

**Bodies of Surveillance:
Disability, Femininity, and the Keepers of the Gene Pool, 1910-1925**

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DISSERTATION

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Disability Studies
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2012

Chicago, Illinois

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This dissertation is dedicated to Grandpa Erato, who never failed to ask me if I was “done with that paper yet,” whenever I came home for a visit.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my advisor, Sandy Sufian and committee members, Lennard Davis, Carrie Sandahl, Licia Carlson, and Michael Rembis. Each of them have inspired and supported me throughout this lengthy process and I would not have been successful without their guidance. First and foremost, Sandy Sufian's expertise in historical research and writing took my project to the next level. She understood my passion for my research topic and guided me accordingly to ensure I could tell the story I wanted to tell regardless of my own history as a literature analyst. She has also provided me with the necessary emotional support while still challenging me as I finalized my journey towards the Ph.D. I consider her a lifelong friend and colleague.

Lennard Davis and Carrie Sandahl have encouraged me more than they know from the moment I met each of them. I sat in on one of Lennard's literature classes and I am often reminded of the critical disability theory we debated in that class as I ponder how it relates to my historical research. The same can be said of Carrie, who I "first" met before I even started the program as she appeared in *Vital Signs: Crip Culture Talks Back*, the documentary by Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell. More central to this project, Carrie could always be relied on when I needed an encouraging word or an opportunity to talk out any issues that were proving difficult to get on the page. Gratitude goes to Licia Carlson, who read an earlier draft of my manuscript and generously provided valuable feedback and praise. Finally, I would like to thank Michael Rembis for pushing me to think even more and delve deeper into this topic through his own work and his comments as I presented segments of this project at various conferences.

I want to also express my thanks to Professors David Mitchell, Sharon Snyder, and Anne Waldschmidt, who advised me during the earlier stages of this dissertation and nurtured the beginning of my research on eugenic fieldwork and female field workers.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family members who have been there for me: my mom and stepdad, Sue and Don; my dad, Greg and Tina; my sister Becki and Ryan, who provided me with the necessary “distraction” of my god-daughter, Kylie; John and Joan Erato, Angela, Chris, and Landon; and Grandpa Erato, to whom I have dedicated this dissertation. I hope I have been as supportive to all of you as you have been to me. Thank you, Christy and the rest of the Vogt family. I especially want to thank Eunjung Kim, Mike Gill, Michelle Jarman, Aly Patsavas, Terri Thrower, Suzanne Poirier, Roxana Stupp, Lindsay Baran and the rest of the DRC and DME staff, Liat Ben-Moshe, Sally Chivers, Jim Ferris, Sarah Franz, Kateřina Kolářová, Riva Lehrer, Simi Linton, Nicole Markotic, Laura, Fred, and Miles Schaaf, Janet Settle, Cindy Wu, and Sandie Yi. Finally, I would like to give a shout out to all of my T1s for coining me “Dr. Diversity.” Now I have the credentials to back it up!

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SUMMARY

This project focuses on eugenic field workers in the United States between 1910 and 1925 in order to highlight the ways in which the U.S. eugenic project imagined disability and femininity. The Eugenic Record Office (ERO) in Cold Spring Harbor, New York led by Charles B. Davenport and the Vineland Training School for Feeble-minded Girls and Boys in Vineland, New Jersey led by Henry H. Goddard used field workers and the data these field workers collected on feeble-mindedness to promote the importance of eugenic research to institutions, state governments, and the general population. My main goal in this dissertation is to explore the work of eugenic field workers in the advancement and promotion of eugenic science as well as the dynamics between themselves and their subjects.

I argue that the case of eugenic field workers demonstrates how feeble-minded and normal women were situated differentially and dialectically as keepers of the national gene pool. In eugenic thought, feeble-minded women, on the one hand, held the prime responsibility – over their male counterparts – for the transmission of the feeble-minded germ plasm. Normal women, like the field workers, on the other hand, were “keepers” in the sense that they protected the national gene pool, ensuring that the feeble-minded taint did not spread within the national population or extend to future generations. By examining eugenic field workers and their employment from a variety of angles, I demonstrate the different ways that femininity and disability were constructed by the U.S. eugenic project between 1910 and 1924 – the years in which the program was most valued and productive as a mechanism of eugenic research.

I begin my project with an exploration of hereditarian explanations of degeneracy and the process by which eugenicists attempted to secure a productive nation, as these explanations became the foundation of the eugenic fieldwork program and structured the day-to-day work of

the field workers. Because feeble-mindedness was seen as the result of a tainted germ plasm, I argue that attempts to halt the transmission of this taint centered on feeble-minded women, who were then disproportionately institutionalized and sterilized as a means of stopping their reproduction.

Chapter III considers how eugenic field workers distinguished between normal and feeble-minded individuals at a glance. I argue that the diagnosis of feeble-mindedness centered primarily on one's proximity to early twentieth century, white, middle- and upper-class normative gendered appearances and behaviors. The standardized intelligence tests field workers administered in institutions relied on knowledge of such social norms, which outsiders from this culture would not necessarily be aware of. Once outside institutional walls and in the field completing pedigrees, eugenic field workers utilized gendered labor norms of the household to determine whether or not an individual was normal or feeble-minded.

Chapter IV explores the construction of the eugenic fieldwork discipline as a field that accommodated women interested in biological research. I argue that the profession relied on maternalist rhetoric in order to emphasize the need for "nurturing," "selfless" women to complete such work, but the actual work in the field involved the implementation of biological science aimed at the collection of genealogical data by any means necessary. Their "femininity," therefore, became a way for field workers and their supervisors to acquire this data – to draw out the instances of disability in the community.

The final chapter explores the selective gaze of eugenic science by interrogating the disabling nature of eugenic fieldwork. Despite often becoming ill or impaired in the field, eugenic field workers did not lose the status afforded to them as normal women, nor did it result in their becoming subject to the eugenic gaze. I argue that these women retained their

placement on the normal side of the diagnostic dichotomy because of two reasons: 1) taking up work in the field necessitated a eugenically fit diagnosis that illness or impairment did not endanger – especially because as women they could transfer their skills back to the domestic sphere as biological mothers should the public sphere prove too taxing on their well-being; 2) compiling eugenic pedigrees and doing eugenic fieldwork served to protect the workers who had to leave due to illness or impairment because the work done had fulfilled their feminine and national duties of securing the national gene pool. Their work provided a protective shield to any stigma related to an inferior status such as that associated with disability.

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2003 I read Donna Haraway's 1989 book, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*, and Michael Newton's 2002 book, *Savage Girls and Wild Boys: A History of Feral Children*, in a course on disability, history, and culture.¹ One common theme stood out to me in particular from these two books, that of scientific women's involvement in the diagnosis and surveillance of individuals or groups deemed "Other" in various historical settings. In her study on the inclusion of women into the field of primatology in the 1970s, Haraway queried the gendered assumptions implicit in many scientific projects. She suggested that modern, professional, white women fulfilled the role of mediator between white man, the scientist, and the "Other," who constituted his research subject. She argued, "the woman's work [was] to create receptivity, to produce the condition in which the animals [could] approach."²

Newton's book illustrated a scenario from an earlier time period in which this dynamic had emerged. In chapter three he documented the capture and "rehabilitation" of a feral girl in a small French village during the late eighteenth century.³ The adolescent girl, later named Memmie, arrived one summer evening and took refuge in a tree on the village's borders. Her presence caused a stir or fright among the villagers because she appeared "devilish" and carried a small club. After failing to entice the girl out of the tree by placing food and water at its base (she was able to escape back into the safety of its branches before anyone could seize her), a villager suggested the following plan, which proved successful:

He told them that they should place a woman and some children near the tree as these would be *less intimidating to the girl than the men* and that they should

¹ Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Michael Newton, *Savage Girls and Wild Boys: A History of Feral Children* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

² Haraway 1989: 149.

³ Newton 2002: 53-92.

smile to her and placidly act out a show of great friendliness. The villagers did as he said: a woman with a child in her arms approached the tree, carrying root vegetables and two fishes in her hands. She held out the food to the savage, who pressed by hunger, came down part of the way...The woman calmly persisted in her gentle invitation, smiling and gesturing her friendship by laying her hand upon her breast “as if to assure her that she loved her and would do no harm.” *Betrayed into trust* the girl slipped down from her place of refuge...The woman continued to entice her, but moved imperceptibly away, still smiling and acting out for the girl her generous love. The girl followed her further and further from the tree, and the *men who had lain in wait* seized their chance to spring out from hiding and take her by force.⁴

This scenario demonstrated how women could utilize their “innate” maternal instincts and femininity to mediate encounters between male scientists and their intended research subjects. In this instance, a woman from the village performed the role of nurturing mother by approaching the savage girl with a child and food in her arms. Her true intent, however, was to provide an opportunity for the men to capture the girl so she could be observed, diagnosed, and treated. This was done not only so the girl could be rehabilitated, but also so that the village would be protected from the allegedly dangerous presence of a savage being.

Although neither Haraway nor Newton discussed eugenic science, their analyses reminded me of a subset of eugenic studies I had come across while doing my research for my Master’s Thesis: the family pedigree studies carried out by eugenic field workers.⁵ Eugenic field workers, who were predominantly women, traveled the country visiting hospitals, institutions and homes in order to collect histories of feeble-mindedness and other forms of social and biological deviance in the form of family pedigrees, with the aim of providing evidence for the

⁴ Newton 2002: 54-55; italics added.

⁵ My Master’s thesis does not discuss these family studies, but instead focuses on literature written by disabled authors during the eugenic period in Germany and the United States. See Sara Vogt, “Epistemologies of Eugenics: Gender and Resistance in Two Works of United States and German Literature.” Master’s Thesis, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2002.

hereditary nature of feeble-mindedness.⁶ This connection between female professionals and individuals with disabilities sparked my interest and I immediately began researching eugenic fieldwork further to explore the link between the female field workers and the surveillance of feeble-mindedness during the early twentieth century. This, in turn, led me to consider the role of femininity in the U.S. eugenic movement, especially in relation to the family pedigree studies, as my theoretical focus.

As such, my main goal in this dissertation is to explore the work of eugenic field workers in advancing and promoting eugenic science and the dynamics between themselves and their subjects at the beginning of the twentieth century in the United States. This case shows that feeble-minded and normal women⁷ were situated as keepers of the national gene pool in very different ways. First, feeble-minded women were “keepers” in that they held the prime responsibility – over feeble-minded men – for the transmission of the feeble-minded germ plasm throughout the national gene pool. Normal women, on the other hand, were “keepers” in the sense that they protected the national gene pool, ensuring that the feeble-minded taint did not spread within the national population or extend to future generations of Americans. While I focus on the roles of women in the eugenic fieldwork program, it is important to note that men were not absent from this process. In fact, these female roles were typically framed by male eugenicists whose careers depended on the diagnosis and surveillance of feeble-mindedness as a threat to the national gene pool.

⁶ Amy Sue Bix calculated that between 1910 and 1924, 85% of the over 250 field workers trained by the Eugenics Record Office were female [Amy Sue Bix, “Experiences and Voices of Eugenics Field-Workers: ‘Women’s Work’ in Biology,” *Social Studies of Science* 27, no. 4 (August 1997): 634.

⁷ As I explore in Chapter III, the eugenicists I discuss diagnosed individuals as either “feeble-minded” or “normal.” Although the category of “feeble-minded” was breaking down into subcategories based on one’s assumed level of function (see Chapter III), the broader germ plasm these eugenicists were tracking was symbolized by an “F” for feeble-minded or “N” for normal. Further, in this dissertation, I use the terminology employed by individuals I discuss. To remain consistent, though, despite various spellings of such words, I use, “feeble-minded,” “feeble-mindedness,” “eugenic fieldwork,” and “eugenic field workers.”

The case of eugenic field workers demonstrates how femininity and disability were inextricable in the U.S. eugenic project. I explore the intersections of femininity and disability from various perspectives in each chapter (i.e. the targeting of feeble-minded women over feeble-minded men; the definition of feeble-mindedness as rooted in part in traditional gender roles of the early twentieth century; the construction of eugenic fieldwork as a discipline for women; and the rigidity of the feeble-minded/normal binary in the case of eugenic field workers who had become ill or disabled on the job). Because eugenic field workers were predominantly women and because they surveyed the presence of feeble-mindedness in homes around the country, this dissertation documents the varied constructions of disability and femininity by the U.S. eugenic project during the early twentieth century.

A. **Scope of the Study: Disability, Femininity, and the Eugenic Fieldwork Program**

Although scholars have examined the roles of women in and the impacts of gender on eugenic projects in the United States, most studies have focused on one or more of the following areas: maternal and child welfare policies,⁸ feminism and birth control politics,⁹ or the gendered nature of eugenic classification and diagnosis.¹⁰ Further, while gender (or at least femininity)

⁸ Cf. Alisa Klaus, *Every Child a Lion: The Origins of Maternal and Infant Health Policy in the United States and France, 1890-1920* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Annette K. Vance Dorey, *Better Baby Contests: The Scientific Quest for Perfect Childhood Health in the Early Twentieth Century* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., Inc, 1999); Lynne Curry, *Modern Mothers in the Heartland: Gender, Health, and Progress in Illinois, 1900-1930* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999).

⁹ Cf. Carole R. McCann, *Birth Control Politics in the United States, 1916-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Johanna Schoen, *Choice & Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Cf. Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Nancy Ordover, *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism*

has become prevalent as a category of analysis within the historical literature on eugenics in the United States, disability remains relatively unexplored as does the intersection between gender and disability.¹¹ Even fewer scholars have examined the efforts of female eugenic field workers in the United States in detail.¹²

One scholar who has done this, Nicole Rafter, had the intent simply to introduce the importance of the family studies to the eugenic project. She argued that the family studies created a professional and lay audience for eugenic science in the United States. Rafter wrote,

Mythic in message, mildly salacious in detail, and Progressive in promise, the family studies attracted an enthusiastic audience among welfare workers and the general public. They also influenced social policy. For instance, their apparent proof of the inheritance of feeble-mindedness fueled the turn-of-the-century movement to expand vastly the network of institutions for the mentally retarded (sic). The family studies, moreover, seemed to validate the popular criminological theory of “defective delinquency,” according to which crime is caused by feeble-mindedness and the feeble-minded are inherently criminal...More importantly, they helped persuade the reading public of the validity of eugenics.¹³

In her introduction, Rafter insisted on the need for historians to explore eugenic fieldwork as valid scientific inquiry and not simply dismiss it as “bad science,” aberrant “propositions about

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults & Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

¹¹ Exceptions to the former include James Trent, *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and Steven Noll, *Feeble-Minded in Our Midst: Institutions for the Mentally Retarded in the South, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). Exceptions to the latter include, Michael Rembis, *Defining Deviance: Sex, Science, and Delinquent Girls, 1890-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011); Licia Carlson, *The Faces of Intellectual Disability: Philosophical Reflections* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Anna Stubblefield, “Beyond the Pale’: Tainted Whiteness, Cognitive Disability, and Eugenic Sterilization,” *Hypatia* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 162-181.

¹² To date, the following pieces have done so: Nicole Hahn Rafter’s 1988 introduction to a collection of eugenic family studies written by various field workers and their supervisors; Amy Sue Bix’s 1997 article, “Experiences and Voices of Eugenics Field-Workers: ‘Women’s Work’ in Biology;” Daylanne K. English’s 2004 chapter, “New White Women: The U.S. Eugenic Family Studies’ Field Workers, 1910-1918;” and Licia Carlson’s 2010 chapter, “Gendered Objects, Gendered Subjects.” [Nicole Hahn Rafter, “Introduction.” In Rafter (ed.), *White Trash: The Eugenic Family Studies, 1877-1919* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988): 1-32; Bix 1997; Daylanne K. English, *Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004): 141-175; Carlson 2010: 53-84.]

¹³ Rafter 1988: 1.

inheritance and/or bad families,” or as simple “propaganda” for social Darwinism.¹⁴ By publishing a compilation of eugenic family studies for the first time, Rafter asserted the importance of such documents to the U.S. eugenic project. With the exception of a few comments at the beginning of each study, however, Rafter refrained from fully analyzing the studies, preferring to leave this work to other scholars.

Historian of Science, Amy Sue Bix’s main concern was giving voice to the female field workers whose gendered disciplinary hierarchy often silenced them in professional literature and disciplinary debates, as her title suggests. She did this in an attempt to recover the field workers’ perspectives, arguing that over time, many eugenic field workers grew uncomfortable with the eugenic family studies’ inherent biases and subjective methodology.¹⁵ Daylanne K. English disagreed with Bix, arguing that Bix was “overgenerous in her analysis of both the workers’ degree of resistance to eugenic thinking and the quality of their research methods.”¹⁶ Instead, English argued that eugenic field workers were committed to the confinement and/or elimination of their subjects, and it was this commitment that made them “paradigmatic New Women,” who utilized the “gendered family structure and disciplinary economy” to exert “power over women and men in a quite flexible and creative fashion.”¹⁷

Finally, Carlson presented an analysis of five groups of women who have historically been involved with the diagnosis, surveillance and treatment of people with intellectual disabilities in the United States. She explored the roles of feeble-minded women, institutional

¹⁴ Rafter 1988: 3-5.

¹⁵ Bix 1997.

¹⁶ English 2004: 222, f. 10.

¹⁷ English 2004: 142, 174-175.

caregivers, mothers, researchers – including eugenic field workers – and reformers.¹⁸ Carlson examined these various groups of women in order to demonstrate the complicated relationship between gender and intellectual disability. In each of these groups, the relationship proved varied and carried different power structures. Mothers, for example – whether feeble-minded or normal – were held responsible for causing and spreading feeble-mindedness. Secondly, roles assigned to female researchers and reformers were reliant on dominant stereotypes regarding femininity. Finally, Carlson argued, feeble-minded women experienced unique forms of marginalization.¹⁹ This dissertation expands on the above-mentioned scholarship through an in-depth historical case study of eugenic fieldwork from a critical disability studies perspective, which I explain further in the following section. To-date, no other scholar has delved as deep into the various facets of eugenic fieldwork or into revealing the inextricable nature of disability and femininity.

The regional and temporal nature of this study sets its analytic borders. As I'll discuss further in Chapter III, the eugenic fieldwork program was housed at Charles B. Davenport's Eugenic Record Office (ERO) in Cold Spring Harbor, New York and the training program for field workers took place from summer of 1910 through 1924. Henry H. Goddard also trained and employed field workers at his institution in Vineland, New Jersey. While eugenic field workers did travel the country compiling data for their family studies, and were employed at institutions throughout the United States (for example, Minnesota, Utah, Indiana, Kentucky, New York, and California), the program was housed on the East Coast and was representative of

¹⁸ Carlson 2010: 54.

¹⁹ Carlson 2010: 83.

eugenic thinking by Davenport, Goddard and their colleagues.²⁰ As Alexandra Minna Stern argued in her 2005 book, *Eugenic Nation*, “most students of eugenics developed a narrative that tacitly enshrined the East Coast as the geographical reference point and then projected that interpretation across the rest of the country.”²¹ However, alternative models of eugenic science and programming developed throughout the early twentieth century in various regions of the country.²² Regardless of where it occurred, eugenic fieldwork associated with the ERO or the Vineland Training school remained aligned with the hereditarian beliefs prevalent in East Coast eugenic science, which I discuss further in the next chapter.

1. **Reframing disability**

This dissertation builds on the extant scholarship surrounding eugenic fieldwork as well as contributes to the growing body of scholarship that teases out the history of eugenics from a critical disability studies perspective. Like the broader scholarship in which it is a part, my dissertation insists that disability cannot be defined as individual pathology but as an example of human variability and grounded in the social, economic, medical and political experiences and contexts of people with a variety of impairments. Instituted in 1982, Disabled People’s International (DPI) first defined impairment and disability similar to early feminist formulations of sex and gender, whereby sex was imagined as a biological given (i.e. biologically male or female) and gender referred to a set of culturally determined and recognized

²⁰ For more information on the various institutions employing ERO field workers and where they traveled, see CBD papers, Series IIB, Cold Spring Harbor Series, “ERO-Field Workers.” See also *Eugenical News*.

²¹ Stern 2005: 5.

²² C.f. Stern 2005; Rembis 2011; Noll 1995.

behaviors that corresponded to each sex (i.e. masculinity and femininity).²³ DPI differentiated between disability and impairment as such:

Impairment: “the functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment.”

Disability: “the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers.”²⁴

Early disability theorists posited the social model of disability as counter to the medical model, which defined disability as pathology – a deficiency or abnormality – that was situated within an individual and therefore required cure or rehabilitation by a professional in order to make the individual as “normal” as possible. The social model, on the other hand, claimed impairment was a difference from an average that had no inherent negative or positive value. Disability, then, derived from an interaction between an individual with an impairment and inaccessible environments.²⁵

Because most scholars see disability within a purely clinical or pathological framework, historians rarely consider it as a variable in their analyses. This elision leaves unanalyzed the key factor disability plays in social relations. Such an elision subsequently influences the contemporary framing of disability as predominantly medical and ignores the social and attitudinal barriers at play in navigating the world as a disabled subject. In her 2003 review essay, *Disability History: Why We Need Another “Other,”* disability historian Catherine J.

²³ Anthropologist Gayle Rubin first outlined this sex/gender system in her 1975 piece, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex.” In it, she argued, “gender is a socially imposed division of the sexes. It is a product of the social relations of sexuality.” (Reprinted in Linda Nicholson (ed.), *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1997): 27-62; here 40).

²⁴ Qtd. in Michael Oliver, “Defining Impairment and Disability: Issues at Stake.” In C. Barnes and G. Mercer (eds.), *Exploring the Divide: Illness and Disability* (Leeds: The Disability Press, 1996): 41.

²⁵ C.f. John Swain, Vic Finkelstein, Sally French, and Mike J. Oliver (eds.), *Disabling Barriers – Enabling Environments* (London: Open University Press, 1993); Simi Linton, *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

Kudlick argued that “disability should sit squarely at the center of historical inquiry, both as a subject worth studying in its own right and as one that will provide scholars with a new analytical tool for exploring power itself.”²⁶ My work not only considers disability as an analytic category, but also responds to Kudlick’s call by placing this category at the center of my inquiry of eugenic science and its connections with gender.

Extant studies of eugenics in the United States that do consider disability tend to do one of two things. First, as historians have begun to recognize disability as a factor in eugenic history, some scholars now mention the disabled in their running list of targeted populations on par with women, homosexuals, and racial and ethnic minorities.²⁷ Doing so serves to recognize people with disabilities as members of an oppressed group, but fails to consider how people with impairments were treated similarly *and* differently from members of other oppressed groups. In addition, this “running list” approach presents each of these categories as completely separate from one another, ignoring the fact that many individuals deemed feeble-minded usually carried any number of these marginalized classifications. In this project, I actively dismiss this “running list” approach by exploring the intersection of two of these oppressed categories, women and individuals with disabilities. While I focus on gender and disability in this project, it is important to note that these were not the only two variables at stake in the eugenic project. My intersectional approach, therefore, necessitates that I make mention of other informing categories such as race and class as they interact with disability and gender.

²⁶ Catherine J. Kudlick, “Disability History: Why We Need Another ‘Other’,” *American Historical Review* 108, no. 3 (2003): 765.

²⁷ C.f. English 2004; Nancy Ordover, *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

Secondly, some historians have alluded to disability in their work only in an attempt to “save” their objects of study from misdiagnosis based on racist, sexist, or classist assumptions.²⁸ For example, Stephan Jay Gould’s monumental 1982 study, *The Mismeasure of Man*, revealed the racist and classist biases informing eugenic research. He did this by demonstrating how in Henry H. Goddard’s best-selling 1912 family study, *The Kallikak Family*, the original photos of the family had been retouched. Gould argued that the publisher of the book, Macmillan Company, did this to make the deviant side of the family appear more “diabolical” and “sinister.”²⁹ He used this example to argue that eugenics should be dismantled as valid scientific inquiry of the early twentieth century.

Historian Leila Zenderland has since refuted Gould’s charge, stating that Goddard’s work emphasized that the high-grade feeble-minded posed such a danger to the nation simply because they looked normal to the untrained observer. Doctoring the photographs would have run counter to Goddard’s argument. Further, Zenderland referred to psychologist Raymond Fancher’s 1987 dispute over Gould’s assertion. According to Fancher, photographs in publications from the early twentieth century were often doctored to prevent facial features from washing out in reproduction. Publishers often did this without informing the authors. Because Goddard wanted to protect the anonymity of the “desirable” side of the family, no photographs were published by which one could compare.³⁰ Whether the retouching did, in fact, occur to

²⁸ C.f. Stephan Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1996; orig. pub. 1982); Kline 2001.

²⁹ Gould 1981: 201.

³⁰ Leila Zenderland, *Measuring Minds: Henry Herbert Goddard and the Origins of American Intelligence Testing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 352-353. See also, Leila Zenderland, “On Interpreting Photographs, Faces, and the Past,” *American Psychologist* 43 (September 1988): 743-744; Raymond E. Fancher, “Henry Goddard and the Kallikak Family Photographs: ‘Conscious Skullduggery’ or ‘Whig History’?” *American Psychologist* 42 (June 1987): 585-590.

dramatize the presence of the “bad” line of descendants, by failing to address the culturally embedded nature of all scientific efforts, Gould rendered eugenics simply a pseudo-scientific enterprise. This, in turn, minimized the practical importance eugenic science had on disability history. Further, it ignored the structuring role such scientific efforts have played in historical and contemporary attempts to regenerate the national gene pool through reproductive efforts (e.g. genetic counseling, the sterilization of individuals with intellectual disabilities).³¹

Additionally, Nancy Ordover wrote in 2003, “there was no legally binding codification for the term ‘feeble-minded,’ and thus, no limit to its misappropriation.”³² While Ordover is correct that there was no means of monitoring the use of the “feeble-minded” diagnosis and the category of feeble-mindedness was ever-expanding during the early twentieth century,³³ there is no interrogation in her work of the category with respect to impairment or disability itself; she only explores how it was used to target those of different races or sexual orientations. One could conclude, therefore, based on Ordover’s analysis, that the exclusion of individuals on the basis of impairment was appropriate and eugenic science went wrong only when it extended beyond the impairment line onto other disenfranchised groups. This, in turn, leads to the contemporary dismissal of eugenics as a time bound endeavor rather than an examination that asserts its lasting influence on contemporary scientific practices and modes of social arrangement with respect to people with disabilities. In contrast, this dissertation contributes to scholarship that documents

³¹ For more information on the lingering effects of eugenic science, see Annette Patterson and Martha Satz, “Genetic Counseling and the Disabled: Feminism Examines the Stance of Those Who Stand at the Gate,” *Hypatia* 17, no. 3 (Summer 2002): 118-142; Erik Parens and Adrienne Asch (eds.), *Prenatal Testing and Disability Rights* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2000); Paul A. Lombardo, *Three Generations, No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Allison C. Carey, *On the Margins of Citizenship: Intellectual Disability and Civil Rights in Twentieth-Century America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009).

³² Ordover 2003: 12.

³³ For more detail on the diagnosis of feeble-mindedness, see Chapter Three. See also, Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

the multi-layered history of eugenics and its investment in disability and gender through an analysis of eugenic field workers and their employment.³⁴

B. **Body Work: Finding Intersections of Disability and Gender**

Gender reaches into disability; disability wraps around class; class strains against abuse; abuse snarls into sexuality; sexuality folds on top of race...everything finally piling into a single human body. To write about any aspect of identity, any aspect of the body, means writing about this entire maze.
~Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride*³⁵

The above quote by poet Eli Clare suggests that effective histories require a consideration of the intricate network of identities and social positions that individual bodies negotiate. Judith Butler's foundational work, *Gender Trouble*, addressed the essentialist assumptions that arise in the attempt to formulate any political constituency (in her case, the category of "woman").³⁶ This essentialism inevitably produces new forms of hierarchy and exclusion. In order to contest this essentialism, Butler interrogated the distinction between sex (biology) and gender (culture), asserting that both are in fact socially constructed.

The sex/gender distinction and the category of sex itself appear to presuppose a generalization of "the body" that preexists the acquisition of its sexed significance. This "body" often appears to be a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figures as "external" to that body. Any theory of the culturally constructed body, however, ought to question "the body" as a construct of suspect generality when it is figured as passive and prior to discourse.³⁷

³⁴ C.f. Rembis 2011; Susan M. Schweik, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Stubblefield 2007; Douglas C. Baynton, "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History." In Longmore and Umansky (eds.), *The New Disability History: American Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

³⁵ Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1999): 123.

³⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 10th Anniversary Edition (New York: Routledge, 1999).

³⁷ Butler 1999: 164.

According to Butler, we cannot distinguish between sex and gender because various histories, cultures, and languages have inscribed meanings to both entities. The body is never trivial but it is a defining facet of everyone's social, cultural, and biological existence. Biology and the body are not immutable or natural but cultural products and therefore sites of inscription. The tangible body may be invoked as a historical agent as to avoid essentialism, biologisms, and naturalism that necessarily confine the body in question and its politics.³⁸

Like Butler's discomfort with the unquestioned nature of sex in feminist scholarship, disability studies scholars have grown uncomfortable with the social model's division of impairment and disability, which situates impairment as purely biological and disability as entirely social essentially leaving the body out of the discussion (in Butler's conception). In 2001, Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell recognized the need for this separation, but urged a return to the body.³⁹ Early disability study scholarship ignored the embodiment of disability for politically strategic reasons that dissociated disability from pathology and brought it out of the realm of medical and rehabilitative institutional expertise. Instead, "the critical gaze was turned on the practitioners of physical, occupational, and psychological evaluations and on the institutions that authorized their gaze."⁴⁰ Within disability studies scholarship, the body is an active player in the definition of socio-historical realities. Clare wrote, "our bodies are not merely blank slates upon which the powers-that-be write their lessons."⁴¹ This is impossible, for no body is identical to the next and each specific configuration of cultural and historical realities

³⁸ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

³⁹ Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, "Re-engaging the Body: Disability Studies and the Resistance to Embodiment," *Public Culture* 13, No. 3 (2001 Special Issue: *The Critical Limits of Embodiment: Reflections on Disability Criticism*, Guest Eds. Carol A. Breckenridge and Candace Vogler): 367-389.

⁴⁰ Snyder and Mitchell 2001: 374.

⁴¹ Clare 1999: 129.

an individual embodies creates an interactive framework which may reflect broad patterns, but can never be predicted or predetermined.⁴²

Building on this literature that stems primarily from literary and cultural studies, I argue that historical investigation proves a fruitful space from which to map out the process of pathologization of intersecting bodily differences. By examining past biological “truths,” historians can tease out exactly how such truths were simultaneously imposed on and formulated by different historical agents. For example, in this project I tease out how “femininity” was constructed and imposed onto the eugenic field workers by the constructors of the discipline. The field workers then defined and imposed the diagnosis of feeble-mindedness on individuals who did not adhere to traditional gender roles. Eugenic fieldwork situated women as keepers of the gene pool and disability as defined in relation to how one was or was not able to secure a healthy and “normal” national gene pool. This, in turn, allows us to demonstrate how such scientific “truths” are not innate and factual, but socially, historically, and culturally constructed, aiding in the destabilization of assumptions surrounding the categories under consideration.

Michael Rembis, for example, took a similar approach in his 2011 book, *Defining Deviance*, where he argued that:

the advent of eugenics, and psychology and psychiatry, as well as broad-based efforts to rebuild a nation that appeared to many white middle-class observers to be wracked by rapid industrialization, urbanization, and immigration hinged upon a relatively recent, continually changing discourse of disablement...materialized through popular perceptions and scientific definitions of mental and psychological “defect.”⁴³

Like Ordover mentioned above, Rembis noted and traced the shifting and expanding definition of feeble-mindedness by U.S. eugenicists, suggesting that impairment itself was socially

⁴² Grosz 1994.

⁴³ Rembis 2011: 5.

constructed. Unlike Ordovery, however, Rembis did so in an attempt to scrutinize the assumption that impairment is simply a biological given and to demonstrate its socio-historical framing.

Ordovery, on the other hand, alluded to the instability of the feebleminded category as a way to dismiss the validity of the eugenic diagnostic process and its corresponding science, not to dismiss the practice of diagnosis in general.

