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“Raw with the shame that I’d tried to be like the rest and couldn’t”: sexual control of immigrant girls in public schools and in literature in early twentieth century America

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“Raw with the shame that I’d tried to be like the rest and couldn’t”:

Sexual Control of Immigrant Girls in Public Schools and in Literature in Early Twentieth  
Century America

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degrees of Bachelor of Arts  
in Educational Studies and in English

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I am an immigrant and I will stay an immigrant forever

-Junot Díaz

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## Abstract

After the surge in immigration to the US at the turn of the twentieth century, public schools grappled with White American anxieties about foreign students. Schools responded to these anxieties, in part, by instructing female students, through formal lessons or implicit socialization, in terms of sexual behavior. This thesis examines the first known American sex survey (conducted 1892-1920), a 1925 novel by Anzia Yeziarska, a prominent immigrant woman writer, and documents related to a 1913 public school sex education course. These texts demonstrate the formation of apparatuses of immigrant sexual control. *The Mosher Survey* demonstrates a medical and educational authority attempting to create a language for discussing sex and sexuality education for women. Anzia Yeziarska's 1925 novel *Bread Givers* offers a window into the effects of trying to access American legitimation through school and sexual behavior. The 1913 Chicago Experiment, the first public school sex education course, demonstrates fear and distrust of immigrant girls. The course taught immigrant girls to bear the burden of public anxieties about them by internalizing shame.

## Introduction

Anzia Yeziarska broke John Dewey's heart in 1918. The educational reformer confessed his love for the immigrant writer and propositioned her for sex after months of an affair carried out mostly through the mail. When she said no, he asked for his letters back. Instead of obliging, she burned them (Dearborn). Since Yeziarska tried to access American legitimation as a writer through her relationship to Dewey, her burning his letters is as much a metaphor as it is a response to one of her heroes being vulgar. She tried to get closer to American language through Dewey, and refused to return any part of that language to him. This would've been the end of public knowledge of this story if it wasn't for a Columbia University janitor working in the 1910's and 1920's. While he cleaned out the trash from Dewey's office every day, he found drafts and drafts of Dewey's dramatic and clumsy poetry for Yeziarska (Boydston).

The poems feel incongruous with the other writings and self descriptions of these figures. The descriptions of Yeziarska in these poems seem disconnected from the person Yeziarska actually was. It's also hard to reconcile the image of the prominent reformer who "was arguably the most influential figure in twentieth-century America" with the side of him that described his a young Polish immigrant student and mistress in histrionic language (Dearborn 3). In his poem "Two Weeks" he imagines her:

Whate'er, howe'er you move or rest  
I see your body's breathing  
The curving of your breast  
And hear the warm thoughts seething (Dewey 30-33)

This language denotes intimacy and intrusion. Dewey wants to understand Yeziarska, but doesn't have access to "the warm thoughts seething." He details the ways he sees and hears her body, making the act of describing her body an erotic experience. In doing so he uses the high

registers of language that Yeziarska worked to access in her career in order to describe her sexualized body, a domain Yeziarska worked to avoid. The tension evident in their relationship and in this poem fragment demonstrate the tensions evident between immigrant women and progressive models of education in the early twentieth century, tensions that were localized around sexuality and language.

Yeziarska had fallen for Dewey in his office at Columbia University. The young Polish immigrant had been sidelined into teaching cooking and marched to Dewey's office to demand that Dewey help her secure a position teaching writing (Taylor 638). Mary Dearborn suggests that at this moment "she was a working girl in search of a savior. . . . The immigrant had come knocking at—or rather was prepared to burst through—the office door of the man who she felt represented America itself" (Dearborn, as cited in Kessner, 185). She wanted to be a real American writer and teacher, and demanded that Dewey help her to become one. She showed up at his office in 1917 emboldened by the publication of her first short story, "The Free Vacation House." Dearborn argues that Dewey then took her under his wing because "Yeziarska was the archetypal 'other,' the immigrant he sought desperately to understand" (Dearborn, as cited in Kessner, 185). Dewey had the allure of belonging, while Yeziarska had the attractiveness of being an outsider.

After this meeting, the two began a brief romance that would influence the career trajectories of both. For six months they learned from each other and intertwined their lives. Their relationship ended and Yeziarska rose to national acclaim as a writer. As she wrote about immigrant women, her works again and again included "savior" male teachers reminiscent of Dewey (Kessner). Dewey went on to rise to national acclaim, becoming a prominent figure in

education reform and the 93rd most cited psychologist of the twentieth century (“Eminent Psychologists”). Yeziarska wrote about the pitfalls of trying to access “America itself” while Dewey went on to try to shape “America itself.” Yeziarska’s work over and over again demonstrates the impossibility of American legitimation through sexuality or language, despite claims of educational reforms like Dewey that this was the proper path for immigrant women.

Instructing immigrant girls how to perform American sexuality took hold among some education reformers associated with the progressive movements of Dewey. One of Dewey’s former students, Ella Flagg Young, spearheaded the first major undertaking of sex and sexuality instruction for immigrant girls. Young was the first female superintendent of a school district in a major US city, the first woman to head the National Education Association, and she successfully pushed for the first public school sex education course in 1913 (Eisenmann 496, Lagemann 171). When she came to Dewey’s class in 1895, she was a career schoolteacher. She studied under him at the University of Chicago at age 50, older than any of her classmates. Her intellect and zeal in the class soon led Dewey to ask her to help run the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago (Lagemann 172). Some scholars note their collaboration as incidental, but current scholars, such as Lagemann, argue that Flagg Young’s work pushed Dewey to push for more teacher autonomy and support in his reforms. Dewey himself remarked that he was “constantly getting ideas from her” and called her one of his biggest professional influences (Dewey, in McManis [1916], p.120, as cited in Lagemann 177).

Young left the Laboratory School and became the Superintendent of Chicago Public schools, where, ten years later, she pushed the schools to incorporate sex education into their curriculum (Moran). The one year of sex hygiene lectures that she got into Chicago Public

Schools in 1913-1914 is referred to in scholarship and news accounts as The Chicago Experiment (Jensen). This name fits as the course was an experiment in that it was a way to try out something unheard-of. As previous sex education had targeted White native born boys (Jensen), Young's insistence on giving the same instruction to immigrant girls was a radical gesture of inclusion. This course was also an experiment in that it set out to prove the hypothesis that constructing a better citizenry could happen through purity instruction. After one year of the course, Young was ousted from her job.

This thesis focuses on the projects of three working women, the two I've already mentioned, Yeziarska and Young, along with Dr. Clelia Duel Mosher. Dr. Mosher was a physician and researcher who undertook the first known American sex survey, interviewing 45 married women in California between 1892 and 1920 in order to gain a "background sufficiently broad to avoid prejudice in her work with women" (Mosher 1). The interview responses were discovered and published in the 1980s, 40 years after her death. Left unanalyzed by Dr. Mosher, the survey as a text demonstrates a medical anxiety over how women gained information on "sexual physiology" and whether the women's lineage had any effect on how she incorporated that information into her behavior (Mosher 1). I study the works of these three women as they explored how instructing girls in the matters of sexual and romantic relationships could shape them into more complete people. I consider the work of Dr. Clelia Duel Mosher as another forgotten influence on modern education who tried to grapple with the same questions of how and why to offer "knowledge of sexual physiology" to immigrant women (Mosher as cited in all blanks). These women tried to respond to national anxieties about immigration and perversion by instructing girls. They all dealt with, sometimes undermining and sometimes reinforcing, the

assumption that teaching girls the correct way to be sexual ensured the propagation of an American student body in the correct ways.

All of their work reveals anxieties over immigration, sexuality, and knowledge. The ways in which they all construct models of possible identities for immigrant girls fragment the potential for these girls to become complete people. Young's course as well as Dr. Mosher's survey perpetuate a model of assimilation for immigrant girls based on shaming them for being different. Yeziarska's 1925 novel *Bread Givers* explores the emotional impact of trying to assimilate on a semi-autobiographical narrator. Yeziarska gives language to the intersection of immigrant women and American structures of education and assimilation. She acts as both a representative for both immigrant women and American education reformers and as an intermediary between the two. She tries to imagine how an immigrant girl becomes a person in America and in American schools in the early twentieth century. In doing so she makes visible the same structures of language, sexuality, and American legitimation that Mosher and Young operate under and sometimes reinforce.

## Organization

Chapter one, the Literature Review, examines the historical context for the three documents I study in this thesis. The chapter explores White Nationalism as a political agenda that influenced how schools and society socialized immigrant women. This chapter also considers the sexual hygiene movement alongside the racial hygiene movement and the progressive education movement. The histories of these movements that all concerned

themselves with making a more pure American populace demonstrate the formation of mechanisms that linked immigrant and queer identities as shameful.

Chapter two, methodology, justifies studying a novel, a survey, and the texts surrounding a public school sex education course together. These three subjects elucidate the ways in which various registers of language worked together to educate immigrant girls in both implicit and explicit ways to imitate American language and sexual presentation.

Chapter three analyzes *The Mosher Survey* conducted by Dr. Clelia Duel Mosher between 1892 and 1920. This survey is the oldest known sex survey of American women, and the only known sex survey of American Victorian women. The survey itself contains interview records from 45 married women, all of whom address the same questions about family history, sexual practices, and sexual knowledge. The survey is useful in this project as it articulates a language of anxiety about sexual deviance and because it links this anxiety to anxieties about race, gender, and immigration. The survey attempts to figure out the influences of nationality, race, physical abnormality, and ways of learning facts on sexual practices and normality. Because Dr. Mosher intended to use this data to instruct women on health in marriage, the survey offers a window into the questions that underlie sex education. Studying this text before analyzing *Bread Givers* and *The Chicago Experiment* establishes prominent anxieties before exploring how they are worked out in books and schools.

Chapter four analyzes the novel *Bread Givers* by Anzia Yezierska. The novel follows a Polish immigrant, Sara, as she watches her father attempt to marry off her three older sisters and then as she rebels and leaves for college to become a teacher. Sara spends the novel trying to understand how Americanness, language, and sexuality are related. Through the novel, Yezierska

negotiates several competing models of immigrant woman identity. She proposes three models of selfhood for immigrant women: that selfhood is learned for immigrant women, that it is inborn, and that it is performed. She never settles on the superiority of a single model and instead imagining the ways that these models break down when heaped onto one fictional, semi-autobiographical narrator. Sara can't figure out how to be a sexual and educated and American person. Sara tries to perform the compatibility of being sexual and educated at the same time. Alongside *The Mosher Survey* and the documents related to the Chicago Experiment, *Bread Givers* offers an articulation of the contradictions experienced by the immigrant women themselves as they encountered progressive educational movements as a key locus of their Americanization.

Chapter five analyzes the 1913 Chicago Experiment, the first public school sex education course in the US. Given that most sex education before 1913 addressed US-born White boys, the fact that the students in the Chicago Experiment were overwhelmingly immigrants and half girls made this course a landmark endeavor. The bubbling national anxieties about immigration and perversion and the emergence of scientific and medical theories of sexuality made social reformers desperate for a way to reestablish social normalcy in Chicago. While some groups imagined public sex education as a societal equalizer, from the documents available it appears that the Chicago Experiment was riddled with fear and distrust of immigrant girls, queer girls, and girls of color.

Chapter six concludes this project, articulating the significance and implications of examining these three ideas together. These three ideas indicate that trying to teach immigrant girls to become American by instilling them with a sense of shame around language and

sexuality doesn't work. The three phenomena examined all demonstrate the trauma inflicted by this approach. The concluding chapter presents several modern stories that exist as a reaction to the same mechanisms of queer immigrant control, mechanisms that have been updated over the past hundred years but that exist for the same basic purpose.

## Chapter One

### Literature Review

We have been forced out of our national boundaries into racial units.  
-Anzia Yezierska, "All I Could Never Be"

Theodore Roosevelt saw Whiteness in peril at the turn of the twentieth century. He argued that Rome fell "because there sprang from its loins no children to defend it against the barbarians" and feared that Americans of the "native stock" would soon encounter the same fate (Roosevelt, 1896, as cited in Watts 26). Women had to protect "against the barbarians" by having more babies of "native stock," he argued. He became obsessed with declining birthrates and his "focus on breeding brought particular pressure to bear on 'native American' women whose most important role (and function) was ensuring race survival" (Demant 12). In describing women of Anglo-Saxon and Nordic descent as "native American," Roosevelt perpetuated an understanding of Americanness generated by nativists and eugenicists. These self-assigned defenders of American "racial purity" saw "any threat to Anglo-Saxon identity (and racial purity) as a threat to American identity" (Demant 12, citing Herman 181). As he left the presidency to William Howard Taft, Roosevelt warned Taft that "there is good reason to fear that your children and mine will see the day when our population is stationary, and so far as the native stock is concerned is dying out" (Roosevelt 1433-4, as cited in Demant 12). The political imperative of the twentieth century was to prevent the "native stock" from "dying out."

Sex education developed to teach those of the "native stock" how to preserve their race in the purest ways possible. The Chicago Experiment seemed so radical because it didn't just have an audience of children from the "native stock." Although its student demographics and radical

mission statement gave this course subversive intentions, the overwhelming project among White politicians and educators of White Nationalism permeated the course. The unstated influence of White Nationalism placed particular scrutiny on the actions and identities of immigrant girls. Such scrutiny rendered the course an extension of the border monitoring and eugenic control. Anzia Yezierska had to grapple with the border control and schools that demanded assimilation at the turn of the twentieth century. Her writing creates a language for trying to understand and both capitulate to and resist the ways in which schools tried to Americanize immigrant girls, girls like her.

Sex education became an outlet for this White Nationalist project as the languages of sexual impurity and racial impurity became conflated. Michel Foucault famously wrote that at the turn of the twentieth century, “The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (Foucault 43). Homosexuality crystallized as a medical identity, a perverse identity, a queer identity. Perversion was no longer just an activity someone engaged in—it was who they were. As immigrant and queer became identifiable categories—something one could be, rather than just a quality one possessed—they became intertwined in their otherness (Jensen 30). Robin Jensen writes about the purity discourse at the turn of the twentieth century, noting that “‘purity’ could...stand for a lack of sex and therefore innocence and/or ‘whiteness’ and being native to the United States. In this sense, to have sex outside of marriage was to be Other, and vice versa, to be racially or ethnically Other was to be impure regardless of individual actions” (Jensen 34). Immigrant women were then, by definition, impure. Any sexuality they expressed would be outside of the bonds of a White American marriage, so it was “Other.” By defining and monitoring perversion, sex education defines sexual Americanness and

creates a language for describing those who don't fit. The Chicago Experiment in particular shows that sex education was a way for White America to actualize and address their social anxieties around queerness and perversion, pinning these anxieties on the bodies of immigrants, and specifically those of immigrant girls. This thesis seeks to understand how the course created and policed definitions of "normal" and "other," and what the living response to this attempted social control was, as evidenced through Yeziarska's novel.

