Constructing 'Free Love': Science, Sexuality, and Sex Radicalism, c. 1895-1913.

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature: ……..

Abstract

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, a broad community of radical men and women engaged in discussions about sex reform and what they termed ‘free love’. Much of this debate took place within a particular community of periodicals, as those interested in radical sexual reform read, contributed to, and corresponded with a small number of key sex radical journals such as *The Adult, Lucifer, the Light-Bearer,* and *The Freewoman*. Drawing upon their contributions to these journals, this thesis will examine the ways in which sex radical authors built and shaped their beliefs about sex and sex reform – in short, how they constructed ‘free love’ in their work.

In particular my research will explore how sex radicals, despite holding diverse and often conflicting views, used similar theories and ideas drawn from a broad range of scientific disciplines to support their arguments. This thesis will show that radicals used a varied set of scientific ideas and theories in order to contend that mankind had a ‘natural’ and important sexuality that had been harmfully bound and distorted by contemporary social, cultural, and legal institutions. It will demonstrate that it was these scientific ideas that underpinned their criticisms of existing social institutions, and thus framed their varied calls for radical sexual reform. Despite the often contentious nature of sex radical debates, this thesis will therefore illustrate that radical authors throughout these journals shared a belief that a scientific understanding of sex was crucial to making sex ‘free’.

Furthermore, by exploring links between sex radicals and other social reformers, research will illustrate that radicals were not isolated and should not be dismissed as a marginal group; instead it will show that they are better understood as active participants in part in a broad set of contemporary intellectual debates about issues related to sex, relationships, gender, and the body. As such, this thesis will show the importance of bringing radicals in from the fringe of historical accounts in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of such debates.

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Contents

Introduction

> 'From the mire of injustice and unmentionableness [sic] into which the sexual instinct has been cast by the unco' guid, the Legitimation Leaguers set themselves to raise it into the peaceful paths of pleasantness. *Appreciation* is our attitude towards this instinct, as against the depreciation it was so long been subject to…To the Obscure Judes and distracted Sues of society we offer the hand of fellowship, and boldly proclaim that only where love is free from legal bonds and sordid pressures, and mutual attraction guides voluntary association between the sexes, is the realisation of the most complete life possible.'[1]

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, a broad community of radical men and women engaged in discussions about sex reform and what they termed 'free love'. Much of this debate took place within a particular community of periodicals, as those interested in radical sexual reform read, contributed to, and corresponded with a small number of key sex radical journals. While their views and agendas often diverged, many of these radicals came to this debate with a shared (and novel) understanding of sex. These sex radicals (as I shall term them) agreed that mankind had a powerful, pure, and natural sexual instinct. This natural imperative, they claimed, had been wrongfully and harmfully restricted and degraded by contemporary social, legal, and cultural mores. As such they were highly critical of laws, values, and customs that they believed had served to obscure the 'true' nature of sexuality, and render what they saw as a clean, natural instinct as impure and

[1] Leighton Pagan, 'To the "Obscure Judes" and Distracted "Sues"', *The Adult* 1:1 (June, 1897), 6.

immoral. This denigration, they claimed, had interfered with and distorted the natural relationship between the sexes. In their view this distortion had a number of worrying outcomes and lay at the heart of a range of social problems. Firstly, radicals argued that the restrictions and controls placed on the expression of natural and pure sexual urges was harmful to an individual's physical and mental health, development and wellbeing. Furthermore, they linked it to worrying social issues such as the declining moral health of society, unhappy, unequal and unjust marriages, and the proliferation of sexual vice. These sex radicals therefore called for a redefinition of the way people thought about sex – they argued that people should not consider the sexual instinct to be something dangerous or in need of control, and instead (as in the opening quote) they called for it to be appreciated as a positive and powerful force. Allowing sex to be free of 'legal bonds and sordid pressures', and allowing mutual feelings of love and desire to guide and govern sexual relations, they believed, would restore a natural order that would not only make people healthier and happier, but also cure a number of prominent social ills. A key aim of these radicals was therefore to free mankind's natural sexual instincts from the social and legal controls and restrictions placed upon them – in short, they sought to facilitate 'free love'.

As Joanne Passet has noted, terminology is a problematic aspect of any scholarly consideration of free love in this period due to the term's contested meanings.[2] For some contemporaries, for instance, 'free love' was synonymous with 'free lust'. A number of historians have shown how free love came to be associated with promiscuity, unrestrained and reckless sexual activity, and prostitution in the

[2] Joanne Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 2.

contemporary public mind; an understanding that has endured and can also be seen in the work of later commentators and historians.[3] While many of those who debated sexual reform and the importance of sexual freedom rejected this association with lust and proudly proclaimed their commitment to free love doctrines, others, due to its association with sexual transgression and vice, rejected or chose not to use the term. While radicals were arguing together that individual sexual lives needed to be freed from a great variety of social constraints and rules, they nevertheless did so using different terms and labels. Free love terminology is further complicated by the diversity of ideas and activities encapsulated within 'free love' doctrines. As Passet has argued, confusion and disagreement between individuals about how a 'free love' life should be lived day to day meant that a broad range of lifestyles and beliefs could be attributed to 'free lovers'. As such in this thesis I use a number of terms to discuss those who challenged contemporary courtship and marriage customs and advocated sexual freedom. Care has been taken to only use the term 'free lover' to refer to those who specifically labelled themselves as such, or to discuss those who explicitly associated with free love doctrines. Elsewhere I have opted to use the term 'sex radical'; this term functions as an effective general description of those associated with or sympathetic to free love circles who may not necessarily have overtly labelled themselves as a free lover.[4]

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[3] See for example Jean L. Silver-Isenstadt, *Shameless: The Visionary Life of Mary Gove Nichols* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 193; Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 68; Emma Liggins, 'Prostitution and Social Purity in the 1880s and 1890s', *Critical Survey* 15:3 'New' Female Sexualities 1870-1930 (2003), 41.

[4] A number of historians have discussed the difficulties of free love terminology, and have also adopted the use of 'sex radical'. Joanne Passet makes a clear case for this in her 2003 work *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality.* Furthermore, Andrea M. Weingartner uses 'sex radical' to refer to the broad range of writers involved in the American free love movement who did not

This aim of this thesis is to examine the way sex radical authors built and shaped their beliefs about sex and sex reform. In particular it will explore how sex radicals, despite their diverse and often conflicting views, used similar theories and ideas drawn from a broad range of scientific disciplines in order to argue that contemporary social, cultural, and legal institutions had harmfully distorted 'natural' sexuality. In doing so it will not only consider in depth how late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sex radicals constructed their radical views; it will also explore the links between free love debates and other contemporary intellectual examinations of sex, gender, and the body.

Sources and Methodology

Within the context of the vibrant and vigorous nineteenth-century periodical press, which Angelique Richardson has argued 'had achieved a place of unprecedented importance in national social, political, and intellectual debate' by the *fin de siècle*, sex radical journals provided a key rhetorical space in which authors could debate and negotiate important aspects of their calls for sexual reform.[5] Supporting the assertion of literary scholars Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell that 'nineteenth-century periodicals were not normally univocal' and claims by historians of the late nineteenth century that a key characteristic of the contemporary periodical press was its miscellany and heterogeneity, this study of sex radical literature recognises the diverse and often contradictory voices that used the journals as a

specifically label themselves 'free lovers'. See Andrea M. Weingartner, *Sex Radicals in America's Heartland: Redefining Gender and Sexuality, 1880-1910* (Unpublished thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia, 2013), p. 2.

[5] Angelique Richardson, "Eugenics and Freedom at the *Fin de Siècle,*" in *Culture and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Media,* ed. Louise Henson et al., (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 275.

space in which to negotiate, debate, and articulate disparate views on provocative issues like gender, race and sexual freedom.[6] Research to date has tended, like the contemporary mainstream press, to use the term 'free love' loosely to discuss a broad range of what were considered to be unorthodox or transgressive sexual and marital behaviours. However, exploring free love debates through periodicals, characterised by heterogeneous and often conflicting views, offers a new insight into the complexity and sophistication of a concept often taken for granted or ignored in the existing scholarship on *fin de siècle* sex radicalism. Despite the fact that we know little about the readership and circulation of radical journals, a study of this type of publication can nevertheless be highly informative as it reveals both the ideological fault lines and shared concerns that characterised debates about free love and sex radicalism at this time.

The varied nature of the journals – which included a range of articles and commentaries alongside correspondence, poetry, prose, reviews, and advertisements –is particularly important to a study such as this which looks to examine the diverse sources that authors used to construct, frame, and support their radical views. Firstly, it allows us an insight into the diverse array of views, approaches, and agendas present in sex radical literature. But further to this recognition of the multifaceted and heterogeneous nature of sex radical debate, a survey of radicals' journals can also show what brought them together. By examining

[6] Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell (eds.), *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editors, Authors, Readers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p. 5. A number of historians and literary scholars have discussed the diverse and heterogeneous nature of contemporary periodicals. See, for instance, Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green and Judith Johnson, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 25; and Margaret Beetham and Kay Boardman (eds.), *Victorian Women's Magazines: An Anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 4.

the way authors shared themes, ideas, theories, and language across their often divisive debates we are able to see how a diverse range of actors were in fact united around a number of shared values and beliefs. While authors often disagreed or clashed over specific issues and the practicalities of living a sex radical lifestyle, analysis of their journals nevertheless can show us how and why they cohered.