Rembis employed an intersectional approach to interrogate how gender, race, class and disability were related in the U.S. eugenic movement – or more specifically, its incarceration of girls and young women deemed feebleminded or otherwise deviant. In doing so, Rembis explored how impairment became gendered and vice versa. Historians Nancy Leys Stepan and Susan Schweik utilized similar intersectional (or “confluence” in Schweik’s words) approaches, emphasizing that membership in identity categories are not similar but intertwined, and therefore cannot be analyzed individually.⁴⁴ The case of eugenic field workers reveals that historians cannot privilege the category of disability over all other categories or the reverse. Instead, this dissertation utilizes an intersectional approach, analyzing the instances in which eugenic field workers utilized assumptions about disability and gender to construct a population considered dangerous to the national gene pool.

C. **Outline of Dissertation**

The body of this dissertation is composed of four distinct, but related, chapters. Each chapter explores the relationship between disability and gender from a different perspective of eugenic fieldwork. Together, they tell the larger story of the eugenic fieldwork program and its

⁴⁴ Nancy Leys Stepan, *“The Hour of Eugenics”: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Schweik 2009.

impact on eugenic research and policy in the United States as well as its impact on the construction of sex, gender, impairment and disability between 1910 and 1924.

Chapter II, *Eugenics, Feeble-minded Women, and the American Project, 1883-1945*, begins this project by exploring the origin of hereditarian explanations of degeneracy and the process by which eugenicists and their field workers attempted to secure a nation composed of productive individuals. I argue that because eugenic field workers deemed feeble-mindedness the result of a tainted germ plasm, attempts to halt the transmission of the feeble-minded taint centered on feeble-minded women over feeble-minded men due to women's presumed status as keepers of all aspects of the domestic sphere, including, and perhaps most importantly, reproduction. Women were therefore disproportionately institutionalized and sterilized at various moments in this history.

Chapter III, *Diagnosing Bodies: Distinguishing between the Normal and Feeble-minded*, expands on the argument of Chapter II and examines how eugenic field workers diagnosed individuals as feeble-minded or normal. I consider the diagnostic process of eugenic fieldwork and ask how gender played a role in the diagnosis of individuals, showing the inherent intersectionality of these two categories. I explore both intelligence testing in schools and institutions as well as observations and interviews by field workers in the home setting. I argue that the diagnosis of feeble-mindedness first and foremost centered on a subject's proximity to early twentieth century, white, middle- and upper-class normative gendered appearances and behaviors. First, standardized intelligence testing relied on socialized knowledge that individuals from non-American cultures or lower-class backgrounds might not share. Second, eugenic fieldwork and its resultant pedigree studies focused on a subject's perceived inability to adhere to

the gendered labor of the household whereby the mother cared for the children and kept the house tidy and the father supported the family through his labors outside the home.

Chapter IV, *Authorizing Bodies: Constructing Professional Femininity on the Eugenic Landscape*, explores the placement of women within the profession of eugenic fieldwork. In particular, I look at the construction of the eugenic fieldwork discipline as a field for women interested in biological research. I situate eugenic fieldwork in relation to other contemporary women's professional "movements," particularly the emergence of maternalist reform and "women's work" in science. I argue that as a predominantly female discipline, eugenic fieldwork lies in the unique ideological position between women's work in science and maternalist reform. Charles B. Davenport and his colleagues constructed the discipline in such a way that it resembled maternalism. However, despite the use of maternalist rhetoric, eugenic fieldwork involved the implementation of hard biological science aimed at the collection of genealogical data by any means necessary. The performance of femininity, therefore, became a tool for field workers to acquire this scientific data, drawing out instances of disability in the community, as opposed to keeping to an accepted ideology regarding a natural division of the sexes.

Finally, in Chapter V, *Passing Bodies: Fulfilling Able-Bodied Femininity through Eugenic Fieldwork* I analyze the selective gaze of eugenic science by analyzing the disabling nature of eugenic fieldwork. I note that due to the exhaustive nature of their work, some field workers became chronically ill or physically impaired while in the field. And yet, even as the intensity of their labors proved disabling – however temporary – the normative gender and ability statuses of these women did not become threatened or subject to the eugenic gaze. This protective was due to two reasons. First, because field workers secured their placement on the

normal side of the diagnostic dichotomy even before taking work up in the field; becoming injured or ill while collecting eugenic data did not threaten their status, especially as they were generally able to return to the home and become biological mothers. Second, taking up eugenic fieldwork could be seen as an extension of the mothering role whereby eugenic field workers were responsible for monitoring the health of numerous “children,” and no longer simply their own immediate families. Compiling eugenic pedigrees, therefore, served to fulfill eugenic field workers’ feminine, persistently “normal,” and national duties.

II. EUGENICS, FEEBLEMINDED WOMEN, AND THE AMERICAN PROJECT, 1883-1945⁴⁵

Just as the mosquito was the key to the malaria problem, so are the feeble-minded the key to the great social problems of the present.

~Henry H. Goddard⁴⁶

British geographer and statistician, Francis Galton (1822-1911), coined the term “eugenics” in his 1883 book, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Development*.⁴⁷ The word drew from the Latin words “eu” meaning good and “gen” meaning born, together denoting “well-born.” The aim of eugenic science was to change the behavior of the public through voluntary or coercive means in order to increase the number of “well-born” individuals. The aimed result of such intervention was to improve the health and ultimate strength of the national population. In 1911, biologist and director of the Eugenics Record Office (ERO) in Cold Spring Harbor, New York – Charles B. Davenport – wrote that eugenics could help form “a united, altruistic, God-serving, law-abiding, effective and productive nation.”⁴⁸ To do this, eugenicists in the United States focused on population genetics and the prevention of so-called hereditary illnesses encompassed under the umbrella category of “feeble-mindedness.” Eugenic science considered feeble-mindedness a burden on and threat to the health of the nation and, as a result, employed various strategies aimed at the prevention of future generations of disabled, ill, criminal, and

⁴⁵ Although eugenics did not disappear after the Second World War, its association with Nazism and the Holocaust caused scientists interested in heredity to reframe their approach to one that focused more on individual choice as opposed to state coercion – at least within the United States. They did, however, simultaneously export the traditional approach to developing countries. For more information see Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

⁴⁶ HHG, “Anniversary Address.” In Edgar A. Doll (ed.), *Twenty-Five Years: A Memorial Volume in Commemoration of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Vineland Laboratory, 1906-1931* (Vineland, NJ: The Training School, 1932): 69.

⁴⁷ Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Development* (London: Macmillan, 1883).

⁴⁸ CBD, *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* (New York: Arno Press, 1972; reprint. Orig. pub., 1911): 3.

other individuals deemed inferior – categories that were often conflated during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴⁹

Eugenic science was first and foremost concerned with the way individuals from inferior types and other, more desirable categories came together in the formation of a nation. In 1911, Davenport assessed the overall population of the United States and broke it down into productive and unproductive citizens:

In the continental United States with over 90 million souls probably 2 ½ million children are annually born... Nearly half a million of these infants die before they attain the age of one year, and one-third of all are dead before they reach their 20th year – before they have had much chance to affect the world one way or another. However, were only a quarter million of the children born each year in the United States destined to play an important part for the nation and humanity we could look with equanimity on the results. But alas! Only a small part of this army will be fully effective in rendering productive our three million square miles of territory... of the 1200 thousand who reach full maturity each year 40 thousand will be ineffective through temporary sickness, 4 to 5 thousand will be segregated in the care of the institutions, unknown thousands will be kept in poverty through mental deficiency, other thousands will be the cause of social disorder and still other thousands will be required to tend and control the weak and unruly.⁵⁰

By focusing on how the presence of feeble-mindedness affected the productivity of the national population, Davenport introduced his readers to the burdens of feeble-minded individuals on the nation's resources.

Historian Nancy Ordovery has argued that “eugenicists put forth an ideologically purified America – purged of past sins and guarded against future menace. The eugenics project revolved around imagining the nation: what it was (now threatened) and what it might be (with and

⁴⁹ For general histories on the development of eugenic policies and procedures in the United States, see Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (New York: Knopf, 1985); Garland E. Allen, “The Eugenics Record Office at Cold Spring Harbor, 1910-1940: An Essay in Institutional History,” *Osiris* 2 (1986): 225-264; James Trent, *Inventing the Feeble-Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Diane B. Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity: 1865 to the Present* (New York: Humanity Books, 1995).

⁵⁰ Davenport 1972: 2.

without government and medical intervention).”⁵¹ Imagining the nation as a collective entity composed of individual units required scrutiny of those individual units in order to construct and maintain a healthy, strong and productive national community. Eugenic fieldwork became the means for doing this outside institutional walls.

Before delving into the eugenic fieldwork program, I explore in this chapter the process by which eugenicists such as Davenport attempted to secure a productive nation. In creating the category of the “feebleminded” and in surveying the hereditary transmission of this defective taint, U.S. eugenicists of the early twentieth century set the deviant feebleminded individual in opposition to the normal, productive U.S. citizen, situating feeblemindedness as a threat to the U.S. national community and its resources. I argue that attempts to halt the transmission of this feebleminded taint centered primarily on feebleminded women (over feebleminded men) because women were responsible for maintaining all aspects of the domestic sphere, including reproduction. Feebleminded women, therefore, became keepers of the national gene pool in that they supposedly inevitably passed on the feebleminded germ plasm to all their progeny. While other scholars have emphasized how “normal” mothers were taught to vigilantly monitor their own children for signs of deviance,⁵² I focus on feebleminded women as a means for exploring how eugenic programs linked femininity with disability in order to prevent the spread of feeblemindedness.

Because the main aim of the eugenic field workers was to identify and document feebleminded individuals already living within the United States as a means of targeting an

⁵¹ Nancy Ordover, *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003): 7.

⁵² C.f. Licia Carlson, *The Faces of Intellectual Disability: Philosophical Reflections* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Annette K. Vance Dorey, *Better Baby Contests: The Scientific Quest for Perfect Childhood Health in the Early Twentieth Century* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1999).

internal menace as opposed to other eugenic programs that focused their efforts on alien immigrant populations, I too focus on the policies and programs intended to minimize or extinguish local sources of degeneracy – primarily segregation and sterilization programs. I do not examine in depth the immigration restriction policies also popular during this time.

Although two field workers did visit Ellis Island with Henry H. Goddard in 1912 in order to demonstrate the value of their trained eyes in monitoring the thousands of immigrants passing through on a daily basis for feebleminded entrants,⁵³ the primary role of eugenic field workers trained and employed by the Eugenics Record Office or Goddard's Training School was to document the pedigree charts of families already living in the United States as a means of demonstrating the hereditary nature of feeblemindedness.

A. **Reimagining the Problem of Mental Deficiency: Feeblemindedness and Heredity**

On December 12, 1903, the Carnegie Institution of Washington – a private research organization devoted to scientific philanthropy and the use of applied science toward the improvement of mankind⁵⁴ – granted a young biologist named Charles B. Davenport \$32,250 to create the Station for the Study of Evolution (SEE) at Cold Spring Harbor in Long Island, New York.⁵⁵ Davenport held a Ph.D. in Biology from Harvard University and was also trained in engineering and biometry. The Carnegie Institution was interested in Davenport's SEE laboratory because of its emphasis on “the analytic and experimental study of the causes of

⁵³ For more information, see Henry H. Goddard, “The Feeble Minded Immigrant” *Training School Bulletin* 9, nos. 7 & 8 (November & December 1912): 109-113; Leila Zenderland, *Measuring Minds: Henry Herbert Goddard and the Origins of American Intelligence Testing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁵⁴ Jane Maienschein, “Introduction.” In Jane Maienschein, Marie Glitz, and Garland E. Allen (eds.), *Centennial History of the Carnegie Institution of Washington Vol. V: The Department of Embryology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 2-3.

⁵⁵ Kevles 1985: 45; Allen 1986.

specific differentiation – of race change” and the quantitative study of evolution through Mendelian inheritance patterns, variation, and natural selection in animals and humans.⁵⁶

Davenport’s research at the SEE on the inheritance of physical traits led him to believe that mental and personality traits may be transferred in a Mendelian manner. His interest in such issues corresponded with his interest in the burgeoning field of eugenics. In 1906, the American Breeders’ Association (ABA), of which Davenport was a founding member, formed a Eugenics Committee, which examined human heredity with an emphasis on “the value of superior blood and the menace to society of inferior blood.”⁵⁷ Prior to this point, the ABA was concerned primarily with animal breeding, but by 1908 Davenport expanded the activities of the Eugenic Committee, adding ten subcommittees to study specific issues such as “deaf-mutism, criminality, heredity, insanity, feeble-mindedness, epilepsy, and sterilization.”⁵⁸ Because of his growing interest in eugenics and the limitations of the work that could be done through the ABA, Davenport began seeking funding to expand his laboratory in Cold Spring Harbor.

In order to do so, Davenport approached philanthropist Mary Williamson Harriman, widow of railroad magnate E.H. Harriman, whose daughter had been a student at the Cold Spring Harbor Biological Laboratory in 1906. Mrs. Harriman shared an interest in the study of human heredity as a means of solving social problems and funded the construction of Davenport’s new laboratory, the Eugenics Record Office (ERO), from its inception in October 1910 until 1918.⁵⁹ At that time, she transferred the ERO funds with an additional endowment of \$300,000 to the

⁵⁶ Qtd. in Allen 1986: 229. See also Kevles 1985: 44-45.

⁵⁷ Qtd. in Allen 1986: 232.

⁵⁸ Allen 1986: 233.

⁵⁹ Allen 1986: 235-236.

Carnegie Institution of Washington, which held responsibility for the ERO until it closed on December 31, 1939.⁶⁰

The general purpose of the ERO was two-fold: first, to research human heredity and its relation to social problems; and second, to educate the general public about the importance and implication of eugenic science for public policy.⁶¹ Eugenic field workers became the vehicles by which the ERO could compile the research on human heredity and its impact on specific populations. On December 12, 1910, the Board of Scientific Directors of the ERO – which included Davenport, Alexander Graham Bell, William H. Welch (Dean of the Johns Hopkins Medical School), E.E. Southard (psychiatrist at the Boston Psychopathic Hospital), among others – convened for the first time. During this meeting, they decided on the following larger objectives for the ERO as stated in the minutes of the meeting:

- A. To make researches in eugenics that shall be of utility to the human race,
 - 1. to the individual in selection of mates.
 - a. Study the methods of inheritance of particular traits, including diseases.
 - b. The consequences of close marriage.
 - c. The consequences of marriage between distinct races – miscegenation.
 - 2. to the state.
 - a. The study of the origin and best method of restricting the strains that require state care (in cooperation with states).
 - b. The study of America's most effective blood lines and the method of securing the proportional preponderance and increase of the best strains.
 - 3. to the nations.
 - a. To bring home to the government the desirability of more careful consideration of the family history of permanent immigrants.
- B. To publish the result of these researches.

⁶⁰ “Carnegie Institution of Washington Extract from the Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of January 11, 1918.” In CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series, “ERO-History and Development.” See also Allen 1986; Kevles 1985.

⁶¹ Allen 1986: 238.

- C. To conduct an administrative office, library, workers and other equipment necessary to carry out this purpose.⁶²

The ERO served as the national hub for eugenic science. It housed the national clearinghouse for eugenic research, and trained and employed most of the eugenic field workers responsible for visiting homes and documenting instances of feeble-mindedness throughout the country. The main goals of eugenic science, according to Davenport in 1911, were “to improve the race by inducing young people to make a more reasonable selection of marriage mates; to fall in love intelligently. It also include[d] the control by the state of the propagation of the mentally incompetent.”⁶³ The ERO therefore involved itself in research and its dissemination for the practical purpose of implementing public policy intended to monitor and influence the national gene pool.

In order to carry out this mission, Davenport and his colleagues reformulated the concept of the hereditary transmission of feeble-mindedness. During the mid-nineteenth century, prevalent models of inheritance in the United States were modeled after Lamarckism, which asserted that acquired characteristics could be passed on to future generations. Lamarckism was based on the evolutionary theories of French naturalist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829). Lamarckian inheritance postulated that “changes induced in a living organism from the outside could be handed on to future generations, thereby causing transmutation.”⁶⁴ The classic example provide when describing Lamarckian genetics is that of the giraffe, who needed to stretch its neck to reach sustenance in trees as a means of survival and, over generations, transformed into a

⁶² “ERO Board of Directors Meeting” CBD Papers – Series I: Correspondence, “Mary Williamson Harriman (Mrs. E.H. Harriman).”

⁶³ Davenport 1972: 4.

⁶⁴ Nancy Leys Stepan, *“The Hour of Eugenics”: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991): 67-68. For further explanation of Lamarck and his theory of inheritance, see Stephen Jay Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

species with long-necks. This model of heredity did not only explain acquired characteristics that could benefit a species, but dysgenic ones as well. Therefore, scientists of the mid- to late-nineteenth century, for example, physician Samuel Gridley Howe⁶⁵ and sociologist, Richard L. Dugdale, viewed idiocy and other forms of degeneracy as a result of various “sins of the father,” such as “intemperance, poverty, consanguinity (meaning marriage between cousins), insanity, scrofula, consumption, licentious habits, failed attempts at abortion, and overwork in the quest for wealth and power.”⁶⁶ Given this model of inheritance, the rehabilitative nature of institutionalization and social reform strategies that addressed these “sins” by changing behaviors seemed the most practical approach in preventing the spread of degeneracy throughout future generations.

In 1848, for example, Howe defined idiocy as a condition “in which, from some morbid cause in the bodily organization, the faculties and sentiments in the bodily organization remain dormant or undeveloped, so that the person is incapable of self-guidance, and of approaching that degree of knowledge usual with others his age.”⁶⁷ Howe felt that idiots were neglected by society and in need of specialized training and care. He therefore proposed that feebleminded individuals be temporarily segregated in institutions on the outskirts of the city. Such segregation, he argued, would remove such individuals from the temptations of urban life, and would allow for the individualized care and attention needed to rehabilitate these individuals – the goal being their eventual release back into society as not only self-sufficient, but productive

⁶⁵ Howe is best known for his work with Laura Bridgman, a deaf-blind girl, who he educated at the Perkins Institute for the Blind in Boston. Bridgman later taught at the Institute.

⁶⁶ Trent 1994: 18.

⁶⁷ Samuel Gridley Howe, *Report Made to the Legislature of Massachusetts upon Idiocy* (Boston: Coolidge & Wiley, 1848): 20.

citizens. While their condition was rooted in biological and somatic difference, Howe felt that at least some individuals could benefit from rehabilitation in such alternate environments.

The belief that feebleminded individuals could be rehabilitated was reflected thirty years later in the first widely disseminated family pedigree study. Dugdale published his “hereditary Pauperism as Illustrated in the ‘Juke’ Family” in 1877.⁶⁸ While Dugdale was among the first to argue that degeneracy had a hereditary component, he simultaneously emphasized the role environment played in the possible rehabilitation of individuals born into poor circumstances.

Dugdale wrote:

We have remarked that the law of heredity is much more firmly established in the domain of physiological and pathological conditions than it is as respects the transmission of intellectual and moral aptitudes. In proportion as we approach features which are moulded (sic) by education, they are less transmissible, and more completely governed by the laws of variation, which are largely referable to environment.⁶⁹

Dugdale’s assertion reflects the shifting opinions regarding intelligence during the late nineteenth century. While he still asserted the Lamarckian belief that changing environments could alter the transmission of certain defects from one generation to another, he nevertheless emphasized that social problems such as pauperism were hereditary.

The appeal of Lamarckian inheritance waned during the late nineteenth century after the German biologist August Weismann forwarded his theory of the “germ plasm,”⁷⁰ and, at the turn of the century, upon the rediscovery of the Mendelian model of heredity. August Weismann’s (1834-1914) “germ plasm” was the portion of the cell that contained genetic material. It was “independent of the rest of the cell (the somaplasm)” and “inherited continuously by one

⁶⁸ Richard L. Dugdale, “Hereditary Pauperism as Illustrated in the ‘Juke’ Family,” *Proceedings of the Conference of Boards of Public Charities* (1877): 81-95. Reprinted in Nicole Hahn Rafter (ed.), *White Trash: The Eugenic Family Studies, 1877-1919* (Boston: Northeastern Press, 1988): 33-47.

⁶⁹ Dugdale 1877. In Rafter 1988: 38.

⁷⁰ C.f. Gould 2002: 197-220; Stepan 1991.

generation from another without alteration from outside influences.”⁷¹ Gregor Johann Mendel (1822-1884) was an Austrian monk and scientist who is now commonly referred to as the “father of genetics” because of his work on the inheritance of dominant and recessive traits in pea plants. Mendel first presented his work on the hybridization of plants at the Brünn Natural History Society meeting in 1865 and subsequently published his theory in 1866,⁷² yet his work went largely unnoticed and was quickly forgotten.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century, however, at least three European scientists rediscovered Mendel’s work, and published it simultaneously (and independently) in 1900: Carl Correns (1864-1933) of Germany; Erich von Tschermak (1871-1962) of Austria; and Hugo deVries of Holland (1848-1935).⁷³ Mendel’s Theory of Inheritance postulated that heredity units of specific, observable characteristics exist within each organism and are transmitted within the sex cells of that organism. These units were broken down into dominant or recessive types, and each sex cell carried one unit where it combined with one from the partner’s sex cell in the fertilization process. The resulting combination of dominant and recessive types (genotype) would then determine how the characteristic appeared externally (phenotype).⁷⁴ Mendel’s emphasis on the relationship between an observable, external characteristic and its internal, hereditary unit, became very important in eugenic ideology, as eugenics relied heavily on the belief that one could diagnose internal defect (e.g. feeble-mindedness) based on externally visible stigmata (e.g. body deformity).

⁷¹ Stepan 1991: 24.

⁷² Gregor Mendel, “Versuche über Pflanzen-hybriden,” *Verhandlungen des naturforschenden Vereines in Brünn* IV (1865): 3-47.

⁷³ C.f. Gould 2002: 418-426; Kevles 1985; Allen 1986.

⁷⁴ C.f. Gould 2002; Kevles 1985.

The concept of Weismann's "germ plasm" and the rediscovery of Mendel's theory of heredity led eugenicists such as Charles B. Davenport, Henry H. Goddard (psychologist and Director of Research at the Vineland Training School for Feeble-Minded Girls and Boys), and Walter E. Fernald, M.D. (Superintendent of the Massachusetts School for the Feeble-minded) to argue against temporary rehabilitative segregation and progressive reform projects aimed at the improvement of social and environmental conditions. Instead, they insisted that each individual possessed a mental plateau, which no amount of training could change.⁷⁵ Moreover, they argued such projects would prove dangerous to the national gene pool. In 1914, M.G. Schlapp, M.D. – eugenicist and professor of Neuropathy at the New York Post-Graduate Medical School and Hospital – asserted that the specialized education feeble-minded youth received only added to their menacing nature, giving them additional skills to pursue criminal livelihoods. More importantly, Schlapp stated, "it makes the feeble-minded girl more attractive, thus increasing the probability of her entrance into prostitution," increasing the likelihood of reproducing her own kind.⁷⁶

The acceptance of Mendelian genetics by U.S. eugenicists shifted the assumptions regarding the control of the feeble-minded population and where they fit into the nation, if at all.⁷⁷ By 1911, Davenport and Goddard felt that no amount of training could remedy feeble-mindedness because of its status as genetic taint. In 1911, Davenport wrote, "these individuals, or rather their traits – cause a disturbance and an expense of time and money quite out of proportion to their

⁷⁵ C.f. Davenport 1972; HHG, *Feeble-Mindedness: Its Causes and Consequences* (New York: Macmillan, 1914); HHG, *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-mindedness* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1912); WEF, "Mentally Defective Children in Public Schools," *JPA* 8, no. 2-3 (1904): 25-35.

⁷⁶ M.G. Schlapp, "The Problem of Mental Deficiency in the Public Schools: How Milwaukee Schools Care for Mentally Unfit Children," *University of Wisconsin Survey, Madison* 15 (August 1914): 29.

⁷⁷ Unlike eugenicists in the United States and Germany, French and Latin American eugenicists tended to prefer neo-Lamarckian models of inheritance over Mendelian ones. For more information, see Stepan 1991.

numbers in the community – they seem to be the main hindrance to our social progress.”⁷⁸

Because of the emphasis on a defective germ plasm, Davenport and other U.S. eugenicists argued that keeping the feebleminded population from interacting with and negatively impacting the “normal” gene pool should be achieved through long-term custodial care in institutions and sterilization where they could be controlled and prevented from further reproducing their defective taint.

1. **The Jukes revisited**

As a means of demonstrating the hereditary taint of feeblemindedness, Davenport employed field worker, Arthur H. Estabrook (1885-1973), to reinvestigate the Juke family originally examined by Dugdale over 35 years prior. In January 1912, Davenport sent Estabrook (who had at that point been employed as a field worker at the ERO for 14 months) to the rural area in New York where the Jukes had lived to begin a eugenic pedigree study. This study lasted three years during which Estabrook personally visited “every Juke possible to see.”⁷⁹ Estabrook eventually charted 2,820 members of the Juke family, including the original 709 individuals in Dugdale’s study.⁸⁰

Forty years earlier, in July of 1874, the New York Prison Association had hired Dugdale to research and report on the state of crime throughout New York. When Dugdale visited an unnamed county jail, he “found six persons, under four family names, who turned out to be blood relations in some degree.”⁸¹ Upon further investigation, Dugdale traced the family back to

⁷⁸ Davenport 1972: 261.

⁷⁹ AHE, *The Jukes in 1915* (Washington: The Carnegie Institute of Washington: 1916): 1.

⁸⁰ Estabrook 1916: 1-2.

a rural area in upstate New York, where he found that they “were so despised by the reputable community that their family name *had come to be used generically as a term of reproach*.”⁸² Because this family was so notorious and had intermarried throughout numerous generations, Dugdale felt they warranted further study to determine whether the laws of evolution could explain the criminal behaviors and pauperism found in the Juke family. He, like Estabrook in 1912, did so by constructing a series of family pedigrees.

The results by both Dugdale and Estabrook are relatively similar upon first glance. Of the 709 individuals Dugdale studied, 540 were of “Juke blood,” while 169 had married into the family. Two thousand and ninety-four of Estabrook’s charted individuals were of “Juke blood,” while 726 were relatives through marriage.⁸³ Further, Dugdale’s and Estabrook’s results showed the following respectively:

Of the 709 whom [Dugdale] studied, 180 had either been in the poor house or received outdoor relief...There had been 140 criminals and offenders, 60 habitual thieves, 7 lives sacrificed by murder, 50 common prostitutes, 40 women venereally diseased contaminating 440 persons, and 30 prosecutions in bastardy. The total cost to the State of New York of this one group of mental and social degenerates was estimated, for a period of 75 years beginning in 1800, at \$1,308,000.⁸⁴

In [Estabrook’s] investigation...366 were paupers, while 171 were criminals; and 10 lives were sacrificed by murder...There were 282 intemperate and 277 harlots. The total cost to the state has been estimated at \$2,093,685.⁸⁵

Calculating the ratios of “degenerate” behaviors to overall individuals studied, Dugdale observed that 25.4% of the Jukes were receiving financial assistance from the state and/or private

⁸¹ Richard L. Dugdale, *“The Jukes”: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease and Heredity*. Seventh Edition (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1902): 7.

⁸² Dugdale 1902: 8; original emphasis.

⁸³ Estabrook 1916: 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

charities; Estabrook's results affected 17.5% of the Juke population. The percentage of criminals was again higher within Dugdale's population: his being at 19.7%, whereas Estabrook's was only 8.2%. While the overall percentage rates were lower in Estabrook's case, his sample was also almost four times that of Dugdale's initial population, which – along with inflation – accounted for the higher cost the Jukes cost to the state.

What is more important than the minor discrepancies between Dugdale's and Estabrook's results, however, are the different explanations each researcher offered for such degeneracy as well as the remedies each of them suggested. First, Dugdale's stated aim in 1877 was to examine "the correlation which exists between physical, biological, and social phenomena."⁸⁶ Dugdale broke this down into two parts: heredity and environment. While heredity fixed "the organic characteristics" of an individual, the environment affected "modifications in that heredity."⁸⁷ Heredity and environment, therefore, worked together for Dugdale in an interactive model to account for social phenomena such as crime and pauperism.

When researching the descendents of matriarch Ada Juke, for example, Dugdale noted instances of both hereditary and environmentally-caused degeneracy. Hans Juke was the oldest legitimate son of Ada and during his deployment in the war of 1812, acquired malignant syphilis after having sexual relations with a "notorious" woman who followed his regiment. Following the war, Hans married a first cousin and passed his disease onto his eight children.⁸⁸ According to Dugdale, Han's youngest daughter "was a congenital idiot, and drifted into the poorhouse with her father."⁸⁹ Dugdale asserted that this was a case of "absolute hereditary pauperism, for

⁸⁶ Dugdale 1877. In Rafter 1988: 35.

⁸⁷ Dugdale 1902: 11.

⁸⁸ Dugdale 1877. In Rafter 1988: 39.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

syphilis is a cause of idiocy.”⁹⁰ In this case, the pauperism of Han’s progeny was a symptom of an acquired hereditary condition (syphilitic idiocy) that they could not escape.

In the longer version of his study, Dugdale wrote the following with respect to the relationship between environment and heredity: “where the organization is structurally modified, as in idiocy and insanity, or organically weak as in many diseases, the heredity is the preponderating factor.”⁹¹ Dugdale continued, reflecting Lamarck and stating that an individual’s heredity is “capable of marked modification for better or worse by the character of the environment.”⁹² Dugdale consequently supported social reform efforts that aimed to improve overall environments in which degeneracy flourished. This included temporary, rehabilitative institutionalization and specialized training as well as other public health initiatives such as individual and domestic hygiene projects.

Estabrook did not dispute the diagnoses originally made by Dugdale, but he argued that heredity was the sole factor in the presence of feeble-mindedness throughout various generations, and while social and environmental change may improve the fate of an individual receiving specialized attention, the feeble-minded germ plasm will nevertheless remain within the national gene pool and be passed on to subsequent generations. Estabrook wrote the following with respect to the Jukes who had moved out of Ulster County since Dugdale’s study in search of better opportunities:

When it is considered that in all probability ... [these individuals] would have been poor citizens had they remained in the environment from which they were taken, the result would seem to approve the action of society in removing them from their poor surroundings. But such approval can not (sic) be given unreservedly ... [The majority of them] must carry in their germ-plasm the

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Dugdale 1902: 65.

⁹² Ibid.

determiners for certain undesirable traits, such as alcoholism, epilepsy, and licentiousness.⁹³

Not only did removing a feeble-minded individual from his/her original environment fail to decrease the presence of feeble-mindedness in the overall population, it actually posed a greater threat because of the danger that the hereditary “contagion” could spread to new populations, increasing and widening its threat within local, regional and national communities.

As a result, Estabrook argued,

The social reformer and the student of eugenics must see that, no matter what the degree of perfection to which we raise the standard of the environment, the response of the individual will still depend on its constitution and the constitution must be adequate before we can attain the perfect individual, socially and eugenically.⁹⁴

In other words, no amount of training or environmental change could help a feeble-minded individual surpass his/her mental plateau. Instead, eugenicists of the early twentieth century focused on improving the national stock through altered breeding practices, increasing the number of “well-born” individuals, or as field worker Adele McKinnie put it in 1912, “regeneration must come through selective breeding.”⁹⁵

Other eugenic family studies written between 1910 and 1924 reflected the ideology of hereditary feeble-mindedness and the eugenic goal of removing its taint from the national gene pool. In 1912, Henry H. Goddard, director of research at the Vineland Training School, expressed his belief that social and environmental change would not decrease the “army” of the feeble-minded in his best-selling study, *The Kallikak Family*.⁹⁶ In this book, Goddard argued that

⁹³ Estabrook 1916: 70.

⁹⁴ Estabrook 1916: 85.

⁹⁵ Adele McKinnie, “Preliminary Report of an Eugenic Survey of Michigan,” *Public Health, Michigan* (October-December 1912): 167.

