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# **SKIRTING THE BOUNDARIES:**

## **The Impact Of Marriage And Domesticity On Women's Perceptions Of Kindergarten And Primary Teaching As A Career In Postwar New Zealand**

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for the degree  
of Master of Education  
at Massey University

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## Abstract

It has been argued that domestic ideologies have played a major influence in shaping both the education profession and the teaching careers of women, bringing about gender differentiated careers that have provided both constraints and professional opportunities for women teachers. Little is known of the response of women teachers to domestic ideologies; how they interpreted and defined their dual domestic and teaching responsibilities and in turn helped reshape them. In addition, the studies that do exist have tended to assume a commonality of experiences among women and over time. Scant attention has been paid to variations in women's approach towards work or to how both domestic and employment experiences structure perceptions of teaching.

Also important is the need to examine the constraints and opportunities within the historical context in which women's experiences occurred. Women entering teaching in post World War Two New Zealand experienced contradictory and changing expectations of their domestic and teaching roles. On one hand, domestic life was represented as the proper sphere for women, on the other, the teacher shortage saw an unprecedented demand for their services. While women took advantage of the greater professional opportunities of the time to develop a diversity of career patterns this shift required women to negotiate a range of contradictions and tensions in the relationship between their identities as teachers and as homemakers.

This thesis will add to our understanding of the impact of domestic ideologies on the teaching careers of women by showing how a small sample of women defined and constructed their teaching careers in the postwar era. The voices of twelve kindergarten and primary women teachers form the basis of this study; their experiences of negotiating and shaping their dual teaching and domestic identities, the focus. It is argued that women's career decisions cannot be separated from the politics of domesticity. Although it is women's teaching careers that have been largely affected by the ongoing need to balance this duality, the way forward is to regard work and family issues as universal, not just as women's concerns.

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