The sex radicals' journals and periodicals represent an important source base for examining contemporary sex radical debates. Therefore while this thesis will explore a number of sex radical publications in order to explore the ideas, beliefs, and theories that underpinned free love debates, it will primarily make use of their journals and newspapers. In particular it will concentrate on *The Adult*, an English periodical allied with the free love group the Legitimation League.[7] The London-based journal, originally edited by George Bedborough before falling to the control of prominent anarchist Henry Seymour, was dedicated to debating the question of freedom in relationships between men and women. Published by the League monthly between 1897 and 1899 it was almost unique in Britain at this time in its outspoken and explicit focus on 'free love'. Despite the League's assertions of the importance of their cause and their belief in the periodical's success, its circulation

[7] Between its founding in Leeds in 1893 and the establishment of *The Adult* in 1897, the Legitimation League had (by its own admission) existed in a state of great inactivity. Other than establishing a notifying secretary and registering a single free union (that of William and Emma Dunton) and one child born out of wedlock (their daughter, Millicent, in 1895) the League, under its original objects which focused on the legitimation of illegitimate but recognised children, did very little of note before the publication of its journal began in 1897. Other than playing a small role in the campaign for the release of Socialist free lover Edith Lanchester from a mental institution, where she had been held on her father's wishes and declared insane for her desire not to marry but to cohabit with her partner, the League's entire portfolio of radical activity before the publication of their journal began can be reduced to this one administrative task. An overview of the League's early activities can be found in their first published report, *The Bar Sinister and Licit Love: The First Biennial Proceedings of the Legitimation League* (London: W. Reeves, 1895).

was probably small.[8] While specific and reliable information about circulation figures does not to my knowledge survive, both Anne Humpherys and Patricia Anderson have speculated that it was likely shared between a limited circle of readers.[9] Indeed Anderson has noted that due to its notably small list of subscribers and modest selling price (twopence until February 1898, and threepence thereafter) *The Adult* was never a 'commercially viable periodical.'[10]

However, while the journal had a limited circle of readers, it was home to the rich discussion of a broad range of topics including theatre, language, foreign affairs, literature, poetry, marriage, divorce, and children - notably, these debates were almost always inherently linked to the question of sex and the agitation for sexual reform. Authors and correspondents looked to discover a way in which society and its attitudes could be changed to offer more freedom in sexual matters and examined what effect this might have. Therefore despite having a small circulation and a limited period in print *The Adult* constitutes an exceptional source for examining the cause of free love in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century and represents, as Anne Humpherys has stated, 'one of the few pieces of evidence of the journalistic underworld of sex radicalism' at this time.[11]

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[8] For example, in 1898 George Bedborough claimed that the Legitimation League had surmounted 'the initial difficulties inseparable from the introduction of so frankly unconventional an undertaking' as starting a periodical committed to the cause of free love, and that therefore there was 'no room for doubt that the future success of the journal is assured.' George Bedborough, Editorial, *The Adult* 2:1 (February, 1898), 3.
[9] Patricia Anderson, 'Free Love and Free Thought: *The Adult* 1897-1899', *Media History* 1:1 (1993), 179; Anne Humpherys, 'The Journal That Did: Form and Content in *The Adult* (1897-1899)', *Media History* 9:1 (2003), 66.
[10] Anderson, 'Free Love and Free Thought', 179.
[11] Anne Humpherys, 'The Journals That Did: Writing about Sex in the late 1890s', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 3 (2006), 12.

Despite its unique focus and importance to an understanding of free love and sex radicalism in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century, *The Adult* has been largely ignored or overlooked by historians. For the most part historians' interest in the journal has centred on the furore caused by the arrest of its original editor on obscenity charges in the summer of 1898. As a number of historical works have detailed, George Bedborough was arrested outside of the offices of *The Adult* by undercover detective John Sweeney for selling 'a certain lewd, wicked, bawdy, scandalous libel'; namely a copy of prominent contemporary sexologist Havelock Ellis's newly published *Sexual Inversion* that discussed homosexuality.[12] Bedborough was also charged with numerous counts of obscenity for articles within *The Adult* itself, including reviews of works by Edward Carpenter, erotic poetry by Berta Buss, and articles that advocated polygamy.[13] Under massive pressure and much to Havelock Ellis's dismay, the politically weak and inexperienced Bedborough swiftly crumbled and pleaded guilty to the first three counts of obscenity; indeed one League commentator stated that he buckled under the pressure of the trial so quickly that the case was over is less than 20 minutes.[14] By focussing on the League's role in the scandal surrounding the publication of Ellis's important early work on

[12] Sweeney had been watching the League undercover for over 2 years before Bedborough's arrest in 1898. Though the arrest has largely been linked to the 'obscene' nature of Ellis's work, in his autobiography Sweeney suggests that it was in reality mostly motivated by a desire on the part of police to shut down League meetings attended by anarchists. Sweeney admitted that while the League's lectures 'were often of an entirely innocent and even elevating nature', the post-lecture discussions 'were mainly supported by Anarchists, and some speeches of highly incendiary character were occasionally delivered.' For more information on Sweeney and the Bedborough affair see John Sweeney, *At Scotland Yard: Being the Experiences during 27 years Service of John Sweeney, Late Detective Inspector; Criminal Investigation Department, New Scotland Yard,* (London, Grant Richards, 1904), pp. 178-197.

[13] A verbatim report of the trial was published in *The Adult* 2:11 (December, 1898). The same edition also included Berta Buss's defence of her work, and reprints of commentaries on the case by figures such as Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis.

[14] George Astor Singer M.A., 'Judicial Scandals and Errors' in Democritus (ed.) *Darwin on Trial* (London: The University Press, 1898), p. 63.

homosexuality, existing historical research has often overlooked or ignored the rich content of *The Adult* itself. However, as this thesis will show, the journal is a source that warrants in depth examination as it offers us an important insight into debates surrounding sex radicalism at the end of the nineteenth century.

Despite the near unique place of *The Adult* in British free love circles in the closing years of the nineteenth century, studying the periodical in isolation would serve to conceal or gloss over a number of important links to other radical circles and publications. For example, suggesting the international scope of free love doctrines, strong connections can be traced between *The Adult* in Britain and important American free love journal *Lucifer, the Light Bearer* published out of Kansas and Chicago between 1883 and 1907.[15] In addition, demonstrating that sex radical ideas espoused in the late nineteenth century persisted into the twentieth, links can be drawn between the Legitimation League's journal and radical feminist paper *The Freewoman* published from 1911. Therefore while the origin and focus of this thesis is *The Adult,* it will also include material from *Lucifer* and *The Freewoman* authors. By discussing these publications side by side I will show that ideas and debates about free love in Britain were not isolated; instead, I argue, they were linked to a loose-knit but ideologically sympathetic sex radical community that was both transnational and enduring.

Transatlantic Connections

[15] *Lucifer* was the successor to the *Valley Falls Liberal*, published by the same editor from 1880. It would become *The American Journal of Eugenics* in 1907. For a good overview of the formation and eventual decline of the journal see Hal Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Lawrence: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977).

Demonstrating that the discussion of free love stretched further than the small circle of *Adult* readers and contributors, British sex radicals closely allied themselves with those debating free love in America. Indeed the opening editorial of *The Adult* included explicit praise for American sex radical publications which they specifically stated had served to inspire them 'to emulate their whole-heartedness in the cause of sex reform.'[16] In particular, *The Adult* was associated with important American journal *Lucifer, the Light Bearer* which begun publication in 1883 under founding editor Moses Harman. Perhaps the most well-known sex radical periodical in America at the time, the journal had subscribers across the country and a circulation of at least fifteen hundred.[17] Its editorial team, including Harman, his daughter Lillian, and her free love partner E. C. Walker, were frequently prosecuted under the Comstock Laws for the supply and distribution of 'obscene' sex radical texts as well as for their own radical behaviour. Lillian Harman and E. C. Walker, for example, were imprisoned in 1886 for entering into an unsanctioned marriage, while Moses Harman was imprisoned numerous times (including time spent doing hard labour) for such crimes as the distribution of information about birth control before his death in 1910.[18] Like contributors to *The Adult, Lucifer* associates discussed free love,

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[16] George Bedborough, Editorial, *The Adult* 1:1 (June, 1897), 1.

[17] Sears, *Sex Radicals*, p. 99. As Passet and Sears have noted the real figure was probably higher. This was due to the fact that many readers shared issues.
A number of historians have identified *Lucifer* as being among the most important and influential sex radical publications of the day. See, for example, Jesse Battan, ''The Word Made Flesh': Language, Authority, and Sexual Desire in Late C19th America', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3:2 (October, 1992), 228; and John Spurlock, *Free Love: Marriage and Middle Class Radicalism in America, 1825 – 1860* (New York University Press, 1988), p. 223.

[18] Lillian Harman entered a union with E. C. Walker (a divorced man twice her age) in 1886. They were both imprisoned (for 45 and 75 days respectively) under the Kansas Marriage Act. Passet has discussed the union of Harman and Walker (called the 'Lucifer match') in *Sex Radicals,* pp. 135-136. Moses Harman was imprisoned at least three times for the distribution and publication of 'obscene' materials including information about birth control and the 'Markland Letter', which discussed marital rape. A general account of his legal troubles can be found in Wendy McElroy, *Individualist Feminism of the Nineteenth Century: Collected Writings and Biographical Profiles* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland,

expressed distrust of church and state intervention into people's intimate lives, and agitated for increased sexual freedom for both men and women.

While a number of historians of free love and sex radicalism in America have used *Lucifer* as a source, they have largely ignored the relationship between Harman's journal and sex radical literature produced in Britain. However, despite its omission in existing literature, the relationship between *The Adult* and *Lucifer* was undoubtedly close. Firstly, following the Legitimation League's decision to make it its main objective to 'educate public opinion in the direction of freedom in sexual relationships', Lillian Harman was invited to become president of the group, and took up the post in 1897.[19] Her free love partner E. C. Walker, with whom she had a child out of wedlock, was also a frequent contributor to the British journal; he submitted numerous articles criticising monogamous sexual practice and was highly critical of the interference of the church in people's private lives.[20] Suggesting the practical links between the two publications, Walker also acted as a distributor for *The Adult* in America through his office in New York, while Bedborough sold *Lucifer* through the Legitimation League's offices in London.[21] Robert Bird Kerr and Dora Forster,

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2001), pp. 92-94. See also Christine Rosen, *Preaching Eugenics: Religious Leaders and the American Eugenics Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 44. A list of all of the prosecutions brought against Walker and the Harmans can be found in Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Civil Disobedience: An Encyclopedic History of Dissidence in the United States* (New York and Oxford: Routledge, 2015), p. 508.

[19] Harman delivered her presidential address, titled 'Some Problems of Social Freedom', in person to the Legitimation League on April 5th 1898. She had previously written to accept the post of League president, and her acceptance letter was included in the first edition of *The Adult* in 1897. In the letter she spoke of the great interest with which she had followed the League since its inception, and expressed her wish to be 'more than a mere figurehead' despite the issue of physical distance. Lillian Harman, 'The New President of the Legitimation League', *The Adult* 1:1 (June, 1897), 11.

[20] See E.C. Walker, 'The Moloch of the Monogamic Ideal', *The Adult* 2:2 (March, 1898), 46-50; ''The Monogamic Ideal' and the 'Ideal Man'', *The Adult* 2:5 (June, 1898), 139-142.