The language of (im)purity took hold as the primary way to consider deviance and transgression, with the so-called social hygiene movement leading the charge for sex education in schools. This movement emerged during the Progressive Era alongside social work and other public health campaigns aimed at bettering society. The epidemic of venereal disease and prostitution documented in US cities in the late nineteenth century led reformers to argue that deviant sexuality had created a public health crisis (The Vice Commission 36). For the growing army of reformers, perceived immorality had risen to the level of social disease. Social hygiene worked alongside so-called sex hygiene, racial hygiene, and mental hygiene movements, as an extension of the eugenic science movement to continue Victorian White purity. In these various applications, "hygiene" may "refer to many levels of governance at once: bodily and personal hygiene, domestic and urban hygiene, and as we have seen, imperial and international hygiene" (Bashford 164). "Hygiene" was a way to consider purging various unwanted traits by considering all unwanted categories unclean. Social hygienists were not concerned with the ways that sex education could teach individual students skills to deal with their emerging sexualities, but with how sex education could prevent the spread of impurity. Foucault suggests that at this historical moment "governments perceived that they were not dealing simply with subjects, or

even with a ‘people,’ but with a ‘population’” (Foucault 30). Considering homosexuals as a “population” could divide society into two groups more easily. The logical response was to deal with perceived immorality, not as an individual problem, but as a public health crisis. Sex education was about keeping society pure; teaching purity on an individual level was the mechanism through which reformers imposed public purity.

Ella Flagg Young, the Chicago Public Schools superintendent who advocated for sex education, made the Chicago Experiment a yearlong reality by emphasizing the potential for it to maintain the city’s social purity. As Young compromised her vision of the course at the behest of both social hygiene reformers and the school board, she had to agree to change the name of the subject from “sex-hygiene” to “personal purity” (Jensen 36). This rhetorical distinction shows that for Young and other advocates of school-based sex education, “Internal moral regulation, and not external repression, was the ultimate goal, if only reformers could reach their audience in good time” (Moran 493). While something (or someone) can be made hygienic from outside cleaning, purity depends on being untouched by vice. This rhetorical shift shows the importance of protecting the purity of the city’s “population.”

Sex education entered schools because reformers realized that they didn’t trust parents, specifically immigrant parents, to “reach their audience in good time.” Reformers feared that if children received improper education that they would be unable to care for themselves and that the public would have to assume responsibility for them. Young argued for the public to intervene in the place of the parent, teaching “proper” behavior so that the public wouldn’t have to undertake the more onerous task of caring for these children when they became adults. In 1912 social hygienists in Chicago began their campaign to save public morality by offering sex

education lectures to adults (Jensen 48). Young next suggested that adults could bring older children to these lectures, then began advocating for sex education in schools, beginning with very young children and giving more information to students each year (Jensen 48). This gradual approach would allow the school to counsel the students at various stages in puberty, providing parental guidance the entire way, rather than trusting students or families to hold onto the knowledge and mold it to each developmental period themselves.

One way to consider the “impurity” that Chicago schools feared is through the language of queer studies. The modern usage of the term “queer” has its roots in early twentieth century vernacular. In exploring gay male culture throughout the twentieth century, George Chauncey writes that “Before the [First World] war, many men had been content to call themselves ‘queer’ because they regarded themselves as self-evidently different from the men they usually called ‘normal’” (Chauncey 19). The choice of “queer” to mean “different” as the word to describe those who engage in homosex at this historical moment exemplifies the weight that sexual object choice had on identity. A man’s desire to have sex with other men was what set him apart from his “normal” male counterparts who solely desired women. This desire came to define the man (Chauncey 13). Margot Canaday corroborates this division as she explores the state relationship to homosexuality over the twentieth century. In the early twentieth century, she tells us, “There was not yet a clear moral axis that cleaved the population into homosexuals and heterosexuals. Rather, a hazier divide existed—something more akin to perverts and normals” (Canaday 11). Both of these theorists establish a category opposite “normals,” defined by a “hazier divide.” This divide reinforces the category of normal but establishes that normality is not fixed but relational.

This divide existed in parallel ways for women, but mainstream society wouldn't name the behaviors that made a woman deviant like they would name a man a pervert or a sodomite. There were normal women and other women, but what constituted this other is rarely written of, either by those attempting to regulate normality or by the women who existed outside of it. Understanding how the categories of normal and pervert/queer/other were constructed for women will be the work of this thesis. I will unpack how deviant identities were constructed without being named, and the living response to those constructions. I will start with the framework used for "queerness and variety" by Erica Rand, which she uses to refer "not just to homosex categorized by sex/gender identity—men together, women together—but to all sorts of sexual identities, practices, and tastes that often have been labeled queer, perverse, 'outside the box'" (Rand 51). This idea is intentionally broad. It allows us to understand how prostitution, homosexuality, and miscegenation became lumped together—feared and monitored with the same mechanisms. Transgressive women can be studied somewhere in this hazy category of not normal because they aren't given any other categories to which they can belong. Because I will be studying the narratives constructed in sex-ed curricula, I will be discussing deviance as these curricula understand it—somewhere on the other side of this "hazier divide."

Queerness entered the cultural discourse as an intrusion, as something brought by and emblematic of immigrants. Identity as "immigrant" is unstable. It is the moment between being, for example, Italian and becoming American or Italian-American. It is always the becoming. It is the moment between being an outsider and an insider, the moment when an outsider has moved into or infiltrated the inside only to be reminded that they don't belong anywhere anymore. The Latin root of the word immigrant, *immigro*, means "to move (into)" (Olivetti Media

Communicatoin). An immigrant, then, is one who is always moving, never one who has arrived. Given this rhetorical instability, the surge in immigration into the United States at the turn of the twentieth century created a national anxiety about the stability of hegemonic American identity. This anxiety over outside deviance crystallized around ideas about sex.

Immigrant communities and gay communities became visible in the public sphere alongside and overlapping with each other at the turn of the twentieth century. As immigrant and queer became identifiable categories—something one could be, rather than just a quality one possessed—they became intertwined in their otherness (Jensen). The association of these communities confirmed that “to be racially or ethnically Other was to be impure regardless of individual actions.” Chaucey explores how this happened in geographical ways in New York City, writing that “the most visible gay world of the early twentieth century...was a working-class world, centered in African-American and Irish and Italian neighborhoods and along the city’s busy waterfront, and praying on the social forms of working-class culture” (Chaucey 10). Queerness becomes cemented in the American imagination as an immigrant phenomenon, something opposite the “middle-class, Victorian conception of sexual respectability” that twentieth century “physicians in the social hygiene movement” and “their allies in the purity and vigilance societies” upheld as ideals (Moran 485).

Once queerness was categorized as an outside phenomenon, queer people became subject to exclusion. In response to the crystallizing of queer as a category came “the development of a rudimentary apparatus to detect and manage homosexuality among immigrants” (Canaday 21). Homosexuality was not yet the stated concern of the state, but anti-homosexual ideology pervaded immigration control at the turn of the twentieth century. While homosexuality became

an explicit reason to bar someone from entry in the mid-twentieth century, the practices that led up to these policies, “did not bar immigrants on the basis of perversion per se, but instead relied on the ‘likely to become a public charge’ clause of the immigration law to exclude or deport aliens suspected of sexual deviance” (Canaday 21). The federal government refined and specified these restrictions against immigrants with queer sexualities over the course of the twentieth century. The Immigration Act of 1917 was the first piece of legislation designed to restrict rather than regulate immigration. Among several other categories, it excluded immigrants who were “polygamists,” “prostitutes,” or “persons being mentally or physically defective,” which at that time was a euphemism for homosexual people (Bromberg). The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 compiled the various statutes that existed at the time covering immigration into one body of law (“Immigration and Nationality Act”). The act was amended in 1965 to exclude “aliens afflicted with...sexual deviation,” another euphemism that indexed pedophiles, prostitutes, and gay people (Wheatley 162). This ban remained in effect until 1990 (Kennedy).

The divide between “perverts and normals” demarcated the sexual identity categories available in the early twentieth century, identities corroborated and constructed by emerging scientific disciplines. From 1896 until 1928 Havelock Ellis ran his journal on “Studies in the Psychology of Sex,” in which many of the pioneering ideas about sexology and psychology were published (Ellis). During this time, Sigmund Freud published numerous papers on sexual development, specifically focusing on “normal” development of sexuality alongside “perversion,” building on the studies of perversion conducted by prominent German psychiatrist Richard von Kraft-Ebbing. The development of the fields of psychology and sexology around this period had impacted American society as “medical discourse was one of the most powerful

anti-gay forces in American culture (and one to which some recent social theories have attributed almost limitless cultural power)” (Chaucey 6). The medicalizing of difference allowed prejudice to adopt the language of impartiality. Schools could then teach that certain groups were inferior to others but appear to be teaching science.

This “limitless cultural power” was evident in schools as they developed pedagogy aimed at stamping out impurity. Since the instructors in the Chicago Experiment were physicians, not familiar teachers, their medical training allowed them to claim objectivity. The use of medical discourse in public schools resulted from the growth of scientific disciplines at the same time as rapid expansion of public institutions. Canaday writes, “Unlike comparable European states, which were well established before sexologists ‘discovered’ the homosexual in the late nineteenth century, the American bureaucracy matured during the same years that scientific and popular awareness of the pervert exploded on the American continent” (Canaday 2). Public schools were growing as American bureaucracy was, and “Attendance at the Chicago public high schools had skyrocketed from a daily average of 1,043 during 1880-1881 to 25,322 in 1914-1915” (Moran 496). This dramatic increase in size meant a restructuring and expansion of the existing institutions as the mechanisms at use in the earlier, smaller schools couldn’t accommodate so many more students. Controlling a larger group of students demanded codified norms of behavior that could be enforced across schools, as larger schools would not be able to personalize instruction in the ways that small schools could. The restructuring that Chicago Public Schools undertook fed off of the ideology of the superiority of science, particularly the fervor around sexual science. Young herself gave particular weight to emerging scientific disciplines and believed they supported her crusade for public morality. Jensen argues that

“[Young] proceeded from the assumption that morality and science were not mutually exclusive; Young held that they naturally overlapped, and she framed her appeals accordingly” (Jensen 55). She viewed morality and science as intertwined and aimed to use moralized science as the foundation for educational reform.

Obscenity laws at the time wouldn't allow for the instruction of just sexual morals, but these lessons were legal when coupled with scientific instruction. The 1873 Comstock Law prevented the circulation through the mail of “obscene” materials, most notably those perceived to advocate for contraception or abortion (Britannica). The ensuing censorship hysteria left a loophole for the teaching of “scientific” material, and

Social hygienists used their scientific exemption from vice reformers' censorship to push sex education, and the values they endorsed, into the public sphere. They argued that because sex was intimately connected to health, a scientific and therefore value-neutral topic, members of the public should be given a factually based introduction to issues such as reproduction, venereal disease, and puberty. (Jensen 21)

The ability to couch this material as “scientific and therefore value-neutral” let social hygienists hide their intentions. Moralized science had the facade of impartiality, so framing sex education as a scientific endeavor allowed advocates to skirt vice reformers' wrath and also mask their purifying intentions. Schools could not explicitly undertake such an extreme form of social control, so they had to convince the public and policy makers that this endeavor was part of their effort to educate students about science.

Biased evaluations of sexuality became an issue for the public sphere because in the anxious public imagination, deviant sexuality flowing into the US' borders has the potential to undermine the normative family unit around which US society functioned. The logic was that sexually deviant immigrants wouldn't participate in normative family activities, and therefore

wouldn't be able to support themselves and will then rely on public support, acting as a monetary as well as moral drain on society. Eithne Luibhéid theorizes that "immigration control has been...integral to the reproduction of patriarchal heterosexuality as the nation's official sexual and gender order" (Luibhéid xix). Immigration control then worked alongside the social, financial, and political mechanisms that prioritized heterosexual families. Gay men's exclusion worked alongside a tax code designed for nuclear families, and a custody system based on sexual and gender norms. These mechanisms of exclusion and control supported a hierarchy of sexual and gender identities. In this way, Americanness was gendered, as having sexual or gender identities outside of the norm rendered someone other, or foreign.

In determining who gets into the country, immigration officials also wield incredible authority over people already inside. Borders are, at their core, symbolic. They demarcate an inside and an outside. This sounds obvious, but shouldn't be overlooked. Immigration control isn't just about exclusion—exclusion mechanisms have never been exact. So many of the so-called impurities they attempt to catch are invisible, so they have never developed ways to accurately find all forms of the deviance they want to target. Immigration control is just as much about reinforcing "the nation's official sexual and gender order" as it is about trying to exclude those who don't obey it. Sex education becomes a reification of these borders within schools. Sex education is particularly suited to reify these borders as sex education enforces the "nation's official sexual and gender order" by disseminating sexual and gender norms. At the border the "likely to become a public charge clause" did much of the work of excluding as well as regulating women; "the clause was a feminized provision that was commonly used against women. Single women were almost by definition public charge aliens" (Canaday 25-26). If

women did not have a male partner or parent traveling with them, the assumption was that they would become the responsibility of the state or else corrupt men through prostitution. This clause established the grounds for excluding immigrant women, and indicated to sex educators what the norms were that should pass on to students. The employment of this clause communicated the deviance of single women, and schools realized this same clause within schools by villainizing immigrant girls.

In explicit terms, however, queer women were left out of the legal code altogether. Laws soon emerged targeting queer men, and immigration policies were in place warning officials about specific bodily attributes that implied queerness in men (a small penis, for example), but women were largely neglected in legal documents, save the ways they could harm men (Canada). Previous sex education was targeted at men, given that “The society labeled any woman who had sex outside of marriage a prostitute and a person from whom men must protect themselves. Prospective brides, by contrast, were framed as women who were innocent (i.e., sexually ignorant) and therefore in need of male protection from the underworld of red-light districts and venereal diseases” (Jensen 46). This madonna/whore dichotomy was not novel, but offers insight into the rationale for denying sex education to women and girls. If being “innocent” stems from being “sexually ignorant,” then reformers feared that any knowledge of sex and sexuality could turn women into prostitutes. For Young to advocate for sex education for girls against “the contention that women did not need sex education in their own right” (Jensen 46), she had to recognize that women were capable of making sexual choices, and could therefore choose wrongly if left without guidance or correctly if given “plain facts” (Moran). Her insistence on providing sex education to girls to keep them from becoming perverse split from the

dominant view of perversion in which “Gendered ideologies of citizenship...shaped the gendered regulation of perversion—male perverts mattered so much to the state because male citizens did” (Canaday 13). If the counterpart to a “male pervert” was “a prostitute and a person from whom men must protect themselves,” women are framed as not having desire of their own. Men’s desires could be perverse, but women are not allowed to exist as sexual agents.

Border monitoring is one of the clearest ways we can study what the state defines as normal. Who is allowed in, and who is granted citizenship tells us who the state sees as potentially productive, either in the sense of economic participation or in terms of sexual reproduction. Border scholarship often overlooks the reproductive capacities of immigrants as crossings are usually described in asexual terms (Epstein and Carillo). Asexualizing immigration overlooks that “sex at Ellis Island is present everywhere...people travel with their sexual histories, fantasies, beliefs, and sometimes, partners” (Rand 43). Rand conceptualizes spaces of border regulation, like Ellis Island, as sexual. Canaday also conceives of immigration policies as sexual, especially in-so-far as they consider homosexuality. She writes, “Over the course of the early to mid-twentieth century, the state crafted citizenship policies that crystallized homosexual identity, fostering a process by which certain individuals began to think of their sexuality in political terms, as mediating and mediated by their relationship to the state” (Canaday 10). Homosexuality became a concrete identity and a political identity because of state policies that demanded sexual classification.