⁹⁶ Goddard 1912.

the defective line of descendents of Martin Kallikak “were feeble-minded, and no amount of education or good environment can change a feeble-minded individual into a normal one, any more than it can change a red-haired stock into a black-haired stock.”⁹⁷ The Kallikaks proved to be the perfect family study to document the hereditary nature of feeble-mindedness because they had both a superior and degenerate line of descendents. In the course of their research, Goddard and his field workers traced the Kallikaks back to Martin Kallikak, Sr., who was a soldier in the Revolutionary War. During his time as a soldier, Martin Sr. had an affair with a “nameless feeble-minded girl” that produced an illegitimate son, and allegedly introduced the feeble-minded germ plasm into the familial bloodline. While Martin Sr. later married and went on to have a prosperous, normal family with his “virtuous Quaker wife,” the one child he had out of wedlock caused irreparable damage, according to Goddard. In addition, Martin Sr. proved to be the perfect patient zero, marking the exact moment at which eventual hordes of feeble-minded vs. normal descendents emerged on either side of the family.

B. **From Victims to Predators: The Shifting Image of Feeble-minded Women**

The focus on women by eugenicists in the United States has been addressed by numerous scholars.⁹⁸ In her 2010 book, philosopher Licia Carlson addressed the relationship between feeble-mindedness and gender, stating:

Mental retardation never became a “female malady” in the way that hysteria and other mental illnesses have become associated with women and feminine characteristics. However, in the first decades of last century, the feeble-minded

⁹⁷ Goddard 1912: 53.

⁹⁸ For example, cf. Kline 2001; Licia Carlson, “Cognitive Ableism and Disability Studies: Feminist Reflections on the History of Mental Retardation,” *Hypatia* 16, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 124-146; Michael Rembis, *Defining Deviance: Sex, Science, and Delinquent Girls, 1890-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

woman became representative of the nature and dangers of the category as a whole.⁹⁹

Scholars have attributed this representation of women as both the source of the problem and of its prevention to a variety of reasons. For example, Carlson has argued this orientation was due to the “conviction that women are more responsible than men for the health of their progeny.”¹⁰⁰ Historian Wendy Kline has argued that eugenicists capitalized on the concerns regarding an assumed lessening of masculine power due to the rising independence of women during the Progressive Era, and used these existing concerns to bolster their own arguments regarding the control of female sexuality, independence, and racial degeneration.¹⁰¹ Building on these arguments, I argue that attempts to halt the transmission of the feeble-minded germ plasm centered on feeble-minded women over feeble-minded men because they continued to be the ones primarily responsible for maintaining all aspects of the domestic sphere, including reproduction.

The U.S. eugenic movement targeted feeble-minded women from its outset, but for changing reasons. As early as 1893, Walter E. Fernald – superintendent of the Massachusetts School for the Feeble-Minded – asserted that scientists and social reformers needed to focus on feeble-minded women. He argued this was due to the fact that feeble-minded women were inherently weaker than normal women, and therefore in danger of being taken advantage of and abused by evil men.¹⁰² He stated, “a feeble-minded girl is exposed as no other girl in the world is exposed, she has not sense enough to protect herself from the perils to which women are

⁹⁹ Carlson 2010: 57.

¹⁰⁰ Carlson 2001: 127. Carlson’s argument reflects her analysis of both feeble-minded and normal mothers. Because of the focus on “negative” eugenics implicit in eugenic fieldwork, I focus on the threat of feeble-minded women to the national gene pool. For more information on the role of normal mothers to the eugenic project, see Carlson 2001; Kline 2001; Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

¹⁰¹ Kline 2001: 27.

¹⁰² See Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

subjected.”¹⁰³ According to Fernald, all women experienced daily exposure to risks against which the feeble-minded girl or woman had no means of protection. That such women later propagated, bringing “forth in geometrical ratio a new generation of defectives and dependents, becoming sources of corruption and debauchery” was not their fault, according to Fernald, but society’s for failing to safeguard individuals who could not adequately care for themselves.¹⁰⁴

In 1910, Dr. Joseph S. Neff and Samuel Laughlin – the director and superintendent of the Philadelphia Bureau of Charities, respectively – along with their colleague, Walter S. Cornell, echoed Fernald arguing, “a helpless, feeble-minded woman is the prey of not one but many men.”¹⁰⁵ As proof, they provided the case of “Nellie B.,” who was a twelve-year-old feeble-minded girl under the care of her extended family. Nellie had come to the attention of the Bureau because her family had applied for acceptance of Nellie to the state institution. After her parents could no longer care for her – being of “less than average intelligence” themselves – she was being cared for by relatives. However, these relatives found it too difficult to control her; Nellie needed “constant watching” because she would often disrobe in public and was “looked upon as a source of fun by the street gangs around her home.”¹⁰⁶ While nothing had happened to Nellie in response to this behavior, Neff and his colleagues insisted it was only a matter of time before she was taken advantage of, became pregnant, and bore illegitimate children – in effect reproducing the same pattern of “poverty, helplessness, [and] ruin.”¹⁰⁷ They therefore suggested

¹⁰³ WEF, “The History of the Treatment of the Feeble-minded,” *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, Chicago 8-11 June 1893* Ed. Isabel C. Barrows (Boston: Press of George H. Ellis, 1893): 212.

¹⁰⁴ Fernald 1893: 212.

¹⁰⁵ Joseph S. Neff, Samuel Laughlin, and Walter S. Cornell, *The Degenerate Children of Feeble-Minded Women* (Philadelphia: Department of Public Health and Charities, 1910): 4.

¹⁰⁶ Neff et al. 1910: 11.

that Nellie and other feeble-minded girls and women be institutionalized so as to protect them from the negative consequences of their inappropriate and uncontrollable behaviors.

While not initially holding feeble-minded women responsible for their behaviors, U.S. eugenicists nevertheless emphasized the danger that feeble-minded women posed to the State. Carlson asserted that U.S. eugenicists relied on the stereotype of women as “passive, vulnerable procreators” and amplified this stereotype for feeble-minded females.¹⁰⁸ Eugenicists such as Fernald, and later Goddard, relied on this stereotype, insisting feeble-minded women present in the community were consistently in danger of “becoming prey to the designs of evil men or evil women,” resulting in “vicious, immoral, and criminal” lives over which they had no control.¹⁰⁹ The feeble-minded, being inferior creatures, had “no power of control,” according to Goddard, and therefore were victims of unrestrained “instincts and appetites.”¹¹⁰ Again, while they could not be held responsible for submitting to such urges, eugenicists in the United States still deemed intervention necessary to ensure the safety of feeble-minded females from the evils of society, which conveniently also protected the State by preventing the procreation of such women.¹¹¹

Despite the portrayal of feeble-minded women as passive victims, because their actions resulted in the reproduction of feeble-mindedness, feeble-minded women were eventually – and sometimes simultaneously – portrayed as sexual predators responsible for the weakening of the

¹⁰⁷ Neff et al. 1910: 16; See also Kunzel 1995.

¹⁰⁸ Carlson 2001: 127.

¹⁰⁹ Goddard 1912: 12.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Cf. Carlson 2001; Rembis 2011; Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

national gene pool. Already in 1904, Fernald had stated the following at the National Conference of Charities and Corrections:

It is well known that feeble-minded women and girls are very liable to become sources of unspeakable debauchery and licentiousness which pollutes the whole life of the young boys and youth of the community. They frequently disseminate in a wholesale way the most loathsome and deadly diseases, permanently poisoning the minds and bodies of thoughtless youths, at the very threshold of manhood.¹¹²

In 1912, Fernald elaborated on his earlier point, stating “the high-grade female imbecile group is the most dangerous class.”¹¹³ Not only were such women supposedly incapable of supporting themselves or refraining from having children and furthering the line of hereditary defectives, but they were often able to pass for normal. Many high-grade feebleminded women were described as “rather good-looking, bright in appearance, with many attractive ways.”¹¹⁴ Because they did not show signs of obvious defect, Goddard found that the high-grade feebleminded woman could deceive not only lay persons, but also many professionals, who often clung to the hope that – given specialized training – such girls could eventually come out all right.¹¹⁵ Such hopes were, according to Goddard, fraught with delusion, and in order to protect communities from their inevitable demise, given the presence of feebleminded women, he too advocated permanent care in institutions. Only then could feebleminded women be prevented from spreading their tainted germ plasm exponentially to future generations. Unlike the feebleminded male, who was “little to be feared,” the feebleminded female required “very close attention.”¹¹⁶

¹¹² Qtd. in Odem 1995: 98.

¹¹³ WEF, “The Burden of Feeble-Mindedness,” *JPA* XVII, no. 3 (March 1912): 90.

¹¹⁴ Goddard 1912: 11.

¹¹⁵ Goddard 1912: 12.

¹¹⁶ Qtd. in Michael Allen Rembis, “Breeding up the Human Herd: Gender, Power, and Eugenics in Illinois, 1890-1940.” Diss. University of Arizona, Department of History (2003): 89.

Although there was a general concern on the part of eugenicists towards all feebleminded individuals regardless of sex, special attention in the United States was slanted towards the female population. Eugenicists in the United States such as Goddard and Fernald argued that the feebleminded man was of less concern because unlike the feebleminded woman he could not deceive others into thinking he was of normal stock. Neff and his colleagues reasoned in 1910 that “more children are born to feeble-minded women than are born to feeble-minded men” simply because the “feeble-minded man is a repulsive person to a normal woman.”¹¹⁷ They did not elaborate as to why feebleminded men were so repulsive to normal women while the reverse was not true, however, one can surmise that this was due perhaps to the lower status afforded women at this time. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries scientists believed women were biologically inferior to men. For example, Gustave LeBon – the founder of social psychology – wrote the following in 1879 with respect to the intelligence of women as opposed to men:

In the most intelligent races, as among the Parisians, there are a number of women whose brains are closer in size to those of gorillas than to the most developed male brains...All psychologists who have studied the intelligence of women, as well as poets and novelists, recognize today that they represent most inferior forms of human evolution and that they are closer to children and savages than to an adult civilized man.¹¹⁸

Therefore, a feebleminded woman might not be as obvious to a normal man who assumed all women were inherently feeble. A man less intelligent than a woman, on the other hand, would arguably be more obvious and less desirable.

In addition, women’s delinquent behaviors as they related to the inheritance of feeblemindedness were easier to police. Neff and his colleagues continued, “because children

¹¹⁷ Qtd. in Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997): 160.

¹¹⁸ Qtd. in Stephen Jay Gould. *The Mismeasure of Man*. (New York: Norton, 1996): 136-137.

tend to be attached to their mothers, ‘the evidence of unchastity (sic) is with the mother rather than the father.’”¹¹⁹ As I explore in chapter three, diagnoses of feeble-mindedness were intertwined with one’s (in)ability to adhere to the gender norms and moral standards of the early twentieth century. During this same time, the perception of the feeble-minded women also changed, intensifying the focus on her as the source of the feeble-minded problem. Unlike the previous century’s stereotype of the weak feeble-minded girl, early twentieth century U.S. eugenicists instead forwarded the stereotype of the feeble-minded female as sexual predator.¹²⁰ The early twentieth century saw a change in behaviors among many women that contradicted the nineteenth century Victorian image of woman as chaste and passionless.¹²¹ As a result, reformers and eugenicists began to recognize that women, like men, had sexual urges, urges which the feeble-minded man or woman was incapable of controlling. Historian Mary E. Odem attributed this shift in perception largely to female reformers:

College-educated women involved in the Progressive movement disagreed with the Victorian assumption of girlhood sexual passivity and victimization. Instead, they acknowledged female sexual agency and thought of young women who engaged in illicit encounters as “delinquents” in need of guidance and control.¹²²

Both eugenicists and reformers recognized the sexuality of young women as a problem in need of attention. While Progressive Era reformers believed that young women could be given special attention and taught to control themselves, though, eugenicists instead used these behaviors as signs that such women were feeble-minded and therefore could not be helped or rehabilitated.

¹¹⁹ Qtd. in Nicole Hahn Rafter 1997: 160.

¹²⁰ Rembis 2011: 44.

¹²¹ For pieces that discuss the image of nineteenth century women and the shift in this image, see Caroll Smith, Rosenberg and Charles E. Rosenberg, “The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America.” In Judith Walzer Leavitt (Ed.). *Women and Health in America*. 2nd Edition (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999): 111-130; Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

¹²² Odem 1995: 95.

Fernald supported this shift in the perception of women, emphasizing the presence of feeble-minded individuals in prisons and shelters throughout the country, especially prostitutes.

He wrote in 1912:

Many of the immoral and diseased girls found in rescue homes and shelters are defective and absolutely incapable of reform or self-support. Many prostitutes are mentally defective. A large proportion of the mothers of illegitimate children at Tewksbury [Pennsylvania] and elsewhere are feeble-minded. In one country almshouse in Pennsylvania there were 105 mothers of illegitimate children, and of those mothers one hundred were feeble-minded. A majority of the parents prosecuted by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children for abuse of their own children are feeble-minded.¹²³

What made eugenicists unique, however, was not that they utilized the new image of women as sexual beings, but that they took this “rearticulation of young women’s heterosexual agency” and infused it with “a new conceptualization of the mental impairment that supposedly lay at the root of their misconduct.”¹²⁴ Being that women were more associated with the reproduction of the race, U.S. eugenicists were especially concerned with this perceived increase in female sexuality, especially as it related to the heredity of feeble-mindedness. Fernald insisted that feeble-minded women were a danger to the health of the nation because they

are not capable of becoming desirable or safe members of the community. They are never able to support themselves. They are certain to become sexual offenders and to spread venereal disease or give birth to degenerate children. Their numerous progeny usually become public charges as diseased or neglected children, imbeciles, epileptics, juvenile delinquents or later on as adult paupers or criminals.¹²⁵

Eugenicists argued that the feeble-minded reproduce at an increased rate (from two to six times that of the normal individual, according to Goddard¹²⁶). Taking this risk of a greater number of

¹²³ Fernald 1912: 91-92.

¹²⁴ Rembis 2001: 45.

¹²⁵ Fernald 1912: 93.

progeny tainted by the feeble-minded germ plasm, and the belief that feeble-minded women could pass as normal – spreading the contagion to once normal familial lines – feeble-minded women became the prime threat and target of eugenicists in the United States. This trend was clearly reflected in the eugenic family pedigrees published by the ERO and other U.S. eugenicists in the early twentieth century.

Although feeble-mindedness was supposedly a recessive trait requiring its presence in both a mother and a father of a feeble-minded child, eugenicists placed a greater emphasis on the role the female played in the transmission of this trait to subsequent generations. In her collection of eugenic family studies, Nicole Hahn Rafter demonstrated how eugenic pedigrees commonly held women more responsible than men in “generating bad offspring.”¹²⁷ As evidence, Rafter cited the eugenic pedigrees that documented both “good” and “bad” lines of descendants from a common male ancestor. Because both lines had the same father, the pedigrees reflected – according to Rafter – that “good branches are produced by chaste, docile, and healthy mothers, whereas the bad branches proceed from women who are promiscuous, illegitimate or...tainted.”¹²⁸

Goddard explained the history of the Kallikaks as such:

We have here a family of good English blood of the middle class, settling upon the original land purchased...in Colonial times, and throughout four generations maintaining a reputation for honor and respectability of which they are justly proud. Then a scion of this family, in an unguarded moment, steps aside from the paths of rectitude and with the help of a feeble-minded girl, starts a line of mental defectives that is truly appalling. After this mistake, he returns to the traditions of

¹²⁶ HHG, “The Menace of Mental Deficiency from the Standpoint of Heredity.” Reprinted from *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 175, No. 8 (1916): 4.

¹²⁷ Nicole Hahn Rafter’s Introduction to Gertrude Davenport’s “The Zeros: Hereditary Crime.” In Rafter (ed.), *White Trash: The Eugenic Family Studies, 1877-1919* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988): 66.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

his family, marries a woman of his own quality, and through her carries on a line of respectability equal to that of his ancestors.¹²⁹

Although Goddard held Martin Sr. somewhat responsible for his actions, his “unguarded moment” would not have been so devastating to the national gene pool had this moment not been with the infamous “nameless feeble-minded girl,” thereby beginning a line of feebleminded descendants who would only reproduce this hereditary taint in generations to come.

Dugdale, too, had emphasized the fecundity of the feebleminded woman in his 1877 study of the Juke family. He wrote, “the impudicity of ‘the Juke’ women is twenty-nine times greater than that of the average of woman, and, and as a result, one forth of the children are illegitimate.”¹³⁰ This unrestrained sexuality of the feebleminded woman and her ability to lead eminent men astray posed great danger to even the best of families. In his analysis of the Tribe of Ishmael, a group of degenerates in the Midwest first charted by Reverend Oscar C. McCullough of the Charity Organization Society in Indianapolis, Davenport noted the disastrous results one unfit woman could have on an entire family line.

Another example of a great family tracing back to a single man may be taken from “the Tribe of Ishmael” of Central Indiana...The progenitor of this tribe, Ben Ishmael, was in Kentucky as far back as 1790, having come from Maryland through Kentucky. One of his sons, John, married a half-breed woman and came into Marion County, Indiana, about 1840...Since 1840 this family has had a pauper record.¹³¹

The tribe of Ishmael was “discovered” in 1878 by eugenicist Reverend Oscar McCullough. “Living in a hovel in one of Indianapolis’s most run-down neighborhoods,” McCullough assumed that he had come across a savage tribe and began his research on the origins of this

¹²⁹ Goddard 1912: 50-51.

¹³⁰ Dugdale 1877. In Rafter 1988: 38.

¹³¹ Davenport 1972: 234-235.

“tribe.”¹³² By situating the Tribe’s moment of collapse at the moment John married an American Indian “half-breed,” Davenport demonstrated how quickly eugenicists were to attribute both success to men and failure to women. Because of this association of female feeble-mindedness with sexuality and increased reproduction, efforts to curb the spread of feeble-mindedness centered on women as well. Now, as Rembis has noted, “unrestrained – and unguarded – female sexuality had become a threat to the race and to society.”¹³³

C. Targeting Feeble-minded Women in Negative Eugenic Programs

Because of their determined hereditary nature of feeble-mindedness, Davenport and Goddard shifted their focus toward methods of removing this tainted germ plasm from the national gene pool. Davenport wrote in his “Directions for the Guidance of Field Workers”: “the day is coming when each delinquent will be traced to his source, and that source will be cleaned up, so that from it shall no longer flow the polluted and polluting stream of defective germ plasm.”¹³⁴ The defects of such a germ plasm represented a burden on local, state, and the national communities because of the alleged inability of feeble-minded individuals to live self-sufficiently and restrain their reproduction. In addition, the image of feeble-minded women as “over-sexed, uninhibited, and sexually aggressive reframed the eugenic problem.”¹³⁵

Eugenicists in the United States supported at least one of four main methods of cleaning up this “source” of degeneracy – to use Davenport’s term: marriage restriction, segregation, sterilization

¹³² Nathaniel Deutsch, *Inventing America’s “Worst” Family: Eugenics, Islam, and the Fall and Rise of the Tribe of Ishmael* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009): 4.

¹³³ Rembis 2011: 35.

¹³⁴ CBD, “Directions for the Guidance of Field Workers” (n.d.). In CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series, “ERO-Field Workers.”

¹³⁵ Molly Ladd-Taylor, “Saving Babies and Sterilizing Mothers: Eugenics and Welfare Politics in the Interwar United States,” *Social Politics* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 144.

and immigration restriction. Of these methods, the increased targeting of feeble-minded women was especially evident in segregation and sterilization programs.

Segregation was first posed as a means of protecting feeble-minded women from the vices of society, and naturally progressed towards segregation as a means of protecting society from feeble-minded women as they became seen as sexual predators versus prey. For example, in 1904, Fernald took up a paternalistic attitude toward institutionalization, stating his concern that feeble-minded individuals were vulnerable targets for criminal and sexual predators. He argued, “the feeble-minded, with their weak willpower and deficient judgment are easily influenced for evil.”¹³⁶ Consequently, he reasoned, it was the responsibility of the “normal” population to safeguard feeble-minded people from the extant threats of adult life by institutionalizing them. By 1911, however, Goddard and his colleagues no longer asserted a need for custodial care for the feeble-minded as a means of protecting individuals from societal predators, but rather for protecting society from the feeble-minded. In “The Elimination of Feeble-mindedness,” Goddard argued that identifying and immediately segregating feeble-minded persons and insisting on “absolute sexual seclusion” would be the most effective means for ridding the United States of the constant menace of the feeble-minded.¹³⁷ Goddard disagreed with Fernald’s original emphasis on care, stating:

We have taken such good care of these people for so many years, have allowed our humanity to get so far ahead of our judgment and reason that we have turned loose in the community a large body of strong men and women, well developed physically, but who have this hereditary taint of feeble-mindedness.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ WEF, “Mentally Defective Children in Public Schools,” *JPA* 8, no. 2-3 (1904): 34.

¹³⁷ Goddard 1911: 512.

¹³⁸ Goddard 1911: 514.

In other words, Goddard felt that the solution of temporary, rehabilitative segregation was not possible given the hereditary nature of feeble-mindedness. Instead, Goddard and his colleagues recommended permanent segregation – or at least segregation during one’s child-bearing years – as a means of halting the reproduction of feeble-mindedness. In doing so, Goddard predicted, that feeble-mindedness could cease to exist in one or two generations.¹³⁹

The main concern regarding the feasibility of segregation was the cost of housing such an immense population of feeble-minded individuals. Fernald agreed in 1912 that permanent segregation was more reliable than temporary, rehabilitative institutionalization and dismissed the economic concern, arguing that the costs of caring for the feeble-minded population in institutions versus the community would be less in the long run:

The cost of this provision will be great, but not as great as the present cost of caring for these same persons, to say nothing of their progeny, in future generations. It would cost less money, be more economical in social life and of immense value morally.¹⁴⁰

Unlike feeble-minded individuals still in the community, who were allegedly reproducing at increased rates and often ending up in the poorhouse or receiving state aid, institutionalized individuals not only halted such reproduction, but also often performed the day-to-day labor of the institution, thereby reducing the overall financial burden to the State.¹⁴¹

The cost of identifying and segregating the population of the feeble-minded was seen by many eugenicists, therefore, as a worthy investment. Despite their differences in opinion with regard to how to eliminate feeble-mindedness, field worker Florence Danielson – a sociologist

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Fernald 1912: 93.

¹⁴¹ For more information about work in institutions, see chapter III. Also see Trent 1994; David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990).

devoted to environmental explanations and remedies¹⁴² - and her supervisor, Davenport, did agree on one thing: namely, the benefits of segregation as a means of reducing the burden of feeble-mindedness, as the presence of feeble-minded individuals who could not work and relied on social supports inevitably put a strain on the nation's resources. In their co-written family study published in 1912, "The Hill Folk: Report on a Rural Community of Hereditary Defectives," they wrote that "the comparative cost of segregating one feeble-minded couple and that of maintaining their offspring shows, in the instance at hand, that the latter policy has been three times more expensive."¹⁴³

Additionally, Goddard stated in *The Kallikak Family* that before any other methods should be considered, the benefits of segregation needed to be assessed:

segregation and colonization is not by any means as hopeless a plan as it may seem to those who look only at the immediate increase in the tax rate. If such colonies were provided in sufficient number to take care of all the distinctly feeble-minded cases in the community, they would very largely take the place of our present almshouses and prisons, and they would greatly decrease the number in our insane hospitals. Such colonies would save an annual loss in property and life, due to the action of these irresponsible people, sufficient to nearly, or quite, offset the expense of the new plant.¹⁴⁴

While the initial cost of creating institutions to house the growing population of the feeble-minded would be great, proponents of segregation insisted that it would cost less overall due in large part to the colony model of segregation popular in the early twentieth century. According to historian James Trent, the colony model had taken over in almost all public

¹⁴² Nicole Hahn Rafter. "Preface." In Rafter 1988: 81-84.

¹⁴³ Florence H. Danielson and CBD, "The Hill Folk: Report on a Rural Community of Hereditary Defectives" (1912). In Rafter 1988: 128.

¹⁴⁴ Goddard 1912: 105-106.

institutions in the United States by 1910.¹⁴⁵ These institutions relied on inmate labor to keep costs low, and when possible, to create self-sufficient institutions not reliant on taxpayer money.

Trent has argued that superintendents of the early twentieth century no longer had to prove that they could rehabilitate their inmates but only to show that their institutions operated in an orderly fashion in a way that placed the least amount of burden on taxpayer dollars.¹⁴⁶ In the colonies, inmates not only provided most of the maintenance work, such as farming, laundry and other chores, but were often responsible for caring for other inmates.¹⁴⁷ Employing inmates became most important because it guaranteed a constant source of cheap labor as well as more efficient and orderly institutional practice, thereby minimizing the cost of care.

At the very least, feebleminded women needed to be institutionalized, as Fernald suggested in 1915, because feebleminded females presented a greater threat,

Every feeble-minded girl or woman of the hereditary type, especially of the moron class, not adequately protected, should be segregated during the reproductive period. Otherwise, she is most certain to bear defective children, who, in turn, breed other defectives. The male defectives are probably less likely to become parents, but many male morons also should be segregated.¹⁴⁸

Sex-segregating feebleminded individuals in institutions would ensure that feebleminded women would not have the opportunity to bear more children tainted with the feebleminded germ plasm or continue behaving in degenerate ways in the community.

¹⁴⁵ Trent 1994: 98.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Trent 1994: 104.

¹⁴⁸ WEF, "What is Practicable in the Way of Prevention of Mental Defect?" Reprinted from *Proceedings of National Conference of Charities and Correction, Baltimore, 1915* (Boston: Massachusetts Society for Mental Hygiene): 6. I discuss the breakdown of the feebleminded category into various sub-categories (e.g. moron, imbecile, idiot) in Chapter III. For the purposes of this chapter, it is important to note that the moron was considered the most high-grade feebleminded, while the idiot was of the lowest-grade.

In 1914, M.G. Schlapp, Professor of Neuropathy at the New York Post Graduate School, had warned that the specialized education feeble-minded children and youth received in public school only made them more dangerous to the community by giving them additional skills to pursue criminal livelihoods, and therefore permanent segregation was the only means for handling the feeble-minded population. More importantly, he insisted, specialized or rehabilitative training “makes the feeble-minded girl more attractive, thus increasing the probability of her entrance into prostitution.”¹⁴⁹ This attractiveness could also aid the feeble-minded female in her attempts to pass and enter into relations with a normal man – once again tainting society by increasing the likelihood of such women reproducing their kind.

Due to this increased danger as well as the double bind of feeble-minded women who were sometimes simultaneously seen as in need of protection *from* and a threat *to* society, they were often institutionalized at greater rates than feeble-minded men. Historian Michael Rembis found that in Illinois during the early twentieth century,

young poor and working-class women who were arrested for moral offenses were more likely than young men to endure incarceration in one of Illinois’ many reform institutions... Many experts asserted that the disparity between the percentage of young men who were incarcerated existed, in part, because adolescent boys’ crimes were primarily against property, and did not pose a sexual or eugenic threat to the individual offender or to society.¹⁵⁰

Therefore, because eugenicists in the United States privileged women’s position in the domestic sphere in their agenda, especially the reproductive process, it was easier to put less weight on the role of feeble-minded men in the transmission of the feeble-minded germ plasm. By guarding and

¹⁴⁹ M.G. Schlapp, “The Problem of Mental Deficiency in the Public Schools: How Milwaukee Schools Care for Mentally Unfit Children,” *University of Wisconsin Survey, Madison* 15 August 1914: 29.

¹⁵⁰ Michael Allen Rembis, “Breeding up the Human Herd: Gender, Power, and Eugenics in Illinois, 1890-1940.” Diss. University of Arizona, Department of History (2003): 99-100.

restricting female sexuality, eugenicists believed they could first and foremost prevent feeble-mindedness from extending to future generations.

The rise in the institutionalization of girls and women was not limited to Illinois. The Sonoma State Home for the Feeble-Minded in California, for example, also experienced an overall growth in their admissions of “over fifty percent” between 1910 and 1920.¹⁵¹ This increase made the Sonoma Home the “fastest growing public institution in the state,” and Kline noted that the “largest new ‘type’ targeted for incarceration was the female ‘high-grade moron.’”¹⁵² In 1919, the U.S. Department of Commerce issued a statistical report on the status of state and federal institutions for the “defective, dependent, and delinquent classes.” In this report, they reported that on January 1, 1916, there were a total of 576 state and federal institutions in the United States. Of these, 27 were devoted to feeble-minded populations, 147 were for the insane, 170 for the criminalistic, 9 for epileptic, 3 for inebriate, and 45 for tubercular populations.¹⁵³ On January 1, 1916 there were a total of 294,991 inmates housed in these various institutions, of which 259,125 (66%) were men and 133,876 (34%) were women. In institutions for the feeble-minded, however, there were a total of 19,298 inmates, of which 9,530 (49%) were men and 9,765 (51%) were women.¹⁵⁴ While the percentages are not skewed much more toward women than men (only 2% more women than men were housed in institutions for the feeble-minded), when compared with the overall percentages in which 32% more men were

¹⁵¹ Kline 2001: 33. The Sonoma Home was opened in 1884 by Julia Judah (wife of railroader Henry Judah) and Frances Bentley (the wife of a Methodist minister). They created the open – then called the California Association for the Care and Training of Feeble Minded Children – with the aim of providing a “school and asylum for the feeble-minded, in which they may be trained to usefulness.” For more information on what is now called the Sonoma Developmental Center, see the Glen Ellen, CA Historical Society’s webpage at <http://www.sonoma.edu/users/w/warmotha/psychclasses/423f00/historical.html>.

¹⁵² Kline 2001: 33.

¹⁵³ Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Directory of State Institutions for the Defective, Dependent and Delinquent Classes* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919).

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

institutionalized than women, these numbers reflect the increased concerns regarding feeble-minded women, as in the case of eugenic sterilization – the second method proposed for ridding the nation of the feeble-minded menace.

Goddard was initially hesitant to support sterilization stating in 1912, “segregation through colonization seems in the present state of our knowledge to be the ideal and perfectly satisfactory method. Sterilization may be accepted as a makeshift, as a help to solve this problem because the conditions have become so intolerable.”¹⁵⁵ By 1916, however, Goddard had lost hope that segregation was an effective means for ridding the country of the feeble-minded menace. Because feeble-mindedness was allegedly a recessive trait, and therefore had to be present from both the father and the mother before it would manifest itself outwardly, the segregation of feeble-minded individuals did not encompass the entire threat. Instead, it ignored those carriers of the feeble-minded trait still out in society, who were on the borderline between normal and feeble-minded, allowing the germ to be passed one from one generation to the next unnoticed. Further, as a revision of his initial financial argument regarding segregation, Goddard argued there weren’t enough resources for those feeble-minded individuals who had been identified by eugenicists. In his “The Menace of Mental Deficiency from the Standpoint of Heredity” Goddard used the example of New York State to assert his belief that segregation could not ultimately succeed: “If the State of New York cared for its estimated proportion of mental defectives, it would require thirty institutions of 1,000 each. They find it hard to raise money for the three or four institutions they now have.”¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, despite the lack of funding for segregation, scores of eugenic field workers were traveling the country, examining

¹⁵⁵ Goddard 1912: 117.

¹⁵⁶ HHG, “The Menace of Mental Deficiency from the Standpoint of Heredity.” Reprinted from the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* clxxv, no. 8 (August 24, 1916): 3.

and labeling individuals as feeble-minded and in need of intervention, whether it be segregation or – increasingly – sterilization.

Indiana passed the first eugenic sterilization law in 1907, which allowed the sterilization of the feeble-minded because, it reasoned, “heredity plays a most important part in the transmission of crime, idiocy and imbecility.”¹⁵⁷ This law authorized the compulsory sterilization of “any confirmed criminal, idiot, rapist, or imbecile in a state institution whose condition had been determined to be ‘unimprovable’ by an appointed panel of physicians.”¹⁵⁸ Historian Philip J. Reilly has reported that while U.S. eugenicists such as Davenport and Goddard “provided the scientific basis for a pro-sterilization argument, prominent lawyers, journalists, and business people helped put it before legislators and the public.”¹⁵⁹ The Indiana law, for example, was championed by a surgeon who worked at the Indiana Reformatory, Dr. Harry C. Sharp. Dr. Sharp had been sterilizing male inmates since 1899 to combat masturbation, and he supported the extension of the procedure to feeble-minded inmates. In 1909 Sharp gave a presentation at the Sixteenth Annual Session of the American Medical Association (AMA) in which he advocated the sterilization of feeble-minded men and women for eugenic reasons.¹⁶⁰ Following his presentation, New York physician Dr. Woods Hutchinson stated his support of sterilization and revealed that he had analyzed family records at the Training School in Vineland,

¹⁵⁷ Qtd. in Paul A. Lombardo, *Three Generations No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008): 25.