[21] While it is directly mentioned before this, adverts for *Lucifer* start to appear in *The Adult* in October, 1897. *Lucifer* was also sold through another British agent, the Legitimation League's Scottish secretary W. Gilmour. *Lucifer* advertised *The Adult* from August 1897.

Canadian sex radicals who were heavily involved with the *Lucifer* circle, also contributed articles to the journal and spoke at Legitimation League events.[22] Authors involved with the League also contributed submissions to sex radical publications in America; Orford Northcote, for example, published his article 'Freethought and Free Love' in *Lucifer* in December of 1897.[23] Particularly interesting is the a contribution on Malthus by Tennessee Claflin, the sister of notorious free love advocate Victoria Woodhull, the so called "high priestess" of the American free love movement.[24] The involvement of Claflin, a prominent name in American sex radical debates, suggests the involvement of the 'old guard' of American free lovers in British free love circles. As such Claflin's article discussing Malthusian philosophy in the second volume of *The Adult* reveals the close and important association between Bedborough's journal and the existing, more established sex radical tradition in America. The topics and news events covered by both journals also suggest that links were not only practical but ideological. George Bedborough, for instance, contributed a scathing article to his own paper criticising American moral reformer (and Harman's great foe) Anthony Comstock, [25] and both papers discussed the prosecution and persecution of prominent American sex radicals and free love advocates Abner J. Pope and Ezra Heywood.[26]

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[22] Kerr and his free love partner Dora contributed a number of pieces to both *The Adult* and *Lucifer,* for example, Robert Bird Kerr, 'The Question of Children: A Symposium' *The Adult* 2:6 (July, 1898), 166.
[23] Orford Northcote, 'Freethought and Free Love', *Lucifer, the Light Bearer* 1:50 (December 15, 1897), 397 – 399.
[24] Barbara Goldsmith, *Other Powers: the Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), p. 7.
[25] George Bedborough, 'Comstock Rex', *The Adult* 2:3 (April, 1898), 62
[26] George Bedborough, 'The Legitimation League', *The Adult* 2:4 (May, 1898), 119.

We should, of course, take care not to totally homogenise British and American sex radical circles. Indeed there are notable differences between the intellectual and social contexts which shaped the two groups. For example, while the Legitimation League circle was largely made of educated figures from the middle classes, Joanne Passet has noted that a large proportion of the readers and correspondents of American sex radical journals were 'non-elites' from working class backgrounds.[27] However, despite these differences, b radicals shared contributing authors, advertised and promoted the same texts, sold each other's work, endorsed similar principles and followed like events. The groups behind each paper therefore can be seen to have established themselves as part of a transnational community of thought. Indeed Hal Sears has suggested that the British journal was a 'sister paper' to its American counterpart – that, in *The Adult, '*England finally had its own version of *Lucifer'*.[28] The inclusion of *Lucifer* in a study of sex radicalism in Britain can therefore help to highlight the international connections and dialogues that influenced contemporary free love debates.

<u>The Freewoman circle</u>

Demonstrating the persistence of sex radical ideas over time, connections can also be traced between *The Adult* and *The Freewoman,* a radical feminist paper published after the turn of the twentieth century. Launched in November 1911, the journal was originally jointly edited by former WSPU organiser Dora Marsden and her friend, WSPU supporter Mary Gawthorpe. Gawthorpe, however, would quickly

[27] Passet, *Sex Radicals,* 58.
[28] Sears, *Sex Radicals*, p. 256.

give up her editorial duties due to her consistently poor health following her stints in prison and a personal falling out with Marsden.[29] Originally subtitled 'A Weekly Feminist Review', Marsden's *Freewoman* ran until October 1912 when, plagued by financial issues, publication ceased. However it was to swiftly reappear; in June 1913 Marsden launched *The New Freewoman* under the title 'A Weekly Humanist Review' complete with a new literary editor in the form of Ezra Pound.[30] From its first issue the *Freewoman* was a controversial publication. Despite its high selling price and small circulation, its discussions of female sexual pleasure and orgasm, homosexuality, abortion and birth control, alongside its anarchic rejection of democratic politics and the authority of the state ensured it was instantly provocative and much discussed.[31] Indeed, the paper began to struggle financially when it was boycotted by W.H. Smith in 1912 as the nature of some of the articles led the newsagent to deem it 'unfit' to be put on display.[32] This early feminist review was also received with widespread horror by other contemporary women's rights supporters. For example it is well documented that Mrs Humphrey Ward called the journal 'the dark and dangerous side of the women's movement'[33] and stated in a letter to the Times in June 1912 that it represented 'a feminism which would uproot the moral landmarks of our race.'[34] The journal's scandalous reputation owes much

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[29] G. Griffin, *Difference in View: Women and Modernism* (London; Bristol P.A.: Taylor &Francis, 1994), p. 73.
[30] For a discussion of the development of *The Freewoman* into *The Egoist* see Bruce Clarke, 'Dora Marsden and Ezra Pound: 'The New Freewoman' and 'The Serious Artist'' *Contemporary Literature* 33:1 (Spring, 1992), 91-112.
[31] Lucy Delap, 'Individualism and Introspection: The Framing of Feminism in the Freewoman' in Maria Dicenzo (ed.), *Feminist Media History: Suffrage, Periodicals and the Public Sphere* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 162.
[32] Griffin, *Difference in View*, p. 79.
[33] Lewis and Ardis, *Women's Experiences*, p. 226.
[34] Delap, 'Individualism and Introspection', 162.

to the publication's interest in sex reform. Although, over the course of three years and three different incarnations, it discussed a huge range of topics including women's economic position, free motherhood and modernist literature, its loud and unembarrassed dealing with issues of sex made it notorious far beyond its small circle of readers.

Despite the time that had passed between publications and the *Freewoman's* more conspicuously feminist slant, there is clear evidence of links between Marsden's paper and *The Adult*.[35] Firstly, indicating his connection with Marsden and her circle, George Bedborough became an active member of the *Freewoman* discussion circles, chairing a number of sessions in 1912[36] – though, perhaps heeding the judges solemn warning handed down to him at his trial in 1898 that his freedom would only last as long as he 'led a respectable life', he never wrote an article for her paper.[37] The Legitimation League's original president, Wordsworth Donisthorpe, was also involved in *Freewoman* discussion circles; although he left the League early on due to its turn to free love doctrines, he remained sympathetic to the

[35] A number of historians have noted the links between *The Freewoman* and previous movements for sexual reform. Lesley Hall, for example, links *The Freewoman* and its 'unblushing' handling of questions of sex and radical sexual sentiment to what she terms 'transient' periodicals of the late 1890s, such as feminist journal *Shafts* and *The Adult.* Hall goes as far as to state that 'Free Love', the central point of Legitimation League thinking that dominated *The Adult,* was some *Freewoman* contributor's sexual 'ideal' and as such links the paper and its readers to 'an earlier generation of 'New Woman' writers and a radical free love tradition.' Lucy Bland has also drawn links between the two by suggesting the importance of free unions to Dora Marsden, stating that some of the central themes of the *Freewoman* revolved around unions that can be characterised as free love relationships – that is freely entered and freely left by either party involved and unsanctioned by marriage. See Lesley Hall, 'The Next Generation: Stella Browne, The New Woman as Freewoman', in Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (eds), *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin de Siècle Feminisms* (London: Palgrave, 2001), p. 225; Lesley Hall, *The Life and Times of Stella Browne: Feminist and Free Spirit* (I.B Tauris, 2011), p. 151; Lucy Bland, 'The Shock of the Freewoman Journal: Feminists Speaking on Heterosexuality in Early Twentieth Century England' in Weeks and Holland, *Sexual Cultures: Communities, Values and Intimacy* (MacMillan, 1996), p. 86.
[36] *The Freewoman* 2:36 (July 25, 1912), 194.
[37] Ibid.

cause and contributed a number of articles discussing sex and marriage to Marsden's journal.[38] There are also contributions from Canadian sex radical Robert Bird Kerr who was heavily involved with both *The Adult* and its 'sister' paper *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer.* Kerr, who was a speaker at Legitimation League events and wrote articles for *The Adult* contributed a number of pieces looking at 'The Dangers of Marriage' to the *New Freewoman* in 1913.[39] Furthermore, Bedborough and Marsden directly corresponded about journal affairs. Letters from Bedborough to Marsden include his suggestion that she send copies of the journal to *Lucifer* sub-editor E. C. Walker for distribution in America. While Marsden's replies to Bedborough do not to my knowledge survive, a note in Marsden's hand states 'Specimen Copies sent', suggesting she felt allied enough with both Bedborough and the *Lucifer* circle (by then being published as *The American Journal of Eugenics*) to take his advice and seek out an explicit association.[40] These links, both practical and ideological, suggest connections not only between *The Adult* and *The Freewoman,* but also with American sex radical literature.

The Freewoman, like *The Adult and Lucifer* before it, offers scholars of sex radicalism and debates surrounding free love an important insight into the debates and controversies about the subject in this period. Although, like *The Adult,* Marsden's journal was short lived and subject to change, it represents an important source for developing an understanding about sexual reform and its links to early

[38] See, for example, 'Problem Plays and Novels', *The Freewoman* 2:30 (June 13, 1912), 66-67; 'Sex and the State', *The Freewoman* 1:16 (March 7, 1912), 305-306; 'Sex and the State – II', *The Freewoman* 1:18 (March 21, 1912), 345-347.
[39] R. B. Kerr, 'The Dangers of Marriage', *The New Freewoman* 1:9 (October 15, 1913), 178.
[40] George Bedborough to Dora Marsden, 5 July, 1912, Dora Marsden Collection, Princeton University Libraries.

twentieth century feminist thought. It is also an interesting source to consider alongside the British and American free love literature discussed above, as a comparison allows us to examine the continuities, changes and antagonisms within the movements for sexual reform before and after the turn of the twentieth century.

