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Introduction

Making Something Out of Nothing

SWOP, at its most basic, is an anti-violence campaign. As a multi-state network of sex workers and advocates, we address locally and nationally the violence that sex workers experience because of their criminal status. Operating in one of the most prominently violent societies today, sex workers in America experience this phenomenon pointedly in the context of their criminal status. Yet, sex workers are seldom afforded protection or recourse from violent acts committed against them because of the precarious, often graft-ridden relationship between sex work and law enforcement. Society tolerates violence against sex workers because of the stigma and myths that surround prostitution. Only until these falsehoods are corrected and sex workers are legitimized will we be able to effectively prevent and minimize the structural and occupational challenges of sex work.

Sex Workers Outreach Project—US Mission Statement

Sex education depends upon stories; stories about where and when to have sex, about who can or should have sex and with whom, about the moral significance of sex, and about the many ways sex can quite literally make or break a life or a family or a community. Like all stories, those that are shared as part of becoming “sexually educated” are filled with characters—sometimes real, sometimes fictional—that depict what is to be gained and what is to be lost when embarking upon sexual relationships. Albeit for different reasons, sex education routinely explores the consequences of sexual behavior through the stories of the teenage mother-to-be or the could-be teenage mother or the person living with HIV/AIDs (who you most certainly do *not* want to become, right?) and the virtuous, virginal, happy, heterosexual person looking for *real* love (look at the beautiful life you *could* have!). It is no game of chance: the story of sex education is one of choice, and the task of taking it is to learn how

to get you to choose *correctly*. However, most students in the United States know, in some sense, that this is *not* actually the game, though, and that this is not *the* story. There are tremendous absences playing roles in these stories, too. And, as so many have been exploring and unpacking for decades, these absences have stories themselves. In other words, they have stories about *the* story, and this book explores just a small part of one.

Any story of the founding of federally funded sex education in the United States includes, in some way, accounts of the following moments, and as such, there are absences here that ignite, for me, a curiosity about the stories within them. I thus include these stories to spark curiosity in others and to bring the reader into the fold of making sense of the absences, as I will argue that there are lessons that need to be explored, too.

- (1) Prince Morrow and Social Hygiene—In 1907, in the *American Journal of Sociology*, emerging sex education expert Prince Morrow's work, "Prophylaxis of Social Disease," was published. Concerned with the spread of venereal diseases, he writes that it is "not simply a struggle against microbes, but a warfare, as well, against bad social conditions."¹ The health of the nation is at stake, and it is the prostitute that grounds the fear of its destruction. It is her "illegitimate sexual relations" that cause the spread of diseases and that threaten the American family and the logics that maintain it.² At stake are the lives of those women who uphold the honor of the American family:

It is upon women that the burden of shame and suffering of disease and death, is chiefly laid—not so much, perhaps upon that unfortunate class who are regarded as the chief agents in the propagation of the diseases, but upon pure women, who do not always find, even in the sanctuary of marriage, a safeguard against "the diseases of the women of the streets."³

In order for "general enlightenment" and "the safeguarding of marriage from venereal infections"⁴ to be achieved, "efforts should be directed not to making prostitution safe, but to prevent the making of prostitutes."⁵ Sex education is seen as a promising site for intervention into this family- and nation-destroying problem.

- (2) Raymond Fosdick and Training Camp Activities—With the decision to enter the First World War came the establishment of soldier training camps within the United States, and, with that, the proliferation of

venereal disease at such an alarming rate near those camps that it was deemed a public health problem by the newly created Public Health Service.⁶ This inspired the creation of the Commission of Training Camp Activities, made up of War and Navy Department branches, which was tasked with providing education about venereal disease. In 1918, the chairman of the War and Navy Departments, and newly appointed chairman of the Commission on Training Camp Activities, Raymond Fosdick expressed great personal concern for the threat posed by the infiltration of these diseases into the lives of soldiers. Referring to a camp in Columbus, New Mexico, he says of these soldiers that

