Vocational Education in Postrevolutionary Mexico

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During the 1930s and 40s, vocational schools played an important role in the lives of Mexican women. Upon completing their primary education, girls often spent two or three years in a vocational school to acquire a variety of skills such as bookkeeping, sewing, and typing which they could use throughout their lives. Historians Patricia Schell and Frederick Lazear Miranda have argued that the Mexican government provided such training so that women could have a means of earning a living in the absence of a male breadwinner or to practice a trade in between domestic chores. However, through an in-depth analysis of the vocational school Miguel Lerdo de Tejada, my faculty advisor and I have found that while schools purported to serve the working class, many students were from the middle class and sought training to exercise a profession.

By assessing documents from the Ministry of Public Education relating to both students and teachers, I have gained insight as to the socio-economic, geographic, and familial backgrounds of the young women who attended Miguel Lerdo de Tejada. Combining this information with the records of individual teachers and press coverage of vocational schools has allowed me to determine how society constructed these schools and the women who attended them in terms of gender and class identity. This project not only affords an enhanced understanding of the women who populated vocational schools, but also the way commercial education contributed to changing gender roles in Mexico.