Identifying Contributors

Undeterred by the threat of being labelled proponents of 'free lust', many journal contributors submitted material to these publications under their own names. As such it is possible to identify and examine the backgrounds of a number of these radical authors. For example in *The Adult* writers like Bedborough, second editor Henry Seymour, and Legitimation League founder Oswald Dawson wrote under their own names, as did London barrister Robert Braithwaite, doctor R. A. Gordon, and accountant John Badcock Jr. In addition there were submissions by more well-known figures such as Edward Carpenter and Emile Zola. However, many of the authors that contributed material to these journals chose to remain anonymous. For example Sagittarius, a prominent contributor to *The Adult,* provided a range of articles on diverse topics but never revealed his or her identity.[41] Likewise I have been unable to find any biographical information about Orford Northcote, who was a prolific contributor to the journal throughout its short run. Similar problems were also encountered with *Lucifer* and *Freewoman* authors; numerous unidentified writers authored works under pen names such as 'Ironicus', 'Progress', and 'Egeria'. Even

[41] I have been unable to trace any firm evidence of this author's identity. However Olive Schreiner, in discussion of the journal in a letter to George Bedborough sent in 1898, asked whether 'Sagittarius' was 'a man called Aveling' (presumably Edward Aveling, who had been in a free union with Eleanor Marx). This suggestion is an interesting one, as the anonymous author's articles stop around the same time as Aveling's death in August 1898. For my own curiosity's sake I checked Aveling's horoscope - he was born on the 29th of November, which would have made him a Sagittarius.

outspoken radical voice Stella Browne begun writing to *The Freewoman* as 'a new subscriber', before 'coming out' (as Lesley Hall has labelled it) and asking Marsden to publish her articles under her real name in 1912.[42]

Despite the difficulties encountered with identifying specific radical authors, the journals remain an important and interesting historical source. In order to counter the lack of information about the radical individuals participating in this circle and make the most of the richness and diversity of these sources, this thesis will not focus on particular individuals writing in and corresponding with the journals. Instead it will take a broader and more inclusive approach and focus most clearly on the shared themes, ideas, and rhetoric present in their writing. This approach has been chosen in order to move away from a narrow focus on radical individuals and the way they formulated their own radical political outlooks. Instead it looks to broaden its view, and explore the ways in which this radical community cohered amidst the divisiveness and diversity of contemporary sex radical debate.

Historiography

Dedicated research into free love and sex radicalism in Britain has to date been limited to a small number of articles. George Robb, for example, has explored the relationship between ideas about degeneration, eugenics, and calls for sex radical reform.[43] Laura Schwartz has also focussed on British sex radicalism in her

[42] Browne, writing as 'a new subscriber', engaged in a long and now well-documented debate with another *Freewoman* author, Kathlyn Oliver, about the dangers of sexual abstinence. For information about Browne and her intervention into debates about sex in *The Freewoman* see Hall, *The Life and Times of Stella Browne*, p. 27-33.
[43] George Robb, 'The Way of All Flesh: Degeneration, Eugenics and the Gospel of Free Love', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6:4 (Apr., 1996), 589-603

work; her research has examined the links between the Freethought movements and calls for free love in the late nineteenth-century.[44] Judy Greenway has also done important research in the area. Her article on anarchism, free love, and utopian ideas provides an interesting insight into how and why sex radicals sought to articulate their views in the public sphere.[45] This study, which takes free love and sex radicalism as its primary focus, expands on this important but notably limited body of work. It therefore breaks new ground by being the first in depth scholarly consideration of the topic in Britain.

This approach means that this thesis moves away from other existing research that has largely tended to feature the topic as a peripheral part of wider calls for social (and particularly feminist) reform. While in many historical accounts of the period considerations of sex radicalism have been relegated to the margins of analysis, this study brings the topic to the forefront of its exploration of contemporary debates about sex, gender, love, and marriage. Furthermore, by considering the transnational and enduring nature of free love debates it will approach sex radicalism in a different way to those historical studies that have isolated radical debates to one place or time. In particular it will show that while the American free love movement was perhaps more established and well-known at the time, it existed alongside and in close dialogue with a community of radicals operating in Britain both before and after the turn of the twentieth century. It will also argue against existing research that

[44] Laura Schwartz, 'Freethought, Free Love and Feminism: Secularist Debates on Marriage and Sexual Morality, England c. 1850 – 1880', *Women's History Review* 19:5 (2010), 775-793.
[45] Judy Greenway, 'Speaking Desire: anarchism and free love as utopian performance in fin de siècle Britain' in Laurence Davis and Ruth Kinna, (eds.), *Anarchism and Utopianism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), pp.153-170.

has tied sex radical movements to the interventions of specific individuals; instead it will show that it involved a diverse range of actors with a diverse range of agendas and views, cohering and coalescing through their links to radical publications like *The Adult, Lucifer* and *The Freewoman.*

In much of the research to date, considerations of free love and sex radicalism are included as a small part of broader considerations of contemporary debates about sex, gender, and marriage. Though a small circle of historians have undertaken specific studies of the topic, for the most part it plays a marginal role in historical accounts of wider movements for social reform. It is historians concerned with examining feminist critiques of marriage and calls for women's rights that have most often included discussions of sex radical campaigns in their work. For example, sex radicals and campaigns for free love are discussed in accounts of feminist challenges to marriage in such works as Joan Perkin's *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth Century England*, Lucy Bland's *Banishing the Beast,* Sheila Rowbotham's *Dreamers of a New Day,* and Nancy F. Cott's *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*.[46] Historians like Perkin, Bland, Rowbotham, and Cott situate sex radical thought at the fringe of broader debates about the flaws of contemporary marriage, the sexual double standard, and the position of women within the home. Bland's work, for instance, includes a small section on the Legitimation League in which she explores the links between feminist agitation for

[46] Joan Perkin, *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth Century England* (London: Routledge, 1989); Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast*: *Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Tauris Parke, 2001); Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2002). Sheila Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso Books, 2010).

marriage reform and calls for sexual freedom.[47] Similarly, Rowbotham's work includes a chapter on the 'Problem of Sex' in which she explores how sex radical women agitated for increased rights for women through calls for free love.[48] For scholars like Bland and Rowbotham, free unions are of interest as one of the myriad ways contemporary feminists sought to challenge marriage customs and agitate for increased social and legal rights for women.

But only examining sex radical debates in this peripheral way can lead us to assume that radicals only discussed the injustices of marriage, or debated the poor treatment of women within it. I will argue that by tying these radicals so closely to broader calls for social reform, and in particular to critiques of marriage and considerations of the position of women both within the home and in wider society, existing historical research has served to gloss over many of the complex intellectual debates and exchanges that shaped sex radical thought. My thesis will therefore move away from existing research that has charted the place of sex radicalism on the margins of social reform movements, and will instead take sex radical views as the primary focus of study. In doing so it will deepen our understanding of contemporary sex radicalism by not only exploring its relationship to wider reform movements, but also by examining the ideas, approaches, theories, and beliefs that were at its core. Through this we will be better able to see both the complex nature of sex radicalism, and the diverse influences that shaped contemporary sex radical thought.

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[47] Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 156-159.
[48] Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day*¸ pp. 58-83.

The largest bodies of existing research have tended to focus on American free love and sex radical movements. Jesse Battan, for example, has done important and interesting research on sex radicalism in America, including discussions of the connection between radical literature and attempts to reshape contemporary sexual culture. In his work Battan focusses on the interventions of American sex radicals like Lillian Harman, as well as other notable figures such as Angela Heywood and Victoria Woodhull.[49] Reflecting this particular concern with American free love circles, Joanne Passet and Wendy Hayden have also primarily grounded their research into sex radicalism in American literature.[50] These studies, while helpful to an understanding of American free love debates, rarely mention the role that key American figures played in British free love circles, and as a result, we continue to know little about the relationship between sex radical movements on both sides of the Atlantic. As a result of this, many historians have viewed sex radical movements as separate and distinctive entities, closely tied to specific places and contexts.[51] While these radical movements were undoubtedly distinctive to each location,

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[49] Jesse F. Battan, "'You cannot fix the Scarlet Letter on my Breast!': Women Reading, Writing and Reshaping the Sexual Culture of Victorian America', *Journal of Social History* 37:3 (2004), 601-624. See also Battan, ''The Word Made Flesh': Language, Authority, and Sexual Desire in Late C19th America', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3:2 (October, 1992), 223-244.

[50] Passet, *Sex Radicals*; Wendy Hayden, *Evolutionary Rhetoric: Sex, Science, and Free Love in Nineteenth-Century Feminism* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013). There is a huge amount of literature that focusses on free love and sex radicalism in America. See, for example, Sandra Ellen Schroer, *State of the 'Union': Marriage and Free Love in the Late 1800s* (London: Routledge, 2005); Christina Simmons, 'Women's Power in Sex Radical Challenges to Marriage in the Early-Twentieth-Century United States', *Feminist Studies* 29: 1(Spring, 2003), 168-198; John Spurlock, 'The Free Love Network in America, 1850 – 1860', *Journal of Social History* 21:4 (Summer, 1988), 765-779; Brigitte Koenig, 'Law and Disorder at Home: Free Love, Free Speech, and the Search for an Anarchist Utopia', *Labor History* 45:2 (May, 2004), 199-223.

[51] Page Smith and Andrea Weingartner, for example, have both tied the emergence of free love movements to specific places in the American Midwest. See Page Smith, *The Rise of Industrial America* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984), p. 267; Weingartner, *Sex Radicals,* p. 13-14.

viewing them in this way obscures or overlooks the exchanges between groups that drew them together.

In exploring the connections between sex radicals in both Britain and America this thesis will look to build on a growing body of literature that has sought to combat this oversight by recognising the international scope of radical discussion. While Sheila Rowbotham's examination of sex radicalism is limited, she nevertheless considers the radical activities of both British and American free lovers.[52] Though Rowbotham does not consider in depth how these groups influenced and communicated with each other, she nevertheless takes care to recognise that interventions into sex radical debates occurred both at home and abroad. The transnational nature of this project owes a particular debt to Lucy Delap's work on *The Feminist Avant-Garde*.[53] Delap's work focusses on how avant-garde feminism was shaped by an Anglo-American dialogue, and thus states that it represents the product of intellectual exchanges between groups in both Britain and America.[54] This thesis, which like Delap's work draws from periodicals published in both the United States and Britain, reflects this approach, and will argue that sex radicalism can only be properly understood as the product of transnational dialogue between groups with distinct but often corresponding views.