Enforcing sexual classification at borders does not, however, just mean to exclude one sexual group and include another as borders have jurisdiction over those already in the country. Just as border crossing is never a singular moment, “citizenship’s threshold and its substantive

character are interwoven” (Bosniak, found through Canaday 9). Studying borders tells us not just how people are excluded, but how they are erased, altered, managed, and discussed. Borders are reconstituted in myriad ways, and “Inspection at the border is not a one-time experience, but is rather, as Foucault’s image of a carceral archipelago suggests, a process that situates immigrants within lifelong networks of surveillance and disciplinary relations” (Luibhéid xvii). This “carceral archipelago” was continued through schools, specifically through sex education. The metaphor of an “archipelago” considers various institutions as a network, rather than as independent agencies, all united in a similar goal. Sex education did much of the work of monitoring, regulating, and assimilating students’ bodies. It was able to do so by building on the regulatory work done by other carceral institutions, namely border monitoring and law enforcement. Since “religion and community sanctions had already proved incapable of enforcing morality in the city...the Chicago reformers concentrated on more reliable modern institutions” (Moran 492). Public schools emerged as the most “reliable” public institution, as they reached residents early and were totally under public control.

That this course occurred in Chicago rather than in other cities with large immigrant populations like New York, Philadelphia, or Galveston was the product of a seemingly random confluence of events. While the social hygiene movement, discussions of purity, and xenophobia existed across the country, “The Chicago experiment was the culmination of national trends in medicine, morality, and reform, trends that displayed themselves with particular force in Chicago” (Moran 484). Chicago emerged as the leader in sex education because of its symbolic position as well as its actual circumstances. While Chicago had many of the same demographics and levels of disease as other cities of comparable size, its public persona was of outstanding

vice. In 1911 the Vice Commission of Chicago investigated the city in order to report on prevalence of prostitution, writing that “the sheer volume of vice in Chicago threatened to engulf the citizenry in an epidemic of venereal disease” (Moran 488). Reports like this corroborated the image that further galvanized reformers. This reputation alone, though, would not have been enough to create the sex education movement that emerged. The working-class nature of the city pushed it towards this reform movement. Jensen suggests that “Chicago’s ‘underworld’ existed alongside its tradition of activism and labor reform, a pairing that eventually led to an outpouring of social programs along the lines of the Chicago Experiment” (Jensen 43). The existence of John Dewey, Prince Morrow, Jane Addams, and Ella Flagg Young all in the same city at approximately the same time created a snowball effect of reform movements. These movements coincided around preserving the purity of sex.

That all of these movements emerged at a time of social upheaval speaks to a widespread fear of change. These movements all emerged, in part, to have some control over the changing social landscape of the city. Sex education in particular emerged as a way to regulate the things society at large didn’t want to talk about. Figuring out how a school system worked to monitor what it wouldn’t name and how the subjects of regulation made sense of their categorization will be the work of this thesis.

## Chapter Two

### Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The set, narrow confines in which reports, resolutions, articles of educational belief are constructed do not contain anything that is suggestive of life more vigorous, more resourceful, than that already achieved

-Ella Flagg Young

“Introductory” in *Survey of Chicago Public Schools*, 1914

Young’s “Introductory” makes clear her frustration with eduspeak. She didn’t see “reports, resolutions, articles of educational belief” that analyzed the conditions of public schools in Chicago as a way to support Chicago schools. Schools, she thought, were full of life. She thought that these reports, however, didn’t understand what it meant to try to educate a city of children. Young allowed the making of this particular report because that was what superintendents did in 1914, not because she had any belief that it would do anything to help students. This thesis is a commiseration with her. The texts I read couch their intentions, using vague language, coded terms, and clunky structure. The anxieties I studied operated in silence. The texts I studied all exist as a response to cultural unrest about a perceived influx of perversion, though none of these texts name their fears. Schools tried to empower and control immigrant girls at the same time, and I read justifications for and assessments of the 1913 Chicago Experiment to understand these contradictory aims.

I considered the Chicago Experiment alongside Anzia Yezieska’s 1925 novel *Bread Givers* and Dr. Clelia Duel Mosher’s 1892-1920 survey of married American women about their sexual habits and knowledge. Studying the documents from the course alongside *Bread Givers* and *The Mosher Survey* demonstrated the imperative established for immigrant women to

articulate their selfhood in language and in sexuality in order to try to access any American legitimation. This imperative turns out to be impossible to fulfill. The Chicago Experiment, *The Mosher Survey*, and *Bread Givers* all try to figure out how to talk about immigrant women's sexuality at a moment when this sexuality took on the weight of determining if someone was American enough. I relied on a New Historicist framework, complicated by the writing of queer theorist Valerie Traub, to analyze these documents and justify studying a novel alongside a survey alongside a course. This theoretical framework allowed me to argue that language was the primary way these anxieties were negotiated and to explore those anxieties by close reading.

Part of the work of this thesis was using texts to understand a historical moment. To do so, I relied on strategies central to New Historicism, or the Poetics of Culture. Jan Veenstra understands the Poetics of Culture as important in that "Contrary to many older interpretive methods and schools that tend to see historical and literary texts as autonomous entities, Poetics of Culture seeks to reveal the relationship between texts and their sociohistorical contexts" (Veenstra 174). This methodology sees texts as a way to understand the culture that led to their creation. It emerged in the 1980's from the writing of Shakespeare historian Stephen Greenblatt (Veeser). While it exploded in popularity then quickly succumbed to criticism, it left behind techniques that I used in this project. It allowed me to consider 1913 writing about schools emblematic of White American norms and anxieties and to close read a 1925 novel by an immigrant woman to understand the implications of the elite's anxieties about immigrant women and girls.

This methodology justifies studying "sub-literary" or "non-literary texts", such as a newspaper article, curricular document, public survey, or other "popular" texts, alongside

literature (Veeser). “The Survey of Chicago Public Schools” is then not just a historical artifact. The way it relays information, through structure and syntax, reveals just as much about the moment of its creation as the information it relays. The medium is the message. This approach breaks with scholarship that saw surveys and speeches as historical artifacts divorced from the study of literature (Veeser). A New Historicist methodology calls for rigorous analysis of these artifacts because of its recognition “that literary and non-literary ‘texts’ circulate inseparably” (Veenstra 174). Studying “non-literary” texts alongside the “literary” *Bread Givers* revealed multiple ways of engaging with the same public discourse. These texts all tried to understand how immigrant women and girls would belong in or contribute to new, modern American cities, sometimes from the perspective of the women and sometimes from the perspective of those tasked with shaping the cities.

This methodology allowed me not only to study these texts as artifacts, but as units of culture themselves. These texts were not just byproducts of a sociohistorical situation, but continued to create that situation. Veenstra expands on his definition of Cultural Poetics, writing that “Cultural Poetics assumes that texts not only document the social forces that inform and constitute history and society but also feature prominently in the social processes themselves which fashion both individual identity and the sociohistorical situation” (Veenstra 174). Justifications for the sex hygiene course informed how it was taught and how future courses would be judged, so studying these justifications not only offers an understanding of the writers’ ideas, but how these ideas shaped the world that led to their writing. *Bread Givers* shaped the way that White American readers considered immigrant girls, and gave immigrant girl and women readers an articulation of their potential relationship to American society. In this way,

*Bread Givers* “fashion[ed] both individual identity and the sociohistorical situation,” making it perfect subject matter for this thesis. I used this methodology to study history as mediated through texts and to study texts as history themselves. I read historical documents as evidence of social anxieties, but also read them as capable of producing anxieties.

The New Historicist approach engendered pushback for good reason. Within the field of queer studies, Valerie Traub critiques the presentist understanding of sexuality that New Historicism embodies. In “The New (Un)Historicism in Queer Studies,” she seeks to understand how to study sex and sexualities of the past without centering the sex and sexualities of the present. She does this by rebuking a teleological approach, which her peers use to understand “the present as a necessary outcome of the past” (Traub 21). Traub warns of the dangers of this school of logic. A teleological framework, when applied to the history of sexuality, positions past sexual identity categories as building blocks towards the “available cultural categories” we know and name today (Jagose 82). A teleologist would argue that identities have stayed the same while the words for them have been altered. This is what allows people to retroactively mold historical figures into their own image. I distanced myself from that framework, as I couldn’t call someone who engaged in homosexual in 1913 gay, because the idea of gayness as a fixed identity category did not exist yet. In this thesis I studied perversion and deviance as White American society understood it in 1913, not as modern society has updated and changed these identity categories. Rather than labeling any woman who expressed same-sex desire a lesbian, I thought about the ways her identity would be viewed according to identity categories available to her in her lifetime. I use “queer” as a way to avoid this trap. While this method also carries issues, I use the

word queer to identify the types of sexual non-normativity with which sex education concerned itself.

I did so to avoid a teleological framework that “through a kind of reverse contamination, conscripts past sexual arrangements to modern categories” (Traub 24). This “reverse contamination” is a way of defining a cause by its effect. It defines pervert as precursor to homosexual. This approach misunderstands people in two different times attempting to name and regulate what they perceive as abnormal. While Traub notes that “there remain ample reasons to practice a queer historicism dedicated to showing how categories, however mythic, phantasmic, and incoherent, came to be” (Traub 35), conflating how something came to be and what it currently is ignores all of its situational nuance. I examined texts that were part of how these categories “came to be,” but also studied identity categories that did not yet have names or social positions. In analyzing *Bread Givers*, I examined how the text itself constructs identity and selfhood as related to other modernist schools of thought, rather than analyzing it from present understandings of what it means to be immigrant, intellectual, or sexually deviant.

To critique reliance on backwards causation, Traub builds on the arguments of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Traub explores Sedgwick’s critique of the phrase “homosexuality as we conceive of it today” (Traub 25). We can’t name something “homosexuality as we conceive of it today” because the boundaries and understandings of “homosexuality” are socially constructed. “Available cultural categories” can’t transcend the moment in which they exist, because the categories available at that moment exist in relation to the other available categories and language. It is misleading to label something “homosexuality” before the idea of homosexuality was used and understood. Sedgwick notes that the framing of past categories as analogous to

present ones “has provided a rhetorically necessary fulcrum point for the denaturalizing work on the past done by many historians” (Sedgwick 45). The assumption that past categories align with “homosexuality as we conceive of it today” lets historians “[reinforce] a dangerous consensus of knowingness about the genuinely unknown’ in modern discourses of sexuality (Sedgwick 45)” (Traub 25). Traub’s rehashing of Sedgwick articulates the methodology I used to explore discourses of coding and of silence. The texts I read were at best indirect and at worst full of erasures. Analyzing silence meant looking for answers never given to questions never asked. In doing so, I looked for the models of identity and desire created in these texts. These models were all subversive given that it was transgressive to have desire or an individual identity as an immigrant woman.

Instead of applying present categories to past behaviors, Traub argues for a historicism that seeks to understand how different identities related to each other at the moment of study. She praises queer historiographers who “call for a queering of history that would be an ‘unhistoricism’—or, to use Freccero’s term, an ‘undoing’ of the history of homosexuality” (Traub 24). To “undo” the “history of homosexuality” would understand sexual identities as historically discrete. These theorists, Traub praises, “champion the capacities of formal textual interpretation—especially the techniques of deconstruction and psychoanalysis—to provide a less teleological, less identitarian, and, in their view, less normalizing historiographic practice” (Traub 24). The “unhistoricism” that they practice, then, means performing rigorous close reading, close reading of the kind I undertook in performing literary analyses on these texts.

## Chapter Three

### **“It makes more normal people”: Reproductive Assimilation and *The Mosher Survey***

First: To my Daughter, whose faith in the physical redemption of woman by correct living has been a constant inspiration in its production! Second: To all Women who, following the lessons herein taught, will be saved the sufferings peculiar to their sex

-Alice B Stockham

*Tokology: A Book For Every Woman*

So begins *Tokology: A Book For Every Woman*. Written in 1888, Dr. Alice B. Stockham’s textbook on women’s physiology and hygiene remained a seminal text for American women wishing to learn about their bodies throughout the early 20th century. Its 400 pages attempted to advise women about every phase of their sexual reproduction—from first menses, to conception, through pregnancy and birth, and through infant-rearing. When Dr. Clelia Duel Mosher undertook the first known sex survey of American women, many of the 45 women she interviewed between 1892 until 1920 told her that *Tokology* was the primary way that they had garnered “knowledge of sexual physiology before marriage” (Mosher 1). These women were terrified about the “sufferings peculiar to their sex.” Through *Tokology* and discussions with other women, usually their friends or mothers, they hoped to access this “redemption of woman by correct living.” We know this because they mention over and over again the imperative to follow social norms in relation to sex. One respondent articulates this as a need to be “normal” in matters of sexual appetite and performance (Mosher as cited in Blank no. 2). When asked if she had any “knowledge of sexual physiology before marriage,” one woman told Mosher that she had had “None.” Unprompted, she then told Mosher that she “Ran away 1 mo. after marriage.

Sent back by parents and told to behave” (Mosher as cited in Blank no. 27). The imperative to “behave” and the anxiety over “correct living” radiate through the pages of Mosher’s interviews. These women don’t embody the popular stereotype of Victorian women as prudeish. Instead, these women talk about orgasm and abortion, intercourse and shared bed practices, but all within the framework of what they understand to be normal. They exist within boundaries whose edges they know but won’t name.

Dr. Clelia Duel Mosher became a medical practitioner and researcher amidst race panic, negotiating race reproduction’s dependence on sexual reproduction. Dr. Mosher never analyzed her *Study Of The Physiology And Hygiene Of Marriage With Some Consideration Of The Birth Rate*. When it was discovered in 1980, it existed as a series of questionnaires included in Dr. Mosher’s papers without formal evaluation. A full questionnaire, or blank, as Mosher called them, contained 73 questions, many with sub questions, all short answer. Each questionnaire operates simultaneously as a dialogue between Dr. Mosher and her subject and a manifesto on the part of each respondent. As a text, the survey exposes “linguistic practices [which] reflect, reproduce and validate the heteronormative order; and by doing so, they expose the regulatory processes lending authority...to certain...forms of sexuality, racial/ethnic background, class position and citizenship and...transnational loyalties” (Leap 644). The survey—in its structure, the questions it includes, and the answers the respondents provide—argues for a model of personhood dependent on knowing the rules. The survey reveals a medical anxiety about the “the uncertain boundaries of Whiteness,” questioning whether education in sexual purity could preserve the “native stock,” or at least mold immigrants into believable facsimiles (Bailey 65). The texts ends up arguing that women have to learn rules of White American womanhood

without talking about them. Breaking the rules or revealing the mechanics could both crack the artifice.

Though Mosher writes that this collection of survey responses from “athletic college women” was an attempt to gain a “background sufficiently broad to avoid prejudice in her work,” it reads as an attempt to understand the relationship between race and sexual deviance (Mosher 3). This text tries to understand if correct expression of sexuality can preserve racial purity for those of the “native stock,” and if it can substitute for racial purity in immigrants. The questionnaire itself verbalizes the logic of the cultural anxiety around sexuality. Many of the respondents skipped questions or dodged them by rambling answers to questions never asked. When Dr. Mosher asked the woman of blank number 27 if she had any “knowledge of sexual physiology before marriage,” the woman told Dr. Mosher that she “Ran away 1 mo. after marriage. Sent back by parents and told to behave” (Mosher as cited in blank no. 27). Moments like this one, when a respondent takes the opportunity Dr. Mosher provided to break silence around sex and marriage to reveal the depth of her fear on the subject, litter the survey. As a text, full of stops and erasures, it helps us understand how high the stakes were for these women. The text concerns itself with nationality, race, class, and upbringing, attempting to reconcile these identities with a woman’s sexual history and knowledge. In trying to figure out what a correctly (re)productive woman is and what goes into making one, the text reveals that these women have to keep making their correctness. Even the most idealized American women, like those sampled by Dr. Mosher, were performed belonging into an elite class. A completed blank begins with a family history, then asks a series of questions about the respondent’s husband, then concludes with a longer section asking the respondent about her own physical characteristics and health,

experience with childbearing, knowledge of sexual matters, and finally her opinions on intercourse and temperance.