There was absolutely nothing in that town that could in any way legitimately interest them. There were no moving-picture shows and no pool tables; there was no place where they could write letters or read, no place where they could purchase a newspaper or magazine. The only attractions in town were a few disreputable saloons and a red-light district; and those institutions were extensively patronized because there was absolutely nothing to compete with them.⁷

The danger was great, but the solution was relatively simple: the federal government would fund the construction facilities such as libraries, theaters, athletic spaces, and meeting places (called “hostess houses”) and more direct intervention into the “evil” that thrived in the “saloons” and “red-light districts” surrounding the camps.⁸ Fosdick adds: “We are confronted with a special problem. These men are not enlisting voluntarily for service, but are being drafted, and we cannot afford to draft them into a demoralizing environment. They must be protected. It is a duty we that we own not only to the men themselves, but to their families when the men come back from overseas.”⁹ To this end, some of the first federally funded sex education materials and information were put into print.

- (3) “Healthy Happy Womanhood”—In 1919, just a year after Fosdick expressed the necessity for sex education for soldiers, the US Public Health Service issued a “Pamphlet for Girls and Young Women” titled “Healthy Happy Womanhood” detailing a path for girls that, if followed, promises not just health and happiness but beauty, joy, popularity, and a husband and children to boot. This is the path *good, healthy* girls are to take: first, you must work on your physical fitness and “incidentally increase your beauty and attractiveness”; this good health also “produces

high spirits, vitality, cheerfulness and leadership,” all of which will also make you popular.¹⁰ Exercise, yes, but “always insist upon working in well-ventilated rooms,” take cold baths, eat three meals and drink eight glasses of water every day, and do not forget to sleep: “A growing girl needs from 8 ½ to 9 ½ hours of sleep every night.”¹¹ Take care of these things now so that you are ready for the moment when your body needs you most: motherhood. To this end, after this path toward wellness has been taken, the pamphlet offers anatomical and biological information about “glands and their functions,” before moving on to an account of female reproductive organs and the process through which life begins. It describes, through a discussion of commonly known animals, the process of fertilization that occurs for many different species, and, like the animals, humans too, we are told, are driven by the “sex instinct,” which “leads [animals and human beings] to create life and continue race.”¹² Something that seems to make humans distinct, however, is “love”; “Love is due in a large measure to the sex instinct. All the fine emotions such as love of mother for child, of husband and wife, friendship, devotion to a great cause, and the joy which one finds in every day work are closely related to it.”¹³ A final note: “The sex instinct is a tremendous power in life. Used rightly it will bring to the individual and to the race the greatest joy; used wrongly it will not only fail to produce this result, but also it will probably lead to serious suffering and unhappiness.” What might cause this suffering and unhappiness? We are told that it is “Sex relations among persons who are not married to each other,”¹⁴ and that this suffering and unhappiness will also likely include a battle with syphilis, gonorrhea, or other venereal diseases. We learn, too, that it is women’s responsibility to make sure she is not seen as an “easy mark” or that she does not “put herself in a position where a man can take advantage of her.”¹⁵ Indeed, take these precautions, and anything is possible: “To-day the opportunities for woman’s development and her ability to contribute toward the creation of a better world are greater than ever before. At last all activities of life are open to her.”¹⁶ *This* is the role girls and young woman can play in working toward the “achievement” of national glory.

What stories are being produced and told in these instantiations of sex education’s history, and how do we understand the importance of these

stories? We could explore these moments in so many different ways, after all. For instance, we could talk about the men being inflicted with venereal disease or the men turning to sex education to help them. There are the people named themselves: Morrow, Fosdick, those at the US Public Health Service who crafted either the literature for the soldiers or the literature for the students. Or, we could center and highlight the experiences of the girls and women discussed, instead. Here, we would have to choose from within that group: the schoolgirls, or the healthy and dedicated wife? Or the prostitute? Yes, let's go with her.