Other historians have focussed on the interventions of individual free lovers and their specific role in calls for sexual reform. Many of these works thus take on a

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[52] Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day,* pp. 58-83.
[53] Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde: Transatlantic Encounters if the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[54] Ibid, 3.

more biographical tone, and dedicate considerable time and space to outlining and discussing the beliefs and motivations of single, well-known sex radical figures. An early and important study of sex radicalism by Hal Sears, for example, focusses on Moses Harman. Sears' discussion of free love debates centres on charting his rise to prominence in sex radical circles, his role in the publication and distribution of radical literature, and his persecution and prosecution under vice crusader Anthony Comstock.[55] While Sears' work gives us important information about the roots of the American free love movement it reduces the role of other radical figures; his book includes scant information about the role played by other, less well-known members of the *Lucifer* circle. Reflecting this approach Martin Henry Blatt focussed explicitly on the life and career of prominent American radical Ezra Heywood in his 1989 work *Free Love and Anarchism;* likewise, John C. Spurlock has written in depth accounts of the lives of free love leaders such as Robert Owen and John Humphrey Noyes.[56] Similarly, historians have undertaken studies that specifically focus on prominent figures like Victoria Woodhull and Emma Goldman.[57] Accounts of sex radicalism in Britain have often taken a similar approach; Lucy Bland, for example, discusses

[55] Hal D. Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Lawrence, KS: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977).
[56] Martin Henry Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism: The Biography of Ezra Heywood* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); John C. Spurlock, *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825-1860* (New York: New York University Press, 1988).
[57] See Candace Falk, *Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1990**);** Bonnie Haaland, *Emma Goldman: Sexuality and the Impurity of the State* (New York: Black Rose Books, 1993); Amanda Frisken, *Victoria Woodhull's Sexual Revolution: Political Theater and the Popular Press in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

feminist attitudes towards free unions through discussions of specific radical individuals like Annie Besant, Mona Caird, and Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy.[58]

While sex radical debates were undoubtedly profoundly shaped by the actions of such important figures, this approach has restricted the focus of historical research into the topic. It has meant that the interventions of less well-known or hard to identify radicals has often been overlooked or ignored in historical accounts. Many historians have so far largely neglected to explore the diverse communities of authors, readers, and correspondents that played a vital role in shaping sex radical views through their contributions to sex radical journals. Furthermore, I argue that by limiting analysis to the actions of singular figures these works have done little to explore the particular social and intellectual contexts through which radical thought emerged and was shaped. By focussing on the diverse content of radical journals (rather than the specific people that wrote or edited them) this thesis aims to reverse these omissions; firstly by including forgotten or anonymous figures often ignored in existing research on the topic, and secondly by exploring links between important themes of radical discussion and broader intellectual debates about sex. It will therefore broaden our understanding of contemporary sex radical thought in a number of ways - by allowing us to better understand both the role diverse actors played in its formulation, and how it was linked to a wider social and intellectual context.

[58] Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 151-156. See also Lucy Bland, 'The Married Woman, the 'New Woman' and the Feminist: Sexual Politics of the 1890s' in Jane Rendall (ed.), *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914* (Basil Blackwell:1987), pp. 141-164.

If we look at the sex radicals on their own terms, rather than considering them as merely an adjunct to considerations of other calls for reform, we are able to see more clearly the broad intellectual agendas and influences that played a key role in the formation of sex radical thought. By shifting focus away from their relationship to particular reform streams such as feminism, and instead considering the broad and diverse nature of their debates, we can see how radicals grounded their beliefs and campaigns in other frameworks. An important framework often overlooked in existing accounts of sex radicalism (and particularly sex radicalism in Britain) is that of science - a framework especially important to consider given that the period saw the emergence of new scientific ways of thinking about sex.[59]

But a consideration of the relationship between sex radicalism and science can tell us more than just how radicals exploited scientific ideas in their work; it can also offer us a new angle from which to study contemporary sexual science itself. In existing research a number of historians, including Steven Seidman and Ivan Crozier, have emphasised that sexual science should only be understood as a branch of medicine, or as a specific project undertaken by medical men.[60] Scholars such as these assert the importance of medical methodologies, and emphasise the central role of medical practitioners in legitimating scientific studies of sex. As such

[59]For example, Paul Robinson has argued that from the early 1900s 'thinking about sex became explicit and systematic giving rise to a new intellectual type, the sexologist'. Paul Robinson, *The Modernization of Sex: Havelock Ellis, Alfred Kinsey, William Masters and Virginia Johnson* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. vii. For a broader historiographical overview see Chris Waters, 'Sexology' in Harry G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (eds.), *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality,* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 41–63.

[60] Ivan Crozier, 'Nineteenth-Century British Psychiatric Writing about Homosexuality before Havelock Ellis: The Missing Link', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 63:1 (January 2008), 66n; Steven Seidman, 'Theoretical Perspectives' in Steven Seidman, Nancy Fischer, and Chet Meeks (eds.), *Handbook of the New Sexuality Studies* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), p. 4.

these authors call for others historians to understand sexology as different and separate to other nonmedical debates about sex – set apart by sexologists' use of 'legitimate' methodologies like the patient case study, and by their status as medical men.[61] This thesis, however, will show that there were other groups and individuals that were invested in thinking about scientifically, and in constructing an understanding of sex in dialogue with scientific evidence. My exploration of how radicals used a range of scientific ideas and theories in their work suggests that contributors to journals like *The Adult, Lucifer,* and *The Freewoman* shared a similar set of concerns and interests to contemporary sexologists, and were similarly interested in identifying and investigating mankind's 'true' sexual nature. As such it will join a growing body of research that rejects a vision of sexual science as something monolithic, elitist, and entirely medical. Like scholars such as Heike Bauer, Kate Fisher and Jana Funke, this thesis will suggest that we should change the way we think about sexual science. In short, it was argue that we should see it not as something restricted to the interventions of a small set of doctors and medical men, but instead as a widespread and diverse intellectual circle of which radicals and sexologists alike should be counted as part.[62]

Structure

[61] See Ivan Crozier, 'Pillow Talk: Credibility, Trust and the Sexological Case History', *History of Science* 46:4 (2008), 375–404.

[62] See Kate Fisher and Jana Funke, 'British Sexual Science beyond the Medical Cross-Disciplinary, Cross-Historical, and Cross-Cultural Translations' in Heike Bauer, *Sexology in Translation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), pp. 95 - 114.; Heike Bauer, *English Literary Sexology: Translations of Inversion, 1860-1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 8. Sarah Bull has also done some interesting work on the way that 'obscene' or 'pornographic' literature engaged with sexual science. See 'A Purveyor of Garbage?: Charles Carrington and the Marketing of Sexual Science in Late-Victorian Britain', *Victorian Review* 38:1 (Spring 2012), 55-76.

This thesis is split into 6 chapters which cover the central themes and issues of sex radical discussion in the journals. While its coverage is by no means exhaustive, it considers the most important and frequently occurring aspects of radical debates. Chapter 1 outlines the specific understanding of sexuality that underpinned radicals' calls for sexual freedom and their assertions of the importance of sexual reform. It discusses, in particular, the influence of scientific ideas and theories. Initially, analysis shows how radical authors used and drew from science in order to debate the nature of sexual desire and the existence of a natural 'drive' or 'instinct'. It then outlines the radicals' belief in the importance of sexual expression for the health, well-being, and development of both mind and body. In doing so it charts the role of scientific thinking in the construction of a particular notion of sexuality that was fundamental to radical's belief that sexual reform was vital for social reform. From here the chapter begins to explore the specific ways radicals put this view of sexuality into practice. Firstly it examines their belief that the regulation of human sexuality was a key cause of a number of pressing social issues such as prostitution and the spread of venereal disease, poor health and racial decline, and marital dysfunction; secondly it explores how they believed sexual freedom could combat such problematic social ills. The chapter not only works to outline radicals' core beliefs about sexuality; it also highlights the links that can be drawn between radical thought and broader scientific considerations of sex. In particular my research here reveals a number of the themes, interests, methodologies and approaches common to both radical campaigns for sexual reform and sexological research undertaken by figures such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis. In charting these links it shows that while sex radical views were extreme, they were

not anomalous or isolated – instead radicals' commitment to thinking about and constructing sex 'scientifically' drew them into a broad intellectual circle interested in exploring the science of human sexuality at this time.

Building from this analysis, chapter 2 explores how radicals used this understanding of mankind's sexual nature and the importance of free sexual expression to challenge the laws, customs, and values of the marriage institution. It shows how radical authors (despite their different and often conflicting views and agendas) were often united in the belief that the social and legal regulations placed on sex by marriage represented the injurious restraint of mankind's natural sexuality. The chapter shows that instead of seeing marriage as an appropriate guide to framework for the sexual instincts, radical authors argued contemporary marriage was in fact profoundly at odds with the 'natural', honest, and right expression of mankind's true sexual nature. From here, analysis outlines the ways radicals directly tied what they saw as antagonistic relationship between sex and marriage to a host of social ills. As such it demonstrates some of the specific ways in which sex radical authors drew from a scientific construction of sexuality in order to underpin their critique of social institutions and support their calls for sexual reform.

Chapter 3 explores another way in which radicals believed that mankind's clean and natural sexual instincts were being harmfully inhibited and controlled – that is through the suppression of sexual knowledge. In this chapter I show how radicals questioned the equation of sexual ignorance with purity and argued that knowledge about sex had the potential to be a powerful purifying force. However I contend that this belief was not isolated, and instead linked them to much broader debates of

issues surrounding ignorance, morality, and knowledge at this time. In particular I discuss the links between the views of sex radical authors and social purity campaigners who were also invested in the idea that knowledge about sex could bring about positive social change. As such, I argue, an exploration of the concepts of ignorance and knowledge in radical texts can tell us more than just how radicals used these ideas to support their radical views. I assert that a consideration of radical and social purist discussions can also deepen our understanding of what it meant to be ‘knowledgeable’ or ‘ignorant’ about sex at this time.