The respondents' answers offer a window into maintaining the artifice of perfection. The women interviewed were of the idealized urban middle class and married to men of similar status. They had degrees from institutions inaccessible to most American women like Vassar and Bryn Mawr and Cornell (Mosher). This cohort represents the most socially desirable group of American women. These women were elevated in the public imagination, given that "It is principally the women of this class upon whom historians' generalizations about women's lives in the nineteenth century are based. And though these women were not a numerical majority of the sex, they undoubtedly set the tone and provided the models for most women" (Degler 1469). Given that these women seemed to the rest of the country to be ladies, should they reveal this as work, and themselves not as naturally perfect, they had many to disappoint. If these women couldn't be perfect, then there wasn't hope for anyone attempting to imitate them. Their answers to Dr. Mosher's questions indicate, however, that identity as a lady parallels Judith Butler's idea of womanhood as "an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 519). They performed and re-performed through their answers, attempting to eventually embody "impossible whiteness" (Demant 1).

The family history section of Dr. Mosher's survey demonstrates a concern over lineage, or what one woman deems the concern for "carrying on our share in the perpetuation of the race" (Mosher as cited in blank no. 2). At this moment, however, the idea of race was in flux. The concept of Whiteness became increasingly specific as waves of immigrants with pale skin but non-Anglo-Saxon or Nordic bloodlines arrived, and "The influx of immigrants at the turn of the

century was accompanied by an increasingly nativist revision of race” (Demant 10). These new immigrants couldn’t belong to the same social category as those of “native stock” without upsetting the hierarchy that privileged those of “native stock.” Dr. Mosher emerged as a researcher in an immigration crisis that “witnessed a fracturing of whiteness into a hierarchy of plural and scientifically determined white races” (Frye 7). Her questions reveal an attempt to negotiate the implications of this new method of categorization. Dr. Mosher asks the respondent about her father, then her father’s parents, then about the respondent’s mother, and then about the respondent’s mother’s parents. Dr. Mosher begins by asking of the respondent’s parents and husband, “Nationality, if American, of what descent?” (Mosher as cited in all blanks). The question is afforded enormous weight by beginning the survey. In some blanks it even proceeds the first question: Mosher asks “Your husband: nationality, if American, of what descent?” of some women, positioning “nationality” where the respondent might write a name in another type of questionnaire (Mosher as cited in blank no. 25). Nationality comes to substitute for a personal identity. The rest of the survey follows this substitution, and each blank positions itself as a response on behalf of that nationality. This positioning demonstrates the extent to which the survey concerns itself with determining links between nationality and impurity.

The respondents struggle to answer nationalities. The woman of blank 15 answers that her husband is “American, Scotch and I suppose English” (Mosher as cited in blank no. 15, underline in original). The parameters of the question, and the understanding of what it means to associate lineage with a country, are confusing enough to leave her to “suppose.” The respondents most often indicate that their parent is American, and then to indicate descent, like the woman of blank no. 26 who answered that the nationality of both of her parents was

“American, English descent” (Mosher as cited in blank no. 26). These answers follow the logic of the question, separating nationality and descent as separate ideas; Americanism is a social status within this framework, while descent is inborn. Many of the respondents provide two countries for each parent, implying one as nationality and the other as descent, like the woman of blank no. 4 who answered that her mother’s nationality was “American. (English)” and her father’s was “American. (Dutch-Irish-English)” (Mosher as cited in blank no. 4). This answer positions “(English)” as a secondary nationality, and “(Dutch-Irish-English)” as a composite secondary nationality. Each national identity matters insofar as it completes the medical national background of the respondent. “American” defines the person, but “(Dutch-Irish-English)” explains her origins. This approach separates country allegiance from the innate markers of pedigree. In indicating pedigree, one woman notes that her mother is “American. ½ Scotch, ½ Penn. Dutch Descent” (Mosher as cited in blank no. 2). The secondary composite nationality is composed of one outside nationality, “½ Scotch,” and one genetic group that is usually considered a subset of “American,” “½ Penn. Dutch Descent.” This separation indicates that asking about descent is a coded way of assessing distance from the norm. “Penn. Dutch” is not normal or pure enough to belong under the umbrella of American.

Some women answer only “American,” flouting the directions of the second clause. These women answer nationality in place of their descent, situating descent as erased by chosen nationality. This defiance of the question builds on James Baldwin’s assertion that “[n]o one was white before he/she came to America. It took generations, and a vast amount of coercion, before this became a white country” (Baldwin 90). Answering “American” in place of “descent” is a way to assert membership in this “white country.” Someone’s descent has as much weight on

their identity as the country with which they identify within the logic of this answer. The “if” of the question positions everyone as other, with Americanness situated as a mask over a true identity. Leaving out a descent, however, comes to be a “melting pot” argument, reasoning that someone’s Americanness matters more than where they came from. Still other women write a single nationality other than “American,” like the woman who answered “Eng[lish]” for her father (brackets added by editors, Mosher as cited in blank no. 23). She doesn’t note which part of the question she meant, however, leaving “Nationality” and “descent” both implicated. The conflation of “nationality” and “descent” indicates the anxiety over trying to figure out what it means to be American. How to teach Americanness differs if Americanness is a “nationality” versus if it’s a “descent” or if it’s something else altogether. Neither Dr. Mosher nor her respondents ever articulate what Americanness is.

The structure of this question suggests that “American” is a “Nationality,” but that Americanism is unstable. Americans are all something else, this question argues. No one is safe from this sorting, as the “if American” clause mandates that everyone supply an outside nationality. Americanness is an unstable category if it is both a nationality and not a real nationality. The following question asks if the parent had “home in city or country,” so it would have been plausible for the “Nationality” question to instead ask “Immigrant or native born.” Instead of offering options, however, the Nationality question requires that each respondent decide how to categorize their parent. Americanism rests on top of a true nationality, it would seem, maintaining an artifice of its own. Asking about “descent” implies that this is a question about race within a structure of “a racialized nationalism that maintains that to be American is to be white and to be white is to be Anglo-Saxon, which creates an impossible standard of

American identity for the immigrant who can never, of course, achieve this whiteness” (Demant 125). Americanism is about hiding true nationality, which can never be hidden. It’s an impossible standard, but one that mandates that everyone keep trying to achieve it.

When the questionnaire moves onto the “yourself” section, it continues to remind respondents of their own imperfect Americanness. The absence of a nationality question for the women themselves makes Americanness the default. Instead of nationality, Dr. Mosher asks them about “Complexion” and “Temperament.” In the absence of standardized racial distinctions, complexion offered one way to figure racial boundaries, as well as a standard of beauty. A 1900 newspaper advertisement for “face bleach” claims that “for brightening and beautifying the complexion it has no equal.” The advertisement promises that with continued use, “the skin becomes as nature intended it should be smooth, clear and white, free from every Impurity and blemish” (“The Charlotte News”). In a text as public and conversational as a newspaper advertisement, perfection is a complexion that is “as nature intended it should be,” which is “white, free from every impurity.” The commercial rhetoric of impurities as a threat to beauty evokes the simultaneous discourses of sexual and racial purity. A product promising that it “cannot fail, for its action is such that it draws the impurities out of the skin, and does not cover them up” seems to offer a way to absolve other kinds of impurities (“The Charlotte News”). This promise is so tempting given that “whiteness is not something you can gain, only something you can lose,” but it’s impossible (Demant 20). The maintenance of whiteness is imperative, but ultimately not real. Dr. Mosher’s asking about “complexion” invokes these same anxieties over whether a complexion could reveal other impurities. Could it give away non-Americanness? Could it give away sexual deviance? Given that “‘purity’ could...stand for a lack

of sex and therefore innocence and/or 'whiteness' and being native to the United States. In this sense, to have sex outside of marriage was to be Other, and vice versa, to be racially or ethnically Other was to be impure regardless of individual actions," knowing that complexion could reveal impurities gave it huge importance in social position (Jensen 34). A question about complexion is then also a question about purity. As racial and sexual purity are integral to Americanness admitting any kind of impurity is to admit not belonging.

The "complexion" question barely incurs the same answer twice. The respondents' answers range from comparative measures of hue, like "dark," "light," and "medium" to more abstract tonal descriptors like "medium fair," "blond," "sanguine," "sallow," and "florid when young" (Mosher as cited in blanks no. 21, 9, 30, 35, 45). None of the respondents give any indication what these colors are in reference to. Relative measures such as "medium" and "light" assume a neutral, but don't indicate if neutral is the average for a person of Anglo-Saxon descent, for a lady of the urban middle class, for the composite demographics of the US, or another group entirely. Instead, these answers all negotiate normality without identifying its boundaries. It would be impossible to create a color spectrum that compared "medium fair" to "sallow" and "florid when young." This constellation instead offers a series of non-answers that highlight the respondents' discomfort with describing themselves. There is no common language among these women for complexion, and each of these attempts show a different way of negotiating the self against an ideal that is not named. These women try to perform their Americanness, but given the lack of codified language to describe an American complexion, the respondents try to invent this language. One woman answered that her complexion was "between light and dark," indexing every possible hue (Mosher as cited in blank no. 15). Her assessment of her husband's

complexion is similarly ambiguous as she calls it “neither blond [sic] nor brunette” (Mosher as cited in blank no. 15). Given that she is the respondent who had to “suppose” that her husband’s descent was English, these answers that say nothing showcase her unwillingness to pigeonhole herself. To assert existence “between light and dark” is to argue for being so normal as to not merit measurement.

Next asking the respondent’s “temperament” also seeks to ascertain her relative belonging in a racial group. Eugenicist Lothrop Stoddard argued in 1920 that the root of connection between nationality and race was “like-mindedness which is necessary for mutual agreement and harmonious co-operation. But to carry the matter still farther, like-mindedness springs from similarity of temperament, which, in turn, depends on similarity in blood” (Demant 15). Two of the women make this link between temperament and “similarity of blood” explicit by answering that their temperaments are “sanguine,” the same word that another woman used to describe her complexion (Mosher as cited in blanks no. 20, 21, 30). This parallel highlights the value judgments evident in both questions. Most of the respondents leave this question blank. The subjectivity involved in rating one’s own “temperament” is much harder than describing menstrual habits or even rating complexion. There are also more clearly defined value judgements implied by each description of “temperament,” especially given the association between temperament and race. The women who do answer the question, however, admit to the anxiety that is implied in the sculpted answers to the rest of the questionnaire. The woman behind blank 34 answered that her temperament was “reflective” and numerous women answer that they are “nervous” (Mosher as cited in blanks 25, 40). “Nervous” seems an appropriate response to the demands to constantly pretend that utter perfection in appearance and behavior is

inborn. The women tried to embody a standard of perfection without having been instructed on the component parts of perfection.

Once she has established who the respondents are and where they come from, Dr. Mosher moves on to asking them about what they know and what they do sexually. After a ten part question about the respondent's experience with menstruation, Dr. Mosher asks "What knowledge of sexual physiology had you before marriage? b) how did you obtain it?" (Mosher). The phrase "sexual physiology" positions sexual knowledge as scientific, and as something that could be learned without having sex. By asking about "knowledge" rather than experience, the question assumes premarital chastity. None of the respondents tell Dr. Mosher that they had engaged in premarital sex. The logic of the question doesn't give the women an easy way to admit impropriety. Asking the question after such an in depth assessment of menstruation implies that the answer to this question will be similarly biological and easy to articulate.

The answers reject the assumed simplicity of the question. The respondents share that they knew "the facts about menstruation," or had "a good general knowledge of the position and function of the organs," or a "full knowledge." or was "2 mo. before marriage told by sister-in-law" (Mosher as cited in blanks no. 15, 18, 29, 32). Each of these responses addresses pieces of knowledge that they'd learned, all of which could fall under "sexual physiology" although some address specific scientific facts while others address gender norms and relations. Dr. Mosher does not elaborate on what she means by "sexual physiology" though, so these varied interpretations show how each respondent tried to articulate what they understood sexuality to be in the absence of a standard definition. Part of the work of the questionnaire then becomes working out what "knowledge of sexual physiology" means. The fact that neither the

respondents nor Dr. Mosher have a common language to articulate what it means to have an American sexuality means that American sexuality can't be explained or taught.

The absence of language indicates the instability of the category itself. If "sexual physiology" meant "the position of the organs" and "the purpose of marriage" and things too impure to say, or too rudimentary to even mention, then sex education has to teach all of them. That project is impossible. Some of the inconsistencies and debates about how to teach "sexual physiology" in schools then happen because the only clear goal of teaching sex is to teach Americanism without naming it. Dr. Mosher tried to dissect American sexuality, but her inability to ask the questions she was trying to get at made her end result a mess of anxieties rather than a roadmap of how to engage with women about their sex lives. Producing a model of assimilation doesn't work if the instructor can't articulate what an assimilated person should look and act like. Dr. Mosher's project was doomed to fail.

## Chapter Four

### **“Was it desire for the man, or desire for knowledge?”: Sexual Displacement and Selfhood in Anzia Yeziarska’s *Bread Givers***

After Yeziarska refused a physical relationship with Dewey, his poetry slipped into despair. In “Two Weeks” he lamented,

Renounce, renounce;  
The horizon is too far to reach.  
All things must be given up.  
Driest the lips, when most full the cup (Dewey 64-66)

Dewey is so close to Yeziarska, but recounts in poetry riddled with cliché that she’s “too far to reach.” She’s past “the horizon,” just barely inaccessible. She’s standing before him and won’t have sex, and she’s emblematic of immigrants whom Dewey can’t quite understand. As Dewey’s poetry post-Yeziarska navigates the impossibility of having her back, Yeziarska’s work post-Dewey navigates the impossibility of an immigrant woman becoming American in both sexual and intellectual ways. Both people struggle with what’s just on the other side of “the horizon.” Dewey became consumed with trying to understand Yeziarska as “the archetypal ‘other’” while Yeziarska wrote, in part, to understand what it meant for an immigrant woman to want to belong in the world of words as Dewey belonged in that world (Dearborn, as cited in Kessner 185). Her 1925 novel *Bread Givers* in particular navigates American legitimation. In the novel, getting close enough to Americanness to reap its benefits of belonging and agency occurs in interrelated and intercausal processes of learning the rules of American language and understanding the norms of sexual desire and expression specific to being an immigrant woman in America. The novel works through each of these processes as a potential way for immigrant women to access

American legitimation, then tries to employ them all together when each alone fails. Employing them together proves more disastrous for a stable sense of self. In doing so, the novel sexualizes language and renders sexuality literary, perverting both registers of identity. This perversion indicates that for immigrant women, reconciling American legitimation, immigrant identity, gender and sexual identity can only happen in the absence of desire. *Bread Givers* indicates, though, that desire for Americanness becomes a sexual desire for immigrant women, rendering them impure in the American imagination and therefore unable to become American.

Yeziarska uses the novel's narrator to explore various models of personhood that she sees as potentially available to immigrant women. She wobbles between models, at times employing contradictory ways to incorporate language and sexuality into selfhood. The imperative of sexuality is invoked as Reb Smolinsky, the novel's patriarch, arranges matches for his daughters. Sara, the youngest daughter and the novel's narrator, resists the imperative to couple and instead goes to college among Americans to study to become a teacher. She claims that she wants to learn American language before she'll consider marriage, narrating that "to marry myself to a man that's a person, I must first make myself for a person" (Yeziarska 172). Her need to "make myself for a person" can be read as an imperative both to become for the use of a person and to resemble a person. Her sentence construction emphasizes "myself." Rather than "marrying a man that's a person," she talks about "marrying myself to a man that's a person. Sara also doesn't claim that she needs to "become a person" but rather "make myself for a person." Myself is then the object of both clauses rather than their subjects. This sentence structure emphasizes the separation between Sara as subject and Sara as object, as artifice. "Myself" can't have subjectivity, because "myself" isn't the subject. An authentically American

“I” has “that sure, settled look of those who belong to the world in which they were born” (Yeziarska 211). Sara can’t imagine an American “I,” or what it might be like to operate from an American subjectivity because she imagines belonging as central to constructing that subjectivity. She doesn’t feel like she belongs in America, so she can’t have American subjectivity. She begins the novel wanting to become “for a person,” but throughout the novel this model breaks down. The novel works her through several models of distilling sexuality, immigrantness, and American language into selfhood, none of which make her feel like an American “I.”