Finding a Purpose

For me, it is the everlasting presence of the prostitute, or the sex worker, that I desperately wanted to know more about.¹⁷ In my experience, being a student of education, so to speak, has meant either never acknowledging the existence of sex work or sex workers or, at the most, understanding their existence as valued only for the terrible lessons they have for those who dare stray from the well-trodden trail toward sexual conformity. Being of a certain class (middle-ish?), of a certain race (white), of a certain assigned gender and sex that I do indeed inhabit without significant tension or sacrifice ("woman"), and being sexually normative enough to avoid questioning, I was taught, albeit mostly implicitly, that the worst-case scenario for my own life was that I end up being "forced" into sex work. At the same time, I never cared much for the thing I was supposed to want, for the best-case scenario (the marriage, the kids, the house, etc.). If anything, I felt apathetic, and thus I primarily found sex education interesting in the abstract. Even as I decided that I most certainly did *not* want to be a high-school history teacher, three years into that undergraduate program, I continued to find it interesting as an academic pursuit until I did finally begin to find it *infuriating* as an academic pursuit that I *did* connect with at a personal level. The more I learned, the more annoyed I became, and I finally reached what I thought were peak-anger levels when I started to realize, in a tiny classroom in the building that used to house the Kinsey Institute with the help of many beloved others, that the worst-case scenario and the best-case scenario are essentially nothing without each other. There is no sex work without heteronormative marriage, and there is no heteronormative marriage

without sex work. At the very least, *that* seems like a good enough reason to take a step back to ask the question of what the hell sex education is for.

My own situatedness and the historical moments shared above point me to a question about sex education that is often left out of much of the essential and innovative scholarship about how to make sex education *better*: Why does sex education exist? It seems like a simple question but, again, as I pondered the histories shared earlier, it quickly became clear that it is a far more complicated question to answer. I could make connections between these stories and contemporary concerns for diseases and pregnancy, yes, and in some ways, the “Healthy Happy Womanhood” pamphlet seems almost *better* than some of the material I was introduced to in my own sex education. But what about the other parts? What about the whole war part? Why in the world was a high-ranking member of what would become the *United States’ defense department* taking up the eugenicist language of social hygiene to advocate for sex education? While we are at it, why was *that* language so similar to what showed up in these sex education pamphlets for girls? And prostitution? What about the prostitutes? I wanted to know more about who *they* were, what their presence in these spaces meant for sex education, and how that understanding might impact the issues with sex education that continue to plague the United States today.

There are already many important and powerful accounts of sex education’s history, and many of them do offer explicit answers to the question of sex education’s existence in meaningful ways. There remains, however, so much to be unpacked about sex education’s past, especially as sex education in the present continues to flail in the face of ongoing sex-, gender-, sexuality-, and racist-related violence and the stakes for addressing this violence feel higher and higher. Despite the research that has been produced on sex education, and the many valuable ways it is seen as a site for such an intervention, there remains almost no evidence of widespread positive impacts of sex education, or even of more comprehensive sex education, in working toward a less-violent future. What we know more than anything else is that people *want* sex education that *better* reflects the needs and desires of today’s world and thus can be part of progressive movements toward equity, recognition, and inclusion, but what we don’t know is how to turn the former into something that can produce the latter. So, it remains an open question as to what has been misinterpreted along the way regarding sex education’s purpose and efficacy. This project attempts

to explore this misinterpretation by offering an alternative story about sex education by centering the very person who remains, at best, at the margins of discourses around sex education policy: the sex worker.

For what purposes *did* sex education come into existence as a federally funded program in the first place? This is a historiographical question, at least in part, as the “search for ‘origins,’” as Foucault reminds us, is simultaneously a fantastical if not delusional task as well as a moralizing and normalizing one.¹⁸ A historical approach that asserts its narrative as truth and as complete is one that makes a metaphysical claim about reality, resulting only in the creation of an illusion of coherence that masks the discrepancies and inconsistencies that are innate to all stories. The task of understanding is framed by “problematization,” or what philosopher Colin Koopman describes as a task that “exposes us” to the central myths by which our experiences are normatively structured.¹⁹ For example, Foucault writes that exploring the history of any contemporary event requires an openness to “‘something altogether different’ behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion in alien forms.”²⁰ In exploring the so-called purpose of sex education, then, I am more interested in the stories that are told about it, and the ones that are *not*, than finding the “real” one. It is from this perspective that I endeavor to seek out answers to my questions about both the presence of the “prostitute”²¹ and the purposes of sex education.