Chapter 4 explores the divisive debates occurring in the journals about what represented the best alternative to the existing marriage institution. Firstly it discusses the division between monogamists (who believed in a system of monogamous but unsanctioned unions), and the varietists (who argued that mankind’s complex sexuality could only be satisfied by a variety of sexual partners). The chapter especially focusses on how radicals on different sides of the debate drew from material from anthropology, ethnology, and evolutionary biology in order to support calls for different alternatives to sanctioned marriage. Therefore while I show how divided radicals often were on the practicalities of living a free love life, I nevertheless demonstrate how they were brought together by a shared commitment to thinking about and discussing sex through a diverse range of scientific ideas and theories. My consideration of radical debates about reproduction and maternity in chapter 5 takes a similar approach; though it concerns itself with outlining the contentious debates between radicals about women’s capacity for sexual freedom, it grounds these debates in a shared investment in scientific theories of evolution and

racial development. I argue that while free lovers were often divided over whether women had the physical and mental capacity to be sexually ‘free’, they nevertheless drew from similar arguments present in evolutionary science about the evolution of the maternal body to support their views. As such I not only explore the internal tensions surrounding gender in radical circles; I also examine the clear links between radical debates about sex and broader intellectual considerations of the evolutionary development of the sexes and the rights and roles of women in society.

Chapter 6 brings together many of the themes and ideas that run through this thesis. I will show how radicals characterised their notions of ‘freedom’ and ‘bondage’ in similar ways, relying on ideas about the rational, emancipating, and modern nature of freedom, versus the irrational, subjugating, and degenerate nature of bondage. In doing so, I will demonstrate that however divisive and contentious their debates were, this group were nevertheless brought together by a shared belief in the importance of ‘freedom’. Drawing together these ideas and examining what it actually meant to these radicals to be ‘bound’ or ‘free’, I will show, is an important way in which to understand what brought such a diverse range of actors together under the banners of sex radicalism and free love.

Chapter 1

Sex and Science: Radical Constructions of Sexuality

The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were characterised by a great deal of anxiety about issues related to sex, marriage, and the family. The period followed the debates about (and subsequent repeal of) the Contagious Disease Acts, which had served to turn the public eye toward the extensive problem of prostitution, the spread of venereal diseases, and a double standard of sexual morality which tolerated male sexual licence but condemned comparable female sexual expression.[63] There was also widespread concerns about the state of marriage. It is now well documented, for example, that when *The Daily Telegraph* asked readers to respond to the question 'Is Marriage a Failure?' in 1888 it received an unprecedented 27,000 replies.[64] While many of these replies dealt with the specific intricacies and difficulties of married life, Lucy Bland has noted that expressions of discontent also reflected a broad and more general dissatisfaction with the institution of marriage and contemporary sexual culture.[65] In addition, George Robb has shown that from the 1880s British society was preoccupied more than ever by ideas of national and 'racial' degeneration, due to concerns about such pressing issues as the falling birth-rate, industrial decline, and poor military

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[63] See, for example, Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640-1990* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 247. Kent argues that Josephine Butler's campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts led to the appearance of 'a whole spate of writings about sex and sexuality'.
[64] Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Tauris Parke, 2001), p. 124. See also Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 20; Patricia Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), pp. 51-52; Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 180-181.
[65] Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, p. 124.

performance in the Boer War. [66] This prompted extensive discussion about the possibilities of eugenic science, and the importance of breeding strong, racially fit children.

Alongside a range of other contemporary reform groups, sex radicals were motivated to seek reforms that would provide answers for such worrying social issues. Importantly, they believed that it was not the control or restraint of sexual activity that was the key to combatting social ills. Instead they emphasised that in order to motivate positive social change it was society's attitudes towards and approaches to sex that needed to be radically overhauled. The sex radicals contributing to these journals were generally united in the belief that placing constraints on both the open discussion of sexual topics and on actual sexual activity had significantly contributed to a large set of worrying social issues. They asserted that a broad range of the period's most pressing social problems had been caused not by a decline in sexual morality or a lack of sexual restraint, but by controls placed upon sex by marriage customs and the contemporary emphasis on chastity and sexual purity. Radicals attributed a whole host of social problems to the controls placed upon sexual activity - from prostitution and the spread of venereal disease, to degeneracy and racial decline, to widespread marital dysfunction. Therefore, inspired by a belief that the repression and regulation of sex lay at the heart of many of the most pressing social problems of the day, their particular mode of reform

[66] The concerns about racial and national degeneration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are examined in detail in George Robb, 'The Way of All Flesh: Degeneration, Eugenics and the Gospel of Free Love', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6:4 (Apr., 1996), 589-603. He discusses the 'preoccupation' of British society with these topics, owing to the atmosphere of economic decline and cultural uncertainty (p. 590).

asserted that it was sexual (rather than, say, legal, moral, or religious) reform that was critical in the amelioration of some of the most problematic social issues of the time.

Sex, then, was central to the radical views of those contributing to journals like *The Adult, Lucifer,* and *The Freewoman.* But this focus on sex raises a number of questions - what was 'sex' to those seeking sexual freedom? What did 'sex' mean to the sex radicals? This chapter will explore the particular understanding of sex that underpinned both their analysis of the social problems of the day, and their varied and contested solutions. In particular, it will show that radicals' ideas about the personal and social issues related to the control of sex and the subsequent importance of sexual reform were based on a specific construction of sexuality. This was based around the idea that sex was a healthy, 'natural' instinct that should be understood as an innate and important part of human existence. In order to construct sexuality in this way, many writers framed their ideas about sex in scientific terms. As well as a general belief in approaching sex 'rationally' by looking at sex 'scientifically', radical authors used particular ideas drawn from biology, physiology, anthropology and psychiatry to assert that sex was a powerful, 'natural' force that was being distorted, restricted, or forced into 'unnatural' channels by contemporary sexual customs. They argued that sexual reform and a turn towards sexual freedom would allow this powerful force to better run 'in accordance with the laws of nature', and would thus help render relations between the sexes healthier, happier, and more equal.[67] This scientific framework worked in a number of different ways. In order to

[67] Dora F. Kerr, 'The Custom of Marriage', *The Adult* 3:3 (March, 1899), 63.

naturalise the sexual ‘instinct’, for example, many radicals drew from biology, physiology and psychology to establish where sexual desire came from, and to emphasise the innate and instinctual nature of sexual drives. In addition, to provide a vantage point from which to critique the constraints placed on sexual activity a number of writers discussed in depth whether a lack of sexual activity was injurious to an individual’s physical and mental health. As these examples show, scientific frameworks allowed these writers to construct understandings of sexuality that supported some of the most important and fundamental aspects of their campaigns for sexual reform.

This scientifically supported view of sexuality therefore had an important role to play in radicals’ different campaigns for sexual freedom; firstly, the idea that sex was a natural force lent authority to their criticisms of contemporary marriage, sex, and courtship customs. By arguing that the sexual drive was natural and reasoning that marriage, in particular, placed restrictions on these natural urges, they could criticise existing sexual customs for being unnatural, injurious and repressive. From this view they could then argue for the benefits of sexual freedom by asserting that it represented nothing more than the free, just, and healthy expression of a natural sexuality. For radicals in this group the idea of an innate and instinctual sexual nature was a liberating concept: not only did it serve to provide a point of resistance to contemporary marriage customs and ideas about the importance of sexual restraint, their construction of sexuality also offered seemingly rational justification for unsanctioned sexual activity. As such, engaging with ideas about the ‘naturalness’ of the human sexual ‘drive’ and the importance of expressing ‘natural’ sexual urges did

more than lend scientific authority to their work; it also gave them a framework through which to establish that free (hetero)sexual expression was normal and necessary.

Radicals' attempts to frame their debates about sex in terms of science and man's 'natural' sexual instincts linked them to much bigger debates about human sexuality and behaviour occurring at this time. Radical authors' explorations of 'natural' and 'normal' sexual behaviour certainly did not occur in isolation, and should instead be understood as coinciding and interacting with the emergence of western sexual science, or sexology, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[68] There is broad historiographical agreement that from the mid-nineteenth century, sex researchers began to consciously shift their focus away from moral considerations towards explorations of sex as an independent and legitimate field of academic study.[69] Owing much to Darwinian theories of evolution in which sex played a key role, sexological considerations of human sexuality sought to explore innate sexual 'instincts' or 'drives'.[70] Austro-German sexual scientist Richard Von Krafft-Ebing, for

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[68] For information on the foundations and emergence of sexology see Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, *Sexology Uncensored: The Documents of Sexual Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Veronique Mottier, 'Sexuality and Sexology: Michel Foucault' in Terrell Carver and Veronique Mottier (eds.) *Politics of Sexuality: Identity, Gender, Citizenship* (Routledge: Oxford and New York, 2005), pp. 113-123; Chris Waters, 'Sexology', in Matt Houlbrook and Harry Cocks (eds.) *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), pp. 41-63; Julia Hirst, 'Sexuality' in Gary Taylor and Steve Spencer (eds.), *Social Identities: Multidisciplinary Approaches* (Oxford: Routledge, 2004), pp. 64-90.

[69] For example, Paul Robinson has argued that from the early 1900s 'thinking about sex became explicit and systematic giving rise to a new intellectual type, the sexologist'. Paul Robinson, *The Modernization of Sex: Havelock Ellis, Alfred Kinsey, William Masters and Virginia Johnson* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. vii. For a broader historiographical overview see Waters, 'Sexology', pp. 41–63.

[70] Julia Hirst has discussed sexologists' ideas about 'drives', including the work of such figures as Havelock Ellis and Alfred Kinsey. See Hirst, 'Sexuality', pp. 66-67. As Kirsten Leng has noted, sexual scientists used a wide variety of terms to refer to sexual 'drives', including sex need, sex instinct, sex impulse, sex feeling, and libido. There were also terms particular to German sexual science, including *Geschlechts-* or *Sexualtrieb, Geschlechts-* or *Sexualempfindung*, and G*eschlechtsgefüh*l.See Kirsten C. Leng, 'Contesting the "Laws of Life": Feminism, Sexual Science and Sexual Governance in Germany and Britain, c. 1880-1914' , unpublished PhD thesis, University of Michigan (2011), p. 53.

example, discussed the 'all-conquering force and might' of the sexual instinct; in his view, sexuality represented 'the most powerful factor in individual and social existence'.[71] Sexual scientists constructed an idea of human sexuality that could be categorised and defined, and they sought find the 'truth' of this sexuality– where the drive came from, how it functioned, what purposes it served, and how often it needed to be exercised. In short, they looked to identify and classify 'normal' sexual behaviour, against which differing notions of sexual abnormality or 'perversion' could be read.