This chapter will analyze her various models of selfhood and will explore why each leaves her unsatisfied and unAmerican. Instead of imagining an American “I,” she thinks of herself as always outside the American experience, trying to fabricate a version of herself that fits. She spends the novel trying to construct an American “myself,” an American facsimile. She does so first through bodily imitation of “real Americans” and then, when that fails, by trying to acquire American knowledge (Yeziarska 211). She claims that she pursues American language as a stepping stone towards marriage, but in actuality she pursues American language to satisfy her desires for belonging and agency in place of men. Romantic couplings don’t fulfill her because she only desires men when they teach her the rules of language, which for her are also the rules of belonging and having power in America. These rules can’t grant her belonging and power together and she has to learn that it’s impossible for an immigrant woman to have both.

She then mixes erotic desire and desire for knowledge, rendering both abnormal and therefore deviant. She thinks that learning American language and using American language as a site of sexual displacement will help her access a happy American marriage. She isn’t fulfilled by

her relationships with men, however, because she realizes that what she wants isn't a man but the sensation of belonging. She starts out the novel thinking that she'll access American subjectivity by learning to use language according to its rules. Even though language rules help her sound American, she discovers that she misses her familial use of words to tell "stor[ies] that will cure you of all your worldly cares" (Yeziarska 11). American language isn't enough for her and she wants immigrant language, immigrant storytelling back. She substitutes language for romantic couplings in order to get agency first, but realizes that not depending on someone else for sexual and romantic belonging left her "long[ing] for the close, human touch of life again" (Yeziarska 270). She has tried to reconcile American subjectivity, language, and sexuality in her drive to find belonging and agency, and she discovers the impossibility of the task she has set for herself. Centering and sexualizing American knowledge helps her make an American "myself" but doesn't get her closer to what she thinks she'll find in an American "I."

Sara and her sisters first try to become American by altering their physical appearances. They imitate the "real Americans" they see who have "in them that sure, settled look of those who belong to the world in which they were born" (Yeziarska 211). Mashah, a middle sister whose dominant personality trait in the novel is her obsession with beauty, tries hardest. After putting years of work onto her appearance, Mashah "was no more one of us than the painted lady looking down from the calendar on the wall" (Yeziarska 3). Sara puts Mashah on par with this "painted lady" who gets her beauty from an exterior covering. This comparison sticks her in a specific point in time, as noted by "the calendar," and at a specific point in space, as noted by "on the wall." Mashah achieves a literally "settled look," but is "settled" insofar as she is incapable of movement. Mashah's body can pass as American when it is stuck. The mutual

exclusivity of pass and “stuck” foreshadow the impossibility of forming a simultaneously immigrant and American subjectivity.

When she uses her body, it betrays her origins. As she tends to the house that has devolved into chaos with the birth of her children, Mashah is untethered. Yeziarska writes, “Savagely, she clapped a shirt on the washboard. Her back humped like an angry cat’s as she flung into the tub” (Yeziarska 149). She is no longer the “painted lady,” but rather “an angry cat” who moves “savagely.” Reproduction and physical work have caused her artifice of Americanness to come undone, and cast her as other. The invocation of savagery and animal imagery renders Mashah a raced body, one who has to clean as frantically as her sisters and mothers do throughout the first third of the novel. The comparison of Mashah to a savage cuts to the heart of her insecurities, as this comparison links her to the other immigrant women from whom she tries to distance herself. At the opening of the novel, Sara describes the hoards of immigrant girls trying to get jobs as animals, as savages. She admits, “There was such a crowd of us tearing the clothes from our bodies and scratching out each other’s eyes in the mad pushings to get in first, that they had to call two fat policemen with thick clubs to make them stand still in a line for their turn” (Yeziarska 2). As a result of reproducing, Mashah loses her artifice and is exposed as the same as the other immigrant women who were “tearing the clothes from our bodies and scratching out each other’s eyes.” The aftermath of having sex then makes Mashah unable to seem American—she becomes impure. In becoming impure, she no longer resembles a person, instead she seems immigrant. The novel then associates her with other immigrant women who are portrayed as inherently sexual, animalistic, and beaten down.

Because the deviance of these women is constructed as sexual, the process of containing them attempts to nullify that sexuality. When the “two fat policemen with thick clubs” impose state-sanctioned order on the working class immigrant women, the process of generating order becomes sexualized. The women “tearing the clothes from our bodies” are described with a primal physicality, one that mirrors the way Mashah’s “back humped like an angry cat’s” after she has a child. Just as having a child sexualizes the body, so too does using the body for work. Productivity and reproductivity are explored interchangeably. After either route to sexualization, it becomes obvious that these are not “painted lad[ies]” but immigrant women whose bodies have power. The policemen’s “thick clubs” have a phallic quality, and their use of these clubs on the bodies of women becomes an expression of sexual force. Because the expression of sexuality is inherently deviant, the fitting punishment targets this sexuality. Sexual expression for immigrant women in *Bread Givers* is an expression of agency, so sexual force is the most pointed way to remove this agency. Immigrant women have to stay “painted,” have to stay fixed in time and space, otherwise they become animals, become obviously not, impossibly not American.

Sara also struggles to reconcile her obviously immigrant body with those of her “painted” collegiate classmates. Growing up in Mashah’s shadow imparted on Sara the fear of betraying her origins in movement or sex. Sara learns that the way to belong is to ignore sex and instead learn to be American. Sara constantly compares herself to the “real Americans” in her class who she sees as the actualized “painted lad[ies] looking down from the calendar on the wall” (Yeziarska 211, 3). In this comparison she disparages her own body, identifying her body as the main thing that keeps her from seeming American. Soon after getting to school she notes

that “I studied myself in the mirror...A gray face. A stone face. Turned to stone from not living. A black shirtwaist, high up to the neck. Not a breath of colour. Everything about me was gray, drab, and dead” (Yeziarska 181). In disparaging her appearance for being “gray, drab, and dead” she has moved away from renouncing “Our black, choking tenements in New York” or “our black years” and instead locates her failure in being “gray” (Yeziarska 85, 116). She realizes that she has gained some whiteness to offset the blackness of poverty, and by extension of immigrant status and Jewishness, but the two colors have mixed, rendering her obviously in between, obviously immigrant. In trying to look White, she realizes that she has become “drab, and dead.”

Instead of seeking Whiteness, she then thinks about color as integral to Americanness. She claims that she is “Turned to stone from not living” because of her lack of color and she situates color as a direct result of “breath.” Color is not only intimately connected with the ability to live, it is associated with her “real American” classmates. Color is how she wants to cover up blackness, and in doing so, how she will become American. Sara wonders about how to fit in with her new classmates, asking of herself “Other girls as plain as I, why do they look attractive? When they have no colour, they put on colour. That's what I must do” (Yeziarska 182). Sara has realized that applying color to her face will cancel out “the colour in her cheeks, such fire in her eyes” that her mother describes as characteristic of women in the Smolinsky family (Yeziarska 30). This application of color is a choice rather than an inborn characteristic, so it offers her the illusion of agency. For Sara, Americanness is artifice.

Her observation that she’ll resemble “real Americans” if she “put[s] on colour” draws the parallel between her own choice to wear makeup and blackface femininity, a performance of femininity in which Jewish immigrant women would seek access to White beauty by appearing

onstage in blackface (Harrison-Kahan 28). Lori Harrison-Kahan argues that for Jewish women performers at the start of the twentieth-century, “Blackface became a way for women...to emphasize their white beauty beneath” (Harrison-Kahan 28). The application of blackface renders blackness clearly a costume. If blackness is a costume, then the opposite of blackness—whiteness—must be what’s underneath. The assumption is that if someone can dress up as black, then they have less at stake in being assumed to be black. Women who don’t fit neatly into the category of White pass as such when they don its opposite. Kevin Young similarly argues that by 1910, “blackface was regularly used in the United States among white ethnic immigrants, who once would have been labelled less than white, as a way of signalling that they were quintessentially American” (K. Young). “White ethnic immigrants,” like Sara, performed belonging by signaling that they, too, could mock the most marginalized group in America, and therefore should be considered above them.

Sara’s painted face allows her access to a Whiteness based on parody of color, but it fails to make her feel American. Her performance of Whiteness puts her within a tradition of “white ethnic immigrants” whose obvious desire to access White femininity makes it impossible for them to access it. Desire is not American. Sara laments, “my painted face didn’t hang together with the rest of me. On the outside I looked like the other girls. But the easy gladness that sparked from their eyes was not in mine” (Yeziarska 183). She assumes that if she looks American enough, she will get to move through the world as an American. In trying to embody Americanness, however, she comes again to realize that her personhood is not settled but “hang[s].” For Sara to “hang” implies suspension, creating a distance in time and space from

“the other girls.” To want to be American keeps her in a liminal space, one that doesn’t exist within any categories.

Sara becomes more and more disillusioned with her bodily interpretation of Whiteness, realizing that in embodying mimetic Whiteness, she has become a minstrelsy performance. As she flounders in gym class and fails to keep up with her peers, she realizes that “I was their clown and this was their circus. And suddenly, I got so wild with rage that I seized the hurdle and right before their eyes I smashed it to pieces” (Yeziarska 217). The height of her “rage” is noting that she is a performer beholden to them in a performance of their own design, and that in that performance she is rendered raced, is rendered other. The logical response is to shatter the tool of that performance. In shattering this tool, however, she also plays into an immigrant stereotype. This moment again invokes the racialized imagery of a savage. The shattering has to happen “right before their eyes” because she has identified her unconquerable difference from them in “the easy gladness that sparked from their eyes.” Eyes become the site of her failed personhood. Dejected, she asks herself, “Will I never lift myself to be a person among people?” (Yeziarska 220). In gym class she realizes that she is neither a person, nor “among people,” but rather is for people. She momentarily succeeds in her quest to “make myself for a person,” as she is the entertainment for her classmates, but she realizes how much is missing in a model of selfhood that defines itself by being consumable by others.

Her wish to be a “person among people” works alongside and in contradiction to her desire to “make myself for a person” as she tries to negotiate the center of selfhood. Alongside her attempts to be seen as a person, she tries to be heard as one, studying to harness an American voice. She locates this voice in the “power of logic and reason” of American language (Yeziarska

226). Immigrantness makes her silent, so she locates Americanness in perfect speech. Her primary shame in her immigrantness is that she is made “Dumb with the shame of poverty” (Yeziarska 145). The biggest ramification from shame is the loss of agency in speaking for herself. Her mother contributes to this humiliation, positioning writing as a way to exacerbate shame. When Mashah falls in love with a poet, one who Sara also develops a crush on, their mother’s chief question about him is, “Ain’t it black enough to be poor, without yet making poems about it?” (Yeziarska 67). Poverty is again raced and associated with filth. The “enough” signifies that “making poems about” being poor intensifies the blackness. If a poor immigrant wants to write about their situation, the act of putting words to the experience intensifies the otherness. If an immigrant is to use Americanized language, it must be to write about American things. Not wanting to sound American is the only thing worse than trying too hard to sound American.

Sara enters college to command American English, determined to use language the way Americans do, and therefore to be able to navigate the world as an American. She articulates her motivation for going to school in that “My one hope was to get to the educated world, where only the thoughts you give out count, and not how you look” (Yeziarska 183). In admitting that she wants to be valued for the “thoughts [she] give[s] out” she repositions selfhood away from her body. A self is not just something that is made, but something that has to be constantly produced. Realizing how much work it takes to become a person, Sara asks of the dean of the college, “Why is it that when a nobody wants to get to be somebody she’s got to make herself terribly hard, when people like you who are born high up can keep all their kind feelings and get along so naturally well with everybody?” (Yeziarska 231). In recognizing that she’s “got to make

herself terribly hard” she acknowledges the work of self production, of “mak[ing] herself.” She invokes the American archetype of “self-made man,” probing how that archetype differs for immigrant women trying to make themselves a “somebody.” In her question she verbalizes that to pass is both “terribly hard” in the sense of being difficult, and in the sense that the end result must be stony, impenetrable, unemotional. This moment of reckoning she must be “terribly hard” echoes her despair in realizing that she looks “gray, drab, and dead.” She’s then both critiquing this divide and emulating it. For a “nobody” to become “somebody,” they can’t “keep all of their kind feelings.” A nobody can then pass by seeming objective and detached, but not by expressing emotion. These “kind feelings” run counter to the mandate that immigrant women must work and must be “terribly hard.”

As a result of her studies, she momentarily succeeds as passing as American. When she wins an essay contest in college on “what the college has done for me” (Yeziarska 232), she wins a cash prize enough to let her travel in a sleeper car, choose her apartment, and to browse shops on Fifth Avenue. After she wins the prize, she enters the section of the novel entitled “New World” proclaiming that she had been “changed into a person!” (Yeziarska 237). She knows she’s a person because she can return “back to New York” as a “college graduate...about to become a teacher of the schools” (Yeziarska 237). She celebrates that “I could choose now what I wanted” (Yeziarska 238). She chooses apartments and suits and hats and declares that as a result of her choices, “For the first time in my life I was perfect from head to foot” (Yeziarska 240). She revels in the bodily performance she has crafted as a result of her intellectual labor. She can look like an American for a moment because she has learned the biggest American secret that college has to offer—how to sound American. In reveling in the things that passing allows

her to attain, Sara expresses desire. She gets to have desire and “choose what I wanted,” but expressing that she wants things, Sara has ruined this moment of passing. Because she has mired learning in desire, however, this moment of passing is impure, and therefore unAmerican at its core. Passing means never arriving, never, no matter how many of the rules have been learned, getting to be “settled.” This moment is passed as soon as it happens. Sara’s initial goal was to become a person so that she could get married and be happy about it, but the process of getting to personhood has destroyed any possibility of satisfaction in future marriage. She has displaced sexual desire from the end goal, belonging and agency in a marriage, to the way of getting there, learning Americanness.

Her rerouting of sexual desire comes out not only in her affection for men associated with learning, but in the sexualization of learning itself. The novel displaces sexual desire onto the White American knowledge that Sara is trying to learn. This transfer can be read as Yeziarska’s exploration of Freudian ideas of displacement and sublimation. While Yeziarska may or may not have been familiar with Freudian writing, the concepts of displacement and sexual sublimation had already invaded popular discussions of sexuality by the time Yeziarska wrote *Bread Givers* in 1925. Freud argued that sublimation was a defense mechanism in which a person transferred taboo impulses, especially sexual ones, into creative or socially useful activities (Freud 196). Sara’s aforementioned insistence that “to marry myself to a man that’s a person, I must first make myself for a person” has already offered cues to Sara’s repression of sexuality (Yeziarska 172). She won’t consider sexual or romantic feelings until she has become the person she wants to become. In creating this order, however, the precursors to sexuality become intertwined with the experience of sexual attraction. This displacement confuses sexual knowledge and

Americanness. Sara redirects her sexual energy into assimilating, but in doing so, the act of assimilating becomes erotic for her. In trying to learn rules that go unstated for “those who belong to the world in which they were born” and apply the rules to the artifice of “myself,” Sara’s sexuality becomes queer. She is not sexually attracted to men, and instead of sublimating her sexual energies into creative or athletic endeavors, she displaces sexual energy towards the act of learning how to be American.