¹⁵⁸ Philip J. Reilly, *The Surgical Solution: A History of Involuntary Sterilization in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991): 33.

¹⁵⁹ Reilly 1991: 42.

¹⁶⁰ Reilly 1991: 33-35.

New Jersey -- where Goddard was Director of Research -- and was subsequently convinced “of the ‘enormous fecundity’ of the feeble-minded.”¹⁶¹

Although many U.S. eugenicists supported sterilization as a means for halting the spread of feeble-mindedness through the national gene pool, some voiced their concerns with respect to sterilization and its dangers. In 1912, for example, Fernald posed sterilization as a radical and ultimately futile attempt at limiting feeble-mindedness. He wrote,

Compulsory surgical sterilization of all defectives is proposed as a radical method for preventing the hereditary transmission of feeble-mindedness... The normal “carriers” of defect would not be affected. The presence of these sterile people in the community, with unimpaired sexual desire and capacity would be direct encouragement of vice and a prolific source of venereal disease. Sterilization would not be a safe and effective substitute for permanent segregation and control.¹⁶²

While sterilization could reduce the number of individuals born from two identified feeble-minded individuals, it would fail – according to Fernald – for two main reasons. First, non-symptomatic carriers of the feeble-minded germ plasm would be allowed to reproduce and therefore risk giving birth to a feeble-minded child if their mates were also carriers. Secondly, Fernald feared that allowing sterilized individuals to remain in the community would only further endanger that community because sterilization would not reduce the feeble-minded individuals’ propensity to vice and sexual deviancy.

There were various means of sterilization – for males, castration or vasectomy, and for females, oöphorectomy (removal of the ovaries) or fallocotomy (tying of the fallopian tubes). Historian Allison Carey has stated that the original aim of sterilization programs in the United States was to punish incarcerated men for “inappropriate sexual behavior” (e.g. engaging in homosexual relations or excessive masturbation) or for “severe sexual violations within society”

¹⁶¹ Reilly 1991: 35.

¹⁶² WEF, “The Burden of Feeble-Mindedness” *JPA* xvii, no. 3 (March 1912): 95-96.

(e.g. sexual assault).¹⁶³ Between 1928 and 1932, however, historian Philip J. Reilly argued, a “dramatic change” occurred that shifted the focus of compulsory sterilization programs.

Whereas prior to 1928 women and men were sterilized at similar rates throughout the nation (men at 53% versus women at 47%), women were increasingly targeted over men after 1928 and according to Reilly, “after this transition occurred, the activity of sterilization programs skyrocketed.”¹⁶⁴

Reilly attributed this increase to two main reasons: 1. the increase in admissions of feeble-minded girls and women to institutions between 1910 and 1920 provided a larger pool of females eligible for compulsory sterilization programs, and 2. the development of safer and cheaper methods by which to sterilize women.¹⁶⁵ Despite the shift in perception of feeble-minded women as sexual predators during the first two decades of the twentieth century, early numbers of compulsory sterilization programs did not reflect this concern. This was probably because female sterilization involved risky internal surgery and more women died or experienced serious health complications from the procedure than did men. Along with this increased danger and higher morbidity rate, sterilizing women was more expensive than vasectomies, which could be performed with relative ease.¹⁶⁶

Regardless of this increased risk and cost, many U.S. eugenicists nevertheless argued it was a price worth paying in order to prevent the spread of feeble-mindedness. For example, already in 1910 Davenport had asserted, the “data in hand” reflected a need to segregate or

¹⁶³ Allison C. Carey, “Gender and Compulsory Sterilization Programs in America: 1907-1950,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 11, no. 1 (March 1998): 75.

¹⁶⁴ Reilly 1991: 98.

¹⁶⁵ Reilly 1991.

¹⁶⁶ Reilly 1991: 34. See also, Bleecker Van Wagenen, “Surgical Sterilization as a Eugenic Measure,” *JPA* 18, no. 4 (1914): 186-196; E. Stanley Abbot, “Preventable Forms of Mental Disease and How to Prevent Them,” *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 174, no. 16 (1916): 555-563.

sterilize “at least female imbeciles” so as to prevent their reproduction.¹⁶⁷ In 1911, Goddard reacted to the higher dangers of sterilizing women:

It must be admitted, however, that the operation on the female is a somewhat more serious one, and can hardly be practiced on any large scale without some danger of fatalities in a small percentage of the cases. Perhaps this is not greater than occurs in such operations as appendectomies to which normal people submit daily.¹⁶⁸

One could infer from Goddard’s statement, which compares the risk of death in sterilization to that of appendectomies, that the ends justify the means. Even though such surgeries entailed a risk of death, Goddard minimized this risk, suggesting sterilization should be accepted as if it were any other life-saving treatment.

Despite the various arguments in support of the sterilization of feeble-minded women for eugenical reasons, Fernald continued to disagree with sterilization regardless of the method or reasoning. He argued that while sterilization might prevent feeble-minded men and women from having children, it did not impair their sexual desires. Therefore, he reasoned, sterilization directly encouraged the feeble-minded individual’s life of promiscuity, causing a rapid reproduction of, if not children, then venereal disease. For women especially, who were “certain to become sexual offenders,” Fernald insisted sterilization did not “substitute for permanent segregation and control.”¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, sterilization gained increasing support throughout the early twentieth century, and between 1907 and 1921 “there were at least 3,233 sterilizations performed” on institutionalized individuals “pursuant to state law.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ CBD, “Application of Mendel’s Law to Human Heredity,” *Journal of Psycho-Asthenics* 2, no. 1 (1910): 95.

¹⁶⁸ HHG, “The Elimination of Feeble-Mindedness.” Reprinted from *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (1911): 505-516.

¹⁶⁹ Fernald 1912: 96.

¹⁷⁰ Reilly 1991: 48.

Reilly stated that the majority of supporters for eugenic sterilization came from four main camps:

physicians, especially those working in state institutions; a handful of prominent scientists such as David Starr Jordan, a biologist who was president of Stanford University, and Davenport at Cold Spring Harbor; nonscientific eugenicists (including judges, lawyers, and journalists) who were convinced that eugenics offered a solution to the social problems with which they were so familiar; and wealthy philanthropists, such as Mrs. E.H. Harriman and John D. Rockefeller.¹⁷¹

Reilly reports that between 1907 and 1963, “more than sixty thousand persons were sterilized under programs aimed at the involuntary sterilization of institutionalized individuals.”¹⁷²

Further, between 1917 and 1941, 22,307 women and 15,780 men were sterilized.¹⁷³

Perhaps the most well-known case around eugenic sterilization is that of Carrie Buck, a Virginian who was sterilized on October 19, 1927, shortly after the state had passed a compulsory sterilization law. Carrie Buck had been committed to the Virginia Colony for the Feeble-minded in 1924 by her foster parents after they had discovered that the then seventeen-year-old had become pregnant out of wedlock (some accounts state that this conception was the result of being raped by her foster cousin). Buck was used as the prime candidate for sterilization and the case went to the Circuit Court of Amherst County in 1924. Throughout this and subsequent appeals, eugenicists Harry H. Laughlin and field worker Arthur H. Estabrook (both of the ERO) testified that Carrie Buck (as well as her birth mother and illegitimate child) were indeed feeble-minded, and sterilization was the most humane thing to do to prevent any future transmission of this “defective” gene. Interestingly, despite accounts that Carrie had been raped by her foster cousin, all efforts focused on the three women involved – Carrie, her mother,

¹⁷¹ Reilly 1991: 42.

¹⁷² Reilly 1991: 94.

¹⁷³ Reilly 1991: 97.

and her daughter. The case went all the way to the United States Supreme Court in 1927, where Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. declared, “three generations of imbeciles are enough”. On May 2, 1927, the United States Supreme Court upheld Virginia's eugenical sterilization law by a vote of 8 to 1.¹⁷⁴

Historian Paul Lombardo has stated that Estabrook had volunteered to assist lawyer Aubrey Strode in his quest to pass a compulsory sterilization law in Virginia. In a letter to Strode dated November 6, 1924, Estabrook argued his unique qualifications to do so, having completed eugenic pedigree studies in Amherst County, Virginia. The legal team eventually accepted Estabrook’s offer and examined Carrie Buck and her mother, interviewed other family members, and testified in support of eugenic sterilization.¹⁷⁵ Estabrook had already voiced his support of sterilization over segregation in the conclusion to his study on the Jukes in 1916. In it, he stated, “sterilization...is entirely practicable. Public sentiment, however, does not favor such a practice. Contrary to public belief, sterilization would interfere with the real liberty of the individual less than custodial care.”¹⁷⁶ If sterilized, Estabrook reasoned, feebleminded individuals could remain in the community and live their lives as they saw fit – with the exception of being able to have children, of course. Weighed against a lifetime of institutionalization, Estabrook considered sterilization a reasonable sacrifice. Following the passage of this law in 1927, Virginia sterilized over 8,000 individuals before it was repealed in 1974, with women being sterilized almost twice as much as men.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ 274 U.S. 200 (1927); See also Lombardo 2008.

¹⁷⁵ Lombardo 2008: 1-6.

¹⁷⁶ Estabrook 1916: 85.

¹⁷⁷ Lombardo 2008: 250, 262.

D. **Conclusion**

This greater emphasis on feeble-minded women in eugenic discourse demonstrates one way in which women became the keepers of the national gene pool in the U.S. eugenic project. In this chapter, I explored how U.S. eugenicists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries situated feeble-mindedness as a burden on national resources and subsequently a threat to the prosperity of the nation. Further, at the advent of the twentieth century the re-discovery of Mendelian inheritance reframed feeble-mindedness as a hereditary problem. Eugenicists correspondingly placed their energies on restraining the reproduction of primarily feeble-minded women as a means of halting the transmission of this genetic taint through segregation and sterilization programs. In the next chapter, I explore how these eugenic field workers distinguished between normal and feeble-minded individuals.

III. DIAGNOSING BODIES: DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN THE NORMAL AND FEEBLEMINDED

In 1912, Henry H. Goddard – psychologist and Director of Research at the Training School for Feeble-Minded Girls and Boys in Vineland, New Jersey¹⁷⁸ – published what would become the most famous eugenic family study, *The Kallikak Family*.¹⁷⁹ In it, he traced the ancestry of “Deborah Kallikak,” a feeble-minded girl housed at the Training School with the aim of documenting the hereditary nature of feeble-mindedness. For the purposes of this study, Goddard sent a eugenic field worker, Elizabeth S. Kite, to the homes of Deborah’s living relatives. Here, she compiled eugenic pedigrees to determine whether Deborah’s family members and ancestors were normal or feeble-minded. When Kite arrived at the home of one of Deborah’s distant relatives, she was able to diagnose the entire family at one glance.¹⁸⁰

Arrived at the farm, the question of the mentality of this family was quickly answered. Desolation and ruin became more apparent at every step...The door opened revealing a sight to which, alas, the field worker was only too accustomed. She gazed aghast at what appeared to her to be a procession of imbeciles. The tall, emaciated, staggering man at the head braced himself against a tree, while the rest stopped and stared with a fixed, stupid stare.¹⁸¹

Neither Goddard nor Kite elaborated as to what made this such an obvious case of imbecility. How did Kite diagnose an entire family based on one fleeting glance?

In this chapter, I ask the following questions: how did eugenicists diagnose feeble-mindedness? Specifically how did eugenic field workers determine when to diagnose their

¹⁷⁸ Hereafter referred to as the Training School.

¹⁷⁹ HHG, *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness* (New York: Macmillan, 1912).

¹⁸⁰ Although *The Kallikak Family* was written by Goddard, this quote comes from the book’s fourth chapter. In the preface, Goddard noted, “The work on this particular family has been done by Elizabeth S. Kite, to whom I am also indebted for practically all of Chapter IV” (Goddard 1912: x). Kite initially wrote up chapter 4 and Goddard edited it, and included it in his book. Therefore, I am taking the words as primarily Kite’s. See Leila Zenderland, *Measuring Minds: Henry Herbert Goddard and the Origins of American Intelligence Testing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 143-185.

¹⁸¹ Goddard 1912: 89-90.

subjects as feeble-minded or normal, and how did notions of gender play a role in this diagnosis?

Two main methods of diagnosing feeble-mindedness in the United States: standardized intelligence testing – the Binet-Simon Measuring Scale for Intelligence – and the compilation of family pedigrees were used to diagnose feeble-mindedness. I argue that the diagnosis of feeble-mindedness first and foremost centered on the eugenic field worker’s perception of a subject’s proximity to early twentieth century, white, middle- and upper-class normative gendered appearances and behaviors. First, field workers utilized standardized intelligence testing that relied on socialized knowledge that individuals from non-American cultures or lower-class backgrounds might not share. Second, eugenic fieldwork and its resultant pedigree studies focused on a subject’s perceived inability to adhere to the gendered labor of the household, whereby the mother cared for the children and kept the house tidy and the father supported the family through his labors outside the home.

A. **The Diagnostic Moment: Classifying Feeble-mindedness**

By the end of the nineteenth century, eugenicists and other scientists studying what we now refer to as intellectual disability in the United States had adopted the term “feeble-minded” to describe individuals who were intellectually subpar or somehow aberrant in their appearance or behavior. In 1893, Walter E. Fernald – superintendent of the Massachusetts School for the Feeble-Minded – described the broad and somewhat confusing nature of the term:

Modern usage has sanctioned the use of the term “feeble-minded” to include all degrees and types of congenital defect, from that of the simply backward boy or girl but little below the normal standard of intelligence to the profound idiot, a helpless, speechless, disgusting burden, with every degree of deficiency between these extremes. The lack may be so slight as to involve only the ability to

properly decide questions of social propriety or conduct, or simply questions of morality, or it may profoundly affect every faculty.¹⁸²

Due in part to this confusion, Martin W. Barr, M.D. – chief physician of the Pennsylvania Training School for Feeble-Minded Children in Elwyn – published a treatise on mental defect. His 1904 book, *Mental Defectives: Their History, Treatment and Training*, explored the classification of various types and degrees of mental defect as well as proposed new methods of diagnosis and detection.¹⁸³ He explained that in the United States, the term “feeble-minded” had become the general term used to denote “every form of mental defect.”¹⁸⁴ In professional and scientific circles during the first decade of the twentieth century, however, Barr stated that eugenicists used the terms “idiot” and “imbecile” to differentiate between various degrees of feeble-mindedness.

Barr described these degrees as such:

The word **idiot** is derived from the Greek ... “a private person,” or ... “peculiar” – i.e. a person devoid of understanding from birth – incapable of holding communication with another, therefore set apart – alone.

The term **imbecile** is taken from the Latin imbecillis – *in* and *bacillum*, as “needing a staff;” or *in vacillo*, “tottering,” “wanting strength of mind,” “weak and feeble;” expressive of a certain degree of intelligence, but unstable, incapable, irresponsible.

The idiot intelligently sees nothing, feels nothing, hears nothing, does nothing, and knows nothing. He simply lives alone – the solitary one.

The imbecile, on the other hand, is able to see, to understand, and to discriminate in greater or less degree.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² WEF, “The History and Treatment of the Feeble-minded,” *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, Chicago 8-11 June 1893*. Ed. Isabel C. Barrows (Boston: Press of George H. Ellis, 1893): 213.

¹⁸³ Martin W. Barr, *Mental Defectives: Their History, Treatment and Training* (Philadelphia: P. Blackiston’s Sons & Co., 1904).

¹⁸⁴ Barr, *Mental Defectives* 1904: 18.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* Original emphasis.

Barr set out to distinguish degrees of feeble-mindedness and the various approaches to treating each degree. In short, idiots represented the lowest form of mental defect and required life-long care, preferably in an institution. “There, whether excitable or apathetic, we place him, and can study him...and we can make the public understand that...he is absolutely untrainable, often unimprovable.”¹⁸⁶ Imbeciles, on the other hand, could be trained, but needed protection “from ignorance and vice.”¹⁸⁷

In 1906, psychologist Henry H. Goddard began collecting as much data as possible from the children housed at the Training School with the hopes of discovering signs and causes of feeble-mindedness as well as any means of possible prevention. In November of 1906, shortly after Goddard’s appointment as Director of Research, *The Training School Bulletin* stated their practice of dividing feeble-minded children into the following eight classes based on the level of productivity each child could be expected to attain:

1. Those who are unimprovable, unable to help themselves or look after their personal habits.
2. Those who may be taught to help themselves only in the simplest ways, feed themselves, walk in line properly, etc.
3. Those who may be trained in a very limited degree to help others.
4. Those who may learn the simplest, industrial occupations, - to wheel, shovel, gather up leaves, etc.
5. Those who learn to farm and do garden work or the simpler lines of manual training.
6. Those who do a good grade of manual work, weaving baskets, mats, etc. – and very elementary mental work.
7. The highest grade of the feeble-minded – those who do fine manual work, tables, chairs, etc., and a good grade of reading, writing, etc.
8. Those who are merely backward. The processes of their minds are normal, but they are so near the border line (sic) that any over-stimulation or excitement would cause defectiveness. Under proper environment they will

¹⁸⁶ Martin W. Barr, “Classification of Mental Defectives” *Journal of Psycho-Asthenics* IX, no. 2 (December 1904): 37.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

continue to advance indefinitely. Their faculties are all present, but some are partly or entirely dormant.¹⁸⁸

As I explored in Chapter II, then, eugenicists in the United States based degrees of feeble-mindedness on one's productive functioning, specifically as it related to educability and labor. This division served the interests of the institution, because it was a way to create a labor economy within the walls of the Training School.¹⁸⁹ The fieldwork program utilized this existing division to aid in its diagnosis of individuals they visited in the community.

In his 1911 book, *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics*, Charles B. Davenport addressed the state of eugenic diagnosis and the difficulties inherent in classifying individuals as feeble-minded or normal. He called attention to the "vague and even false" nature of classifications as evidenced by the lack of a standardized definition of feeble-mindedness or method of diagnosis.¹⁹⁰ He continued, alluding to the different approaches of scientists within the multi-disciplinary field of eugenics:

one expert will define a feeble-minded person as one incapable of protecting his life against the ordinary hazard of civilization, but this is very vague and the test is constantly changing. For a person may be quick-witted enough to avoid being run over by a horse and carriage but not quick enough to escape an automobile. A second expert will define a feeble-minded person as one who cannot meet all (save two) of the Binet test for three years below his own; if he fail and only one he is no longer feeble-minded. But this definition seems to me socially insufficient just because there are moral imbeciles who can answer all but the moral question for their proper age. Every attempt to classify persons into a limited number of mental categories ends unsatisfactorily.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ "Classification." *The Training School Bulletin* 1, no. 33 (November 1906).

¹⁸⁹ See James W. Trent, Jr., *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) for more information on the labor economy of institutions in the United States.

¹⁹⁰ CBD, *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics*. Reprint ed. [original copyright, 1911], (New York: Arno Press, 1972): 8.

¹⁹¹ Davenport 1972: 8-9.

In the quote above, Davenport revealed the subjectivity of the diagnostic process, emphasizing its relativity and transitive nature. What may prove as aberrant in one setting may not in others or by other observers making the diagnosis. Nevertheless, Davenport, Goddard, and other eugenicists in the United States during the early twentieth century sought out other, more objective and standardized means of diagnosis.

1. The Binet-Simon Measuring Scale for Intelligence

In 1909, Goddard expressed his dissatisfaction with the classification system employed by the Training School and other institutions in the United States because it was based on one's "trainability" and because of the extensive time and energy it took to diagnose individuals suspected of being feebleminded. According to him, in order to diagnose correctly within the extant system, an individual needed to be observed for an extended period of time, which was not ideal or even always possible. In addition, one's "trainability" was a subjective measure, according to Goddard, which relied on an often false assumption that the given training was "the best possible," giving the child "a fair chance."¹⁹²

Goddard found his ideal measure in the Binet Scale. Alfred Binet was a well-known experimental psychologist based at the Sorbonne in Paris. Together with French psychologist, Theodore Simon, Binet studied issues of intellectual development and educability. In 1906, Binet published a questionnaire designed to measure intelligence levels in children.¹⁹³ By 1908, Binet had already revised his questionnaire along with Simon, supplying a range of tests, standardized for average children of varying ages. Although this questionnaire was not received well by his colleagues, Goddard decided to test them out for himself after returning to the

¹⁹² HHG, "Suggestions for a Prognostical Classification of Mental Defectives." *JPA* XIV, no. 1 (September 1909): 48-54.

¹⁹³ See Zenderland 1998: 94-98.

Training School from a tour of Europe in 1908.¹⁹⁴ Having decided that “a classification of our children based on the Scale agreed with the Institution experience,”¹⁹⁵ Goddard published his translation of this test in January, 1910 in *The Training School Bulletin*.¹⁹⁶

The 1910 Binet scale¹⁹⁷ included tests that could determine an individual’s mental age if it was between three and thirteen years. Because an individual’s mental age did not necessarily correspond with his/her chronological age, the test proved necessary to determine how far behind or ahead of the normal curve an individual’s mental capacity and intelligence might be. Alfred Binet originally intended his scale to serve as a guide for institution workers and teachers, who could use the tests to gauge their patients or students and adjust treatment or educational plans accordingly.¹⁹⁸ The tests were broken down according to various mental ages, under which age-appropriate questions and tasks – as decided by Binet – were posed to the individual being tested. A person would grade the highest age for which s/he correctly answered all questions save one. For example, if a subject correctly answered all of the questions but one for someone with a mental age of 9, s/he would move on to the next level until s/he erred on more than one test. If that same subject failed two questions in the section for someone with a mental age of 11, s/he would be graded with a mental age of 10.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ Zenderland 1998: 93.

¹⁹⁵ Qtd. in Zenderland 1998: 98. See also Henry H. Goddard, “Four Hundred Feeble-Minded Children Classified by the Binet Method.” *JPA* 15, no. 1-2 (1910): 17-29.

¹⁹⁶ HHG, “Binet’s Measuring Scale for Intelligence.” *The Training School* 6, no. 11 (January 1910): 3-11.

¹⁹⁷ Despite their earlier collaboration, Simon’s name was not added to the scale until the third revision in 1911. No reason is given for the former omission or later addition of Simon’s name. HHG, *The Binet-Simon Measuring Scale for Intelligence* (Vineland: The Training School, 1911).

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Zenderland 1998; Trent 1994; Snyder and Mitchell 2006.

¹⁹⁹ Goddard “Binet’s Measuring” 1910: 4.

Questions were posed in the following format – as taken from the section for someone with a mental age of 3.

1. Where is your nose? Your eyes? Your mouth? One of the best signs of awakening intelligence in young children is the comprehension of spoken words. We test this by asking these questions which can be answered by a gesture.
2. Repetition of sentences of six syllables. *It rains. I am hungry.* Experiment proves that it is easier for a child to repeat words than to speak a word on his own. If a child does not respond one may try him with two syllables (“*mama*”) then four, etc. A child of three repeats six syllables but not ten. There must not be a single error.
3. Repetition of Figures “6-4.” A child of three can repeat two figures. Figures require closer attention than words because they mean nothing to him. Pronounce the figures distinctly, one-half second apart and without emphasis on any one figure.
4. Describing Pictures. A picture is shown to the child with the question, “*What do you see?*” The pictures must be chosen with some care. Each one must represent some *people* and a *situation*. Binet uses three pictures. The first is a man and a boy drawing a cart loaded with furniture. The second, a woman and an old man sitting on a bench in a park in winter. The third a man in prison looking out of the window; a couch, chair and tables. A child of three names the things – enumerates. He does not describe any actions in the pictures.
5. Name of the Family. All children of three know their *first* name. They sometimes know the *family name* but not always.²⁰⁰

Between 1908 and 1910, Goddard applied his translation of the test to the more than 400 children housed at the Training School, using it to assign a mental age to each child at the Training School. Further, he introduced the term “moron” to describe the highest grade of feeble-mindedness.²⁰¹ Goddard defined the various grades of feeble-mindedness into the following, more precise categories: idiot, imbecile, and moron. According to Goddard, an idiot

²⁰⁰ Ibid; original emphasis.

²⁰¹ Goddard “Four Hundred” 1910: 27. Goddard did eventually perform the IQ test on individuals outside his institutions, most notably immigrants and soldiers. He did this both to determine what percentage of people entering and fighting for the country were actually feeble-minded, and therefore to alert politicians and the military of the dangers of feeble-mindedness and the importance of IQ testing to ensure that such individuals would not be allowed past national borders or to fight on behalf of their country. For more, see Zenderland 1998: 261-30.

achieved a mental age of 0-2 years, an imbecile 2-7 years, and a moron 8-12 years.²⁰² In terms of functioning and labor, the three degrees of (intellectual) feeble-mindedness could be broken down as follows: the idiot was “utterly helpless and dependent,”²⁰³ not even capable of self-preservation without assistance. The imbecile was capable of simple menial work or manual work, but needed to be under “constant supervision.”²⁰⁴ Finally, the high-grade moron could be trained to work independently, but functioned at a level that was not competitive with normal individuals.²⁰⁵

According to Goddard’s interpretation, the Binet test was fair and objective in its examination of intellect because it removed one’s access to training from the variable set. The Binet test utilized “only those things as tests which are not usually taught to children but which they acquire more or less unconsciously.”²⁰⁶ As such, it purportedly could test one’s capacity for learning as well as one’s current mental age. Unlike Binet who used the test as a measure to determine the areas of specialized training individuals needed to improve their intelligence, Goddard utilized the test to diagnose, creating a mental plateau that a feeble-minded individual could never surpass.²⁰⁷ As a result, as Sharon Snyder and David T. Mitchell have argued, “IQ testing provided the critical assessment tool that gave birth to the modern eugenics movement,

²⁰² Goddard “Four Hundred” 1910: 26-27.

²⁰³ Qtd. in Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006): 81-82.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Goddard “Binet’s Measuring,” 1910: 3.

²⁰⁷ Goddard 1912.

for the identification of ‘defective persons’ relied upon the establishment of a measurable baseline that separated normal from subnormal human actors.”²⁰⁸

Still, the Binet test was not as objective as Goddard insisted. While the Binet test might have excluded academically-learned or practical knowledge, it still relied heavily on socialized knowledge that immigrants or individuals from lower-class backgrounds might not share. The best example of the bias inherent in the Binet test occurred within the section for a mental age of six years. Question Three within this section consisted of an “Esthetic (sic) Comparison.”

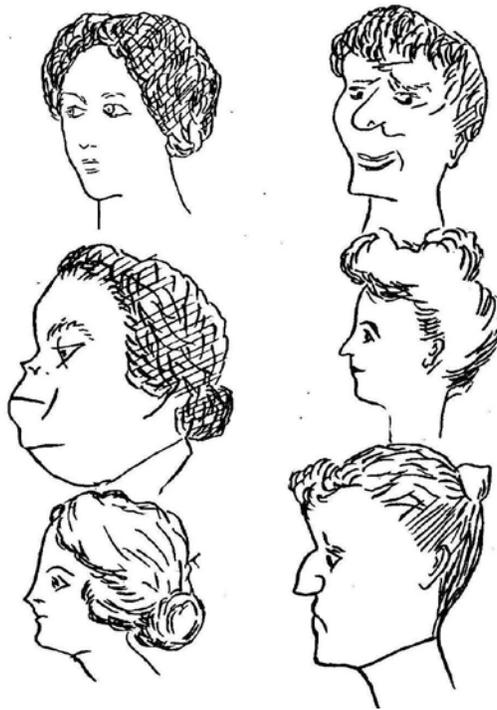


Figure 1: “Esthetic Comparison” Binet Test, Age 6, No. 3

²⁰⁸ Snyder and Mitchell 2006: 72. See also Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985): 77-84.

In this test, there are three drawings of women, in three pairs, one of which is “pretty and the other ugly or deformed.” The individuals had to compare the two drawings and determine “which is the prettier.”²⁰⁹ According to Binet, an individual with a mental age of six could answer each correctly, but an individual with a mental age of five would only choose correctly about “half of the time.”²¹⁰

Neither Binet nor Goddard referenced physiognomy in their construction and translation of the Binet Scale; however one glance at the above drawings reveals the upper-class, white, Western European standards of feminine beauty informing their construction.²¹¹ As I mentioned above, the eugenic definition of feeble-mindedness included what we would consider physical, intellectual, sensory and psychiatric disabilities today. The physical and mental were inextricably linked for eugenicists in the United States during the early twentieth century. Drawing from a physiognomic tradition, eugenicists treated physical aberrances or defects as “stigmata of degeneration,”²¹² which would, in turn, alert the researcher or field worker to the presence of internal mental defect. This would call for intelligence testing when possible to verify, or would simply serve as proof of feeble-mindedness.

²⁰⁹ Goddard “Binet’s Measuring” 1910: 5.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ The science of physiognomy emerged in the late eighteenth century and consisted of the interpretation of external physical features as markers of personal characteristics. Although most scholars argue that physiognomy was discredited as pseudo-science by the end of the nineteenth century, the rise of scientific theories regarding evolution, physiology and eugenics during this time retained certain facets of physiognomic thought. For more information on the history of physiognomy, see Lucy Hartley, *Physiognomy and the Meaning of Expression in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 99.

²¹² HHG, “The Height and Weight of Feeble-Minded Children in American Institutions,” *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 39, no. 4 (April 1912): 217. See also, Snyder and Mitchell 2006.

The drawings in the Esthetic Comparison reveal some of the physiognomic stigmata for which eugenicists were on the lookout. For example,

aquiline noses in Caucasians belonged to the elite and professional classes, whereas stubbed (pug) or upturned noses symbolized the degraded working class. Features such as sunken cheeks or prominent cheekbones, small eyes, short noses, prominent lower lips, and poor posture – [were] all attributed to the lower, “less sanitary,” and “criminal” classes.²¹³

In the first pair, the woman on the left has a symmetrical, proportional face, marking her beauty, while the woman on the right has a large nose, prominent cheekbones and lips, as well as asymmetrical eyes – marking her as deviant. The second set reveals similar markers with the woman on the left having an upturned nose and protruding jaw, while the woman on the right evidences perfect posture and unremarkable, proportional features. Finally, the supposed “ugly” woman in the third set holds a down-turned mouth, a large, dominant nose, a protruding forehead, and small eyes. A child who could not recognize such aesthetic norms and choose correctly revealed to Goddard and his field workers his/her low mentality.

In her 1913 study of “The Pineys,” a deviant family from the Pine Barrens in New Jersey, one of Goddard’s field workers, Elizabeth S. Kite, completed the Binet test with some of the individuals she diagnosed. After posing Question Three’s “Esthetic Comparison” to one of the adult women interviewed, Kite wrote the following of “Beckie”:

When shown a collection of human figures, in all of which some prominent anatomical feature was lacking, arms, eye, nose or mouth, Beckie could see nothing wrong. A Mulatto girl serving a term in jail, who was listening, was much annoyed at this and said with irritation, “Can’t ye see that woman ain’t got no mouth?” Beckie, still gazing at the picture, protested she could not see.”²¹⁴

²¹³ Sandy Sufian, “Anatomy of the 1936-39 Revolt: Images of the Body in Political Cartoons of Mandatory Palestine,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 37, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 25. See also, Mary Cowling, *The Artist as Anthropologist: The Representation of Type and Character in Victorian Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

²¹⁴ ESK, “The Pineys (1913).” In Nicole Hahn Rafters (ed.), *White Trash: The Eugenic Family Studies, 1877-1919*. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988): 179-180.

Kite's observation is interesting for two reasons. First, she documents that one's ability or inability to recognize which pictures were those of the "prettier" (i.e. normal) person reflected his/her lower mental status. Further, that a "Mulatto" girl in the vicinity of Beckie and Kite noted the difference that Beckie could not, spoke volumes in this analysis, because it further separated Beckie from the boundary of normal. Being of "mixed blood," an individual with heritage from both white and non-white heritages were labeled deviant and inferior in eugenic terms. That an individual from such a background could notice these differences, but a poor, white girl could not emphasized the feeble-mindedness of the latter.