To date, much of the research on the emerging discipline of sexology has focussed on its role in the identification, classification and pathologisation of these 'normal' and 'abnormal' sexual behaviours. In many of the existing historical accounts on the topic sexual science is most often depicted as being a field that was essentially monopolised by medical practitioners who consistently emphasised their scientific credentials in order to legitimate their studies of sex. We're told that they did this in specific ways; particular emphasis is placed, for instance, on sexology's reliance on 'legitimate' medical methodologies such as the patient case study.[72] Steven Seidman, for example, has asserted that the 'truth of sexuality is to be discovered by means of the "case study" method', and has drawn specific links

For information on the relationship between sexual science and Darwinian evolutionary theory, see Kimberly A. Hamlin, 'The Birds and the Bees: Darwin's Evolutionary Approach to Sexuality' in Jeannette Eileen Jones and Patrick B. Sharp (eds.) *Darwin in Atlantic Cultures: Evolutionary Visions of Race, Gender and Sexuality* (Routledge, 2010), pp. 53-72.

[71] Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1894), p. 1.

[72] For information on the role of the case study in providing scientific authority to studies of sex see Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Ivan Crozier has also written specifically on the topic: Ivan Crozier, 'Pillow Talk: Credibility, Trust and the Sexological Case History', *History of Science* 46:4 (2008): 375–404.

between the methodology of sexologists and the methods of physicians and psychiatrists.[73] In addition, Ivan Crozier insists that historians looking to explore contemporary sexual science should 'keep one's attention within the field', and understand sexology as a separate entity to other contemporary, nonmedical debates about sex.[74] According to scholars like Seidman and Crozier, sexual science should be seen as the strict dominion of medical professionals, who consciously and decisively separated themselves from other groups (such as sex reformers, social purity campaigners, and feminists) interested in exploring issues about sex. This view, Kate Fisher and Jana Funke demonstrate, has been readily taken up by some historians who continue to closely tie the study of sexual science to their deliberations of medical interventions into debates about sex.[75]

But an examination of radical debates about sex and an exploration of the way they constructed a sexuality on which to base their campaigns demonstrates that important links can be drawn between radical authors and the works of more well-known sexologists such as Havelock Ellis, Iwan Bloch and Krafft-Ebing. Exploring these links shows that sexologists and contributors to journals like *The Adult, Lucifer,* and *The Freewoman* shared a similar set of concerns and interests, and were similarly invested in constructing, identifying and studying the 'true nature'

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[73] Steven Seidman, 'Theoretical Perspectives' in Steven Seidman, Nancy Fischer, and Chet Meeks (eds.), *Handbook of the New Sexuality Studies* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), p. 4.
[74] Ivan Crozier, 'Nineteenth-Century British Psychiatric Writing about Homosexuality before Havelock Ellis: The Missing Link', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 63:1 (January 2008), 66n. In addition, Crozier has specifically stated that sexologist's use of case studies mean it should be defined as a medical discipline. See Crozier, 'Pillow Talk', 375; 'Havelock Ellis, Eonism and the Patient's Discourse; Or, Writing a Book about Sex', *History of Psychiatry* 11:42 (June 2000), 125-154.
[75] Kate Fisher and Jana Funke, 'British Sexual Science beyond the Medical Cross-Disciplinary, Cross-Historical, and Cross-Cultural Translations' in Heike Bauer (ed.), *Sexology in Translation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), p. 96.

of human sexuality. We see that radicals and sexologists relied upon similar sources and methodologies drawn from a diverse range of disciplines in order to investigate man's sexual 'instinct', and to explore the boundaries of 'normal' sexual behaviour. In accordance with scholarship that has begun to challenge a reductive, strictly medical view of sexual science, this chapter's exploration of the radicals' active involvement in the scientific construction of sexuality suggests that sexual science should not be understood as existing in isolation, or as the self-consciously niche domain of medical professionals. Instead, an examination of the links that can be drawn between sex radical circles and more well-known sexological research will show that contemporary sexual science is better characterized as a broad, diverse, and politically and socially interested intellectual circle of which radicals contributing to these journals should also be considered a part.

In this chapter I will examine what 'sex' meant to those arguing for sexual freedom in these radicals journals. In particular I will explore the ways in which sex radical authors constructed their view of sex 'scientifically' in order to support their belief in the importance of sexual reform and their advocacy of free, unsanctioned sexual unions. Analysis will focus specifically on the way that authors debated ideas about the nature and importance of sexual desire, the benefits of sex for an individual's physical and mental health, and the divisive concept of sexual difference in order to create a vision of sexuality that supported their notions of sexual freedom. It will then go on to discuss some of the specific ways radicals used their understanding of sexuality to argue for sexual reforms. This analysis will not only show the way in which their particular notion of sexuality was fundamental to their

various calls for sexual freedom – it will also reveal a number of the themes, interests, methodologies and approaches common to both sexological research and radical campaigns for sexual reform. As such it will highlight the close links that can be drawn between the works of more well-known sexologists and sex radical campaigners like those contributing to journals like *The Adult.* In doing so it will show that while sex radical views were undoubtedly extreme they were certainly not isolated, and instead served to draw them into a broad intellectual circle interested in issues surrounding the science of human sexuality in this period.

Defining Sex: What Did 'Sex' Mean to the Sex Radicals?

In order to support the view that social reform required sexual reform, radical authors constructed a notion of sexuality that asserted that it was an important natural imperative. By naturalising sexual desire and emphasising that it was an innate part of human nature they looked to argue that contemporary marriage and courtship customs represented the 'unnatural' and harmful distortion of a powerful natural force. In addition to justifying their criticism of existing sexual customs, a naturalised sexuality also provided justification for sexual freedom; radical authors emphasised, for example, that the expression of a natural sexual 'drive' was important for the maintenance of both a healthy mind and body. In order to construct this 'natural' sexuality, radical authors framed their discussions of sex in scientific terms. This framework worked in a number of different ways. Some authors used general scientific ideas to emphasise the clean, rational, and natural character of the sexual 'instinct'. Others relied on more specific scientific methodologies, and employed biological, physiological, anthropological, and psychiatric ideas (among

others) in their work. Sex radicals were, of course, not alone in their application of scientific ideas to reform campaigns. As historians have shown, a broad range of activists operating throughout Western Europe and the United States incorporated a diverse array of scientific ideas into their agitations for social and political change.[76]

Like many of the radicals contributing to the journals in this study, these reformers were not professional scientists and were instead often informed by the scientific theories and ideas that flooded the public sphere through journals, newspapers, novels, and exhibitions at this time.[77] Reflecting the general popularity and authority of science in the era, in many sex radical journal articles the term 'science' was not related to practical investigations in a laboratory, or the application of specific scientific methodologies to research on sex. Instead it appears that radical authors often used a general rhetoric of science to suggest that their approach to sexual issues was characteristically rational and enlightened. For some, this meant relying on general ideas about rationality and logic. American free lover E.C. Walker, for example, criticised the passing around of misleading and 'unscientific' ideas about sex for its detrimental effect on the development of children, and *Adult* contributor Orford Northcote called for the 'scientific investigator of sex questions' to provide answers for pressing social and sexual problems 'to which the collective

[76] Kristen Leng, for example, has discussed the use of science by a diverse group of reformers including feminists, socialists, nationalists, hygienists, aesthetes, and life reformers. See Leng, 'Contesting the "Laws of Life"', p. 13.
[77] On the wide dispersal of scientific ideas in contemporary culture see Louise Henson, Geoffrey Cantor, Gowan Dawson, Richard Noakes, Sally Shuttleworth, and Jonathan R. Topham (eds.) *Culture and Science in the Nineteenth-century Media* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Laura Otis, introduction to *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. xvii-xxviii; Bernard Lightman, *Victorian Popularizers of Science: Designing Nature for New Audiences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Bernard Lightman, '"The Voices of Nature": Popularising Victorian Science' in Bernard Lightman (ed.), *Victorian Science in Context* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 187-211.

wisdom of the nineteenth century gives no clear answer'.[78] Similarly, an advert for free love paper *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* from 1900 called on those 'in favor of science rather than Ignorance, Knowledge rather than Superstition, Fact rather than Tradition, Freedom rather than Slavery … Light rather than Darkness' to subscribe. [79] In a similar vein, in a speech given to Legitimation League members in 1898, British-Canadian free lover Dora F. Kerr stated that it was the responsibility of sex radicals to 'for the first time in human history … apply the principles of science and humanity to social problems', and to frame their 'collective ideals of social life on science and love'.[80] As the use of 'scientific' ideas in this small sample suggests, these discussions of science were not tied to specific scientific theories, and instead the authors emphasised in more general terms the importance of approaching sex 'scientifically'. Indeed this general reliance on the idea of 'science' was not isolated. For example, Chris Nottingham has argued that that a number of contemporary progressives discussing 'science' were actually using what 'might be better described as scientism, science as ideology, rather than science itself'.[81] Instead of reflecting the reality of contemporary scientific research, Nottingham argues, the rhetoric of science instead represented 'a way of looking at the world, a side to be on, a vantage point from which to dismiss old-fashioned moral judgements'.[82] Hence, like a wide range of other contemporary reformers who relied on broadly scientific

[78] E. C. Walker, *What the Young Need to Know: a Primer of Sex Rationalism* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1897); Orford Northcote, 'Some Sex problems Considered', *The Adult* 1:1 (June 1897), 8-9.
[79] Quoted in Wendy Hayden, *Evolutionary Rhetoric; Sex, Science, and Free Love in Nineteenth Century Feminism* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), p. 1.
[80] Dora F. Kerr, 'The Conversion of Mrs Grundy - reported', *The Adult* 2:4 (May, 1898), 97.
[81] Chris Nottingham, *The Pursuit of Serenity: Havelock Ellis and the New Politics* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999), p. 88.
[82] Ibid.

ideas – which, as Kristen Leng has shown, included such diverse groups as socialists, nationalists, hygienists, and self-proclaimed 'moderate' social reformers – sex radicals drew support for their work from science's claims to truth and rationality, over superstition, custom, and dogma.[83]

However, other authors relied upon more specific scientific frameworks to support their campaigns for sexual freedom. One of the most prevalent involved an emphasis on the idea that sexuality was an innate and essential human impulse or instinct: drawing from ideas from scientific disciplines like biology, physiology, anthropology and psychiatry, many radicals asserted that human beings had a basic, inborn sexual drive. This investment in the essential nature of human sexual urges most clearly manifested itself in radicals' assertion that sexual desire was an important 'natural' faculty. Indeed, the idea that sexual desire was a vital 'natural' drive was a pervasive one throughout the journals. *Adult* authors, for example, based a wide range of their discussions around the idea that sex should be understood as representing 'laws of nature'[84], 'natural desires'[85], and the 'forces of human nature'.[86] Mirroring this, *Lucifer* author E. C. Walker called on the female free lover to 'live her life as a natural being' by indulging the 'natural' 'forces of attraction'.[87] Similarly, some *Freewoman* contributors grounded discussions of sex in terms of 'natural