There are at least three dominant or prevailing discourses circulating the field of sex education regarding the beginning of federal involvement in the sexual education of US citizens and residents, each of which appears in some way in the moments discussed earlier: (1) public health and hygiene; (2) the regulation of female sexuality and sex difference; and (3) eugenics and the often explicit desire for the preservation of the white race. Though not entirely independent from each other, the prevalence of these three trends throughout this literature is telling not merely because of the understandings of sex education they perpetuate but because of the impact of this perpetuation on whose experiences are deemed most reliable and valuable in dissecting sex education’s continued existence and possible worth today.

First, then, there is little disagreement that the most prevalent discourse regarding sex education’s emergent existence as a subject of federal interest at the turn of the twentieth century in the United States among historians is

one regarding public health and the concept of “hygiene.” Alexandra Lord’s powerful *Condom Nation*, for example, traces the history of the creation and increased centralization of sex education in America in a way that culminates in the argument that sex education is best understood as representing an instance of “the active intervention of the state in protecting its citizens’ health has been central to American history.”²² Noting that while initial, informal sex education programs were popular with the American citizenry prior to the 1900s, she argues that contemporary discourses around morality, religion, and race coalesced into a particular sense of public health that then shaped how that public health was to be achieved. This moment was met with many voices, each eager to intervene upon the declining health of the United States and its citizens. Not the least of which was the newly defined “expert” of “science.” Highlighted earlier, Prince A. Morrow is so often, and rightly I think, identified as a leading “expert” in shaping sex education’s existence by using science to link public hygiene to sexual behavior. Morrow, a founding member of what would become the American Federation for Sex Hygiene, a predecessor of the American Social Hygiene Association, and prominent sex education researcher and proponent of the early 1900s, focused on particular forms of sexual deviancy as dirtying the health of the population. Most notable, as both Lord and Jeffery Moran in his book *Teaching Sex* argue, was his concern with the spread of venereal disease through prostitution. Moran brilliantly outlines how the social hygiene movement, spearheaded by Morrow, moved the perceived source of the problem of prostitution and disease from the individual to society as a whole. Moran writes that Morrow helped define these trends as “metaphors for social decline,” affecting the most innocent and respectable members of society: married white women and their children.²³ Likewise, Huber and Firmin describe the emergence of sex education policies as explicitly bound to Morrow’s work in linking immorality and sexual deviance under the guise of expertise. They write in their own account of sex education’s history that the increased reliance upon newly developed medical and scientific language and knowledge was utilized by social hygienists, like Morrow, to simultaneously justify the need for formal intervention into the sexual behavior of those living within the US borders while provoking fear toward those who strayed from the ideal the intervention invoked.²⁴

In an effort to explore the importance of the hygiene discourse, the Comstock Act of 1873 is almost always highlighted in these stories, too. That

is, with the Comstock Act, which criminalized the selling and distribution of “obscene” material, as well as its transportation across state lines, all discussions of sex and sexuality were scrutinized for their possible obscenity. This requirement, even for conversation about sex, narrowly limited what could be proposed and even discussed in relation to sex education programs. Lord notes, “The Act cast a long shadow and sparked fear among not only pornographers, prostitutes, and others in the sex trade but also among those who promoted sex education or the use of contraceptives.”²⁵ On her account, part of the possibility of public health, then, was understood in part as contingent upon the narrowing of sex’s presence in the public sphere, and early consideration on the part of the federal government for sex education reflected this trend. Further, the generalized desire for public health is also connected to the prevalence of venereal disease that resulted during the First World War. For Lord, sex education thus served a specific function as a federal project: “By the early twentieth century, substantial precedents existed that allowed the federal government to draw upon its diverse powers to force the issue of sexually transmitted diseases into the open, to push sex education into the schools and the workplace, and to conduct research into the causes of and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases.”²⁶ Situating the “origin” story of sex education within a discourse about public health therefore mirrors the legitimacy assumed by experts at the time regarding the purposes for which sex education was necessary.