When she expresses interest in men, it is only on those who bring her closer to words and knowledge. As a child she grows attached to Morris Lipkin, the poet her older sister Fania wants to marry. Sara finds his letters to Fania and develops an obsession of her own, confessing that “For days and weeks, I lived only in Morris Lipkin and in his letters” (Yeziarska 87). Not only does she associate this feeling of love with being “in his letters,” she travels to other places of book knowledge to feel closer to him. Overcome with feeling, she “had to go to the library where Fania used to meet him” (Yeziarska 87). Once there, she deals with her feelings for him through books as a proxy. She says, “I took a book from the shelf and sat near him” (Yeziarska 87). Holding a book is as much a part of this experience as sitting “near him.” Her moments of affection towards him are mediated by written works.

Similarly, she develops a crush on her psychology professor, Mr. Edman, transferring her excitement over becoming a learned person onto the man most closely associated with that study. Realizing her wish to be around him, she reflects “Why was I so driven to get an education? Why did I pick out this college of all colleges? Was it not because here was the man who had the knowledge that I had been seeking all my years?” (Yeziarska 228). Here she acknowledges that her drive for men is based on their knowledge. Mr. Edman offers her “the knowledge that I had

been seeking all my years,” which is to say the knowledge of how to be a person. This attachment is again because of proximity to language, just as her affections for Morris Lipkin were.

After Sara begins to study Freud she reflects on “What countless riches lay buried under the ground of those early years that I had thought so black, so barren, so thwarted with want! Before long, I had finished the whole textbook of psychology” (Yeziarska 223). Her previous life was “black,” implying that her new life will be its opposite—White. Similarly, she names her pre-collegiate life as “barren,” a word most often used to describe infertility, reinforcing the idea that learning will allow her romance and marriage, and therefore procreation. She won’t be “thwarted with want,” but able to succumb to her desires. Given the position after “barren” and that she’s talking about a crush on Mr. Edman, the succumbing to want comes to be read as enacting her sexual desires. That this displacement from human connection onto book learning occurs around the subject of psychology emphasizes that Sara wants to understand people but only does so through texts and knowledge. Sara celebrates that “This wider understanding of life, this new power of logic and reason I owe to Mr. Edman” (Yeziarska 226). The “new power of logic” gives her a chance at agency, at being a subject.

She pursues book knowledge to access belonging and the power of speech instead of trying to do so through sexual or romantic experiences. In doing so, she ends up describing reading in explicitly sexual ways, using it as a substitute for intimacy. After Max, a suitor who she eventually dismisses, disparages her wish for an education, Sara realizes how much college has changed her, noticing that “There was a glow in my face that was never there before. Gone was that vague gaze at nothing. My eyes had grown bigger and darker. They had become seeing

eyes. I had seen and felt. I had tasted and known” (Yeziarska 200). She describes herself post-college as if she were post-coital. College has given her a “glow in [her] face,” and made her eyes become “bigger and darker,” descriptors often given to describe the effects of an orgasm. Her confession that she had “tasted and known” invokes Eve’s tasting of the forbidden fruit as well as the common euphemism for sex as “having known someone in the biblical sense.” These references to sex through bible imagery rupture her purity, solidifying the connection between sexual desire and knowledge acquisition.

Her relationship with Max, an intermediary between Mr. Edman and Hugo Seelig, her school principal whom she eventually marries, fails because Max reveals that he won’t teach her anything. Sara admits of Max that “I knew he was not my kind” and tells that “I seized my books and hugged them to my breast as though they were living things” (Yeziarska 201). Instead of seizing Max, she seizes her books, physically replacing him with these schoolbooks. He becomes repulsive to her when he “shoved [her] books aside,” asking of her “What for should you waste your time yet with school anymore?” (Yeziarska 199). In calling her real love a “waste,” Max renders himself unlovable for Sara. That he does so in Yiddishized English, asking “what for should you” rather than the Americanized “why,” and asking “yet with” instead of just “with,” adds insult to injury. He threatens the content of her selfhood by trying to separate her from her books, and undermines the way she has put herself together by doing so in the Yiddishized, and therefore unAmerican, English against which she rebels.

Perpetrating violence against her books exemplifies his potential destruction of the basis of Sara’s selfhood. Reflecting on her lost relationship to Max, Sara expresses that “I want knowledge. How, like a starved thing in the dark, I’m driven to reach for it. A flash, and all lights

up! Almost I seem to touch the fiery centre of life!” (Yeziarska 230). Sara becomes a self, rather than a “starved thing in the dark,” when she feels as though she’s pursuing knowledge. She expresses this quest as a desire, full of all the passions that she never had in her desires for Max. That she recognizes that she can “almost” access the “fiery centre of life” points to her realization that she can never actually access this point. She’s caught in the stage of wanting. She continues, “And there! It was only a man. And I’m left in the dark again. What was that flash of light that lured me into this blackness? Was it desire for the man, or desire for knowledge? Why does one kill the other and make everything that was so real nothing but an empty mockery?” (Yeziarska 230). She articulates that her “desire for the man” and “desire for knowledge” can’t exist together. Trying to hold both destroys her sense of reality, “mak[ing] everything that was so real nothing but an empty mockery.” These desires are confused and intertwined and are both potentially devastating, especially in their displacement.

Because she has replaced sex with school, teaching language replaces sexual reproduction for Sara. When she becomes a teacher she proclaims “Once I had been elated that a man had wanted me. How much more thrilling to feel that I had made my work wanted! This was the honeymoon of my career!” (Yeziarska 241). That a “career” can have a “honeymoon” upsets the expected division between work life and personal life, instead positioning teaching as a marriage. She positions her desirability as stemming from her “work,” or ability to command and teach American language. More valuable than being desired is knowing that she has “made my work wanted.” Sara then treats her students as the children of that marriage, bemoaning that “My children used to murder the language as I did when I was a child of Hester Street. And I wanted to give them that better speech that the teachers in college had tried to knock into

me” (Yeziarska 271). “The language” has become a living thing for Sara—something that a child can “murder.” She employs the familiar narrative of an immigrant parent wanting to make a better life for their children in America, calling her students “my children” and saying that she “wanted to give them that better.” Instead of a better life, however, she touts “that better speech” that she got from “the teachers in college.” In employing but subverting this immigrant trope, Sara locates language production at the center of Americanness.

Sara doesn’t get to be truly American in language, either, though. When she finally becomes a teacher and returns to her childhood tenements to teach she wonders, “Now I was the teacher. Why didn't I feel as I had supposed this superior creature felt? Why had I not the wings to fly with? Where was the vision lost?” (Yeziarska 269). She doesn’t get her perfect Americanness when she thought she would. If language can’t help her be American, then what is she? When she tells her father that she wants to go to college, he asks “Have you forgotten the undying words of our race?” (Yeziarska 125). He locates “words” as the center of heritage. Language is what will connect her to her roots. This concept of identity is exposed as fragile given that it is possible to “forget” something that is “undying.” After all her work to learn Americanized language and succeed in school, her father accuses her of being “Not a Jewess and not a gentile” (Yeziarska 293). She achieves moments of passing as American, but in doing so embodies a bastardized version of Americanness that corrodes her previous selfhood. She can’t be two selves, and in wanting to replace one for another, she realizes that just as in desire for a man and desire for language, “one kill[s] the other and make everything that was so real nothing but an empty mockery,” so too does being divided between two selves. When her family talks about her as an “*Americanerin*” and a “*teacherin*,” they also express her new selfhood as a

bastardization (Yeziarska 144, 195). Both of these words are Yiddishizations of the English words “American” and “teacher” rather than the Polish or fully Yiddish equivalents. These descriptors given in hybrid language emphasizes her hybrid identities. The words to describe her new self are bastardizations because her desire to attain a new self has perverted the self she already inhabits. She’s not Polish anymore, and not American either, but quintessentially immigrant.

With Hugo Seelig, Sara again tries to access the “fiery centre of life” through a man who gets her closer to American English. As she teaches pronunciation to a third grade class, she momentarily slips into accented English as Hugo walks by. Burning with embarrassment, she admits “There it was. I was slipping back into the vernacular myself. In my embarrassment, I tried again and failed. He watched as I blundered on” (Yeziarska 272). This moment of obvious immigrant-ness, of being in “the vernacular,” recalls her feeling of being “Dumb with the shame of poverty” (Yeziarska 145). She loses her speech and burns inside about it until “The next moment he was close beside me, the tips of his cool fingers on my throat. ‘Keep those muscles soft until you have stopped. Now say it again,’ he commanded. And I turned pupil myself and pronounced the word correctly” (Yeziarska 272). In this moment Hugo not only helps her access Americanized English, but initiates intimate physical contact. He accesses her biggest sources of vulnerability, her imperfect speech and soft intimate places on her body. His position “close beside me, the tips of his cool fingers on my throat” gives him access to the body part that commands vocal production and represents physical tenderness. Their romantic relationship begins when Sara’s step-mother sends a letter to Hugo damning Sara. Once he shows it to her, however, Hugo remarks, “It’s queer, how people get to know one another. That mean letter,

instead of turning me against you, drew me to you” (Yeziarska 279). Their relationship begins through language correction and a written “letter.” While Hugo affords Sara the opportunity to merge sexual desire and desire for knowledge, he also represents a bastardized Americanness. He describes their connection as “queer,” thereby acknowledging the deviance of an affair between a principal and a teacher, and the deviance of any sexuality expressed between two immigrants.

Hugo’s Jewishness and Polishness exacerbate the transgressiveness of this relationship. He has the key to White American knowledge but is neither authentically White nor American. His ability to command this knowledge and to pass fascinate Sara, who ponders how he has “A Jewish face, and yet none of the greedy eagerness of Hester Street any more. It was the face of a dreamer, set free in the new air of America. Not like Father with his eyes on the past, but a dreamer who had found his work among us of the East Side” (Yeziarska 273). His body betrays his origins, just as Sara’s does, but his aura strikes her as changed. He has her origins but he seems American. He has “none of the greedy eagerness of Hester Street any more,” implying that he once did, but that achieving the freedom “in the new air of America” has altered his character. He is distinctly an immigrant, as he is “among” the other immigrants “of the East Side,” but he represents the potential for a future in the in-between state of being neither old world nor new, of being distinctly immigrant with the full command of American knowledge. Recognizing their joint status as immigrants, they solidify their affections. Sara describes, ““*Landsleute*—countrymen!’ we cried, in one voice, our hands reaching out to each other” (Yeziarska 277). Their merging into “one voice” exonerates Sara’s accent failures that drew them together, and replaces it with a dual language hybrid, crying both “*Landsleute*” and “countrymen.” This shared

voice with “hands reaching” exemplifies the novel’s view of immigrantness as always a reach, always a want, even when a language is attainable.

Because this desire pervades Sara’s idea of selfhood at a moment when desire was not allowed in pure American women, Sara ends the novel again on the outside. She reflects, “I suddenly realized that I had come back to where I had started twenty years ago when I began my fight for freedom. But in my rebellious youth, I thought I could escape by running away. And now I realized that the shadow of the burden was always following me, and here I stood face to face with it again” (Yeziarska 295). Sara realizing her containment comes on the heels of her father bonding with Hugo over Hugo asking her father to teach him Hebrew. The “shadow” of her burden is then Hugo, who is “face to face” with her as the intimate presence in her life. He both represents freedom from the past, and also a continuation of the same patterns as he represents an updated version of Reb Smolinsky, a modern father figure. The novel concludes on Sara reflecting that “It wasn’t just my father, but the generations who made my father whose weight was still upon me” (Yeziarska 297). Throughout the novel she comes to realize her attachment to her lineage, and the impossibility of ever freeing herself from it. Marriage, the reason she wanted to become a self, is then a recapitulation of the same power structures, situating her as always immigrant.

Sara ends stuck in a state of reaching, of wanting. This movement towards Americanness emphasizes that she’s coming from somewhere else always reaching in. Her hope is to pass, but the very word passing implies movement. To pass means to transfer, or move, but none of its meanings involve arriving. Some of Sara’s devastation comes from the realization that in always trying to seem American, she will always be kept outside of it. To pass also colloquially means to

die, emphasizing that an understanding of death is of someone moving away without knowing where they might be going. In reaching towards Americanness, Sara is always dying, always disappearing. The only hope that she, and other immigrant girls like her, have to be accepted in America is to remain “painted lad[ies].”

## Chapter Five

### **“Ignorance and... uncontrolled instincts”: Civilizing Education and The Chicago Experiment**

Leading up to the Chicago Experiment, the Vice Commission of Chicago demanded sex education as a fix to social evil in Chicago. After investigating sites and sources of vice, this municipal body issued a 1911 report to the Mayor and the City Council arguing that “Many of the immoral influences and dangers which are constantly surrounding young children on the street, in their amusements, and in business life, may be counteracted and minimized by proper moral teaching and scientific instruction” (The Vice Commission 36). They called for schools to give “proper moral teaching and scientific instruction” to “young children on the street” in order to fix the epidemic of venereal disease and prostitution. Their addition of “on the street” indicates their inclusive vision of the project. They proclaimed that “Colored children should receive the same moral protection that white children receive,” decrying the “prejudice” that made it almost impossible for “colored girls” to “earn an honest living” (The Vice Commission 39). They went on to argue for protection for immigrant girls, too, claiming that “The immigrant woman...[is] generally virtuous when she comes to this country, she is ruined and exploited because there is no adequate protection and assistance given her after she reaches the United States” (The Vice Commission 39). They imagined immigrants as “generally virtuous” before arrival in the US, and saw the US as the corrupting influence. One of their biggest grievances with public education was that it did not provide girls of color and immigrant girls with adequate education to secure a job other than prostitution, a profession that they feared would pull good

husbands away from American women and spread impurity through American cities, and they tasked schools with supporting the students most likely to end up in this profession.

The demands for including and protecting the city's most marginalized girls don't align with the ways that other administrators discussed the course after it happened. From the documents available, it appears that the course ended up marginalizing the same girls it was called on to protect. Rather than celebrating the "generally virtuous" nature of immigrant girls or the potential for "colored girls" to "earn an honest living," the Chicago Experiment positioned immigrants as the deviant influence on purity of the US. The mechanisms that were established in Chicago in this course became used later in the century to other students from different marginalized groups. The course employed cultural elitism, Protestant values, and White Supremacy to construct a model of purity that it used to instruct students on how to behave.

Ella Flagg Young, the superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools at the time of the Chicago Experiment, pushed for sex education in schools following the Vice Commission's report. She proposed three lectures to be given to all 21 high schools in the district on the topics of "the biological and physiological truths which formed the basis for sex education, personal sexual hygiene, problems of sex instincts, and a few of the hygienic and social facts regarding venereal disease" (Wright 698). Although she proposed this course after the release of the Vice Commission's radically inclusive report, the course fell short of its radical goals. Young wanted to give everyone access to elite morals and values, so her vision of the course argued assimilation for those not in the White, native-born elite. In a discussion at the American Federation for Sex Hygiene, she claimed that in the course "The instruction will be given by physicians selected because of two marked qualifications: first, fine training as physicians; second a high moral tone

that will pervade their presentation of this subject to the boys, or to the girls, in the high schools. We do not intend to give this instruction from the scientific standpoint only” (Young 72) Young’s stipulation that the instructors must have “fine training as physicians” as well as “a high moral tone” implies but never states cultural elitism. Demanding “fine training” rather than thorough training, or scientifically rigorous training signifies that Young wanted physicians whose training came from the most prestigious institutions, institutions inaccessible to those from any but the highest class. Young’s insistence on “a high moral tone” also echoes the rhetoric of upper and middle class morality (Young 72). Rather than touting the usefulness or industriousness of the education, as many of her contemporary Progressive Era reformers might have, Young called for education based on moral assimilation.