Goddard insisted that the standards of beauty offered in the "Esthetic Comparison" were passed unconsciously from one generation to the next and a child of a mental age of six should be able to recognize the beautiful versus the ugly or deformed.²¹⁵ Goddard stressed the need for intelligence testing because of his belief that many high-grade feeble-minded individuals went undetected due to their invisibility and ability to pass as normal within society. Unlike individuals in the lower grades (idiots and imbeciles), who Binet stressed were often identifiable through physical and pedagogical defects, Carlson argued, "the moron [was] the most difficult to diagnose by virtue of the invisibility of symptoms, hence the importance of the psychological method (the intelligence tests)."²¹⁶

Despite Goddard's affinity for the Binet-Simon Intelligence scale and its use within the institution, it proved difficult to utilize outside institutional walls, where he and other eugenic field workers were employed to ascertain the presence of feeble-mindedness in the community. The eugenic field workers rarely had the time or the resources to administer the Binet method or any other standardized test to each person they visited and instead compiled eugenic pedigrees.

²¹⁵ Goddard "Binet's Measuring" 1910: 5.

²¹⁶ Carlson 2010: 47-48.

Because feeble-mindedness was considered hereditary in nature, family histories could aid field workers who didn't have access to the intelligence tests in confirming "the presence of the invisible cause (bad blood) and the invisible defect (low intelligence)."²¹⁷ Compiling pedigree charts, therefore, became the preferred method of making the invisible menace of high-grade feeble-mindedness visible between 1910 and 1924.

2. Charting the Feeble-Mind: Eugenic Family Studies and the Pedigree Method

In 1869, British scientist and statistician, Francis Galton (1822-1911), published the first eugenic pedigree study entitled, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences*.²¹⁸ In this study, Galton charted the accomplishments of hundreds of British men of elite status as a means of demonstrating that one's natural abilities such as intellect and talent were inherited like physical characteristics.²¹⁹ In doing so, Galton hoped to encourage individuals to pay greater attention when choosing their mates, as – he argued – “it would be quite practicable to produce a highly-gifted race of men by judicious marriages during several consecutive generations.”²²⁰ While Galton paved the way for future eugenic pedigree studies, he was limited by a lack of primary access to the individuals he charted (most of Galton's evidence derived from questionnaires and published biographies of eminent men) and did not have much knowledge regarding genetic inheritance, specifically Mendel's Theory of Inheritance, which influenced later eugenic pedigrees.²²¹

²¹⁷ Carlson 2010: 49.

²¹⁸ Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences* Orig. pub. 1869. (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2001).

²¹⁹ Galton 2001: 45.

²²⁰ Ibid.

Mendel's Theory of Inheritance proved influential to eugenicists in the United States, especially biologist Charles B. Davenport (1866-1944). Family pedigrees conducted at the ERO, the Training School, and other collaborating institutions followed the trend of Galton's earlier research. The pedigrees featured an in-depth study of one specific trait such as feeble-mindedness so that an adequate analysis could be made regarding the inheritance of that characteristic. In doing so, Davenport stated, one would be able to infer the genetic makeup of each person charted as well as that of entire family lines.²²² In addition, one would be better able to predict the "characteristics of the generations yet unborn, and would, indeed, aid in bringing about better matings (sic)."²²³ Davenport encouraged all families of "good stock" to submit their own pedigrees to the ERO, which would serve as a clearinghouse for data on heredity.²²⁴ Unlike Galton, eugenic field workers focused their research on families of "bad stock," and examined the inheritance of negative characteristics such as criminality, insanity, and feeble-mindedness.

The ERO and the Training School, along with other institutions, agreed to adopt the charting method devised at a 1910 committee meeting of the American Association for the Study of the Feeble-Minded (AASFM).²²⁵ Founded in 1876 the AASFM, of which Davenport,

²²¹ For more information on Mendel's Theory of Inheritance, see Chapter II. See also, Stephan Jay Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002): 418-426; Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985); Garland E. Allen, "The Eugenics Record Office at Cold Spring Harbor, 1910-1940: An Essay in Institutional History," *Osiris* 2 (1986): 225-264.

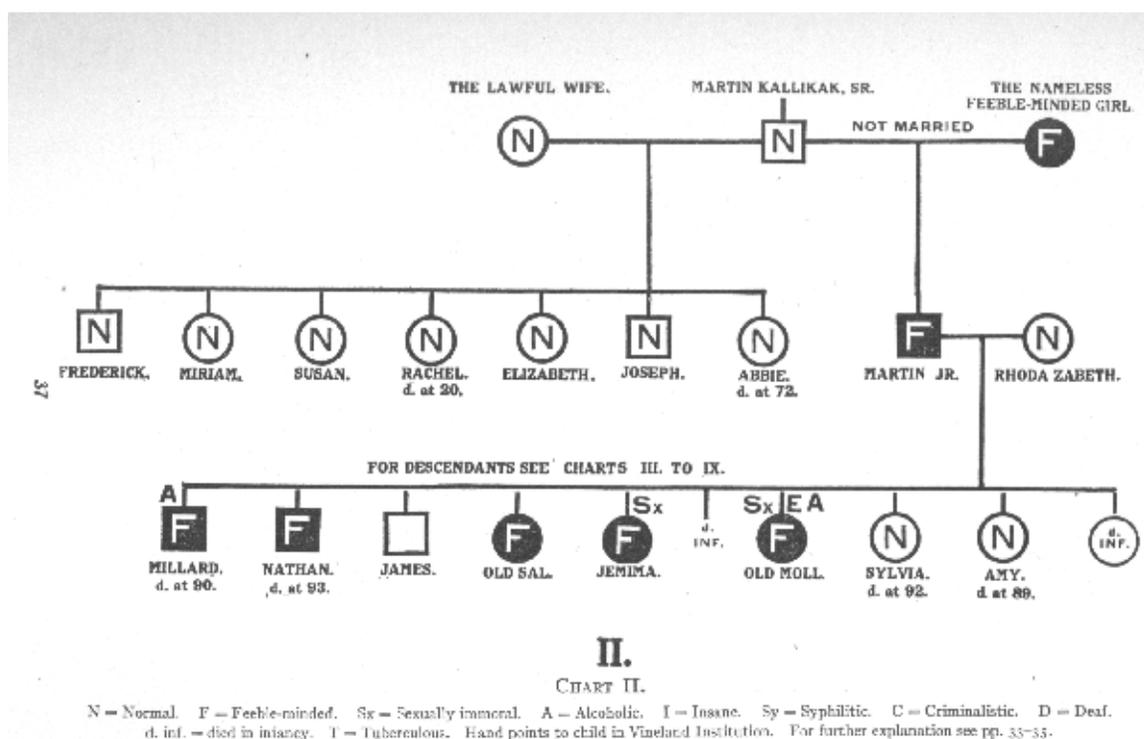
²²² Davenport 1972.

²²³ Davenport 1972: 240-241.

²²⁴ Carnegie Institution of Washington, "Extract from the Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee on January 11, 1918." In CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series, "ERO-History and Development."

²²⁵ Davenport et al. 1911: 1-3. In 1876, a group of American Physicians formed the Association of Medical Officers of American Institutions for Idiotic and Feeble-Minded Persons. The Association met annually and in 1896 created the *Journal of Psycho-Asthenics* as a means of disseminating their research. In 1906, the Association changed their name to the American Association for the Study of the Feeble-Minded. Members of the AASFM included Davenport, Fernald, Goddard, David Starr Jordan (chancellor of Stanford University), as well as most

Fernald, and Goddard were members, was an organization devoted to the discussion of “all questions related to the causes, conditions, and statistics of idiocy, and to the management, training, and education of idiots and feeble-minded persons.”²²⁶ Following the plan devised in 1910, the general chart field workers compiled looked as follows, marking the various points at which feeble-mindedness existed in each family and how it was passed from one generation to the next:



institutional superintendents. For more information on this Association, see Zenderland 1998: 74-75. See also, G.E. Milligan, “History of the American Association on Mental Deficiency,” *American Journal of Mental Deficiency* 66 (1961): 357-369.

²²⁶ Article II, Constitution of the Association of Medical Officers of American Institutions of Idiotic and Feeble-minded Children, passed June 7, 1876 (In 1900, the name was changed from the above to the American Association for the Study of Feeble-Mindedness). Qtd. in Steven Noll and James W. Trent Jr., “Introduction.” In Steven Noll and James W. Trent Jr. (eds.), *Mental Retardation in America: A Historical Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2004): 10.

Figure 2: Chart II – Martin Sr.’s Children and Grandchildren (1912)²²⁷

When charting a pedigree, the field worker assigned an “N” or an “F” to each individual s/he observed, to designate a diagnosis of normal or feebleminded. In addition, if other conditions were present, the field worker placed a letter inside or around the individual’s symbol designating that condition (e.g. A: alcoholic; B: blind; C: criminalistic; D: deaf; E: epileptic; I: insane; S or Sy: syphilitic; Sx: sexually immoral).²²⁸ An accompanying report included descriptions of all individuals observed, and had to contain at least the following information:

1. name (including maiden name of all married women); 2. sex; 3. date of birth; 4. place of birth...5. if dead, date of death or age at death approximately; 6. cause of death; 7. place of death; 8. if immigrant, date of immigration (steamship and port of entry where possible); 9. mental and physical condition of each person; 10. if married, a description with full name of consort, or of consorts; if married more than once, of the children and of the consort’s parents; 11. occupations, whenever possible; 12. a general description of the home influences, environment and education; 13. for each family, the sources of information.²²⁹

The purpose of this description was to gather as much information as possible on each individual and their family members, so that field workers could continue tracing the family history as far back as possible. Each field worker submitted a draft report and pedigree chart to their supervising institution after visiting an individual or family under investigation.²³⁰

It is important to note that Davenport’s understanding of heredity was very different from our contemporary understanding of genetics. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, scientific explanations of heredity maintained that traits could be passed on to offspring, not only in a direct manner (e.g. a blind father might have a blind child), but also in an

²²⁷ Chart 2 from Henry H. Goddard, *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness* (New York: Macmillan, 1912). Chart available online at: <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Goddard/chart2.gif>

²²⁸ CBD, HHL, David F. Weeks, Edward R. Johnstone, and HHG, “The Study of Human Heredity,” *Eugenics Record Office Bulletin* 2 (1911): 4.

²²⁹ Davenport et al. 1911: 6-7.

²³⁰ “Directions for the Guidance of Field Workers.” In CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series, “ERO-Field Workers.”

indirect way (e.g. a blind father might have a deaf, imbecilic, or insane child). Therefore, each trait was representative of a broader hereditary “germ,” symbolized by the “F” in the pedigrees.²³¹ For example, in 1912 Fernald wrote:

The modern intensive study of the family trees of individual degenerates, the insane, epileptics, criminals, prostitutes, hereditary paupers and feeble-minded has emphasized the fact that these various conditions of degeneracy are often merely different phases or expressions of the same fundamental inferiority...the form of defect varies from generation to generation.²³²

The two most important factors of heredity for eugenicists in the United States, however, were the notions that, first, “*two mentally defective persons will produce only mentally defective offspring*. This is the first law of inheritance of mental ability.”²³³ In Mendelian terms, feeble-mindedness was a recessive trait. Therefore, to be feeble-minded, one had to have received this trait from both the mother and the father to make it homozygous recessive. Secondly, because feeble-mindedness was considered a recessive trait, a “normal” person could still be a carrier of the feeble-minded trait, and was, therefore, a danger to the national gene pool. The pedigree method became necessary in the field, therefore, to determine the likelihood that individuals with the feeble-minded trait were either heterozygous or homozygous and therefore assess their relative threat to the national gene pool. Further, it allowed for identification of individuals who were heterozygous and would otherwise go unnoticed, even with the Binet test.

A typical picture of a eugenically deviant family appears in Kite’s 1913 study on “The Pineys.”²³⁴ In this study, Kite described a subset of the “Dink” family as such:

²³¹ For more information on genetic theory of this period, see Gould 2002; Kevles 1985.

²³² WEF, “The Burden of Feeble-Mindedness.” *JPA* 17, no 3. (1912): 87-111.

²³³ Davenport 1972: 66-67; emphasis in original.

²³⁴ ESK, “The Pineys.” *The Survey* 21, no. 1 (October 4, 1913): 7-13, 38-40. Also in Nicole Hahn Rafter (ed.), *White Trash: The Eugenic Family Studies, 1877-1919* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988): 164-184.

They lived in a shack in the woods on the edge of a cranberry bog and there were five feeble-minded children whose paternal parentage was very uncertain. “Sammy boy” like “Joe boy” was too lazy to work and what his wife did not earn she begged. There were rumors that his shack was a rendezvous for men and that Sammy drew quite an income from their visits. Suse, his wife, was an energetic, sharp-tongued, shrill-voiced woman, with black hair, sparkling black eyes, a finely shaped oval face, and dark gypsy coloring. The freedom of her life gave strength and vigor to her limbs and a rosy coloring to her cheeks...she was a wild, almost graceful creature that seemed the genius of the place. Only when togged out in the forlorn cast-offs of civilization could one see how coarse and vulgar she was.²³⁵

The pedigree studies’ focus on deviant *families* marked gender and sexuality as primary to this diagnosis of feeble-mindedness.

Kite questioned the gendered behaviors and sexual practices of the “Dink” family, especially that of the mother, Suse. In the above passage, Kite referenced “five feeble-minded children of uncertain paternal parentage.” She did not elaborate on how she came to the conclusion that the children were feeble-minded, but did mention rumors that Sammy Dink opened his home to strange men and prostituted his wife, which for eugenicists was proof positive of both Suse’s and Sammy’s feeble-mindedness. In March of 1912, Fernald wrote the following on the relationship of idleness, prostitution, and feeble-mindedness:

The feeble-minded are a parasitic, predatory class, never capable of self-support or of managing their own affairs, the great majority ultimately becoming public charges in some form. They cause unutterable sorrow at home and are a menace and a danger to the community. Feeble-minded women are almost invariably immoral, and if at large usually become carriers of venereal disease or give birth to children who are as defective as themselves. The feeble-minded woman who marries is twice as prolific as the normal woman.²³⁶

The expression of the feeble-minded trait, therefore, became gendered in such a way that associated male feeble-mindedness with laziness and pauperism, and female feeble-mindedness with sexual “immorality” (that is, prostitution and sex outside of marriage) and high fecundity.

²³⁵ Kite 1913. In Rafter 1988: 175.

²³⁶ Fernald 1912: 90-91.

As Chapter II relates, U.S. eugenicists disproportionately targeted women because they held the power to have children who could either strengthen or threaten the national gene pool.²³⁷ Men were not exempt from the eugenic gaze, however. In 1908, J.T. Searcy – psychiatrist and superintendent of the Alabama Insane Asylum at Tuscaloosa – wrote the following on the divided psychic abilities of men and women and how this translated into the division of labor within the home.

The mother's psychic department by reason of her sex, is specialized for maternal work, and, when naturally occupied, she has neither the time nor the qualifications for obtaining, from among the competitions of her environment, the necessaries of life for herself and her children. They ought to be provided for her. The psychic department of the father...is more specialized for combative, competitive, aggressive, digressive work. He ought to provide for his family.²³⁸

In the case of the Dink family, then, it was Sammy's refusal to work and provide for his family that led to Suse's begging and prostitution. By mentioning Sammy's role in the possible prostitution, Kite shifted her blame of the children's unknown parentage from solely on Suse Dink to both parties for not adhering to their appropriate gender roles of husband/father and wife/mother. This idleness on the part of Sammy and the prostitution of Suse, then, became a symptom of feeble-mindedness in the Dink family, which, in turn, caused their impoverishment.

Searcy elaborated on the relationship between eugenics, the strength of a race, and heteronormative behaviors of the household, stating:

Those races do best by whom these mental characteristics of the sexes are most respected. They are strongly involved in the principles of monogamous matrimony...The conservation of the family, always judged a most desirable social object, is, of course, best obtained by strict compliance with monogamic

²³⁷See Chapter II for more information on this increased focus on feeble-minded women. Also see Anna Stubblefield, "'Beyond the Pale': Tainted Whiteness, Cognitive Disability, and Eugenic Sterilization," *Hypatia* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 162-181; Edward J. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

²³⁸J.T. Searcy, "Heredity: An Allegory," *Insane and Epileptic: Report of Committee* (1908): 297-298. Smith Ely Jelliffe Collection.

principles. Father and mother should jointly devote themselves to their children. With a strong instinctive sense for the safety and maintenance of themselves and their children, the mothers of the land are always the most strenuous advocates for the principles of monogamy.²³⁹

During the early twentieth century, western European standards of “femininity” placed women at the moral center of their families, and when feminine and masculine roles expanded into the public sphere, they became responsible for maintaining the moral center of the nation.²⁴⁰

Engaging in immoral or illegal behavior such as sex outside of marriage or prostitution was not the only way a woman could reveal her alleged deficiency. In *The Kallikak Family*, Goddard diagnosed one family as feeble-minded based solely on the apparent disarray of the house:

The woman at the head of this house was an imbecile. In one arm she held a frightful looking baby, while she had another by the hand. Vermin were visible all over her. In the room were a few chairs and a bed, the latter without any washable covering and filthy beyond description. There was no fire, and both mother and babies were thinly clad. They did not shiver, however, nor seem to mind. The oldest girl, a vulgar, repulsive creature of fifteen, came into the room and stood looking at the stranger. She had somehow managed to live. All the rest of the children, except the two that the mother was carrying, had died in infancy.²⁴¹

A mother’s inability to bear and raise healthy, beautiful children and keep her home clean and free of vermin revealed her feeble-mindedness to Goddard and other eugenicists in the United States. They did not agree with the belief common among social reformers at this time that by improving social and environmental conditions, poor families could be rehabilitated. Goddard specifically addressed this “false” expectation of reformers, stating, “mentally defective

²³⁹ Searcy 1908: 298.

²⁴⁰ I explore this further in Chapter IV.

²⁴¹ Goddard *The Kallikak Family* 1912: 73-74.

people...can never be taught to live otherwise than as they have been living.”²⁴² Therefore, for eugenic field workers, finding a family living in filth became evidence of a family’s feeble-mindedness, as opposed to a sign of a social problem or class inequality.

In her analysis of the Dink family, Kite continued, describing the 23-year-old, “Beckie Dink,” as such:

Well-formed, robust, healthy looking and bearing no stigma of degeneracy, unless it be a rather flat head, low forehead, and protruding lower jaw. She is fairly clean in her personal habits, is conscious of the value of pretty clothes and likes to look well, also likes what she calls a good time. She can do all sorts of coarse work, and occasionally is willing, but left to herself her idea of housekeeping seems to consist in preparing some sort of food, clearing up the dishes, sweeping the dirt under the stove or just outside the door after which she sits and rocks herself or walks the streets or the road smiling at every one (sic).²⁴³

The eugenic family studies focused on the “high-grade” feeble-minded (imbeciles and morons) because due to their invisibility, eugenicists felt they needed to be rooted out from the community. Because they often appeared normal to the untrained observer, the high-grade feeble-minded posed the greatest threat according to Goddard, Davenport, and other eugenicists in the United States because they could easily pass on the feeble-minded trait to future generations.

An examination of ERO family studies reveals similar trends with respect to eugenic diagnosis. For example, in 1913 ERO field worker V.P. Robinson submitted a description of “Elizabeth C.” for a family pedigree. It read:

Elizabeth C. b. 1888

Committed to Bedford from town of Saugerties on charge of impairing the morals of her children, Sept. 1912.

²⁴² Goddard *The Kallikak Family* 1912: 70-71.

²⁴³ Kite 1913. In Rafter 1988: 177-178.

She is a tall, big-boned girl with an abundance of dark brown hair, prominent masculine features, and large conspicuous teeth, black with tartar.²⁴⁴

This brief description alerted researchers at the ERO to Elizabeth's institutional commitment for failing to fulfill her motherly duty of morally educating her children. Robinson did not specify exactly what Elizabeth did to impair her children's morals, but considering the social mores at the time and the concerns of eugenicists, it is likely that she and/or her children were involved in prostitution or another inappropriate sexual act.²⁴⁵ In her book, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom*, historian Wendy Kline argued that with the addition of the "moron" category, "the boundary between what was considered pathological (or backward) and what was considered normal (or modern) was scientifically reformulated on standards of morality."²⁴⁶ I argue this put acceptable gender notions at the center of the diagnostic moment, because of the higher morality standards expected of women as opposed to men in the early twentieth century.

In addition, Elizabeth had "prominent masculine features," according to Robinson, which further situated her outside the boundary of "normal" or "beautiful" women, as evidenced above in the Binet Simon Esthetic comparison. Robinson further noted that Elizabeth was "tall" and "big-boned." In 1912, Goddard published a study that examined height and weight differentials of feeble-minded children.²⁴⁷ In this study, he found that individuals of the lower feebleminded grades (idiots and imbeciles) were "consistently shorter" than and "inferior physically" to normal

²⁴⁴ V.P. Robinson, "The Curtiss Fuller Pedigree" (1913). In ERO papers, Series VII: Field Worker files, "Robinson, V.P."

²⁴⁵ C.f. Stubblefield 2007; Larson 1995.

²⁴⁶ Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001): 26.

²⁴⁷ HHG, "The Height and Weight of Feeble-Minded Children in American Institutions." *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 39, no. 4 (April 1912): 217-235.

children.²⁴⁸ However, this discrepancy almost disappeared in the moron case, and further, some morons were taller and larger in size than their normal counterparts.²⁴⁹ Goddard argued that this followed previous observations that the moron “does not differ in appearance from the normal boy or girl”²⁵⁰ (thus making them particularly dangerous). Elizabeth, on the other hand, clearly differed in appearance – according to Robinson. In her case, though, her abnormal height and weight seem to be more indicative of her aberrant femaleness than her intellectual capacity.²⁵¹

Further, Elizabeth revealed to Robinson that her “husband wouldn’t support her.”²⁵² Like in the case of Sammy and Suse Dink, Robinson attributed part of the responsibility of Elizabeth’s fate on a husband who was unable to fulfill his husbandly and fatherly duties. Robinson described John Fuller, Elizabeth’s husband as such:

Known as Joker, near on to 40 years of age took Elizabeth when she was 13 and soon after married her...It is said that John was good to Elizabeth at first and gave her a comfortable home. But she never took care of anything, he began to drink harder and things went from bad to worse. He drinks heavily and steadily now and is spoken of as a crazy fellow.²⁵³

Robinson’s description appears – at first glance – to blame Elizabeth’s feeble-mindedness on the relationship’s dissolution, alluding to the possibility that she had indeed tricked a normal suitor. Elizabeth was not able of fulfilling her wifely duties of caring for the home and this caused him to drink; however, her husband’s alcoholism and alleged “crazy” behavior, along with his

²⁴⁸ Goddard, “The Height and Weight,” 1912: 225-227.

²⁴⁹ Goddard, “The Height and Weight,” 1912: 224-229.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Robinson 1913.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid.

eventual abandonment of Elizabeth and their children, served to secure him a diagnosis of feeble-mindedness as well because of his failure to fulfill his husbandly and fatherly duties.

Robinson did have the opportunity to test Elizabeth's intelligence level using the Binet scale. At the time of the test, she was chronologically twenty-five years old. Robinson did not say anything about her performance on the test other than to say that she had a mental age of seven years, placing her just within the moron category.²⁵⁴ When possible, the combination of the Binet test and family visits seemed to U.S. eugenicists the best means for achieving an "accurate" diagnosis of feeble-mindedness.

B. **Diagnosing *The Kallikak Family*: A Complete Picture of the Feeble-minded**

The Kallikak Family, published in 1912, proved a landmark study in the diagnosis of feeble-mindedness both within the institution and in the field. It included the entire range of diagnostic tools available to eugenicists in the United States between 1897 and 1912, such as institutional and educational records, professional observation, standardized intelligence testing, and family pedigrees compiled through eugenic fieldwork. After two years of intensive fieldwork, Goddard and his field worker, Elizabeth S. Kite, were able to chart over 1000 individuals by tracking the immediate and extended relatives of the object of their initial investigation, Deborah Kallikak.²⁵⁵ Deborah Kallikak had been housed at the Training School

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ This is actually a pseudonym developed to both protect the identity of those involved in the study as well as to reflect the two branches of the family. The name, "Kallikak" was derived from the Greek words kalos (meaning good) and kakos (meaning bad), which represented the two branches of the family. Maintaining the confidentiality of the normal line of the family was of high importance for Kite and Goddard. In her research of the normal descendants, Kite came across a woman who had been compiling a genealogy of the family. This unnamed woman subsequently gave her research to Kite and provided corrections on Kite's own pedigree charts [Goddard, *The Kallikak Family*, 1912: 98-99.] No further notes are made about whether Kite and the other field workers obtained consent for the family histories they were collecting, but as I mention in Chapter Four, field workers rarely shared the true intentions for their visit, so any consent they did gather, was likely under false pretenses.

since November of 1897, and Goddard traced her ancestry back to her great, great, great grandfather, Martin Kallikak, Sr.

The Kallikak Family began with Deborah Kallikak, who was admitted to the Training School in November 1897 at eight years of age. She had been born in an almshouse and her mother, having married the father of a subsequent child, worried that Deborah had special needs, which prevented her from properly caring for Deborah at home.²⁵⁶ Upon Deborah's admission, the Training School made the following observations about her:

Average size and weight. No peculiarity in form or size of head. Staring expression. Jerking movement in walking. No bodily deformity. Mouth shut. Washes and dresses herself, except fastening clothes. Understands commands. Not very obedient. Knows a few letters. Cannot read nor count. Knows all the colors. Not fond of music. Power of memory poor. Listens well. Looks steadily. Good imitator. Can use a needle. Can carry wood and fill a kettle. Can throw a ball, but cannot catch. Sees and hears well. Right-handed. Excitable but not nervous. Not affectionate and quite noisy. Careless in dress. Active. Obstinate and destructive. Does not mind slapping and scolding. Grandmother somewhat deficient. Been to school. No results.²⁵⁷

This seemingly random list of observations regarding Deborah's appearance, behavior, and family history of deficiency revealed her status as an outsider. It documented an apparent gait disturbance, her disobedience, illiteracy, carelessness, destructive nature, and a grandmother with a questionable mental status.

In April 1910, Deborah was first tested with the Binet Scale. At this point, she was chronologically 21 years old; however, her test revealed a "mentality of a nine-year-old child with two points over,"²⁵⁸ placing her in the moron category. Goddard presented this in contrast to Deborah's teachers' reports of her progress, which described Deborah as such:

²⁵⁶ Goddard *The Kallikak Family*, 1912: 1.

²⁵⁷ Goddard *The Kallikak Family*, 1912: 2.

²⁵⁸ Goddard, *The Kallikak Family*, 1912: 10.

She is cheerful, inclined to be quarrelsome, very active and restless, very affectionate, willing, and tries; is quick and excitable, fairly good-tempered. Learns a new occupation quickly, but requires a half hour or twenty-four repetitions to learn four lines. Retains well what she has once learned. Needs close supervision. Is bold towards strangers, kind towards animals. Can run an electric sewing machine, cook, and do practically everything about the house. Has no noticeable defect... Very fond of children and good in helping care for them. Has a good sense of order and cleanliness.²⁵⁹

Goddard presented this description for two reasons: first, to document the ease at which the borderline feebleminded could often pass as normal, even to the professional observer. In the quote above, Deborah's teachers speak of her in a very positive light, documenting her ability to complete domestic tasks, and even mention that she "has no noticeable defect." Secondly, Goddard warns of the dangerous mindset of reformers who insist that the feebleminded can be taught to become self-sufficient. Deborah's ability to execute the "feminine" tasks of sewing, cooking, and cleaning up around the house was made possible, according to Goddard, only through her placement within the safe confines of institution in which she lived. He insisted that should she leave the Training School, Deborah would become pretty to the outside world, and "would lead a life that would be vicious, immoral, and criminal."²⁶⁰

In his book, *Inventing the Feeble Mind*, historian James W. Trent, Jr. showed that whereas earlier institutional models were rehabilitative in nature, by the early 1900s the training of institutionalized individuals was aimed not at teaching skills that would lead to the eventual release of an inmate back into society, but at "institutional adaptation."²⁶¹ Inmate labor in most institutions for the feebleminded throughout the United States relied on the same gendered labors that the feebleminded were supposedly unable to master. Feebleminded individuals were

²⁵⁹ Goddard, *The Kallikak Family*, 1912: 7-8.

²⁶⁰ Goddard, *The Kallikak Family*, 1912: 11-12.

²⁶¹ Carlson 2010: 44. See also Trent 1994.

institutionalized in part because of their failure to adhere to the gendered labors of the household, thereby preventing them from being productive members of society. And yet, institutions relied on their ability to complete such tasks, proving they were indeed capable of conforming to gender and sexual norms in a monitored environment. Carlson noted,

the female inmates were responsible for caring for more severely feeble-minded patients. While the men worked on the farm...and did manual labor, feeble-minded women learned basket weaving, sewing, nursing, and most importantly they cared for the low-grade idiots and imbeciles.²⁶²

Institutional labor during the early twentieth century became a means of keeping order in the institution and also provided a source of free labor that allowed the *institution not the individual* to become self-sufficient.²⁶³ Because of the level of importance placed on the genetic and financial well-being of the nation over individual therapies of its “burdensome” inmates, institutions around the United States became increasingly custodial in nature.²⁶⁴

While this may seem like a contradiction, Carlson argued that such contradictions have surrounded women with intellectual disabilities and their treatment in the United States throughout history. She stated,

the tension between these two portrayals is more than a function of the belief in the therapeutic benefits of institutionalization. It was not simply that feeble-minded women could lead worthwhile lives inside the protective facility. They were subjected to competing definitions of their very nature: on the one hand, they were inherently morally defective and the birth of an illegitimate child proved their feeble-mindedness. On the other hand, they were seen as able to properly care for children – presumably in a morally acceptable fashion – which is why they were employed within the institution. Paradoxically, the same women who had perverted the virtues of feminine purity and motherhood in the outside world were called on to use them within the walls of the institution.²⁶⁵

²⁶² Carlson 2010: 64.

²⁶³ C.f. Trent 1994; Fernald 1912; Bird T. Baldwin, “The Psychology of Mental Deficiency,” *The Popular Science Monthly* LXXIX (July – December 1911): 82-93.

²⁶⁴ Trent 1994: 104.

²⁶⁵ Carlson 2010: 65.

Although the high-grade feeble-minded woman was often institutionalized because of the danger she represented to the national gene pool, this did not negate her supposedly innate feminine and maternal instincts as long as she was externally controlled. Keeping her harnessed within the walls of the institution, however, allowed such instincts to flourish and controlled the deviant, sexual aspects while benefitting the institution and society at the same time.

Of the 1040 Kallikaks Kite eventually charted, Goddard and Kite diagnosed 262 of them as feeble-minded, 197 as normal, and 581 as undetermined.²⁶⁶ Goddard was quick to note that those labeled as undetermined should not be considered normal, but were labeled as such because they could not collect enough data on the individual in question to make a sufficient judgment. He continued, “they are people we can scarcely recognize as normal; frequently they are not what we would call good members of society. But it is very difficult to decide without more facts, whether the condition was...one of true feeble-mindedness.”²⁶⁷ This followed the general procedure for diagnosis outlined by Davenport, Laughlin, Goddard and their colleagues in 1911.²⁶⁸

The training materials did not heavily warn eugenic field workers against applying the diagnosis of “feeble-minded” too liberally to the individuals examined. The cautious application of a “normal” diagnosis, on the other hand, received more attention. In their 1911 bulletin, “The Study of Human Heredity: Methods of Collecting, Charting, and Analyzing Data,” Davenport and his colleagues asserted, “the term ‘normal’ should be used only to indicate that...the individual is believed on trustworthy evidence to be like most people. Normal is not to be

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Davenport et al 1911.

applied to persons simply because nothing is known to the contrary.”²⁶⁹ Normal was therefore not the default status attributed to monitored individuals and was only assigned if no evidence of feeble-mindedness arose or could possibly arise.