Second, and intrinsic to the public health narrative, is the connection between sex education and the regulation of female sexuality and sex difference. A point of contentious debate within the Progressive era, the strengthening of the link between the white race, the traditional family, and the need to control, even criminalize, female sexuality, particularly as it was distinguished from the so-called nature of the male sex, is cited within sex education history as a founding motivation for its existence. Again, Lord centers this cause in her articulation of the impact of what was perceived by many in the upper classes as the destabilization of the American family, particularly due to industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. For Lord, the loosening of women’s roles in the home caused by these societal shifts was itself a contributing factor in the public health crisis, and thus the emergence of federal interest in something to be called sex education is best understood as an antidote to the consequences of these shifts. According to

Jeffery Moran, people like Morrow also perpetuated the link between public health and female sexuality by linking the spread of disease to a particular expression of female sexuality: prostitution. He writes that this was “only one particular instance of the much broader concern at the turn of the century with defending women, the family, and, in many reformers’ eyes, the race.”²⁷ Further, Moran highlights the ways in which G. Stanley Hall came to the foreground in debates around public health by proposing the category of the “adolescent,” a new category able to do the work of identifying and describing normal sexual behavior and development and thus solidifying the legitimacy of the “innocent” female. One of Moran’s penultimate arguments about sex education as a federally funded project is that “the turn toward youth and the schools embodied a number of historically contingent factors, including the rise of expertise as a force in America culture, Prince Morrow’s ideological disdain for coercion, and the ascendant Progressive faith in education.”²⁸ Of course, the link between public health and sexuality that was developed at the time is often attributed to the tidal wave of expert literature on sexuality itself. Moran and Jonathan Zimmerman, author of *Too Hot to Handle: A Global History of Sex Education*, especially emphasize that it was people like Hall and also Freud who established a discourse that participated in the very kind of normalizing of control over female sexuality that made sex education a desirable endeavor.

The last prevailing thread that must be addressed is centered on race. That is, eugenics and the desire to preserve the superiority of the white American individual and family is always offered as an essential framework for understanding the purpose of sex education during the Progressive era. Lord writes convincingly about how the general anxiety around the influx non-“native” people into the United States was itself a reflection of the already festering, if not widely rampant, racist fear of nonwhite people. Citing the lingering effects of Jim Crow laws, for example, Lord details the way that such laws “fed into the widespread belief that nonwhites corrupted whites.”²⁹ The oft discussed Mann Act of 1910, which aimed at preventing “white slavery,” is particularly valuable evidence of this belief for historians of sex education. The threat to female sexuality caused by the decline of moral and physical wellness of the time was envisaged anew in the promotion of the fear around the possibility of young, innocent white women being held captive for the purposes of sex. It was therefore argued that sex education could also serve

the purpose of spreading the word of this threat; it could give a voice to the victims of “white slavery” and ensure that the traditional, Victorian-style family and sexual ideals were protected and preserved for years to come. Notably, as Darlene Clark Hine, Dorothy Roberts, and many others have powerfully demonstrated, the very idea of reproductive freedom that was developed during this time was guided by a racist concern for the preservation of the white race. It is for this reason that almost all historians of sex education see Margaret Sanger’s role in sex education’s founding as important, as both her advocacy around birth control for women and the connection between that advocacy and eugenicist beliefs complicates the idea that sex education was in any way a truly “progressive” step. Sanger’s work in arguing for public acknowledgment and acceptance of sex as pleasurable in and of itself, and thus not merely for the sake of reproduction, was, on Sanger’s own account, tied to the idea that “cultural progress for future generations was possible through selective breeding or discriminatory reproduction.”³⁰ In *Sex Ed, Segregated*, for example, Courtney Q. Shah shows how “American racism complicated sex education” from the start and summarizes the main point of this narrative: sex education “could have been a revolutionary way of empowering people but instead was more often used to reinforce power relations.”³¹