Her rhetoric about the course echoed the language of the Christian Bible. Young argued that “While it is well to teach reproduction of plants and animals, I do not believe that the transition is necessarily made from the reproduction of the plant and the animal to that of the human being in the spirit which makes the human soul strong to resist the storms and temptations of sexual life” (Young 73). Young didn’t believe that students would learn the necessary tools to navigate human reproduction by learning about “the reproduction of plants and animals” that was already given in biology classes. She saw a void in educating the students’ souls, and specifically “the spirit” that allows the soul to rebuff “the storms and temptations of sexual life.” Writing about a “spirit” that guards against “temptations” invokes biblical claims about God as the spirit that keeps followers from succumbing “into temptation” (“Lord’s Prayer”). Young’s claim then compares sex education to Psalm 29’s language of “the voice of the Lord in the storm” (Psalm 29). The lectures are compared to the “voice of the Lord,” as they are inspired by

“the spirit,” which is a common descriptor in the Bible for God. Another Chicago Public School administrator at the same time said about the course that “we must not stop short of the spiritual side of the sexual life” (Wright 700). The emphasis on “the spirit” and “the spiritual side of the sexual life” position educating this group of majority immigrants as a religious obligation.

The rhetoric of religious obligation for educating people seen as not American enough establishes the parallel between the Chicago Experiment and missionary work. At the start of the twentieth century, Christian missionaries of various denominations swarmed the globe trying to spread Christianity (Cha 5). During his time in office, just before the Chicago Experiment, President Theodore Roosevelt argued that “It is the duty of the leading race to help those who are backward to a higher plane of education, and the work of missionaries in this movement is most important” (Roosevelt, as cited in Drinker et al. 267). His previous remarks make it clear that he considered Anglo-Saxons the “leading race.” This statement then suggests that he favored the assimilation and elimination of “those who are backward” (Demant 12). His idea of “a higher plane of education” was assumedly Christian given that it was “the work of missionaries.” As discussed in chapter two, Roosevelt argued that immigration had threatened the purity of American birthlines. This sentiment is reflected back by the rhetoric of Young and her contemporaries.

Young’s religious rhetoric and her cryptic elitism can be better understood by examining the course’s eugenic influences alongside its missionary influences. The eugenic influences made it impossible for this course to serve the girls that the Vice Commission wanted it to educate and protect. Prince Morrow’s establishment of the social hygiene movement paved the way for Young to get sex education into Chicago Public Schools, so his influence on the course shouldn’t

be overlooked. His celebration of eugenics pervaded the social hygiene movement and its tributary projects, such as the Chicago Experiment. Morrow, for example, called eugenics “the youngest and most beautiful branch of the biological science” and believed that teaching students about racial hierarchies would better civilization (Morrow 3). In a pamphlet on eugenics, he wrote that “The function of eugenics is to produce a race healthy, well formed, and vigorous, by keeping the springs of heredity pure and undefiled, and improving the inborn qualities of the offspring” (Morrow 2). He believed that to “produce a race healthy, well formed, and vigorous” their heredity must be kept “pure and undefiled,” which is to say White and untarnished from outside bloodlines. His emphasis on maintaining people who were “pure and undefiled” also invokes notions of sexual purity, reinforcing the idea that sexual and racial purity are integral to each other. His emphasis on pure breeding led him to argue that the only way to create the ideal American populace was through “education and legislative restrictions upon the procreation of the unfit” (Morrow 4). His vision of sex hygiene, the vision that helped sculpt the the Chicago Experiment, held that sex education could teach “the fit” to have babies in a hygienic way, and that “the unfit” should be sterilized. Given, however, that he would have categorized the majority of the girls educated in the Chicago Experiment as “unfit,” the message sent to these girls by public political discourse was that they should not reproduce. The value to a eugenic society in educating “unfit” girls was to prevent them from becoming prostitutes, lest they tempt good potential husbands away from the right women.

A colleague and friend of Morrow, Maurice Bigelow, helped him author a report in 1913 for the American Federation for Sex Hygiene on the methods of sex education. In 1913, Bigelow had the credentials to make him a leading authority on the intersection of medicine and practical

education, as he was a professor of Biology and the Director of the School of Practical Arts at the Columbia University Teachers College. In their report they warned of “hygienic and moral dangers to the individual and the community which grow out of the violation of the physical and moral laws governing sex life and the sacred processes of human reproduction” (Bigelow et al. 2). Their concern with the “violation of physical and moral laws” evokes the obsession with legal order as a way to protect those things they saw most sacred: reproduction of the race and Christianity. Bigelow wrote *Sex Education: A Series of Lectures Concerning Sex In Its Relation To Human Life* in 1916 after Morrow’s death and dedicated the book to him. In this text, he put forth his vision of sex education as the way to elevate those he saw as civilized above those he saw as savages. He worried that too many women saw sex as just “an animal method for perpetuating the human species” and wanted to lay out a plan for making women embrace what he saw as their responsibility to polite society (Bigelow 196). The work of Bigelow and Morrow can illuminate some of the influences on the Chicago Experiment and give us clues as to what was taught in the course, since the content of the lectures was never recorded. Specifically, the work of these two men can give us insight into the concept of sex education as a form of racial control.

Chicago administrators’ obsession with protecting the right kind of American girls ignored that the majority of students did not meet their criteria for the right kind of American girl. The 1913 Chicago Public Schools records don’t give demographic information about the students enrolled, but the 1910 Census indicated that 79.2% of the “White Population” of Chicago was “foreign born” or “native with one or both parents foreign born” (US Census Bureau). It follows that a large majority of students in the public schools were then also of the

“White Population” and “foreign born” or “native with one or both parents foreign born.” The Census Bureau doesn’t clarify what it meant by “White population” and the fluidity of racial categories makes it impossible to apply a present understanding of Whiteness to this 1910 census. In the 1910 census, the term appears to index anyone non-Black given the limited nature of the categories provided and the imprecision with which the census labeled someone’s race (Chicago Area Geographic Information Study). No data are publically available regarding the nativity of Chicago’s Black population, but other social trends indicate that most of Chicago’s Black population was born in Chicago or migrated from the American South. Given that the Black population of Chicago in 1910 was less than two percent of the city’s total population, almost 80% of the city was first or second generation immigrants. Chicago, and therefore Chicago Public Schools, had many more immigrant children than administrators’ reports imply.

With that in mind, it appears more and more deliberate that the rhetoric of the people behind the Chicago Experiment centered elite, assumedly White, and “native born” students, even though initial calls for the course centered the most marginalized students. Given the fluidity of racial categories and their boundaries, elite White students may have been of the same color as their multiethnic peers, but of a different social position. The huge population of immigrant students didn’t have a place for themselves in the course as these administrators imagine it. If the course followed Morrow’s advice and taught elite girls to make sure they didn’t become what he called “the class known as degenerates,” then the course would have alienated most of its students (Morrow 3). The implicit message to the huge majority of girls, the non-elite girls, was to imitate their elite counterparts in public but to recognize that they were other, that they were inferior.

Examining the eugenic influences alongside the actual makeup of Chicago Public Schools makes clear the racial undertones of the Chicago Board of Education's 1913 report calling for Chicago Public Schools to become civilized. This report, alongside Young's advocacy, pushed the sex education lectures into schools. The report indexed different pedagogical techniques used in other countries, mostly Germany and Italy, and declared that "These modern educational tendencies are becoming more and more aggressive in all civilized countries" (Owen et al. 394). They demanded that if Chicago Public Schools were to belong in "civilized countr[y]," then they had to become "aggressive" in their teaching. To be "aggressive" to them meant unrelenting attempts to distance themselves from everyone on the outside of "all civilized countries." In the same report they argued that "We cannot understand the social and religious life of civilized races until we study the development of the social and religious life of savage tribes...we cannot understand the present psychosocial life of our school children until we study the childhood and adolescence of their forefathers and the savages" (Owen et al. 399). Their goal was to understand "civilized races" by studying "savage tribes" and teaching children to be the opposite. The Board of Education report never specifically mentions eugenics or selective breeding, but given the similarity of their rhetoric to the rhetoric of known eugenicists Morrow and Bigelow, it is clear that the Chicago Experiment existed in the same continuum of eugenic thought.

Alongside racism, anti-immigrant sentiment undergirded the course. In aiming to become modern, these administrators tried to figure out an authentic American form of civilization. In doing so, they kept coming back to the idea that to be American meant to be not anything else. The Board of Education's report asked "Shall we have the same curricula for city and country

schools in America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia?” (Owen et al. 394). Their question drips with implied scorn. By listing a range of continents, they attempt to mask the racial undertones of their report. These undertones are more apparent in the section of their report mentioned earlier in which they separated “civilized races” from “savage tribes.” They feared that to teach an American classroom the same things that were taught in classrooms in Eastern Europe or in Africa would invite in the principles that they were trying to exclude. Their anxieties mirror Bigelow’s warning that girls can pose a danger because they have “found attractiveness in more or less superficial studies of radical socialism” (Bigelow 192). Bigelow imagined sex education as a catch-all response to foreign bodies and foreign political structures. His argument implied that sex education was both a preventative measure and a way of taking care of what border control missed or never saw. To teach the same things about bodies and sex in Chicago as were taught in “Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia” would condone foreign styles of bodily comportment, which, these administrators feared, could lead to “radical socialism” as well as prostitution and queerness.

Administrators articulated knowledge of sex hygiene as a protective barrier for the purity inside students, and in their articulations, they draw comparisons between sex education and border control. The school board argued that school hygiene instruction must entail “(a) *examination of new children* who are just entering school, and (b) *periodical examination and care of pupils health and physiological development in the course of life*” (Owen et al. 397, italics theirs). This emphasis on physical evaluation mirrored inspection upon entry to the country. The school board imagined the school as catching and fixing the physical abnormalities specific to development that border agents had not seen. In 1913, almost half of students

considered in the “foreign” population had been born in the US to immigrant parents (US Census Bureau). The fear among White America became that immigrants already in the country could have children with perceived abnormalities or could teach their children what they saw as deviant and radical things. Following the logic of their fear, then border inspection was not enough to keep out deviance. Since public schools were the institution with access to the most young people, schools became the sites designated with catching deviance among children. Schools had to mimic the border inspection that tried to catch abnormalities for a wave of immigrants born on the other side of inspection. The school board’s assertion that schools had to undertake “*examination of new children* who are just entering school” was a demand for border inspection at the boundaries of the school. The school board demanded a wider network of institutions participating in border control.

Medicine was used to justify control and inspection of students’ bodies. At this moment, “Since sex was becoming medicalized, physicians were instructed to watch for signs of sexually ‘abnormal’ appetites and behavior for venereal disease” (Luibheid 9). The assertion by the school board that a majority-immigrant group of students should be inspected clarifies the creeping network of medicine being used to exert control over immigrants. This course makes visible Eithne Luibheid’s assertion that “Inspection at the border is not a one-time experience, but is rather, as Foucault’s image of a carceral archipelago suggests, a process that situates immigrants within lifelong networks of surveillance and disciplinary relations” (Luibheid xvii). This proposal of “examination of new children” and monitoring of pubescent changes show the beginning of the apparatus of “surveillance.”

After the course happened, The Physical Director of Girls at a Chicago high school during the time of the Chicago Experiment, Mabel Wright defended it in front of the National Education Association (NEA). She interviewed girls who had attended all three lectures, and presented her findings to the NEA in 1914. She had similar reasons for approving of the course as Young had for proposing it. Both women centered Protestant morality and celebrated the school as a site of civilizing children. In describing “the personal purity talks given in the Chicago high schools during the fall of 1913,” Wright admitted that she spoke to “the girls of one of the coeducational high schools where economic and social conditions may be considered somewhat above average” (Wright 698). She supported these “personal purity talks” and argued to the NEA that other school districts should implement their own. She argued that these were particularly important given how quickly Chicago was becoming 20th century city rather than a 19th century town. She argued that “The school is the outgrowth of civilization. In pioneer days, education came from the home, and the more highly civilized we become the more does the school have to assume what was formerly considered the work of the home” (Wright 697, 700). She saw schools as emblematic of civilization, and argued that given that schools existed within the civilization that created them, schools had to do the work that a home would do in an uncivilized group, like those homes in “pioneer days.”

The homes to which she referred were full of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant colonial families. These groups arrived with the intent of forging a new civilization for themselves and assimilating or eradicating the people already here. When Wright lamented the loss of “pioneer days” home education, homes in Chicago were becoming increasingly non-White and increasingly non-Christian and non-Protestant. Calling for schools to “assume what was formerly

considered the work of the home” is then tasking schools with instilling White Anglo-Saxon Protestant values and family structures into children of other backgrounds. Echoing Young’s assertion that students needed to be given the tools to “make the human soul strong to resist the storms and temptations of sexual life,” Wright claimed that “we must not stop short of the spiritual side of the sexual life” (Wright 700). Wright also claimed that the spirit in students was the most important barrier to indiscretion. She went on to argue that “Biology in itself is not sufficient,” claiming that “Sex mistakes are generally due to ignorance and to uncontrolled instincts. A complete and comprehensive course based on biology and physiology would do much to overcome ignorance, but, when we consider the matter of controlling instincts, we need a greater inspiration than is found in biology” (Wright 700). The “greater inspiration” was found in a religious morality, a morality ready to tackle the civilizing project of “controlling instincts.” This view of students saw education as a way to elevate them from animalistic, with “uncontrolled instincts,” towards those of civilized people whose instincts are rerouted, attempting to realize eugenic ideals. Wright argued that it was the role of schools to do what she saw families of immigrants and people of color not doing. She asked, “If sex instinct has increased in direct proportion with civilization, how can the school shift this responsibility entirely onto the unprepared homes, while it assumes much less vital responsibilities?” (Wright 700). Wright centering White Anglo-Saxon Protestant homes tried to address the Vice Commission’s demand that “colored girls” receive “special care and protection on the maxim that it is the duty of the strong to help the weak,” but treated assimilation as central to “special care and protection” (The Vice Commission 39).

The Superintendent's committee, a group who reported to Young, evaluated the “Moral and Humane Education” in the Chicago Public Schools in the academic year 1913-1914 and used what they saw to celebrate the passive ways that schools instilled morality and to implicitly condemn the sex education lectures. They celebrated that “The recent institution of the office of dean of girls marks an epoch in placing upon a higher plane the social life of the high school student body” (Schmidhofer et al. 48). They saw the appointment of Mabel Wright, and other people in her job at other schools, as a spiritual elevation of the “social life of the high school student body” to “a higher plane,” to a place where the spirit of the child was considered as important as their intellect. They saw this role as providing opportunities for moral activities.

They used the idea of inborn goodness to argue against the need for “personal purity talks.” Their report insinuates that knowledge of sex could pervert good children. The authors argue that “It is moral and humane development, not moral and humane teaching that our children most need” (Schmidhofer et al. 49). Trying to teach children to be “moral and humane” would backfire, they warned. They argue that helping children “liv[e] up to the best that is in them” depends on supporting the goodness they already have (Schmidhofer et al. 48). They write that “children’s good impulses find expression in building bird houses and feeding the inmates” (Schmidhofer et al. 48). Rather than instructing children on how to “liv[e] up to the best that is in them,” the committee argued that children access the “best...in them” in oblique ways. They argue that rather than teaching this morality, school should offer opportunities for children to demonstrate and practice “The ideals which have been gradually fostered up to this time by his social life, his home environment and his inborn aspirations” (Schmidhofer et al. 49).

