.J. (1889). *What our girls ought to know*. New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls.
- Whicker, M.L. & Kronenfeld, J.J. (1986). *Sex role changes: Technology, politics, and policy*. New York, NY: Praeger Publishers.
- Wright, J.M. (1881). *The complete home: An encyclopedia of domestic life and affairs*. Philadelphia, PA: J.C. McCurdy & Co., Publishers.