By 1912, the ERO had gone a step further – echoing Goddard – stating that readers of family studies should keep those labeled as “normal” under consideration. Specifically, eugenic field worker Florence Danielson and Davenport stated, “the term ‘normal’ ... as it is used in these descriptions is often applied to a person on the borderline, so that only a few of these ‘normals’ are clear cut, ordinary persons.”²⁷⁰ Their caution called attention to the number of “borderline” individuals caught between the category of feeble-minded and normal, and justified intelligence testing and eugenic pedigree studies as the best methods for determining the prevalence and types of feeble-mindedness – including carriers of its trait – in the general population.

C. **Conclusion**

Regardless of the diagnostic method, one’s proximity to early twentieth century, white, middle-class gender and sexual norms – whether through appearance or behavior – proved important in the diagnosis of feeble-mindedness. Eugenic field workers focused their gaze on the gendered labors of family members under eugenic surveillance. Whether a father could provide for his family through wage labor and whether a mother could care for her family and home were signs of normality or deviance – reducing feeble-mindedness to (ab)normative behaviors. Because of the focus on appearance and behavior, eugenic field workers were able to diagnose feeble-mindedness at a distant glance, devastatingly documenting the fate of numerous

²⁶⁹ Davenport et al 1911: 7.

²⁷⁰ Florence Danielson and CBD, “The Hill Folk: Report on a Rural Community of Hereditary Defectives,” *Eugenics Record Office Memoir* no. 1 (1912): 3.

individuals and families in one day's work. As we will see in the next chapter, a distant glance was all that was practically possible given the field worker's workload.

IV. AUTHORIZING BODIES: CONSTRUCTING PROFESSIONAL FEMININITY ON THE EUGENIC LANDSCAPE

In 1912, Charles B. Davenport – founder and director of the Eugenics Record Office (ERO) – revealed the gendered nature of eugenic fieldwork in his lecture on the “Importance of Eugenic Field Work for the State of Rhode Island”:

...the visits of the eugenic field worker establish a desirable contact of the institution with the home...Her visits to relatives, physicians, and others establish a friendly feeling toward, and an intelligent understanding of, the Institution and its work. The mother who has cherished in secret the history of her child who has been “put away” is glad to find a sympathetic, confidential ear to listen.²⁷¹

In this lecture, Davenport evidenced the taken-for-granted assumption that eugenic field workers were most likely women by using the feminine pronoun as opposed to the standard male. Davenport cited characteristics commonly considered during this time as naturally female, including sympathy, friendliness and discretion. He simultaneously offered a possible explanation for the extant division of labor within the eugenic family studies, whereby the (typically) female field workers collected the data from families and other informants, and their male supervisors analyzed and disseminated this research with the purpose of demonstrating the hereditary nature of feeble-mindedness and its relation to crime and degeneracy.

In the previous chapter I discussed how feeble-mindedness was diagnosed by one’s ability or inability to adhere to traditional gender roles in the home; here we move to fieldwork as professional and gendered. In this chapter, I ask the following question: How was the discipline of eugenic fieldwork constructed as “women’s work” and why? In one of the few secondary sources that examined U.S. eugenic fieldwork in detail, Daylanne K. English has argued that neither theories of maternalism nor professionalization are adequate explanations of the

²⁷¹ CBD, “Importance of Eugenic Field Work for the State of Rhode Island” (1912). In CBD papers, Davenport lectures.

discipline.²⁷² Keeping this call in mind, I situate eugenic fieldwork in relation to two popular professional positions women occupied during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I argue that as a predominantly female field, eugenic fieldwork lies in the unique ideological and practical position between women's work in science and women's work in maternalist reform, which positioned women as better suited than men to engage in work aimed at the betterment of disenfranchised populations. Davenport and his colleagues constructed the fieldwork in such a way that it resembled maternalism. However, despite the use of maternalist rhetoric, eugenic fieldwork involved the implementation of hard biological science aimed at the collection of genealogical data by any means necessary. As a result, female field workers were situated as keepers of the national gene pool in that they became ultimately responsible for the monitoring the presence of feeble-mindedness in the community.

While I agree with English's call for a framework that moves beyond maternalist and professionalization models, I do not agree with the reasons she gives to demonstrate the inadequacy of those models. English lists three main reasons why she feels the professionalization and maternalist models do not prove adequate in the case of eugenic fieldwork. First, she argues, the conservative, hereditarian nature of eugenics did not mesh with liberal maternalist reform. She stated, "unlike more liberal women reformers who were generally committed to the protection and support of poor mothers and children, the eugenics

²⁷² Daylanne K. English, *Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004): 158-159. The other pieces examining eugenic fieldwork in detail are Nicole Hahn Rafter (ed.), *White Trash: The Eugenic Family Studies, 1877-1919* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988); Amy Sue Bix, "Experiences and Voices of Eugenic Field-Workers: 'Women's Work in Biology,'" *Social Studies of Science* 27, no. 4 (August 1997): 625-668; Licia Carlson, "Cognitive Ableism and Disability Studies: Feminist Reflections on the History of Mental Retardation," *Hypatia* 16, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 124-146; and Licia Carlson, *The Faces of Intellectual Disability: Philosophical Reflections* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

field workers were committed to their confinement or elimination.”²⁷³ It is true that maternalist reformers did focus on improving women and children’s welfare (although not necessarily that of women and children with disabilities), changing domestic and social hygiene practices, and reducing environmental causes of disease and disability as a means of improving the strength and health of the national body. Eugenicists, on the other hand, resoundingly supported hereditarian theories intended to “protect” women, children, and the nation, whereby those deemed of good genetic stock were encouraged to increase their reproductive rates while those deemed genetically inferior were instructed to halt reproducing their defective germ plasm. That said, these two groups were not always mutually exclusive, and supporters of eugenics were not all “conservatives.” Eugenic science was successful in part because of its ability to unite people from a variety of political, personal, and disciplinary backgrounds.²⁷⁴

Second, English stated that the family studies were conducted by professionals *and* voluntary collaborators, thereby denying a professionalization model.²⁷⁵ Although the ERO did encourage contributions by professionals and volunteers alike, English’s dismissal ignores the existence of the discipline of eugenic fieldwork and the role professionalization played in its establishment and gendering. In his article, “The Making of a Feminine Professional Identity: Social Workers in the 1920s,” historian Daniel J. Walkowitz identifies four factors that contribute to the professionalization of a field: wage labor, a professional training program, the development of (a) new technique(s), and a collaborating professional organization – often

²⁷³ English 2004: 142.

²⁷⁴ Cf. Donald Pickens, *Eugenics and the Progressives* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968); Diane Paul, “Eugenics and the Left,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1984): 567-590; Kevles 1995; James Trent, *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

²⁷⁵ English 2004: 147.

expressed through conferences and journals.²⁷⁶ Despite their acceptance of submissions by volunteers, eugenic fieldwork as established by Davenport, Goddard and Laughlin fulfilled these listed requirements. Most of the individuals employed as eugenic field workers were trained in the Summer Training Program (after having already attained professional college degrees), where they learned about the new science of eugenics and how to trace family histories of feeble-mindedness and other traits of concern to eugenicists. They also met annually at a Field Workers Conference, subscribed to *Eugenical News*, the official organ of the American Eugenics Society.

Finally, English asserted that eugenic fieldwork cannot be considered maternalist in nature because the field workers “collected data on and exerted power over men as well as women”²⁷⁷ and therefore disrupted the traditional gender hierarchy. Once again, English is correct in her assertion that eugenic field workers examined, diagnosed and reported men *and* women suspected of being feeble-minded or otherwise defective. However, the disability status of these family members – even if those families were simply under suspicion of being feeble-minded – altered the traditional gender hierarchy itself, ensuring that female field workers did not overstep their bounds as women. If we accept Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s assertion in her 1997 book, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, that the presence of disability and its corresponding “non-normative status...feminizes all disabled figures,”²⁷⁸ then the presence or suspicion of feeble-mindedness –

²⁷⁶ Daniel J. Walkowitz, “The Making of a Feminine Professional Identity: Social Workers in the 1920s,” *American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (October 1990): 1051-1075. See also, Kathrin Schultheiss, *Bodies and Souls: Politics and the Professionalization of Nursing in France, 1880-1922* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Charlotte G. Borst, *Catching Babies: The Professionalization of Childbirth, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Regina G. Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

²⁷⁷ English 2004: 143.

the catch-all category for disability within eugenic science – compromised the masculinity status of men under eugenic surveillance. This created a different power dynamic different to the one English posits. If we examine the previously listed traits commonly associated with early twentieth century masculinity (individualism, virility, and strength²⁷⁹) and compare them with those associated with disability during this time period (dependency, frailty, passivity²⁸⁰), the two conflict, making it impossible to imagine that eugenic field workers still situate disabled men a masculine status during the early twentieth century.²⁸¹ While this was not always the case, and female eugenic field workers did occasionally interview male family members who were not feeble-minded, the overwhelming majority of the individuals they did observe were not considered “normal.”

In addition, eugenic theories of feeble-mindedness did not respect the chronological age of subjects, but rather emphasized an assigned mental age based on observed behaviors and characteristics and intelligence testing, when available.²⁸² According to eugenic theory, someone diagnosed as feeble-minded could only reach a mental plateau of twelve years, regardless of his/her chronological age.²⁸³ Therefore, eugenic scientists and field workers considered individuals diagnosed as feeble-minded not as adults, but overgrown children, again leaving female field workers well within the boundary norms of gender hierarchy when working

²⁷⁸ Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997): 9.

²⁷⁹ Mosse 1996.

²⁸⁰ Thomson 1997.

²⁸¹ For more information on the gendered nature of the diagnostic moment, see chapter Three.

²⁸² As I discussed in Chapter III, field workers were not always able to complete intelligence testing such as the Binet test in the field, but they did occasionally employ it as a measure.

²⁸³ Cf. HHG, “Four Hundred Feeble-Minded Children Classified by the Binet Method.” *JPA* 15, no. 1-2 (1910): 17-29; CBD 1972.

with such individuals. The “normal” female field workers were ranked higher in the hierarchy than those deemed feeble-minded because of this.²⁸⁴

A. **Defining “Femininity” and its Use in the Public Sphere**

During the mid-nineteenth century, many male and female social reformers in North America and Western Europe argued that white, middle- and upper-class women had the innate ability to relate to a whole range of social undesirables, including racial and ethnic minorities, the poor, and people with disabilities. These social reformers were most active in fields such as social and welfare work, especially those that focused on the health, hygiene, and status of women and children. They based their claims to power over these areas of work on women’s presumed biological capacity for nurturance. When emphasizing the need for women in the public sphere to be social servants (whether voluntary or paid), maternalist reformers often applied the traditional notion of “separate spheres,” which emphasized women’s domestic talents, to the outside world. These reformers argued that an inescapable sense of motherhood was present not only in women who had become biological mothers, but was inherent in all women, and therefore “social” or “spiritual” motherhood could be practiced by those with or without families of their own.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ Cf. Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, “A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State,” *Signs* 19, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 309-336; David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Mark Priestley, *Disability: A Life Course Approach* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2003): 72-75.

²⁸⁵ Cf. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, “Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of the Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States, 1880-1920,” *American Historical Review* 95 (1990): 1076-1108; Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992); Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (eds.), *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of the Welfare States* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

A tendency towards maternalist care is evident with respect to disabled individuals in the United States as early as the mid-nineteenth century. Since their creation in the 1840s, institutions for so-called idiots and other defectives relied on female labor as caring labor. Edouard Seguin – a nineteenth-century French physician renowned for his belief that individuals with intellectual disabilities could be educated – emphasized the need for women in an institutional setting, stating the importance of “gentle, caring” teachers, attendants, and matrons.²⁸⁶ According to historian Douglas Baynton, around the same time, women began replacing men in the overall teaching profession for two main reasons: 1. female teachers were less expensive than male teachers to hire and to retain as employees, and 2. the increasing belief that women were naturally patient, gentle, and self-sacrificing made them “ideal” for such roles of teaching children.²⁸⁷ As a result, by the turn of the twentieth century, institutions and schools had become predominantly female domains. That being said, these women -- like mothers in the home -- typically remained subservient to principal “male scientific authority”²⁸⁸ in these respective fields.

As I explained in Chapter II, biologist and eugenicist, Davenport, began the training program for field workers at the Eugenics Record Office (ERO) in 1910. Eugenic field workers thereafter traveled the country collecting information on feeble-mindedness and other forms of deviancy. Between 1910 and 1924, the ERO trained over 250 field workers, 85% of whom were female.²⁸⁹ What mostly qualified women for this work was simply their “feminine nature.” Between 1910 and 1924 – when the eugenic fieldwork training program was its most popular –

²⁸⁶ Carlson, 2010: 62-63.

²⁸⁷ See Douglas C. Baynton, *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign against Sign Language* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996): 56-57.

²⁸⁸ Carlson 2010: 62-63.

²⁸⁹ Bix 1997: 634.

“femininity” was said to encompass the following traits: intuition and empathy, warmth and emotion, the ability to rear and educate as well as nurture and care for others, altruism and self-sacrifice, and high morals and ethics.²⁹⁰ These “feminine” qualities were meant to contrast with those traits associated with masculinity, such as competitiveness, individualism, honor, virility, strength, and courage.²⁹¹ The elaboration of traits specific to women was not intended to supplant those of men in the public sphere, but rather to complement them.

By bringing their domestic talents to employment, women were tolerated in specific areas outside the home that were in consort with traditional ideas of femininity – e.g. women’s and children’s welfare, nursing, and social work. Historians Seth Koven and Sonya Michel labeled such work between 1880 and 1920 as “maternalist.” They defined maternalism as:

Ideologies that exalted women’s capacity to mother and extended to society as a whole the values of care, nurturance, and morality. Maternalism always operated on two levels: it extolled the private virtues of domesticity while simultaneously legitimating women’s public relationships to politics and the state, to community, workplace and marketplace.²⁹²

Maternalist work was easily incorporated into existing political and social structures because it did not challenge extant gendered divisions of labor. In fact, although intended to be emancipatory in nature – by “legitimating women’s public relationships to politics and the state” – the maternalist insistence on domesticity ultimately reinforced this division. This, in turn, limited women’s access to and impact upon the state, as politics remained securely within the men’s sphere. As a result, most professional women remained “at the bottom of organizational hierarchies, their voices diminished”²⁹³ and essentially without any power to systematically

²⁹⁰ Koven and Michel 1990; Koven and Michel 1993.

²⁹¹ George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

²⁹² Koven and Michel 1990: 1079. See also Koven and Michel 1993.

change society. Eugenic fieldwork adopted this hierarchical position, as eugenicists viewed their female field workers primarily as data collectors; the female field workers rarely had the power to either influence the ultimate use of their research or to rise within the eugenic profession.

It is important to note here that by “professional women” I mean college-educated women involved in scientific service, or medical disciplines. These were not women who held factory jobs or other jobs not requiring higher education. The women in the latter position were often construed as anti-feminine or in need of assistance by women in the former position.²⁹⁴ Therefore, along with a gendered division of labor, there was also a class-based one. In this chapter, I focus on female eugenic field workers, who were white, educated, and from middle- or upper-class backgrounds.²⁹⁵

B. **“Be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove”²⁹⁶: The Construction of the Eugenic Fieldwork Discipline**

On March 9, 1909 Davenport wrote to Edward R. Johnstone – Superintendent of the Training School for Feeble-Minded Girls and Boys in Vineland, New Jersey²⁹⁷ - simply asking whether he had any “heredity data concerning feeble-mindedness.”²⁹⁸ Johnstone forwarded the

²⁹³ Koven and Michel 1993: 24.

²⁹⁴ Cf. Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Georgina D. Feldberg, *Disease and Class: Tuberculosis and the Shaping of Modern North American Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1995); Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-c. 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989);

²⁹⁵ I explore the “dis/ability” status of the field workers in Chapter Five.

²⁹⁶ CBD to AHE on January 8, 1911. In CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series, “Estabrook, Arthur H.”

²⁹⁷ Hereafter referred to as the Training School.

letter to Henry H. Goddard – psychologist and Director of the Research Laboratory at the Training School – who replied to Davenport that they did have some data, but that they were “meager and so unreliable.”²⁹⁹ To remedy this problem, Goddard suggested sending a worker out in the field “to quietly and tactfully draw out all the information that it is possible to get.”³⁰⁰ Goddard had already made this suggestion on June 1, 1908 in a letter to the President of the Carnegie Institution of Washington and its Board of Trustees when requesting funding for his laboratory. In this letter, Goddard expressed his concern that although his research laboratory had some surveys of heredity at its disposal, which gave “many valuable hints about parentage, heredity and prenatal conditions” regarding the children housed at his institution, “the full history [could] only be obtained by the visit of an expert to the home and neighborhood” of the family in question.³⁰¹ He was unsuccessful in this application, however, and so in his letter to Davenport on March 15, 1909, Goddard reiterated his belief that the information garnered through such home visits could “be obtained in no other way.”³⁰² By this time, Davenport had already established the Station for Experimental Evolution (SEE) in Cold Spring Harbor, New York, and was in the process of applying for funding towards what would become the ERO.³⁰³ In his response to Goddard, Davenport concurred, stating he “had personally very little success in

²⁹⁸ Qtd. in Leila Zenderland, *Measuring Minds: Henry Herbert Goddard and the Origins of American Intelligence Testing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 153.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ HHG to CBD on March 15, 1909. In CBD papers, Series I: Correspondence, “Goddard, Henry H. Folder 1 (1909).”

³⁰¹ HHG to President and Board of Trustees of the Carnegie Institution of Washington on June 1, 1908. In HHG papers, Box M33, Folder AA-4.

³⁰² HHG to CBD on March 15, 1909. In CBD papers, Series I: Correspondence, “Goddard, Henry H. Folder 1 (1909).”

³⁰³ For a general history of the SEE laboratory and the ERO, see Chapter Two.

obtaining data on defectives thru correspondence.”³⁰⁴ In April of 1909, Davenport traveled to the Training School to meet Goddard in person, which began years of close, collaborative work between the two of them, including the development of eugenic fieldwork as a means of documenting the presence of feeble-mindedness throughout the country.³⁰⁵

Being that eugenics was a relatively new discipline, Davenport felt that the ERO should offer a training program for potential field workers.³⁰⁶ Davenport and Harry H. Laughlin – superintendent of the ERO – created the training program together with the agreement that Laughlin would be responsible for its daily operation. The Training Course on Eugenics for Field Workers, also known as the Eugenics Summer Class, took place each summer at the ERO over the course of six weeks. It is not exactly clear, why the course occurred once every summer. However, in his letter to Goddard on June 27, 1910 Davenport wrote,

[Mrs. E.H. Harriman] wishes however to make a beginning without delay and would like to see some workers trained for field work next Autumn. She is willing to pay something toward the expenses of a few students who will spend six weeks here this summer and then will be available for work in connection with the different laboratories in the Autumn.³⁰⁷

In addition, the ERO’s fiscal year began October 1st of every year, so a summer training program would allow for new field workers to be given fieldwork placements by this deadline. Mrs. E.H. Harriman, the woman responsible for financing the ERO from its inception in 1910 until 1918,

³⁰⁴ CBD to HHG on March 18, 1909. In CBD papers, Series I: Correspondence, “Goddard, Henry H. Folder 1 (1909).”

³⁰⁵ Zenderland 2001. From Davenport, Goddard learned the biological basis of heredity, specifically the Mendelian Theory of Inheritance, which aided him in his understanding and reformulation of the traditional nature vs. nurture debate in psychology. Goddard, on the other hand, lent his expertise in the area of intelligence testing. Together, they created the U.S. eugenic fieldwork method and consulted each other on eugenic projects throughout their respective careers.

³⁰⁶ CBD to Mary Williamson Harriman on June 15, 1910. In CBD papers, Series I: Correspondence, “Harriman, Mary Williamson (Mrs. E.H. Harriman).”

³⁰⁷ CBD to HHG on June 27, 1910. In CBD papers, Series I. Correspondence: Goddard, Henry H. Folder 2 (1910).

agreed to contribute \$1,000 in scholarship funds each summer, which covered travel and living expenses for approximately ten to twelve students, so as to ensure adequate attendance.³⁰⁸

The first training course took place in July and August of 1910 and had twelve students (nine women and three men).³⁰⁹ Although eugenic fieldwork drew methods from the growing field of social work, most of the students did not come from social work backgrounds, but were instead graduates with Bachelors, Masters, and even Doctorate degrees in biology, zoology, and anthropology. Bix reports that during the first six years of the training program (between 1910 and 1916), seven of the 25 men enrolled in the training program had already earned Doctorates of Philosophy, as had one woman – Wilhelmina Key, a biologist who had received her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1901 for her research on wasps. In addition, five women and two men during this same time period had already received Medical Doctorates.³¹⁰ This was, according to Laughlin, because “the problems of eugenics are, in last analysis, largely biological” and the students of the Training Course were therefore “preferably college graduates who have had a special training in biology.”³¹¹ The rest of the student makeup consisted of individuals with backgrounds in medicine and nursing.³¹²

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ See CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series, “ERO-Eugenics Summer Class;” HHL, *Eugenics Record Office Report* no. 1 (1913): 12-13; Bix 1997.

³¹⁰ Bix 1997: 633-634. In her introduction to a collection of family studies, Nicole Hahn Rafter (1988) argued the contrary, stating that “most ERO students were indeed members of ‘helping’ or regulatory professions; school and college teachers; superintendents of institutions...; physicians; employees of child welfare agencies...” etc. However, she got her results from a 1919 Alumni Roster which likely listed the current positions of individuals who had gone through the training program, rather than the backgrounds of the students prior to training at the ERO. From my own research, I found that while the training program did attract individuals from a variety of backgrounds, Bix’s conclusion is more representative than Rafter’s.

³¹¹ Laughlin 1913: 12-13.

³¹² Bix 1997: 633-634.

The ERO attracted students in a variety of ways. Laughlin sent out a “Memorandum on Eugenical Work as an Occupation for College Women” to universities throughout the country.³¹³ He and Davenport also encouraged superintendents of institutions for the feeble-minded to consider sending some of their employees to learn how to compile eugenic pedigrees and begin visiting the families of their inmates to research their heredity.³¹⁴ The Summer Course lasted six weeks and included 29 different lectures on the following scientific topics: heredity (with an emphasis on the Mendelian model); the relation of race and heredity; anthropology (lectures on physical anthropology comprised eleven of the 29 lectures and included instruction on the analysis of skull and facial features and orientation, as well as anthropometry – or the measurement of physical features);³¹⁵ mental tests and types of feeble-mindedness; sterilization and sterilization laws; insanity; four lectures on crime and its types; and finally, the models of inheritance (of musical ability and of defective traits).³¹⁶ Students in the training program were taught to analyze data on Mendelian patterns of heredity, so as to understand the “formulae for the inheritance of traits.”³¹⁷ In addition, students were taken on field trips to nearby institutions

³¹³ HHL papers, Folder D-5-3: 12: “Eugenics work for College Women” (n.d.).

³¹⁴ Cf. *Proceedings of the First National Conference on Race Betterment* January 8-14, 1914, Battle Creek, Michigan; “Laboratory Work in Eugenics,” *Eugenical News* 5, no. 2 (February 1920): 14; “Membership in the Eugenics Research Association,” *Eugenical News* 5, no. 3 (March 1920): 20.

³¹⁵ The syllabus cited below does not go into greater detail regarding specific lessons, but simply from the list of topics, we see the impact physical anthropology had on eugenics in the United States, and more importantly, the role it played in a field worker’s diagnostic toolbox. For more information on the history of physical anthropology, see George W. Stocking, Jr., *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1968); N.T. Boaz and Frank Spencer, “The Rise of Physical Anthropology in the United States, 1880-1980,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 56, no. 4 (1981): 353-364.

³¹⁶ Cf. CBD, “From the Institution’s Year Book no. 17 for the Year 1918.” In *Official Records in the History of the ERO, 1913-1940*, Folder 2; HHL, “Eugenics Field Worker Materials Used in Classes, 1921.” In HHL papers, Folder C-2-4: 9.

³¹⁷ Laughlin 1913: 13.

for the insane, feeble-minded, and epileptic to give them the opportunity to observe institutionalized individuals first-hand and practice charting family pedigrees.³¹⁸

The following is an example of problems that were charted in the Summer Class as a means of teaching various principles of heredity:

1. Peter's wife's mother had palsy. Peter did not have it, but his son had it. What type of trait, dominant or recessive?
2. Peter's wife's mother was feeble-minded. Peter was normal and so was his wife but their son was affected. Where else might the taint have existed?
3. Brothers and sisters have I none but this man's father is my father's son. Chart two ways (one chart after eliminating "brothers and sisters have I none").
4. Mr. Harold Leck married Ida Smith, daughter of Egbert Smith. The bride was the daughter by first marriage. His (Egbert's) marriage was with the daughter of Joseph Leck, Harold's father. Chart and indicate in words the curious relationship existing.³¹⁹

These examples reflected the main concerns of eugenicists with respect to the perceived weakening of the germ plasm: the recessive nature of the feeble-minded "trait" and the dangers of incestual relations. From its outset, the training program emphasized the eugenic belief that heredity played a greater role than environmental factors in the transmission of feeble-mindedness.³²⁰ The curriculum for eugenic field workers, in turn, focused on biology and genetics as opposed to maternalist social reform efforts, such as domestic hygiene interventions and maternal and child welfare projects. Historian Edward J. Larson noted the similarities and differences between eugenic science and Progressive Reform, stating, "applying recent developments in genetics and evolutionary biology, eugenicists offered a means to breed better people just when rising middle class progressives were seeking to cope with an apparent increase

³¹⁸ CBD, HHL, Harris Hawthorne Wilder, "The Biological Laboratory Bulletin" (1924). In HHL papers, Folder C-2-6: 2.

³¹⁹ HHL papers, Folder E-2-1: 20: "Summer School Class."

³²⁰ For more information, see Chapter II.

in the number of urban paupers, criminals, and mentally ill or retarded persons.”³²¹ While both relied on scientific knowledge as a way of understanding and remediating such issues, the main difference between the two was that eugenics focused on heredity while Progressive reform focused on environmental changes.

Once they were trained, eugenic field workers traveled the country visiting hospitals, institutions, and homes in order to collect histories of feeble-mindedness and other forms of social and biological deviance in the form of family pedigrees. In order to do this work, the field workers went to the home territories of individuals and families now under eugenic surveillance – either family members of already institutionalized individuals or families who had gained notoriety in their communities for their aberrant behavior. The family pedigrees included descriptions of each family member with reference to the specific trait under consideration.³²² Between 1910 and 1913, the most common traits being researched by the ERO were insanity, feeble-mindedness, and delinquency. They were also concerned with miscegenation, epilepsy, and other deviant behaviors. The fieldwork method consisted of in-depth observation and interviews of institutionalized individuals, their families, and community members knowledgeable of the family’s standing.

Eugenic fieldwork at the ERO consisted of compiling family pedigrees that tracked the inheritance of various conditions, such as feeble-mindedness, insanity, and Huntington’s Chorea. In so doing, Davenport felt he would be able to infer the genetic makeup of each person charted

³²¹ Edward J. Larson, *Sex, Race, and Science: Eugenics in the Deep South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995): 31.

³²² “Minutes and Lectures to the Eugenics Education Society, January 29, 1924.” In HHL papers, Folder D-5-2: 13. See also “Field Workers of the ERO: Tabulated Summary of Work (October 1, 1910 to January 1, 1913). In CBD papers, Official Records in the History of the ERO, 1913-1940. Folder 1.

as well as that of entire family lines.³²³ For the purpose of eugenic family studies, Davenport and Laughlin defined the family as such:

...the propositus and his immediate relatives. The restricted family comprises the propositus, his sibs (brothers and sisters) and the consorts and children of such sibs as are parents, the father of the propositus, the father's sibs, the consorts of such father's sibs as have children and their children (i.e. first cousins of the propositus), and the father's father and the father's mother, also the corresponding relations on the mother's side of the house.³²⁴

Securing information on each of these family members was the minimum requirement for a eugenic genealogy, but if possible, Davenport and Laughlin recommended securing information on the extended family as well, which consisted of “all descendents of the eight great-grandparents and enough of the family history of the consorts of these descendents to explain the peculiarities of the immediate children.”³²⁵ While desired, Davenport and Laughlin recognized that such information was difficult to obtain, at least “without great research.”³²⁶ The ERO therefore recommended that all dutiful citizens begin by charting their own family pedigrees – and provided the resources and training materials to do so free of charge.

As I mentioned above, between 1910 and 1924, the ERO trained over 250 field workers, 85% (219) of whom were female.³²⁷ While considering the fieldwork method to secure data on feeble-mindedness in 1908, Goddard emphasized the added benefit of securing a woman to do this work, simply stating, “doubtless in many families a woman would get the most reliable

³²³ CBD, *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics*. Reprint Ed. [original copyright 1911], (New York: Arno Press, 1972).

³²⁴ CBD and HHL, “How to Make a Eugenic Family Study,” *Eugenics Record Office Bulletin* 13 (June 1915): 3.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Bix 1997.

data.”³²⁸ He did not elaborate as to why this was, but Davenport and his colleagues at the ERO also found it preferable to have women as field workers because of their assumed inherent maternal instincts and soft temperaments, which they assumed would make them more accessible to their research subjects. In the construction of the eugenic fieldwork program at the ERO, Davenport and Laughlin employed the notion of femininity as nurturing, altruistic and empathetic. Carlson has noted that female eugenic field workers:

occupied an epistemic position similar to the vigilant mothers who watched closely for signs of feeble-mindedness in their children. For both groups, their alleged ability to recognize these signs was attributed to their feminine intuitiveness, whether it was put to use in the nursery or the [fieldwork] interview.³²⁹

Like mothers in the home, then, female eugenic field workers benefited from their assumed superior surveillance skills and heightened intuition that aided in the diagnosis of feeble-mindedness at a glance.

In their 1911 article entitled, “The Study of Human Heredity: Methods of Collecting, Charting and Analyzing Data,” Davenport, Laughlin, Johnstone, Goddard and David F. Weeks (superintendent of the New Jersey State Village for Epileptics at Skillman) described the field worker’s first home visit as such:

Just before starting out to visit the relatives and friends, the field worker visits the patient in his ward or cottage. This is done in the manner of a friendly visit...The patients enjoy these visits, and are often able to give very useful information. Everything now being ready for the visit to the home, the field worker, armed with recent personal knowledge of the patient, which assures her cordial welcome, visits the home and interviews the relatives, friends, and family physician. To secure satisfactory results, sympathetic and confidential relations must always be maintained...The field worker’s constant endeavor must be to

³²⁸ HHG to J.S. Woodward and members of the Board of Trustees of the Carnegie Institution on June 1, 1908. In HHG papers, Box M33, Folder AA-4.

³²⁹ Carlson 2010: 75.

establish a feeling between the family and Institution that will assure her of a welcome at any time with kindly cooperation.³³⁰

Since the topics of discussion surrounding eugenic pedigrees were often taboo, Davenport and his colleagues felt that female workers would secure more accurate data than men as they would be able to use their feminine talents like compassion and sympathy to urge delicate information out of those they interviewed better than a man whose paternal authority presence might intimidate the individuals in question.³³¹

Arguing that establishing a relationship with the individuals and families being interviewed was vital to gaining the accurate data necessary for analyzing the threat of feeble-mindedness, Davenport and Laughlin emphasized the need for field workers to create and maintain “sympathetic” relations with their subjects in order to “secure satisfactory results.”³³²

In his “Directions for the Guidance of Field Workers,” Davenport wrote,

First of all, unfailing courtesy and regard for and sympathetic (humanistic) attitude toward the persons you are interviewing are essential from every point of view...To get the truth requires great tact. Check all critical facts by independent witnesses. Take plenty of time in interviewing. Seek to be invited to call again, and accept the invitation if possibly useful.³³³

While courtesy and sympathy are not traits immediately associated with femininity to contemporary readers, Davenport and his colleagues felt that female field workers would be again better able than male field workers at setting the families in question at ease. This would, in turn, allow for the intimacy necessary for gaining access to these families. I have not found

³³⁰ Davenport et al. 1911: 1-2.

³³¹ CBD, “Directions for the Guidance of Field Workers” (n.d.). In CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series, “ERO-Field Workers.”

³³² CBD, HHL, David F. Weeks, Edward R. Johnstone, and HHG, “The Study of Human Heredity,” *Eugenics Record Office Bulletin* 2 (1911): 2.