It is important to add here that there is at least one other essential umbrella concept related to understanding sex education’s existence that is both connected to each of the above threads while also distinct enough, particularly giving this project’s interest in education, to warrant brief attention: the Progressive-era faith in the potential of education, in general and in its publicly funded form, to solve social problems, especially those related to social “instability” and family life. For instance, Huber and Firmin cite the work of Ella Flagg Young as exemplary of the ways in which public health issues were increasingly seen as educational issues during the Progressive era. They write about how schools, for Young and many others, were perfect laboratories for experimenting on children to see how best to effectively combat unhealthy and immoral sexual behavior.³² Similarly, Julian Carter’s important examination of the intellectual history of sex education posits that this Progressive-era “confidence in education” led to “profound ambivalence” regarding its construction and institution.³³ Carter carefully explores the “logic of contagion” that surrounded sex education discourse during this era, and, as Robin Jensen argues later in her work, the rhetorical confusion produced in

these discourses cultivated a uniquely Progressive-era ambiguity around sex education, such that it was difficult to even speak about.³⁴

Taken together, then, these historiographical narratives exhibit the way historians of education have accounted for sex education's "origins" and can be seen as aligning with a view of sex education that situates the federal project of sex education as a Progressive public health initiative aimed at maintaining the social, cultural, political, and epistemological status of the traditional white American family through idealizations of femininity as pure, innocent, and in need of protection. As discussed earlier, however, my interest is in a specific set of questions about the lives centered in these histories and the assumptions, epistemological and normative, that such centering depends upon in order to be justifiable. In other words, here, I aim to problematize the stability of the threads just discussed or to refuse to take for granted the processes of humanization and dehumanization at play in them, always guided by my original question about the presence of sex workers within these narratives.

Biopolitics, Erasures, and Reorientation

Sex education, then, is explored here as a kind of biopolitical device. In its existence as a federal policy, it operates for the exclusive purpose of distinguishing between life and death in its many forms. To live is to be seen, to matter, to be spoken of, to be allowed to reproduce, to be rewarded, to be allowed to exist as an agent; to die is to be erased, to be in *need* of erasure, to be expelled, to be subhuman, to exist as a problem for other agents, to be allowed to die. In discussing the idea of biopolitics as it came into existence within modern discourses of sexuality, Foucault argues that the contrast between life and death is one that is upheld and negotiated through relations of power, language, and governance. Biopolitics, therefore, refers to a kind of political rationality, or a system of thought and practice "by which human behavior is directed via a state administration,"³⁵ that allows for and simultaneously justifies the enactment of differentiated forms of material and epistemological control across and between populations by way of laws, policies, and institutional norms. Foucault discusses such rationalities through a view of them *not* as "an absolute against which they could be evaluated as constituting more or less perfect forms of rationality" but instead as "inscriptions" that

allow for biopolitical practices to be justifiably normalized.³⁶ So, biopolitics are those discursive practices that produce the logics and norms by which any part of a population is to be determined as worthy of life, and a certain kind of life at that.