While the Superintendent's committee's rhetoric sounds as though the committee values every child, its model of moral development only works if students come from a "home environment" that is already pure. It only works if the child in question has inherited positive "inborn aspirations" from correct lineage. This model breaks down when the students in question are from homes whose "ideals" or "aspirations" don't match exactly those of the school, most notably students of color and immigrant students. Wright admitted that she didn't give much consideration for the differing needs of these students as her report begins with the qualification that "Such tangible facts as have been obtained come chiefly from the girls of one of the coeducational high schools where economic and social conditions may be considered somewhat above average" (Wright 698). The "economic and social" eliteness of the students discussed allows the administrators to discuss sex education as a way of protecting the purity of students, as these elite students are assumed to be already pure.

The discussion of just these students furthers an ideal of only elite students learning about sexuality in order to further a society in which only elite adults reproduce. The most marginalized students, students like the immigrant girls I've discussed, can assume from this instruction that they should always act like their elite classmates in public, but that they should not engage in sexual activity.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

“Can I tell you a horrible secret about coming out?”

“Always” (Tu 3:40)

Chinese-American journalists Kathy Tu and Tobin Low start their 2017 LGBTQ podcast series *Nancy* with stories of coming out to their mothers. In the first episode, Tobin confesses to Kathy that he came out to a stranger before coming out to his friends or family so as to have an easy disclosure “to throw to myself” (Tu 4:15). In doing so, he first experienced this “thing that queer people have in common: these moments where you have to define yourself” (Tu 4:35). Stories of “these moments where you have to define yourself” populate *Nancy* and this thesis. In *Nancy* and in the stories in this thesis, an agent of the dominant group demanded self definition from someone they saw as an outsider. Kathy began articulating difference “When I was about five years old my parents told me we were going on vacation, so I packed up my little blue backpack, walked onto a giant airplane, and we moved from Taipei to Los Angeles” (Tu 5:30). As a gay immigrant with parents who spoke Mandarin, a language she forgot the longer she stayed in the US, Kathy felt like an outsider. She recounts coming out to her mother, “The first time I came out to my mom was after I’d returned from a college semester in Taiwan, re-learning Mandarin...Even though I felt my mom wouldn’t take kindly to this news...I needed to try” (Tu 7:23). Since her mother refused to listen, Kathy kept articulating her difference in a process that was full of the same shame that Yeziarska wrote about and mediated by the same structures in schools that made immigrant girls in 1913 Chicago feel alienated.

Kathy kept realizing that American legitimation is impossible for a woman with any sort of deviant sexuality, a realization also found in *The Mosher Survey*, and *Bread Givers*, and The Chicago Experiment. *The Mosher Survey* demonstrates the anxiety over American sexuality, situating normal sexual behavior as integral to correct American womanhood but also impossible to articulate. Dr. Mosher's questions reveal a medical anxiety about whether sexual practices could preserve the sexual purity of American women, or whether race and lineage were stronger than individual choices. Although the women interviewed disclosed a huge variety of sexual behaviors, they kept hinting that sex and sexuality were okay to know about, but shameful to talk about in public. In *Bread Givers*, Yeziarska works through the same understanding that talking about sex in public was shameful, especially for immigrant women. Yeziarska presents a semi-autobiographical immigrant woman narrator trying to access American legitimation first through bodily performance and then through education. The narrator keeps realizing that sexual desire of any kind is deviant for an immigrant woman, and she navigates this shame at the same time that she tries to create a language of resistance to the imperative to feel guilty for existing. Studying the documents related to the Chicago Experiment revealed some of the mechanisms that taught immigrant girls to feel shame about their sexualities. In the Chicago Experiment, educators tried to teach correct American sexual expression, and ended up teaching that correct American sexual expression for immigrant girls was no sexual expression. The course set out to protect the most marginalized students, but instead created mechanisms to control them through shaming their difference.

Both Kathy and Yeziarska describe being in school as an immigrant girl with an unnamed sexual difference as an experience of shame. Kathy says that when she entered American school

“even though I didn’t know I was queer, I knew I was different” (Tu 9:09). In *Bread Givers*, Yeziarska writes through a semi-autobiographical narrator, Sara. She writes that once Sara entered school full of American girls she “felt funny and queer. Something was wrong” (Yeziarska 183). Kathy and Yeziarska both locate their otherness in being “queer.” While this term shifted in meaning in the hundred years between the publications of *Bread Givers* and *Nancy*, the term maintained a sense of undefined sexual and bodily otherness. Kathy goes on to say “and I was ashamed of it” (Tu 9:09), and Yeziarska reflects that Sara was “Raw with the shame that I had tried to be like the rest and couldn’t” (Yeziarska 183). Both of them experience being “ashamed” or “raw with...shame” as a result of entering an American educational institution where they had to reconcile their immigrant and queer bodies with those of their straight, native-born classmates.

Sex education relied on shame as a form of control, and the woman Dr. Mosher interviewed expressed an understanding that sex was something that they could know about, but never something that they could discuss. Maurice Bigelow warned that if women, especially working class or immigrant women, experienced “external sexual stimuli” or read “radical literature” by “European authors,” they would see sex as just “an animal method for perpetuating the human species” (Bigelow 191, 194, 196). He argued that women’s feelings of guilt instead needed to keep them from seeking out bawdy influences.

Sex education grappled with how to produce shame as border control was no longer sufficient to exclude deviant sexualities. After the federal government assumed control of immigration in 1892, the first women who entered the country through the new federal screening started to have children. Border control then had no authority on these children—these second

generation immigrants. Control over immigrant bodies had to move into the country if the US were going to continue to try to construct its ideal American populace. When defending the Chicago Experiment, Chicago administrator Mabel Wright argued that “The school is the outgrowth of civilization. In pioneer days, education came from the home, and the more highly civilized we become the more does the school have to assume what was formerly considered the work of the home” (Wright 700). Given that she saw school as “the outgrowth of civilization,” her vision of the Chicago Experiment was to civilize its students, especially those from homes unlike the homes found in the US in “pioneer days.” Modern homes, she implied, were full of immigrants with deviant morals. Wright’s assertion then calls for sex education as a way to control immigrants. The model of sex education as a form of immigrant control was powerful as sex education attempts to dictate who reproduces, who controls their body or the bodies of others, and who expresses desire. Sex education brought “these moments where you have to define yourself” in sexual terms into public school curriculum.

Studying 1913 sex education, an 1890-1920 sex survey, and an immigrant woman’s 1925 educational narrative makes visible the formation of the apparatuses of immigrant control that became so dominant over the following century, the apparatuses that demanded self definitions from immigrant women and that gave the options as prostitute, or imitation of native born, assumedly pure classmates. Studying the formation of these apparatuses let me articulate how language constructed models of control over immigrant women, models that moved so permanently into the public sphere. While I studied language as a mechanism of control, this method also let me study language as a site of resistance for immigrant women, as how they tried to “define yourself” on their own terms. While this project was predominantly an act of historical

recovery, understanding this moment also let me understand how queerness and immigration status became intertwined and the how American legitimation was impossible for queer immigrants who've been made to internalize shame. The categories have altered slightly in the past hundred years, but the basic options of deviant and imitation of non-deviant have remained constant.

The labeling system in schools classifying immigrantness and sexual difference as belonging in the same category of deficiency emerged from the work of early twentieth century medical and education authorities. As these authorities created a language for describing sexual deviance as intertwined with immigrantness, both categories became subject to the same types of exclusion and assimilatory tactics. *The Mosher Survey* and the Chicago Experiment show the creation of this language of difference. They offer a window into the conflation of anxieties about queerness and immigration. For example, the Chicago Board of Education in 1913 called for “(a) examination of new children who are just entering school, and (b) periodical examination and care of pupils health and physiological development in the course of life” (Owen et al. 397, italics theirs). As I've explored, this assertion calls for a mechanism of immigrant control—bodily inspection at a border—to be used to catch sexual deviance. The overlap of mechanisms of control exposes the ways in which popular discourse has come to use queerness and immigrantness as metaphors for each other. It is no accident that the term “coming out” can be used to both describe someone revealing their queerness or their status as an undocumented immigrant.

Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Jose Antonio Vargas writes about his status as an undocumented immigrant in language similar to his description of realizing, then revealing, that

he's gay. When the NPR show Fresh Air interviewed him for a series on "voices in the immigration debate" they titled the episode "Coming Out As An 'Undocumented Immigrant'" (Fresh Air). In the New York Times Magazine in 2011, Vargas divulges decades of living as undocumented in the US, decades of fabricating documents and having to lie to employers, colleagues, classmates, and friends after learning that his green card was fake when he tried to get a driver's license at 16. Vargas writes that at the root of these experiences was that "I had to lie about who I was" (Vargas). He writes, "Tough as it was, coming out about being gay seemed less daunting than coming out about my legal status. I kept my other secret mostly hidden" (Vargas). Even though he worked to create a life and journalism career in the US, he reflects, "I am still an undocumented immigrant. And that means living a different kind of reality. It means going about my day in fear of being found out" (Vargas). He continues, "It means rarely trusting people, even those closest to me, with who I really am...It means reluctantly, even painfully, doing things I know are wrong and unlawful" (Vargas). He was forced into "doing things I know are wrong and unlawful" by policies that made it impossible for him to exist openly as himself. The shame he felt about hiding "who I really am" parallels Kathy's shame, Yeziarska's shame, the shame of some of Mosher's interviewees who felt that the things they had to do to survive in a system not designed for them made them deviant. All of these people then internalized the idea that their perceived deviance—their queerness, their immigrant status, or both—was a secret that they had to carry alone.

This life of concealing "who I really am" resulted from the possibility of the federal government recognizing his perceived deviance. It is telling that Vargas realized that he was undocumented after contact with the DMV. He sought governmental validation in an American

rite of passage: a driver's license at 16. When he presented his green card to the clerk as proof of residency, however, she whispered "this is fake...don't come back here again" (Vargas), condemning him to decades of shame and secrecy. Federal government takeover of immigration policy in 1892 moved moments of exclusion like this one into national domain. Reading his story alongside Kathy's coming out story after discussing *The Mosher Survey*, *Bread Givers*, and the Chicago Experiment demonstrates the extent to which this exclusion is institutional and systemic. All of these stories sound so similar because these people all existed under the scrutiny of the same basic mechanisms. Measures of immigrant control in the US have become increasingly concerned with perceived sexual deviance. After the federal government takeover of immigration policing in 1892, the federal government "did not bar immigrants on the basis of perversion per se, but instead relied on the 'likely to become a public charge' clause of the immigration law to exclude or deport aliens suspected of sexual deviance" (Canaday 21). The subsequent Immigration Act of 1917 excluded immigrants who were "polygamists," "prostitutes," or "persons being mentally or physically defective," which at that time was a euphemism for homosexual people (Bromberg). The 1965 amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act excluded "aliens afflicted with...sexual deviation," another euphemism that indexed pedophiles, prostitutes, and gay people, a ban that remained in effect until 1990 (Wheatley 162, Kennedy). Immigration legislation codified certain identities as deviant, and in doing so, relegated anyone in the country with those identities to secrecy.

Vargas exists at the intersection of mechanisms positioning immigration status and queerness as flaws to be hidden, mechanisms refined in the Chicago Experiment and during the lives of Yezierska and of Dr. Mosher's subjects. Immigration status and queerness at first don't

seem like they belong in the same category of identity. It seems more logical that immigration status and race should be grouped together, or queerness and gender. Immigration status and queerness became associated however, because both identity categories are invisible, and neither is inherited. Neither lineage nor appearance can predict if someone is queer or undocumented, or if they are a first generation immigrant or a ninth generation immigrant. Queerness and immigrant status got associated as educational, medical, and political authorities scrambled to create a language for recognizing and regulating them. Educational, political, and medical authorities vilified these identities at the turn of the twentieth century, forcing the people with them to feel ashamed of being different. The mechanisms that vilified these identities remain in place and continue to incite shame in people like Vargas. He reflects, “This deceit never got easier. The more I did it, the more I felt like an impostor, the more guilt I carried — and the more I worried that I would get caught” (Vargas). These mechanisms relegated him to silence and guilt, just as these mechanisms tried to do to immigrants in Chicago Public Schools in 1913, and just as these mechanisms did for Yeziarska at the beginning of the twentieth century. He was left always feeling on the outside, always feeling “like an imposter,” again echoing Yeziarska’s sentiment of being “Raw with the shame that I had tried to be like the rest and couldn’t” (Yeziarska 183). Almost a hundred years apart, both writers are wracked with guilt when they feel like they don’t belong. Both of them try to make up for this feeling of shame in alienation by becoming what they perceived as American enough in language.

Like Yeziarska and Kathy, Vargas talks about writing, about storytelling as his way of trying to compensate for feelings of not belonging. He bumps against the same structures that they do, realizing the impossibility of American legitimation. In the same 2011 New York Times

Magazine piece he writes, “I convinced myself that having my name in print — writing in English, interviewing Americans — validated my presence here” (Vargas). His lengthy struggle to get to college and to “hav[e] my name in print” echoes Yeziarska’s assertion through Sara that “My one hope was to get to the educated world, where only the thoughts you give out count, and not how you look” (Yeziarska 183). They both struggle against government regulation of their identities by turning to schools to access American legitimation. Schools were and are extensions of the same mechanisms of immigrant and queer control and assimilation. In schools, they all learned to feel ashamed. Almost a hundred years apart, these moments emphasize the trauma of being made to feel like an outsider.

*Nancy* provides a hopeful antidote to the stories of queer immigrant isolation analyzed in this thesis. Kathy and Tobin tell their own stories in *Nancy*, but they also bring in guest after guest to talk about queer experiences, immigrant experiences, and especially those experiences that overlap. Their insistence on telling these stories helps further their mission of creating queer communities, particularly queer Asian-American communities, and queer immigrant communities. Vargas came out as gay and undocumented in the New York Times Magazine after being inspired by “four students who walked from Miami to Washington to lobby for the Dream Act” (Vargas). He writes that “At the risk of deportation...they are speaking out. Their courage has inspired me” (Vargas). He was moved to tell his story by “four students” “speaking out.” Children in school pushed him to action by storytelling. This model forms a blueprint for resisting the silencing capacities of shame.

Stories of alienation, stories like the ones in this thesis, have to be on educators’ minds as they teach and on education scholars’ minds as they conduct research. Educators and researchers

have to listen to students who've been marginalized by schools in order to learn how to best celebrate their identities and teach about the legacies of trauma and shame that schools have enforced. Reading *The Mosher Survey*, *Bread Givers* and documents associated with the Chicago Experiment makes clear the trauma associated with learning shame. Over the course of the twentieth century, schools filled with students outside of White America's idealized norm. Schools had more students of color, more immigrants, more students whose home languages didn't match classroom languages, and more students who identified as queer or transgender. As schools had to educate students with these identities, they honed the mechanisms for teaching shame as a form of classroom and social control. Teaching shame works if the goal is dominance over students. While control might have been an implicit mission of schools until now, it's not the future of education that I want to believe in. Teaching shame can't be sustained. Given how many more identities American classrooms house now than they did at the start of the twentieth century, schools have to turn towards models of education that celebrate these identities and tell their stories in classrooms. Yezierska and Mosher's subjects and Kathy and Vargas all also offer storytelling as a model of student resistance. Now it's up to teachers to listen.

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