³³³ CBD, “Directions for the Guidance of Field Workers,” Emphasis in original. See also, Nicole Hahn Rafter (ed.), *White Trash: The Eugenic Family Studies, 1877-1919* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988); Carlson 2010: 53-84.

evidence that Davenport or his colleagues drew from anthropological ethnographic methods in their construction of eugenic fieldwork, but being that eugenics was an interdisciplinary science that drew from other fields including anthropology (as reflected in the famous depiction of eugenics as a tree fed by roots from a variety of disciplines – “Eugenics Tree Logo,” ca. 1925),³³⁴ it is likely that they drew methods from the field as well as its gendering. Margaret Rossiter discussed the belief in anthropology that women “could study women and children better than men could” and was therefore a place where professional women could make unique contributions to the science.³³⁵

The “Field Work Manual,” written in 1917 by the New York State Board of Charities and modeled after the ERO’s fieldwork method, elaborated on the reason for a gendered preference:

On account of the many details which are inquired into relative to pregnancies, births, and many other intimate matters, it is best, as a rule, that field workers should be women, for they can visit married women during the husband’s absence without offence and can get many details which a refined woman would hesitate to a strange man.³³⁶

The “Field Work Manual” did mention that in the case of an alcoholic or criminalistic family member, a male field worker might need to take over, for the situation might be too distressing or dangerous for a female. Therefore, the topic at hand as well as the population being monitored played a role in determining whether male or female field workers would be assigned to the case. At the same time, however, the Manual was quick to note that it wasn’t impossible for a female field worker to do work with criminalistic families: “if the woman is dignified in bearing and not too timid by nature she can carry out her part without special danger or

³³⁴ Image Archive of the American Eugenics Movement, <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org>.

³³⁵ Cf. Davenport et al 1911: 1. See also, Margaret Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America: Struggles and Strategies to 1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982): 62; Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

³³⁶ The Bureau of Analysis and Investigation of the New York State Board of Charities, “Field Work Manual.” *Eugenics and Social Welfare Bulletin X* (1917): 16-17.

inconvenience.”³³⁷ This caution reflected another common perception of women during this time: that they were delicate and frail creatures in need of protection by physically superior men. Still, in the case of eugenic fieldwork at least, women were assigned to most cases.

In 1911 Davenport commented on a conference presentation on the study of heredity of insanity by eugenic field worker Gertrude L. Cannon and Dr. A.J. Rosanoff of the Kings Park State Hospital in New York. He said the following regarding the gender of eugenic field workers:

A person biologically trained and trained in the rapid diagnosis of mental disease visits the family to which the patient belonged, and enters into such a cordial relation with the members of that family that the mother, for example, soon becomes quite willing to tell the truth, whereas, if she were brought before the hospital officials she might hesitate or decline to tell the facts. In addition to this, the field worker, who is not limited as to the time and expense in her attempts to learn the facts, can visit other branches of the family; she [the field worker] can see the family physician and the neighbors in order to corroborate the statements made by the parents or wards. By this method, in the course of time, the field worker obtained the real facts in the case, and such a history, when compared with that usually obtained in the hospital, clearly demonstrated the total inadequacy of the latter.³³⁸

This reflects the reasoning of Davenport and his colleagues at the ERO and collaborating institutions, that the structuring of fieldwork interaction would be more suited to women than men. This stance was based on the following reasons: 1) the lower authority granted to women making institutional and home visits would allow for such “friendly” communication; 2) women were inherently “sympathetic” according to early twentieth century standards of femininity,³³⁹ and 3) the topics under discussion would be more comfortable to discuss with a female confidant than a male one.

³³⁷ The Bureau 1917: 17.

³³⁸ CBD, “Discussion.” Following Gertrude L. Cannon and A.J. Rosanoff, “Preliminary Report of a Study of Heredity in Insanity in the Light of Mendelian Laws.” *Eugenics Record Office Bulletin* no. 3 (1911): 9.

³³⁹ Cf. Koven and Michel, 1990; Koven and Michel 1993.

In 1914, Goddard had described the methods he had utilized to secure data for his 1912 best-selling family study, *The Kallikak Family*. Goddard stated,

We realized keenly the importance of securing the right person. The qualities that we considered necessary were: a pleasing manner and address such as inspire confidence; a deep and true interest in humanity which would enable the worker to have a genuine sympathy with the people she would visit; a high degree of intelligence which would enable her to comprehend the problem of the feeble-minded, to learn readily the types and characteristics of the children, and to see the bearing upon the central problem involved of various facts that might come to hand; a general or special training such as to render her accurate and efficient in reporting and recording results. Good health and resourcefulness were of course included.³⁴⁰

So constructed, eugenic fieldwork provided a means by which to show the softer side of science, one based not in a laboratory, but in “warm human interest.”³⁴¹ Goddard and Davenport felt that invoking traditional notions of femininity into the discipline would aid the field workers in securing the confidence of their research subjects, and therefore improve their results. Despite these men’s insistence on the insertion of such maternalist qualities into the fieldwork discipline, the female field workers generally imagined their work as pure science, as I discuss in the next section.

C. **“Neither a Missionary nor a Reformer”: Female Field Workers Imagine the Discipline**

During the late nineteenth century, women who had finally gained access to higher education began entering the workforce. Historian Margaret W. Rossiter argued in her landmark study, *Women Scientists in America: Struggles and Strategies to 1940*, that female scientists were offered two types of jobs between 1880 and 1910:

³⁴⁰ HHG, *Feeble-Mindedness: Its Causes and Consequences* (New York: Macmillan, 1914): 24.

³⁴¹ ESK, “Method and Aim of Field Work at the Vineland Training School,” *The Training School Bulletin* 9, no. 6 (October 1912): 85.

Those that were so low paying or low ranking that competent men would not take them (and which often required great docility or painstaking attention to detail) and those that involved social service, such as working in the home or with women or children (and which were often poorly paid as well).³⁴²

Eugenic fieldwork fit both of these characteristics. While eugenic fieldwork wages were superior to nurses and comparable with social workers, they were among the lowest ranking employees within eugenic research. For example, a 1919 survey by the ERO found that on average, field workers employed by large custodial institutions such as the one in Vineland, NJ earned 70% more than nurses within those same institutions. The nurses reported an average monthly salary of \$48.05, while the eugenic field workers reported an average monthly salary of \$81.36. This was second only to social and parole workers whose average monthly salary was \$82.91.³⁴³

The workload was also painstaking. At the ERO, for example, field workers sent their daily reports and pedigrees to a secretary who was responsible for compiling and organizing all the records. The records were housed at the ERO, which served as a national clearinghouse for eugenic data that the typically male, researchers could examine and analyze.³⁴⁴ Because the field workers were generally busy in the field collecting the data, they rarely had the time or energy to analyze or publish the results of their studies. When they did, however, Davenport or Laughlin generally received first or sole authorship (as did Goddard at the Training School, and Superintendents of other institutions).³⁴⁵

In addition, eugenic fieldwork required countless hours of travel, field interviews, and the documentation of endless pedigree charts and reports, all of which necessitated – in Rossiter’s

³⁴² Rossiter 1984: 53.

³⁴³ “The Position of Field Workers” reprint from *Eugenical News* 4 (1919): 41. Image #1877 of the *Image Archive of the American Eugenics Movement*. Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory. <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org>.

³⁴⁴ See CBD to HHG on June 27, 1910; CBD, “Directions for the Guidance.”

³⁴⁵ See Letter from AHE to CBD on May 15, 1912 and reply from CBD to AHE on May 16, 1912. In CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series: Estabrook, Arthur H.

words – “painstaking attention to detail.” Finally, field workers involved in family study research obviously did most of their work in the homes of families suspected of being feebleminded. The field worker consulted mothers, fathers, and siblings of institutionalized children in order to root out what were considered the deviant members of the family, and in eugenic terms – the national gene pool.

While such tasks may be expected for entry-level employees, most female field workers did not move beyond this level, either because they left the public sphere to marry and have children of their own, as noted in *Eugenical News*' "Personals" section,³⁴⁶ or because little to no opportunities were made available to women interested in advancing their careers in eugenic research beyond this stage. In fact, on July 25, 1912 Goddard wrote Davenport asking if the ERO could possibly employ one of his former field workers, Miss Maude Moore. Davenport responded on July 29th, stating,

I am inclined to advise that she seek some other permanent arrangement. We regard our appointments as temporary and have adopted the general principle that we shall employ a field worker for only three years and after that no longer continue her support in the hope that she may marry and thus the Eugenics Record Office cannot be charged with working cacogenically in inducing the excellent field workers whom we have secured to neglect more important social duties. Tho (sic) the work may suffer the loss of experience yet we hope that this loss will be compensated in other directions.³⁴⁷

In this quote, Davenport revealed his preference for the consistent hiring of new, young field workers as opposed to reappointing existing ones. This served to 1) explicitly encourage female

³⁴⁶ Beginning in 1916, the Eugenics Record Office published a monthly bulletin, *Eugenical News* that discussed recent developments in eugenics. Each issue had a "Personals" section, which documented where previous ERO-trained field workers could be found and what they were doing. This section included marriage and child announcements as well as the occupational achievements of eugenic field workers. For female field workers, it was less common to find occupational achievements listed as they often left the workforce to marry and have children.

³⁴⁷ HHG to CBD on July 25, 1912, and CBD to HHG on July 29, 1912. Both in CBD papers, Series I: Correspondence, "Goddard, Henry H. Folder 4 (1912-1921)."

field workers to exit the professional sphere and to create their own families;³⁴⁸ and 2) implicitly prevent female field workers from gaining enough experience to rise up in the professional ranks.

This dynamic was unique to the ERO's *female* field workers. Arthur H. Estabrook – one of the few male field workers – had no problems securing a lengthy appointment. Estabrook acquired his Ph.D. in zoology in 1910 from Johns Hopkins and attended the Eugenics Summer Class that same year. Following the fieldwork training program, the ERO hired Estabrook to study the “Jukes” in Hudson Valley, New York.³⁴⁹ Already in 1911, Estabrook earned \$85 per month, which was ten dollars more than his female colleagues and by 1913 Estabrook's monthly salary was \$135.³⁵⁰ Davenport justified Estabrook's higher salary, stating he was “the only married man living in [his] own home” and therefore as the head of a household needed a larger salary than his single, female colleagues. Estabrook worked at the ERO between 1910 and 1929, leaving only to work as a Captain in the Sanitary Corps in the Army between 1918 and 1920.³⁵¹ Unlike his female colleagues, there is no evidence that Davenport ever urged Estabrook to find other employment. In fact, the correspondence records between the two of them document Davenport's continual efforts to keep Estabrook employed at the ERO, even raising his salary in 1929 to \$265 per month.³⁵² While he remained a field worker throughout his tenure at the ERO,

³⁴⁸ For more information on the desire for female field workers to eventually return to the home where they could translate their fieldwork skills into those of alert and eugenically fit mothers, see Chapter Five.

³⁴⁹ AHE, *The Jukes in 1915* (Washington D.C.: The Carnegie Institution of Washington).

³⁵⁰ “Contracts with Field and Office Force (1911).” In CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series, “ERO-Field Workers;” See also, CBD to AHE on September 13, 1913. In CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series, “Estabrook, Arthur H.”

³⁵¹ In CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series, “Estabrook, Arthur H.”

³⁵² See CBD to AHE on January 30, 1920. In CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series, “Estabrook, Arthur H.” While this was by far the highest salary offered to a eugenic field worker, it was still lower than Estabrook had received in the army (he stated he received \$3,250 per year from the army in a letter to

Estabrook's experience and authority as a male field worker allowed him greater independence and success as a researcher, as reflected by his numerous presentations and publications unlike his female colleagues who were not afforded the same opportunities.³⁵³

Most female field workers of the ERO and the Training School did not enjoy the successes of Estabrook. Rossiter has further elaborated on the placement of women in science stating, "the most advancement these women could hope for was to a position...in directing the work of other women."³⁵⁴ For example, field worker Elizabeth S. Kite was appointed director of the newly founded Department of Field Work at the Training School in 1916. As director, Kite was responsible for overseeing two field workers – Mary E. Hoover and Marion E. Nash. This position was only part-time, however, as the rest of her time was spent working with the New Jersey Committee on Provision for the Feeble Minded. Kite did remain employed by the Training School until 1918 (she was hired in 1909) and continued her collaboration with the Training School until 1932. No other details exist regarding this supervisory appointment, Kite's salary, or how long it lasted, but it appears to be one of the few examples of a female field worker rising rank within the profession at either the ERO or Training School.³⁵⁵ Some of the exceptions to this include, Gertrude E. Hall (ERO class of 1911) who became the Supervisor of

Davenport on January 14, 1920). Davenport urged Estabrook to take the pay cut, so that he could return to the more socially important field of eugenics in his letter on January 30th. There is no response in the file, but Estabrook's biography states he was employed by the ERO until 1929 ["Biographical Sketch." In *Finding Aid for Arthur H. Estabrook papers, 1910-1943 [AAP 069]*. M.E. Grendander Department of Special Collections and Archives, State University of New York, Albany.]

³⁵³ Cf. AHE and CBD, *The Nam Family: A Study in Cacogenics* (Cold Spring Harbor: Eugenics Record Office Memoir, no. 2, 1912); Estabrook 1916; AHE and Ivan Eugene McDougale, *Mongrel Virginians: A Study in Triple Race Mixture* (Baltimore: The Williams and Wilkins Co., 1926). See also Bix 1997. For his role in the Buck v. Bell case, see Paul A. Lombardo, *Three Generations No Imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

³⁵⁴ Rossiter 1982: 56.

³⁵⁵ ESK, "Report of the Department of Field Work." In HHG papers, Box M615: "Correspondence J-K." See also Zenderland 1998.

the State Board of Charities in Augusta, Maine and Mabel Bishop (ERO class of 1912), who became the Head of the Department of Biology at Rockford College in Illinois.³⁵⁶

The gendered hierarchy of eugenic fieldwork resembled the general trend of women in science during this same time period. Even though eugenic fieldwork emerged in 1910 – almost thirty years after the trends Rossiter says began to establish themselves in scientific employment, the gendered division of labor was still in practice – with few exceptions – in mainstream scientific research. “Women’s work” in science, therefore, was usually a taken-for-granted part of the research hierarchy, as we see in the case of eugenic fieldwork. There were few opportunities open to women with Bachelor’s degrees in science, and so they often accepted the fieldwork positions despite their tedious nature and low rank, and “often did superbly well with little support.”³⁵⁷ This was perhaps because many of these women were overqualified for what were essentially research assistant positions.

At the same time, while eugenic fieldwork as a discipline generally employed traditional notions of femininity and certain maternalist tendencies, the discipline as a whole did not fit perfectly within a maternalist mold. Unlike maternalists, the evidence that exists shows female eugenic field workers themselves did not always buy into this ideology that asserted women’s inherent abilities made them more suited for eugenic fieldwork.³⁵⁸ For example, in 1912 Kite wrote, “the field worker must never forget that she is neither a missionary nor a reformer – her sole business is to do a work of science, which, in this particular case, is the appreciation of

³⁵⁶ *Eugenical News* 1, no. 5 (May 1916): 33; *Eugenical News* 4, no. 3 (March 1919): 22. Several other ERO-trained field workers went on to teach in primary and secondary schools if they did not go on to work as eugenic field workers or immediately marry. See *Eugenical News* for specific updates.

³⁵⁷ Rossiter 1982: 60.

³⁵⁸ Bix 1997: 637.

mental states.”³⁵⁹ Here, Kite presented herself as a distanced scientist responsible for observing and cataloguing the physical and mental states of those she visited.

Even though the data field workers collected was used for eugenic projects such as segregation, marriage and sterilization laws, immigration reform, and hygiene efforts, field workers did not necessarily align themselves with maternalist reformers. Eugenic field workers surveyed feeble-minded men, women, and children as a means of revealing the hereditary nature of feeble-mindedness, and its subsequent danger to the national gene pool. In addition, eugenic field workers regardless of their sex reported directly to their always male supervisors – whether Davenport, Goddard or the superintendent of the employing institution. Further, as the following examples show, eugenic field workers distanced themselves from social workers and other reformers whenever possible.

In fact, during the 1913 Field Workers’ Conference held at the ERO, the field workers discussed changing the name of their profession so as to reflect its professional and scientific nature:

Miss Ruth Moxcey: We should have a different name from eugenics field workers. I have been asked what I was and people have thought that I was a stenographer and that detracts from one’s dignity. Perhaps the name “Eugenics Investigator” is better.

Miss Brown: Every field worker has a feeling of rebellion at being called a field worker. Miss Bryner and I have been called “eugenics research workers.”³⁶⁰

The name was never changed from “eugenics field worker” and while the discipline soon became recognized among eugenicists, field workers often had to fight their institutional

³⁵⁹ ESK, “Method and Aim of Field Work at the Vineland Training School,” *The Training School Bulletin* 9, no. 6 (October 1912): 85.

³⁶⁰ “Transcript – Second Field Workers’ Conference, June 20-21, 1913.” In CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series, “ERO-Field Workers’ Conference.”

employers – who felt field work should include aspects of social work – to retain the research-oriented nature of their position.

For example, Ruth Lawton, who was a field worker funded by the Eugenics Record Office but employed at the Boston State Hospital, had written to Davenport on July 17, 1912 to discuss the danger of her current appointment becoming more akin to social work than eugenic fieldwork:

I believe I told you that Dr. Frost [the Superintendent of the Boston State Hospital] would like to have me remain in the capacity of social service worker. There are a number of reasons why I do not care to do this; and so, as he does not wish to have the pedigree work continued, my work here ends with my year's appointment.³⁶¹

When it naturally fit in with the completion of the pedigrees, eugenic field workers did not usually mind doing such social service as well.³⁶² It is important to note that while eugenicists considered the compilation of eugenic pedigrees as service for the betterment of society, it was not in the same vein of maternalist social reform that worked to improve social environments through family counseling, social hygiene, and maternal and child welfare projects. In fact, historian Leila Zenderland has argued that Davenport distinguished between the two fields as follows: “Social workers were trained to gather information to help alleviate environmental hardships; by contrast, field workers, according to Davenport’s plan, would try to ‘unravel of the laws of inheritance.’”³⁶³ The main discrepancy, therefore, between social work and eugenic

³⁶¹ Ruth W. Lawton to CBD on July 17, 1912. In CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series, “Lawton, Ruth W.” Lawton did not elaborate as to what these “number of reasons” were, but in her letter of resignation, dated August 5, 1912, she stated that she did not intend to take up any immediate paid work. She also stated, “it is necessary that I should be at liberty by the end of August,” which leads one to suspect that she was resigning, in part, because of personal reasons. Ruth W. Lawton to CBD on August 6, 1912. In CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series, “Lawton, Ruth W.”

³⁶² Ibid.

work was that eugenicists and eugenic field workers considered the charting of pedigrees and the documentation of the hereditary nature of feeble-mindedness their primary objective.

This objective was evidenced in the deceptive tactics designed to gain access to the “likely dangerous” families in question, despite Goddard’s and Davenport’s assertion that field workers required courtesy and understanding for their research subjects, qualities arguably naturally possessed by the female field workers.

In his section on data collection in his 1914 book, *Feeble-Mindedness: Its Causes and Consequences*, Henry H. Goddard suggested that one means of gaining better access to the families a field worker visits was by stating she had word from the institution:

...when the field worker approaches the family, saying, “I have come from Vineland, from Superintendent Johnstone, I bring you a message from your Willie or your Katie,” she is received with the most cordial welcome. And when she sits down with them and gradually discloses the fact that we are studying Willie’s case and that we want information along such and such lines, they gladly give every aid in their power.³⁶⁴

In this instance, Goddard urged field workers to use a variety of tools to ensure a warm welcome among the families she visited. First, in mentioning not only the institution’s name in which the family is housed but also the Superintendent’s name, she places herself in a position of authority and expertise. Then, by immediately stating she has a message from the individual (most often a child or adolescent) who is in residence at the institution, she positions herself as an ally not of the distant male professionals, but of the family member in question. Finally, in requesting any information the family member could provide that would help “Willie’s case,” the field worker utilized her gender, presenting herself as substitute mother, caring, doting, and trying with all of

³⁶³ Leila Zenderland, “The Parable of *The Kallikak Family*: Explaining the Meaning of Heredity in 1912.” In Steven Noll and James W. Trent, Jr., *Mental Retardation in America: A Historical Reader* (New York: NYU Press, 2004): 172.

³⁶⁴ Goddard 1914: 26.

her might to find a way to rehabilitate the boy so that he could be released and brought back to his family. If they didn't "give every aid in their power,"³⁶⁵ the family would be ultimately responsible for the failure of the institution to cure their son. What they didn't know, of course, was that the field worker was not looking for a way to save Willie, but instead evidence that his defects were indeed hereditary, fueling the case that certain measures such as further institutionalization and sterilization be taken to prevent further generations of deviants and defectives.

Kite further asserted that a field worker's scientific training was only one "part of the essential equipment" of a good field worker.³⁶⁶ She argued that it didn't matter how much scientific knowledge a field worker had if she could not get "en rapport" with the people she visited, for otherwise it would be impossible to secure any information.³⁶⁷ She suggested the following means of gaining access to the homes:

it is often possible to come and go without in any way betraying the real object of our visit. Dropping in on a hot day and asking for a glass of milk or water, at once rouse friendly interest. Still better is to ask shelter from an approaching storm, or the opportunity to dry one's drenched clothing. The great fundamental human need is to form a bond that unites all classes. Spontaneous human sympathy brings out the very best that is one, so that even the defective has experienced the truths of the saying that it is more blessed to give than to receive.³⁶⁸

Going beyond Goddard's suggestion to utilize an institutional affiliation to her benefit, Kite argued that female field workers should use the assumed skills attributed to women to ease the interview process. The supposed nurturing care, empathy, and tact on the part of eugenic field workers assisted in gaining the trust and rapport of their research subjects, who would often bare

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Kite 1912: 87.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Kite 1912: 85-86.

their souls, ignorant of the field worker's true intention to monitor, document, and report instances of hereditary defect and deviance.

D. **Conclusion**

Davenport and the creators of this profession drew from extant maternalist expectations of women as inherently nurturing and sympathetic and therefore more able to solicit information from the family members they interviewed. Eugenic field workers, on the other hand, tended to view their work as primarily a biological science, and utilized their "femininity" only in so far as it was a tool by which to gather data. The tension between these two positions, in turn, created a field where female field workers could assert their dominance over the feeble-minded men and women they charted. At the same time, they remained "stuck" in the position of glorified data collectors furnishing the raw materials from which their typically male supervisors created publications and presentations and furthered their own careers through the dissemination of eugenic science. Nevertheless, female eugenic field workers were primarily responsible for monitoring the presence of feeble-mindedness in the community, and were therefore situated as protectors of the national gene pool regardless of a lack of professional advancement.

V. PASSING BODIES: FULFILLING ABLE-BODIED FEMININITY THROUGH EUGENIC FIELDWORK

On November 4, 1911, Training school field worker, Jane W. Griffiths, wrote Training School assistant, Miss Bell, stating she had become ill while in the field documenting eugenic pedigrees.

On Wednesday morning I was taken sick just as I was about to start out...and a little later I went...to see the doctor. He says my heart is not in very good condition though there is nothing organic. A rectal hemorrhage alarmed me a little and it has not entirely gone yet, but I couldn't get much satisfaction about it. I felt well enough to start out yesterday morning.³⁶⁹

Just one day later, however, Griffiths sent another letter alerting Miss Bell to an injury she had sustained. "I am still working on the H_____ case. In the last few days I have been disabled by a lame foot, either a weak arch or rheumatism. The doctor is treating me for the latter and I'm wearing arch supports...expect to be able to get out tomorrow."³⁷⁰ By November 10th, Griffiths' foot had healed and she reported feeling well enough to get back to work.³⁷¹

Less than six months following Griffiths' initial health concerns, eugenicist and Superintendent of the Massachusetts School for the Feeble-Minded, Walter E. Fernald, wrote the following regarding acquired disabilities in his article, "The Burden of Feeble-Mindedness"³⁷²:

The various known causes of feeble-mindedness occur in two main groups – the hereditary and the accidental...The accidental group includes those who are feeble-minded as a result of environmental causes, without hereditary influence...Among the probable accidental or environmental causes of feeble-

³⁶⁹ Letter from Jane W. Griffiths to Miss Bell on November 4, 1911. HHG papers, Box M614, "Correspondence – Bell from Griffiths (1910-1912)."

³⁷⁰ Letter from Jane W. Griffiths to Miss Bell on November 5, 1911. HHG papers, Box M614, "Correspondence – Bell from Griffiths (1910-1912)."

³⁷¹ Letter from Jane W. Griffiths to Miss Bell on November 10, 1911. HHG papers, Box M614, "Correspondence – Bell from Griffiths (1910-1912)."

³⁷² During the early twentieth century, feeble-mindedness was an umbrella category for individuals with physical, cognitive, and psychiatric impairments as well as chronic health issues. See Chapter III for more information regarding the diagnosis of feeble-mindedness.

mindedness are injuries to the head at birth, blows or falls in infancy, inflammatory brain disease, toxemia from infectious diseases, abnormal mental or physical conditions of the parents, etc., or the absence of certain vital substances from the blood, as in cretinism...*But even where the exciting cause is undoubtedly accidental, there is often a strong hereditary predisposition.* Similar injuries or causes in sound families do not result in feeble-mindedness. In the majority of these cases the environmental causes are only accessory. *The real origin of the disease lies in the defect of the germ plasm.*³⁷³

Fernald's quote is representative of eugenic ideology in the United States during the early twentieth century that considered congenital and acquired impairments or health conditions external reflections of an internal defect at the hereditary level. Typically, then, Griffiths' letters would suffice to warn eugenicists about the possibility that her germ plasm was tainted.

Griffiths' letters reveal a common problem among eugenic field workers. Because of the exhaustive nature of their work, some field workers became chronically ill or physically impaired while in the field. Female eugenic field workers often endured the stresses of their position because as professional women they did not have many other options. Female field workers were rarely given the opportunity to rise ranks in eugenic research, leaving them in the undesirable position of overworked data collectors.³⁷⁴ And yet, even as the intensity of their labors proved disabling to many field workers – however temporary – how did they avoid becoming objects of eugenic intervention unlike those they were responsible for observing and diagnosing?

This chapter explores the selective gaze of eugenic science, by analyzing the disabling nature of eugenic fieldwork and its effect on female eugenic field workers. I argue that despite the injuries and illnesses such work often caused, doing eugenic fieldwork secured a woman's

³⁷³ WEF, "The Burden of Feeble-Mindedness," *JPA* XVII, no. 3 (March 1912): 88-89. Emphasis added. For more information on "exciting causes," see Charles E. Rosenberg, *Explaining Epidemics and Other Studies in the History of Medicine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); id., *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

³⁷⁴ For more information on the status of eugenic field workers, specifically the employment of female eugenic field workers, see Chapter IV.

place on the “normal” side of the diagnostic dichotomy for two reasons. First, the majority of eugenic field workers were female, and the Eugenics Record Office and the Training School constructed the discipline as appropriate “women’s work.” Therefore, by compiling hereditary data on families in the field and rooting out the feebleminded menace from the greater population, female field workers, like normal biological mothers, fulfilled their feminine and national duties, even if, in the process they became disabled or sick.³⁷⁵ Second, eugenic field workers distracted the attention of eugenic scientists away from their own surveyed bodies and onto the specimens they gathered. Because being employed as a field worker necessitated a “normal” diagnosis, eugenicists did not see injuries or illnesses incurred in the field as reflections of internal weaknesses – like those seen in the individuals under eugenic surveillance³⁷⁶ - but as sacrifices for the eugenic cause.

A. **The Demanding, Disabling Nature of Eugenic Fieldwork**

Immediately upon their first discussions regarding establishing the fieldwork method and discipline, Charles B. Davenport and Henry H. Goddard revealed their high expectations for eventual employees. On March 15, 1909, Goddard wrote Davenport stating his plan to send out a field worker “to the home of each of [the Training School’s] nearly four hundred inmates...to

³⁷⁵ For more information on the role of normal mothers in the eugenic project, see Licia Carlson, *The Faces of Intellectual Disability: Philosophical Reflections* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Annette K. Vance Dorey, *Better Baby Contests: The Scientific Quest for Perfect Childhood Health in the Early Twentieth Century* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1999); Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

³⁷⁶ For more information on eugenic beliefs regarding mental and physical impairments as external markers of internal deviance, see Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, “Out of the Ashes of Eugenics: Diagnostic Regimes in the United States and the Making of a Disability Minority,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 36, no. 1 (2002): 79-103.

quietly and tactfully draw out all the information that is possible to get.”³⁷⁷ Goddard eventually hired three field workers, Elizabeth S. Kite, Jane W. Griffiths, and Maude Moore, to accomplish this immense task, the results of which Goddard published in a 1914 book entitled *Feeble-Mindedness: Its Causes and Consequences*.³⁷⁸ These three women gathered data on the extended families of 327 inmates from the Training School, which involved collecting the inmates’ medical, school and institutional records, as well as observing and interviewing family members and other informants in the inmates’ hometowns.

Goddard and Davenport disagreed on the amount of data a field worker should compile and submit while in the field. Davenport felt that the field workers should send in daily reports and complete summaries and charts in duplicate for submission to their employing institution and the ERO.³⁷⁹ Goddard, on the other hand, saw this as unnecessary and too demanding of the field worker’s time and energy.³⁸⁰ Instead, Goddard suggested allowing the field workers the freedom to “send in a report on their cases in their own way...putting it in their own form,” and then the employing institution could “write it up in shape,” in the office.³⁸¹ Davenport disagreed, stating that it would be more efficient in the end if there were a standardized procedure in which the field workers compiled their reports and charts as thoroughly as possible while in the field.

³⁷⁷ Letter from HHG to CBD on March 15, 1909. CBD papers, Series I: Correspondence, “Goddard, Henry H. Folder 1(1909).”

³⁷⁸ HHG. *Feeble-Mindedness: Its Causes and Consequences* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1914).

³⁷⁹ Letter from CBD to HHG on September 17, 1910. CBD papers, Series I: Correspondence, “Goddard, Henry H. Folder 2 (1910).”

³⁸⁰ Letter from HHG to CBD on October 10, 1910. CBD papers, Series I: Correspondence, “Goddard, Henry H. Folder 2 (1910).”

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Doing so, Davenport argued, would omit most errors and prevent the need for return trips.³⁸² In the end, the field workers employed by the ERO – whether solely or jointly with other institutions – submitted completed daily reports and charts in duplicate when possible, while those employed solely by Goddard at the Training School checked in when they felt it was necessary. Regardless, the workload for field workers at both locations proved mentally and physically exhausting.

Between October 1, 1910 and January 1, 1913 – the first 27 months of the ERO fieldwork program – there were 32 field workers employed (at least jointly) with the ERO. These field workers averaged 13.5 days in the field each month and spent an average of 10.7 days per month working up the material they gathered in the field. They traveled an average of 408.3 miles, interviewed an average of 46.5 people and charted an average of 338.0 people each month (See Chart 1). All ERO field workers received two weeks of full-paid vacation and two weeks of vacation at half-pay per year.³⁸³ Often, the vacation time was spent recuperating from injuries or illnesses incurred from overwork. For example, on September 28, 1913, ERO field worker, Arthur H. Estabrook wrote Davenport, expressing his failed attempt at taking vacation.

I have just returned to work from a vacation of two weeks which turned out to be very disappointing. I was taken sick and was obliged to remain in bed several days. The doctor said I was run down from overwork and really needed a longer rest. I am not well yet but have returned to work as I cannot afford to stay away any longer.³⁸⁴

³⁸² Letter from CBD to HHG on October 11, 1910. CBD papers, Series I: Correspondence, “Goddard, Henry H. Folder 2 (1910).”

³⁸³ “Contracts with Field and Office Force (1911).” CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series, “ERO-Field Workers.”

³⁸⁴ Letter from AHE to CBD on September 28, 1913. CBD papers, Series IIB: Cold Spring Harbor Series, “Estabrook, Arthur H.”

Prior to writing this letter, Estabrook had been researching families in New York. He had traveled an average of 309 miles, interviewed an average of 26.6 people and charted an average of 298.8 people per month, averaging 18 days in the field and 12.2 days working up the material each month.³⁸⁵ Estabrook's workload was typical for eugenic field workers at the ERO and the Training School.