In invoking this biopolitical framework, I explore how sex education participates in the construction and legitimization of biopolitical discourses, and therefore inquire into the ways that those logics are normalized via determinations about sexual normalcy and deviancy. In thinking about Foucault's notion of biopolitics, especially in relation to logics of sexual normalcy and deviance, I want to recall, too, a comment he makes elsewhere. He writes,

Sexuality is a part of our behavior. It's a part of our world freedom. Sexuality is something that we ourselves create—it is our own creation, and much more than the discovery of a secret side of our desire. We have to understand that with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation. Sex is not a fatality; it's a possibility for creative life.³⁷

When assessed alongside the concept of biopolitics, it becomes clear, I think, that, while yes, biopolitics is about life and death, it is also about *creation and reproduction*, too. This suggests something important about the stakes of understanding the biopolitical characteristics of sex education policies: sexuality is a site within which *possibility* itself is to be maintained, contained, and even restrained. If we desire something novel, or that rejects the violence inherent in federal sex education policies, or that something currently impossible becomes possible, the way that the creative impulse at the core of sexuality is itself erased in education must be accounted for, too.

To this point, L. H. Stallings offers an important critique and extension of Foucault's concern with power, knowledge, and sexuality, writing that, after Foucault, "we know what power does with sexuality and we understand the discourse of sex, but we understand less about what imagination does with sexuality and how imagination thwarts power's need to establish a knowledge-power of sex as either *Scientia sexualis* or a truth-as-pleasure from *ars erotica*."³⁸ My contention is, therefore, that sex education policies overwhelmingly erase, and thus produce, blind spots when it comes to sex workers, specifically by way of the circulation and perpetuation of a political rationality that itself normalizes their exclusion *and* makes the alternative, imaginative, and novel

ways of living and loving and creating they enact seem both impossible *and* evil. Sex education limits what constitutes legitimate knowledge by explicitly refusing a specific understanding of sexuality—as art as experience.³⁹ So, the seeming impossibility of sex workers existing meaningfully in sex education policies is what makes it seem crazy to include them; their assumed inherent evil is what justifies their isolation from the child; and both their impossibility and evilness combined determine the distance from education itself at which they must be kept.

These are the distances I want to trouble and denaturalize and dismantle. It is imperative to understand sex workers first as actual, existing human beings and, second, as a legitimate source of knowledge about sex education's existence at the federal level. At the very least, we have enough information and understanding to ask about other ways of orienting and staging questions of sex education's purpose beyond the narratives offered so far. Framing the history of sex education through a concern for sex work and sex workers, and acknowledging the normative and epistemological assumptions inherent in their exclusion, points to an unquestionable blind spot, a nothing that is actually something. The value of the lives of the sex workers is depicted as incomparable, on these accounts, to the value of everyone else, which is perhaps exactly why I want to center their value in understanding sex education here. Even while sex workers are acknowledged in these stories, their own experiences are not given the same space or authority in making sense of the purposes of sex education that is extended to others. Certainly, it is not *only* sex workers who are left out, which makes this project incomplete itself, but, to the extent that sex work is positioned as especially contentious within, if not entirely unrelated to, education studies, it is to this form of labor that I commit my own work. Exploring the experiences of the sex worker enables a better understanding of the work sex education does in organizing life in the United States and around the world, and the import of that work itself. Most importantly, though it should *not* have to be said, sex workers are indeed living, breathing, beings whose lives inherently matter. Their exclusion from educational discourses represents education's own exclusionary foundation.

In order to resist this exclusion, I ask: What would it look like to read the era in which sex education emerged from a concern with the life and experiences of the sex worker? To this end, I move forward with this examination of sex education for three reasons. First, again, is my desire to affirm the existence,

experience, and knowledge of the sex worker and the legitimacy and value of her work. In doing so, I also hope to identify a different view of sex education's history and, with it, an alternative understanding of its relationship to violence, including its relationship to mitigating violence. Finally, taking the experiences of the sex worker to be invaluable to the history of sex education more explicitly justifies a concern for the contemporary relationship between sex work and sex education and all but requires of us—those interested in intervening upon violence—to imagine something “otherwise.” In an effort to stay focused on these aims, I have bookended each chapter with the words of sex workers, of all kinds and of all genders, and of all levels of notoriety, and with very little commentary from myself. While these are not the only spaces wherein the voices of actual sex workers are present, they are the most evident, and I want to be clear about why I have made these choices. I do not want to speak *for* sex workers. I do not want to even attempt to have the kind of knowledge/experience that might allow me to interpret their voices. My intent instead is to both frame the scholarship presented as important *because of them*, as opposed to suggest that they are important because of the scholarship. I also intend to present statements about sex work by sex workers that are disruptive of the stigmatizing discourses that circulate discussions of sex work, particularly within education, and to make it all but impossible for those interested in sex education to dismiss as irrelevant or unimportant: those on agency, pleasure, power, survival, acceptance, and joy.⁴⁰

Without a new way into the critique of sex education, we are likely to remain bound to the same discourses that have failed to lead to real change in how individuals, *all* individuals, and communities, *all* communities, experience and participate in processes of education that facilitate nuanced, broadened, and deepened notions of sexuality. I am serious about the way in which our contemporary attitude toward sex education is dangerous and has real effects on real people's lives inside and outside of the school setting. And I am serious about the connection between such an attitude about sexuality and education and the traumatic and deadly events that continue to plague our world. In pushing for alternative pedagogies and moving beyond sex education policy, I hope to make space for different critically informed practices that privilege the epistemologies of those most harmed by our current educational policy and that need not wait for legislation to be implemented. In this way, I believe that while critique is at the heart of this project, so too is the generative nature

of such critique. As Cathy Cohen writes, scholars interested in such questions ought to “take seriously the possibility that in the space created by deviant discourse and practice, especially in Black communities, a new radical politics of deviance could emerge.”⁴¹ Indeed, it is my hope that the small constructive component of this project, no matter how imaginative and impossible, might, at the least, inspire anyone or any community that feels the weight of education’s assumptions about the role, and kind, of sex in schools as harmful, to resist and reconstruct educational experiences in new ways that dismantle the logics that enable and normalize such harm in the first place.

What follows constitutes a more detailed exploration of sex education’s ideological history and policy evolution, and the relationship to violence present in both. Chapter 1 again calls upon Foucault, as well as critical insights from the field of Queer of Color Critique to reorient the history of sex education around the history of sex work and to ruminate on what happens to our understanding of sex education, as a national project, when it is considered in this way. The lessons I take away from doing this work makes up the focus of Chapter 2, wherein I attempt to situate federal interest in sex education within this history of the United States’ relationship to colonialism, slavery, and racism, heteropatriarchy, and the emergent privileging of the capitalist, and ultimately neoliberal, subject within American society. Here I extend my use of Queer of Color critiques and engage with additional Queer of Color scholarship, as well as postcolonial and cultural studies. Chapter 3 offers an argument for seeing the project of federally funded sex education as a form of state-sponsored violence by evoking the concepts of state violence and biopolitics. This chapter is “inward” looking, focusing on the way federal sex education policies in the United States maintain and naturalize violence today within its own borders and also addresses the “problem” of the human at stake in these policies. The following chapter, however, shifts the gaze “outward,” considering the relationship between the state violence trafficked in sex education against those within the United States as inherent to its foreign affairs and thus implicating it as part of a general, global contradiction between national policies on sex education and the treatment of sex workers. Chapter 4 therefore offers an international view of sex education policy in the United States.

Finally, left with what I argue is little reason to maintain sex education as it currently exists, Chapter 5 offers a justification for moving “beyond”

policy-oriented change and, instead, for calling upon the tradition of Black radical imagination to guide the positing of new pedagogical demands that more deeply resist and undermine the systems sex education policies currently uphold. Within this justification is an argument for the essential and inherently productive nature of critique, and, as such, an argument for resisting prescriptive suggestions for policy makers, practitioners, scholars, and communities. Given the patronizing and over-extended reach of imperialist powers perpetuated by such “constructive” work, I instead return to the experience of sex workers and, in the short Conclusion, offer an impossible, impractical, unrealistic demand, and deeply held personal desire, for what I imagine could be a nonviolent, non-Enlightenment-based homage to the intimate relationships between sexuality and education themselves. My hope is not to tell others what to do but to humbly offer something that might spark in others the desire and demand for a world different than this one.