During this same time, the ERO field workers submitted an average of 29.6 pages of pedigree charts and 282.9 pages of description per month.³⁸⁶ Four years later, in January 1917, the Archivist of the ERO reported that during the previous year (1916), the following data had been submitted:

About 8,000 manuscript pages of data have been received. In addition to this mention may be made of 3,000 cards containing data on the Jukes family, already received and indexed, and also of 9,000 cards containing the data, produced in the Nassau county (N.Y.) survey. There are also in the archives 2,105 Records of Family Traits; 5 schedules for the Personal Distribution of Family Traits; about 500 Stature Schedules; 100 Twin Schedules; 200 pages of correspondence containing data; and 2,587 pages of Special Trait Studies...The total number of pages of genealogies is 27,778...The general card index now contains over a half million cards and is being added at the rate of more than 165,000 new cards per year.³⁸⁷

Not all of this information was collected by eugenic field workers; the ERO accepted submissions from volunteers in the community, individuals documenting their own pedigree charts, and professionals from institutions throughout the United States. However, field workers

³⁸⁵ "Field Workers of the ERO, Tabulated Summary of the Work (October 1, 1910 to January 1, 1913)." CBD papers, Official Records in the History of the ERO, 1913-1940. Folder 1.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ "Archivist's Summary" *Eugenical News* 2, no. 1 (January 1917): 4-5.

employed by the ERO and other supporting institutions submitted the vast majority of the genealogies and data cards.³⁸⁸

Further, superintendent of the ERO and director of the fieldwork training program, Harry H. Laughlin, wrote in 1924 that even given this immensity of data compiled and submitted by the field workers, the written submissions represented only a small portion of the field worker's overall workload:

The drawing of the chart is only a tenth part of the job. The first-hand field work is the real task. The family, whether good or bad, has to be found, and the field worker has to see that the pedigree is authentic and the description of its individual members accurate. The whole job of getting the interest and the collaboration of the family, of using the neighborhood information, and of getting official records are part of the job of getting data from their official source; the field worker has a difficult and important task in all modern eugenical research.³⁸⁹

Eugenic field workers went into the community seeking out family members of institutionalized children or adults. The people they interviewed were generally strangers, and therefore initially hesitant to share personal information with the field workers. Approaching these cautious strangers proved taxing and sometimes dangerous for eugenic field workers.

In 1917 the Bureau of Analysis and Investigation of the New York State Board of Charities alerted its readers to the intensity of eugenic fieldwork. In their "Field Work Manual," the Bureau warned,

Field work is interesting to those of scientific temperament, but it is not easy work. It requires youth and health and enthusiasm to meet the adversities of travel and to turn off the work satisfactorily...Physical qualifications are also of importance as the investigator must be able to stand the fatigue of travel, must be able to walk long distances if necessary and keep irregular hours. The health therefore must be such that personal matters may be subordinated to the interest

³⁸⁸ See *Eugenical News*, a monthly bulletin published by the American Eugenics Society in collaboration with the Eugenics Record Office. Each issue lists the data the ERO received each month from various sources.

³⁸⁹ HHL, "Minutes and Lectures to the Eugenics Education Society, Jan. 29, 1924." HHL papers, D-5-2: 13.

of the work. The field worker should possess a curiosity both scientific and social which will survive fatigue and discouragement.³⁹⁰

The ERO and its collaborating institutions expected their field workers to overcome the adversities involved with fieldwork, pushing past their own physical limitations for the greater cause of securing a eugenically fit nation.

As I mentioned above, Estabrook returned from his vacation despite needing more rest because he could not afford to take unpaid leave. Another field worker even delayed necessary surgery to accommodate her data collection schedule. The ERO employed Elizabeth Muncey as a field worker after she attended the 1911 summer training program. Even though prior to becoming a field worker with the ERO Muncey had been a working physician for fourteen years, eugenic fieldwork proved more demanding on her energy and health. In September of 1920, Muncey was forced to halt her work because she had been injured in the field. On September 10, 1920, Muncey wrote Davenport – her supervisor – stating,

I am unable to do much field-work at the present...on account of an operation on my foot necessitated by a street-car accident...over a year ago...on my way home from the library. My toe was dislocated at the time and I have suffered greatly with it since. Finally after or during the intensive field-work in June and July it became unbearable and I called a surgeon who found the nerve inflamed the entire length...Amputation was necessary and *after collecting enough data* so that I could work my notes while keeping still, I had the operation done.³⁹¹

Muncey likely continued working despite her injury for two reasons. First, she could not afford to take time off and therefore had to schedule her surgery when she could complete the written portion of her research while recovering at home. Second, she took up the cause of eugenics and found fieldwork, although extremely isolating and taxing, worth her continued attention. As a

³⁹⁰ Bureau of Analysis and Investigation of the New York State Board of Charities, "Field Work Manual" *Eugenics and Social Welfare Bulletin* no. 10 (1917): 16.

³⁹¹ Qtd. in Amy Sue Bix, "Experiences and Voices of Eugenic Field-Workers: 'Women's Work' in Biology," *Social Studies of Science* 27 (1997): 640. Original emphasis.

result, field workers such as Muncey reinforced the belief that the health of the nation was more important than any one individual – even if it was individuals of desirable stock.

Fieldwork at the Training School was just as intense, as evidenced by Jane W. Griffiths' experiences noted above. Griffiths experienced numerous difficulties during her tenure at the Training School. Between May 27, 1911 and December 2, 1912, many of Griffiths' letters reflected her growing exhaustion and declining health. On May 27, 1911, Griffiths expressed that she was "rather tired, though quite well," and she planned to take a day off to rest "at [her] own expense if necessary."³⁹² On July 14, 1912, Griffiths' asked for permission to take a month's leave of absence because of exhaustion due to the difficulty of attempting to visit families during inclement weather. She offered to continue work on her pedigree charts and descriptions during this time.³⁹³ There is no response from Goddard in the files, but a letter written from Griffiths on July 19, 1912, in which she again expressed her waning health while in the field, shows that she did not secure the leave of absence she had requested.³⁹⁴ Finally, on December 2, 1912, Griffiths wrote Goddard stating,

For the rest I am not well. Just what is the matter I don't know. The doctor says I must take...Lactobacilli for at least three months and I am taking a [illegible drug] three times a day besides. I have thought several times I would have to give up my work altogether, but unless this is absolutely necessary I cannot very well afford to do it. At the same time I am not able to do the regular amount of work so that I feel you have a right to criticize my daily reports and to take from my salary anything you think is fair.³⁹⁵

³⁹² Letter from Jane W. Griffiths to HHG on May 27, 1911. HHG papers, Box M614, "Correspondence: G."

³⁹³ Letter from Jane W. Griffiths to HHG on July 14, 1912. HHG papers, Box M614, "Correspondence: G."

³⁹⁴ Letter from Jane W. Griffiths to HHG on July 19, 1912. HHG papers, Box M614, "Correspondence: G."

³⁹⁵ Letter from Jane W. Griffiths to HHG on December 2, 1912. HHG papers, Box M614, "Correspondence: G."

Like with Muncey, Griffiths' letters document a need to continue working despite increasing problems associated with being in the field. Griffiths did remain at the ERO until May of 1913, when she was hired by Dr. Fernald at an institution in Waverly, Massachusetts. Eventually, though, Griffiths left eugenic fieldwork altogether. In 1932, the *Memorial Volume in Commemoration of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Vineland Laboratory*, simply listed her as, "Jane Griffiths, Social Investigator, 1910-1913. Now in business, Rochester, NY."³⁹⁶

Bix argued that Davenport treated his field workers as if they were "human research machines, expecting them to travel great distances and devote day and evening to gathering information and writing reports, maintaining throughout an intense dedication to eugenics."³⁹⁷ And for the field workers who did continue their employment beyond the initial year-long appointment offered following training (such as Estabrook, Muncey, Griffiths), they continued their work despite the inconveniences of fieldwork because they a.) believed in the importance of eugenic science and the work they were doing, b.) did not have any other employment opportunities, or c.) both. The longer they remained as field workers, however, the greater their chance that they would become overworked and sick or impaired.

³⁹⁶ Myra W. Kuenzel, "Personnel and Publication of the Vineland Laboratory, 1906-1931." In Edgar A. Doll, Ed. *Twenty-Five Years: A Memorial Volume in Commemoration of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Vineland Laboratory, 1906-1931* (Vineland, NJ: The Training School, 1932): 105.

³⁹⁷ Bix 1997: 640.

Table 1:
Field Workers of the ERO
Tabulated Summary of Work (October 1, 1910 to January 1, 1913)³⁹⁸

Name	Virginia R. Brown	Edna C. Bryner	Marion Collins	Marie T. Curial	F.H. Danielson	Sadie C. Devitt	Mary O. Dranga	Amey B. Eaton	A.H. Estabrook
Avg. # of days/mo. in field	12.6	13.5	11.9	15.5	13.5	7.8	16.1	12.3	18
Avg. # of days/mo. working up material	14	12	9.5	12.5	10.4	17.4	12.3	15.2	12.2
Avg. # of miles traveled/mo.	328	779.5	343.6	960	720.4	230.2	120	166.6	309
Avg. # of people interviewed/mo.	31.3	35	41.8	29	59.9	34.7	17	40.5	26.6
Avg. # of people charted/mo.	650	178.5	236	419	230.6	400.1	112.5	464.5	398.8

Name	Susan K. Gilean	W. Hathaway	Sybil Hyatt	W. Key	Ruth Lawton	E.C. Macomber	W. Marshall	A. McKinnie	E.P. Moore
Avg. # of days/mo. in field	26.6	15	9.6	13	10.5	9	15.5	10.3	15.4
Avg. # of days/mo. working up material	1	8.5	6	6	13	13.5	11	12	10
Avg. # of miles traveled/mo.	261.3	775.7	141.6	535	413.9	379.6	659.5	469.5	235
Avg. # of people interviewed/mo.	96	86.4	110.4	58.5	41.5	22.5	22.5	35.5	30
Avg. # of people charted/mo.	20	512.2	10.3	170	311	199.6	95.5	219.8	940

³⁹⁸ Selection from larger chart of same title. In CBD papers, Official Records in the History of the ERO, 1913-1940. Folder 1. Average figures from source. Data was missing from 5 field workers. I have left them out of this representation.

Name	Ruth S. Moxcey	Dr. E.B. Muncey	Florence Orr	H.T. Reeves	V. Robinson	Jane H. Ross	M.M. Sturges	Ruth Wagner	A.M. Wendt
Avg. # of days/mo. in field	11.8	15.2	12	12	22	12.4	10.5	10.5	10
Avg. # of days/mo. working up material	13	9.8	19	6.5	8	7.1	14	8.5	12
Avg. # of miles traveled/mo.	408.7	389.3	400	435	588	392	52.6	512.5	424.5
Avg. # of people interviewed/mo.	35.7	85	20.1	32.3	99.5	19.5	43.7	62	52
Avg. # of people charted/mo.	271.6	360.8	154	158	79	304.1	291.4	246	226.5

Name	AVERAGES
Avg. # of days/mo. in field	13.5
Avg. # of days/mo. working up material	10.7
Avg. # of miles traveled/mo.	408.3
Avg. # of people interviewed/mo.	46.5
Avg. # of people charted/mo.	338.9

B. **Feebleminded Need Not Apply: Field Workers as Eugenically Fit Specimens**

Before someone could become a eugenic field worker, s/he had to demonstrate that s/he was healthy enough to tolerate the demands of the job. In his list of qualifications for eugenic field workers, Goddard stated that s/he be in “good health,” that is, s/he fit within the eugenic framework of “normal,” which encompassed not only physical and psychological health, but also a desirable race and class status.³⁹⁹ Because field workers proved such “fitness” prior to gaining the job through their demographic background and outward appearance, becoming ill or disabled while in the field did not subject them to the eugenic gaze.⁴⁰⁰

During the first fieldwork training program in July of 1910, Davenport wrote Mrs. E.H. Harriman stating that he had found “six excellent” candidates for subsequent fieldwork. He described the women of this group as follows:

Miss Amey B. Eaton, a student of Radcliffe and a graduate of Brown University. She lives in Providence where her father is one of the most highly esteemed and active citizens...Miss Helen Reeves of Bridgeton, New Jersey who has been associated with Dr. Johnstone...Mrs. Mary D. Graebe who is nominated by Dr. Healy of the Juvenile Psychopathic Institute of Chicago where she will return to work...Miss Florence H. Danielson, graduate of Brown University...⁴⁰¹

All of the women listed above were deemed qualified for eugenic fieldwork because of their race and class statuses, educational backgrounds, and/or association with eminent men.⁴⁰² Miss Eaton, for example, had attended Radcliffe and Brown, and had a well-respected father. The others had been nominated by their male supervisors or professional acquaintances, whose

³⁹⁹ HHG, *Feeble-Mindedness: Its Causes and Consequences* (New York: Macmillan, 1914): 24.

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. English 2004; Bix 1997; Carlson 2010.

⁴⁰¹ Letter from CBD to MWH on July 20, 1910. CBD papers, Series I: Correspondence, “Mary Williamson Harriman (Mrs. E.H. Harriman).”

⁴⁰² Although race is not explicitly discussed here, the field workers in question were likely white. See English 2004; Bix 1997.

recommendations automatically legitimized these women as normal, and therefore eugenically “fit.”

In addition, becoming disabled in the field did not threaten the eugenic field workers’ statuses as normal, fit women eligible to continue their work. In fact, they were encouraged to keep working, further taxing their bodies, and sacrificing their own health for that of the nation. Like disabled veterans, therefore, eugenic field workers who had become sick or disabled constituted a protected class. They had been normal, and due to their service had become feeble.⁴⁰³ Unlike male veterans, the disabling nature of eugenic fieldwork did not impair their ability to fulfill their gender roles as women thereby threatening the social or gender status of female field workers like it did in the case of the feeble-minded. In fact, their gender protected them even further. David Gerber wrote the following regarding male disabled veterans in the introduction to his 2000 edited volume, “On the one hand, the warrior may be valorized as a symbol of masculine honor, on the other, pity and fear, the common emotions associated with our response to disability, serve to subvert honor and infantilize and feminize the male.”⁴⁰⁴ Therefore, while disabled veterans were generally protected from the eugenic gaze, becoming disabled could threaten their masculinity if they became dependent and unable to work. On the other hand, during the early twentieth century, women were considered naturally “dependent” and having to return to the home after becoming disabled or sick, further emphasized the belief that external work was too taxing for women and they belonged in the home. The meaning of dependency shifted during the late nineteenth century, splitting into two

⁴⁰³ For more information on the protected status of disabled veterans, see David A. Gerber (ed.), *Disabled Veterans in History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky (eds.), *The New Disability History: American Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

⁴⁰⁴ David Gerber, “Introduction.” In David A. Gerber (ed.), *Disabled Veterans in History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000): 5.

unequal groups.⁴⁰⁵ Because women were considered naturally dependent upon men, if female eugenic fieldworkers became disabled in the field, this did not threaten their femininity. Unlike disabled men, this did not generally lead to poverty. If not longer fit to work outside the home, eugenic field workers could return to the domestic sphere, regain their health, and fulfill their feminine duty by becoming wives and biological mothers as many of the women who left field work did eventually did.

C. **Fulfilling their Feminine Duty: Field Workers Secure the National Gene Pool**

Every complete woman has the maternal instinct in her; if she have no children of her own, her instincts reach out to the children of others. Child-saving is a natural and favorite work for the altruistic woman.

~J.T. Searcy 1908⁴⁰⁶

On July 29, 1912 Davenport expressed his concern regarding hiring female eugenic field workers for an extended period of time.⁴⁰⁷ Davenport was not necessarily concerned with the disabling nature of eugenic fieldwork, but worried that continued employment would delay female field workers – women considered of good eugenic stock – from marrying and having children, thereby failing to contribute their own strong progeny to the national gene pool. During this time, eugenicists such as Davenport and Goddard feared that the feeble-minded reproduced at a rate “from two to six times” faster than those of desirable heredity.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁵ Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, “A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State,” *Signs* 19, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 320. See also Susan Schweik, *The Ugly Laws: Disability in Public History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

⁴⁰⁶ J.T. Searcy, “Heredity: An Allegory.” In “Insane and Epileptic.” *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction* 33 (1908): 298.

⁴⁰⁷ Letter from CBD to HHG on July 29, 1912. CBD papers, Series I: Correspondence, “Goddard, Henry H. Folder 4 (1912-1921).”

⁴⁰⁸ HHG, “The Menace of Mental Deficiency from the Standpoint of Heredity.” *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* Reprint 175, no. 8 (1916): 4.

In 1916, Goddard wrote of the dangers of limiting reproduction in families of good stock, especially considering the unrestrained procreation of the feebleminded.

We are told sometimes that two children in a family are all that can be properly reared; that is better to rear two children and rear them properly than to rear a larger family and rear them badly...The average in the United States is, for all classes, something less than two [children per family], and the average for these defectives is from four to twelve.⁴⁰⁹

Goddard's main purpose in the above article was alerting readers to the growing "army of the feeble-minded"⁴¹⁰ and the need for restraining the reproduction of defectives, however, in the passage above, he simultaneously warned his readers of the growing popularity of limiting progeny for economic and health reasons and the eugenic dangers of such behavior.

Eugenicists such as Davenport and Goddard focused mainly on "negative" eugenic strategies aimed at ridding a population of those deemed inferior from the national stock (i.e. limiting immigration and marriage of the feebleminded and introducing sterilization laws intended to prevent feebleminded people from reproducing). They did, however, incorporate "positive" eugenic strategies with the hopes of encouraging those deemed healthy and normal to increase their reproductive stock, such as "better baby" and "fitter family" contests at state fairs.⁴¹¹ Positive and negative eugenics were not two separate entities, but were intimately intertwined and rooted in the belief that disease and disability should be prevented or eliminated from the national gene pool, thereby creating a stronger, purer race of men who would inherit a world free of "degenerates."

⁴⁰⁹ Goddard 1916: 5.

⁴¹⁰ Goddard 1916: 4.

⁴¹¹ For more information on positive eugenic strategies and their relation to negative eugenics, see Dorey 1999); Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Martin Pernick, *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of "Defective" Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures since 1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

A normal woman's role in the positive eugenic project, therefore, was to have and raise healthy children. Namely, Anna Stubblefield argued, desirable women contributed to the "supremacy of the white race" by "bearing and nurturing children who, if they were male, would contribute to the progress of humanity; and, if they were female, would become good mothers."⁴¹² Women could also fulfill this role, as eugenic field workers did, by promoting eugenic research policies and programs aimed at strengthening the national gene pool. Licia Carlson argued that eugenic field workers "occupied an epistemic position similar to the vigilant mothers who watched closely for signs of feeble-mindedness in their children."⁴¹³ While in the field, female eugenic field workers acted as vigilant mothers scoping out feeble-mindedness in the community, which led to the employment of negative eugenic strategies aimed at the elimination of this population. Once they gave up their work and returned home, however, they returned to the more traditional role of normal women engaging in positive eugenic strategies whereby they increased their own reproductive efforts.

The concept of maternalism, explored in Chapter Four, encompassed both biological and "social" mothers. Historian Molly Ladd-Taylor wrote in 1993:

I use the term maternalism to denote a specific ideology whose adherents held 1. That there was a uniquely feminine value system based on care and nurturance, 2. That mothers performed a service to the state by raising citizen-workers, 3. That women were united across class, race, and nation by their common capacity for motherhood and therefore shared a responsibility for all the world's children, and 4. That ideally men should earn a family wage to support their "dependent" wives and children at home.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹² Anna Stubblefield, "'Beyond the Pale': Tainted Whiteness, Cognitive Disability, and Eugenic Sterilization," *Hypatia* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 176.

⁴¹³ Licia Carlson, *The Faces of Intellectual Disability: Philosophical Reflections* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

⁴¹⁴ Molly Ladd-Taylor, "Toward Defining Maternalism in U.S. History," *Journal of Women's History* 5, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 110.

Therefore, a woman could fulfill her feminine and national duty through biological reproduction or by involving herself in a field that was committed to the improvement of all children's health and welfare as it was directly related to that of the nation's health. Daylanne K. English further emphasized this point in her 2004 book, arguing:

While they must be considered New Women, whose lives and labor challenge Victorian gender restrictions, the field workers are nevertheless able to "pass" as acceptable, conventionally feminine women because their work functions to restrict the unacceptable gendered and reproductive behavior of others.⁴¹⁵

Eugenic fieldwork did not threaten the established gender hierarchy; in fact, it allowed women to fulfill their feminine and national duties by extending their natural role as mothers beyond the domestic sphere into the public sphere and, when that was no longer possible, return to biological motherhood. English continued, "the field workers laboriously produce[d] exhaustive catalogs of family members in a metaphorical replay of the reproductive labors of the fertile women of the family."⁴¹⁶

D. **Conclusion**

Despite the belief by U.S. eugenicists that even environmental or accidental causes of disability and illness was usually reflective of an internal hereditary weakness, female eugenic field workers were protected from the eugenic gaze. This was due to two reasons: first, because field workers secured their placement on the normal side of the diagnostic dichotomy even before taking work up in the field, becoming injured or ill while collecting eugenic data did not threaten their status, especially as they were generally able to return to the home and become biological mothers. Second, taking up eugenic fieldwork was considered an extension of their

⁴¹⁵ Daylanne K. English, *Unnatural Selections: Eugenics in American Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004): 168-169.

⁴¹⁶ English 2004: 164.

mothering role whereby eugenic field workers were responsible for monitoring the health of numerous “children,” and not longer simply their own immediate families. Compiling eugenic pedigrees, therefore, served to fulfill eugenic field workers’ feminine and national duties and kept them from coming under scrutiny if they became sick or impaired.

VI. CONCLUSION

This project has focused on eugenic field workers in the United States between 1910 and 1924 in order to highlight the ways in which the U.S. eugenic project imagined disability and femininity. The Eugenic Record Office and the Vineland Training School used field workers and the data these field workers collected on feeblemindedness to promote the importance of eugenic research to institutions, state governments, and the general population. My main goal in this dissertation was to explore the work of eugenic field workers in the advancement and promotion of eugenic science as well as the dynamics between themselves and their subjects. Doing so has allowed me to document varied intersections of disability and femininity during this historical moment as a means of illuminating the complexity and fluidity of these and other determining characteristics.

I argued that the case of eugenic field workers demonstrates how feebleminded and normal women were situated differentially and dialectically as keepers of the national gene pool. In eugenic thought, feebleminded women, on the one hand, held the prime responsibility – over their male counterparts – for the transmission of the feebleminded germ plasm. Normal women, like the field workers, on the other hand, were “keepers” in the sense that they protected the national gene pool, ensuring that the feebleminded taint did not spread within the national population or extend to future generations. By examining eugenic field workers and their employment from a variety of angles, I demonstrated the different ways that femininity and disability were constructed by the U.S. eugenic project between 1910 and 1924 – the years in which the program was most valued and productive as a mechanism of eugenic research. In doing so, this dissertation contributes to scholarship that documents the multi-layered histories of

eugenics and its investments in disability and gender as well as the growing field of disability history.

I began my project with an exploration of hereditarian explanations of degeneracy and the process by which eugenicists attempted to secure a productive nation, as these explanations became the foundation of the eugenic fieldwork program and structured the day-to-day work of the field workers. Because feeble-mindedness was seen as the result of a tainted germ plasm, I argued that attempts to halt the transmission of this taint centered on feeble-minded women, who were subsequently disproportionately institutionalized and sterilized as a means of stopping their reproduction.

Chapter III considered how eugenic field workers distinguished between normal and feeble-minded individuals at a glance. I argued that the diagnosis of feeble-mindedness centered primarily on one's proximity to early twentieth century, white, middle- and upper-class normative gendered appearances and behaviors. The standardized intelligence tests field workers administered in institutions relied on knowledge of such social norms, which outsiders from this culture would not necessarily be aware of. Once outside institutional walls and in the field completing pedigrees, eugenic field workers utilized gendered labor norms of the household to determine whether or not an individual was normal or feeble-minded.

Chapter IV explored the construction of the eugenic fieldwork discipline as a field that accommodated women interested in biological research. I argued that the profession relied on maternalist rhetoric in order to emphasize the need for "nurturing," "selfless" women to complete such work, but the actual work in the field involved the implementation of biological science aimed at the collection of genealogical data by any means necessary. The performance

of femininity, therefore, became a way for field workers and their supervisors to acquire this data – to draw out the instances of disability in the community.

Finally, the final chapter explored the selective gaze of eugenic science by interrogating the disabling nature of eugenic fieldwork. Despite often becoming ill or impaired in the field, eugenic field workers did not lose the status afforded to them as normal women, nor did it result in their becoming subject to the eugenic gaze. I argued that these women retained their placement on the normal side of the diagnostic dichotomy because of two reasons: 1) taking up work in the field necessitated a eugenically fit diagnosis that illness or impairment did not endanger – especially because as women they could transfer their skills back to the domestic sphere as biological mothers should the public sphere prove too taxing on their well-being; 2) compiling eugenic pedigrees and doing eugenic fieldwork served to protect the workers who had to leave due to illness or impairment because the work done had fulfilled their feminine and national duties of securing the national gene pool. Their work provided a protective shield to any stigma related to an inferior status such as that associated with disability.

From this investigation, we learn that eugenic field workers had more authority and agency in the eugenic project than historians have given them credit for, and that they were essential to the early success of the U.S. eugenic project. In their role as “glorified data collectors” (my own words), they held the power to define what femininity and disability encompassed in the individuals they diagnosed. Despite assertions to the contrary by Davenport and his colleagues, the subjective nature of eugenic fieldwork gave the field workers freedom to embed their judgments of how people behaved and appeared within their data. While it is still important to note that female eugenic field workers were situated at the bottom of the hierarchy of the eugenic science field, and rarely had the chance to rise within this hierarchy, they

nevertheless found ways of influencing the science within this power dynamic, often at the expense of individuals with disabilities and other marginal identities. Further work on this topic could and should explore this dynamic in more detail, including how eugenic field workers were able to work subversively despite the hierarchy.

This work helps us understand how the day-to-day work of eugenic science was accomplished. Exploring in depth the eugenic field workers and their contribution to eugenics helps understand the process by which both ideology and policies were constructed. As such, this work makes contributions to the histories of eugenics and disability in numerous ways. First, it helps elaborate who had the power to define and diagnose disability and femininity in the numerous contexts of even such a small discipline as eugenic fieldwork. Second, it broadens our notion of who and what constituted eugenic data, including who the collectors of this data were, again granting more agency to the female field workers involved despite the fact that they were rarely given credit in its publication and dissemination. It helps us understand, therefore, how eugenic ideology was reinforced through particular practices and through particular people.

In terms of disability history, this project has expanded our notion of the role of women in the disablement process. Previous scholarship that has focused on women in the history of disability has focused on mothers and caretakers of individuals with disabilities.⁴¹⁷ By examining the role of female eugenic field workers, I have been able to add a layer of analysis by including professionals who were responsible for constructing and confining disability during the early twentieth century.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. Eva Feder Kittay and Ellen K. Feder (eds.), *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.); Chloe Silverman, *Understanding Autism: Parents, Doctors, and the History of a Disorder* (New Brunswick: Princeton University Press, 2011); Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson and Jen Cellio (eds.), *Disability and Mothering: Liminal Spaces of Embodied Knowledge* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011).

Despite these contributions, this dissertation does, of course, lead to further questions that are not fully explored here. First, it would be valuable to explore in greater detail the relationship between the (typically) male supervisors and female field workers by not only noting what this relationship tells us about assumptions regarding femininity, but masculinity too. This would help expand the analysis to one not just of femininity and disability, but of gender and disability as a whole. As femininity and disability are inextricable from one another, so too are masculinity and femininity (and masculinity and disability, for that matter).

Second, further work might explore the intersectionality of race and class and its place in this particular history. Such an analysis might further raise the methodological question for disability historians of how one interrogates numerous identities in a single project without getting lost in those intersections? Further, how does one do this while giving equal credence to the various standpoints individual bodies inhabit and simultaneously recognizing that such intersections are inherently blurry and cannot easily be teased out or explained? This is the challenge of every social historian, but I believe by focusing on the relatively small “society” of eugenic field workers I was able to demonstrate how an intersectional approach can help us to understand various categories and distinctions as simultaneously material and socio-historical. Such an analysis reveals a space in which classifications remain fluid and historically contingent.

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Vogt, Sara Ann. "Epistemologies of Eugenics: Gender and Resistance in Two Works of United States and German Literature." Master's Thesis, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2002.

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University of Illinois at Chicago. College of Applied Health Sciences Graduate Student Award.

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Who's Who Among Students in American Colleges and Universities Award.

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University of Illinois at Chicago. Department of Disability and Human Development Travel Grant. Accompanied and assisted advisor at various conferences on Disability Studies in Germany.

Presentations:

Constructing a National Body: Disability, Race, and Gender in the United States. American Historical Association Conference. San Diego, CA, 2010.

Diagnosing Defectives: Eugenic Fieldwork in the United States, 1910-1924. Transmission, Translation, Relocation Conference. Indiana University, Bloomington, 2009.

In the Service of the Gene Pool: Disability, Gender and the Welfare State. Social Science History Association Conference. Chicago, 2007.

Disability, Gender and the National Body. Society for Disability Studies Conference. Seattle, Washington, 2007.

“In Service of the Gene Pool”: *Fürsorgerinnen, Eugenics and Disability during the Weimar Republic.* German Studies Association Conference. Pittsburgh, 2006.

The New Eugenics: Theorizing Normalization Strategies in Akif Pirinçci’s Felidae. Society for Disability Studies Conference. San Francisco State University, 2005.

Therapeutic Labors: (Re)Negotiating the Confines of Madness. Society for Disability Studies Conference. St. Louis, 2004.

Der deutsche Hinkemann: Resisting the Eugenic Master Narrative of Disability. Graduate Student Conference of the Department of German, Scandinavian and Dutch at the University of Minnesota. Minneapolis, 2003.

Gendered Eugenics: Reproduction, Nation and Eugenics in Germany and the U.S., 1890-1945. Society for Disability Studies Conference. Oakland, 2002.

Invited Presentations:

Invited Discussant. “Choosing Children with Disabilities: A Choice Too Far?” Paper given by Professor Timothy F. Murphy, Department of Medical Education, University of Illinois at Chicago. 2008.

Gender, Eugenics and the Legacy of Disability as Deviance. Department of Sociology and Criminology, Dominican University. 2007.

Behinderung, Weiblichkeit, und die Hüterinnen des Genpools. Disability Studies Colloquium, Lehrstuhl für Soziologie in der Heilpädagogik, Sozialpolitik und Sozialmanagement. University of Cologne, Germany, 2006.

An Introduction to Disability Studies. Internationale Ringvorlesung, “Internationale Perspektiven der Special Needs Education.” University of Cologne, Germany, 2006.

Publications:

“Diagnosing Defectives: Disability, Gender and Eugenics in the United States, 1910-1924.” *Hektoen International: A Journal of Healthcare, Humanities, and Medical History* 3, no. 1 (April 2009). <http://www.hektoen.org/journal.html>

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Editorships:

Editorial Board. *Encyclopedia of Disability: A History in Primary Source Documents*. Vol. 5. Eds. Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2006.

Managing Editor. *Body Electric: Literary and Visual Arts Magazine*. University of Illinois College of Medicine, Chicago. 2002-2005, 2006-2010.

Teaching Experience:

“Women’s Occupation and Health in Modern Medicine: An American Perspective.” *University of Illinois at Chicago*. Non-clinical elective for 4th year Medical Students. Offered each semester, 2008 – 2010.

“GAMD 202: The History and Philosophy of Medicine.” *University of Illinois at Chicago*. Undergraduate Honors/GPPA 2nd year course. Spring semesters, 2007 – 2010.

“New Discourses of Disability: An Introduction to Disability Studies.” *University of Cologne, Department of Special Education*. Summer Semester, 2006.

"American Eugenics and the Legacy of Disability as Deviance." *University of Illinois at Chicago*. First Year (Medical Students-M1) Special Topic-Spring Semester 2004-2005; 2008-2009.

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