[83] Leng, 'Contesting the "Laws of Life"', pp. 12-14.
[84] Sagittarius, ''The Liars'; Or, Marriage at the Criterion Theatre', *The Adult* 1:5 (December, 1897), 87; Orford Northcote, 'Prostitution', *The Adult* 1:3 (October, 1897), 37; Kerr, 'The Custom of Marriage', 63.
[85] Sagittarius, 'Sexual Freedom in Relation to Women and Economics', *The Adult* 1:2 (September, 1897), 27; Robert Braithwaite, 'Self-Reverence, Self-Knowledge, Self-Control', *The Adult* 1:5 (December, 1897), 89
[86] Sagittarius, 'Marriage at the Criterion Theatre', 84.
[87] E. C. Walker, 'The New Woman – What is She? What Will She Be?', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 12:14 (August 30, 1895).

instincts'[88], and 'instinctive and natural' desires.[89] Though the terms they used were often different (articles include, for example, references to 'drives', 'instincts', and 'impulses'), authors appear to have made a conscious and concerted effort to emphasise the 'naturalness' of sexual desire. This reveals that a large number of radical authors were heavily invested in a conception of sexuality which asserted that sex was a universal and biologically driven force.

Radical authors contributing to these journals drew from material and methodologies from a range of disciplines to support this vision of sex as a powerful, natural force. In particular, some authors grounded their ideas about natural sexual impulses in discussions of human biology and physiology. In *The Adult*, for example, a number of writers asserted that the sexual drive was dictated by the most basic level of man's biological make up, the cells, and argued that the sexual impulse should therefore be understood as a kind of 'sex cell hunger'. This idea is found in a range of radical articles. In 'The Mutability of Sex Love' (1897), Orford Northcote called for people to recognise that 'male and female sex cells were solely responsible for the sexual attraction'.[90] In his view, desire was merely evidence of a person's sex cells recognising other 'sex cells of suitable character for the purpose of union'.[91] Northcote argued that man's sexual urges were, in essence, a manifestation of an instinctive drive operating at the most basic cellular level. Mirroring this view, Sagittarius also emphasised the central role played by the 'sex

[88] E. B. D'Auvergne, 'The Definition of Marriage', *The Freewoman* 1:1 (November 23, 1911), 6.
[89] Julian Warde, 'Modernism in Morality: The Ethics of Sexual Relationships', *The Freewoman* 2:31 (June 20, 1912), 88.
[90] Orford Northcote, 'The Mutability of Sex Love', *The Adult* 1:2 (September, 1897), 21.
[91] Ibid.

cells' in human sexual nature. He argued that 'The prime duty of the sex reformer to-day is … to rescue that 'sex cell hunger' from the obloquy which has been cast upon it, to enforce the fact that all the appetites and functions of the body are clean and wholesome'.[92] In addition, William Platt agreed that sexual desire was motivated by the 'functional work of the sex-cell' which he believed would 'constantly suggest coition'.[93] Like Northcote, these authors emphasised the idea that 'sex cell hunger' should be understood 'as a dominant factor in the majority of sex relationships'.[94] Clear in this discussion of the 'sex cells' is a shared belief in the idea that man's sexual drive had a basic biological foundation.

Some writers looked to further stress the biological necessity of sexual expression for both men and women by describing the sexual drive as analogous to other basic biological urges –in particular, they related it to hunger. In Northcote's view, for instance, desire for sex was akin to a desire for food or water – it was 'crude,' 'undifferentiated', and represented a basic biological imperative.[95] Other authors also emphasised the innate and instinctive nature of sexual desire. *Freewoman* contributor Julian Warde, for example, argued that 'Every perfect organism desires the sexual act',[96] and, mirroring Northcote, stated his belief that a desire for sex should be understood as 'as instinctive and natural as the desire for food'.[97] *Lucifer* author Ford held similar views; in an 1897 article they stated that

[92] Sagittarius', 'Love's Coming of Age', *The Adult* 2:1 (February, 1898), 13.
[93] William Platt, 'Spiritual Love', *The Adult* 1:4 (November, 1897), 57. Platt and Northcote fundamentally disagreed about how free love relationships should function day to day, but nevertheless used similar ideas about 'sex cells' to discuss the sexual impulse. For an overview of their debates see Orford Northcote, 'Mr Northcote and his Critics', *The Adult* 2:1 (February, 1898), 22.
[94] Sagittarius, 'Love's Coming of Age', 14.
[95] Northcote, 'Some Sex Problems Considered', 10.
[96] Julian Warde, 'Modernism in Morality: The Ethics of Sexual Relationships - II', 110.
[97] Julian Warde, 'Modernism in Morality - I', 88.

‘Sex hunger may, when people know enough, be satisfied wherever suitable food be found, just as we satisfy our stomachs’.[98] This analogy reflects ideas being used by well-known sexological figures. For example in his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Havelock Ellis stated that the ‘nutritive region’ was the only other impulse that can be seen as comparable in importance to that of sex.[99] It also clearly mirrors ideas discussed in the later work of Sigmund Freud; his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) opens with his assertion that ‘The fact of sexual need in man and animal is expressed in biology by the assumption of a “sexual impulse.” This impulse is made analogous to the impulse of taking nourishment, and to hunger’.[100] Many of these authors, reflecting broader ideas in sexual science, thus emphasised the fundamental nature of sexual desire in humanity.

This belief in the power and importance of sexuality is also seen in sex radical debates occurring after the turn of the century, though it tended to be expressed in mental, rather than physical, terms. This was especially noticeable in *The Freewoman* which, as Lucy Delap has shown, was particularly influenced by the later development of Edwardian psychology and early readings of Freudian psychoanalysis.[101] Indeed, as Delap has also noted, *Freewoman* contributors Barbara Low and David Eder became important psychoanalytic practitioners.[102] While a number of contributors to the journal emphasised a psychic understanding of sexuality this approach to sexuality was perhaps manifested most clearly in ideas

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[98] Ford, ‘Love and Freedom. II’, *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 1:16 (April 21, 1897), 123.
[99] Quoted in Robert Nye, *Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 147.
[100] Sigmund Freud, *Three Contributions to the Sexual Theory* trans. By A. A. Brill (New York: The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease Pub. Co., 1910), p. 1.
[101] Lucy Delap, ‘The Superwoman: Theories of Gender and Genius in Edwardian Britain’, *The Historical Journal* 47:1 (March, 2004), 120.
[102] Ibid.

concerning ‘Passion’, most often in the work of journal editor Dora Marsden. Reflecting the editor’s own highly self-orientated individualism, which emphasised the importance of ‘genius’, introspection and psychological transformation, articles discussed the highly spiritual and ‘intensifying’ nature of love ‘passion’ as a ‘psychic force’.[103] True ‘Passion’ here was understood as an intense spiritual experience, as the ‘interknitting of two human souls’.[104] Marsden and her followers believed that sexual ‘passion’, properly appreciated for its spiritual power, should lead to the ‘riotous, passionate, exultant thrill of being’[105] and, in the words of one anonymous correspondent, ‘be so complete in its spiritual union that it carries us far away into the regions of illimitable space to which our bodies do not belong’.[106] While in this narrative sexuality was drawn away from the body it was nevertheless described as an important, powerful, and vital force that, if properly expressed, could function as an important mode for self-realisation and spiritual and psychological development. In Marsden’s view, sex ‘more than any other human factor’ had the potential to function as an important means of ‘springing life higher’.[107]

It is clear that sex radicals’ shared notions of an innate and instinctual human sexual drive (and the campaigns for sex reform that these notions inspired) were informed and shaped by a variety of scientific ideas. In part their discussions exploited the connotation that a broadly ‘scientific’ treatment of sex would break with outdated theological, spiritual, and subjective ideas and instead deal properly with

[103] Dora Marsden, ‘The Interpretation of Sex – II’, *The Freewoman* 1:25 (May 9, 1912), 481.
[104] Ibid, 482.
[105] Dora Marsden, ‘The New Morality – II’, *The Freewoman* 1:6 (December 28, 1911), 102.
[106] P, ‘A Sex Heresy’, *The Freewoman* 2:27 (May 23, 1912), 19.
[107] Dora Marsden, ‘Interpretations of Sex – IV’, *The Freewoman* 2:27 (May 23, 1912), 2.

the ‘reality’ of human sexuality.[108] Other accounts drew from the authority of more specific methodologies, gleaned from biology, physiology, and psychology in order to construct a sexuality that was innate, powerful, and, when allowed free expression, well placed to guide a person towards health, happiness, and fulfilment. A scientific construction of sexuality that viewed it as a natural, innate, independent and powerful instinct therefore transcended the personal (contradictory, and indeed often contested) sex radical politics of individual authors. As such their investment in discussing sex ‘scientifically’ represents an important theme through which radicals were able to cohere and coalesce.

Notions of Sexual Difference

In contravention to the views of a number of earlier medico-scientists who emphasised that women were naturally ‘passionless’ and largely uninterested in sex, most radicals agreed that this natural and important sexual drive was innate in people of both sexes.[109] A number of radicals lamented the ‘sexual starvation’ of both men and women, and emphasised the role sexual freedom could play in facilitating sexual satisfaction for people regardless of their sex. Reflecting this view, a *Freewoman* correspondent referenced German sexologist Iwan Bloch to argue that the intensity of the sexual appetite in women should be seen being ‘at least as great as that of man’.[110] But while many agreed that women had a strong and natural

[108] For information on attempts to justify sexual reform through the use of ‘rational’ scientific ideas see Leng, *Contesting the “Laws of Life”,* p. 12-14.
[109] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, for example, has shown how medical understandings shifted in the latter part of the nineteenth century to the view that ‘frigidity was rooted in women’s very nature’. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1985), p. 23.
[110] A Would-Be Freewoman, ‘The Individualism of Motherhood and the ‘Normal’ Woman’, *The Freewoman* 1:18 (March 2, 1912), 353.

sexual drive equal in strength to that of men, a number of writers, influenced by evolutionary theories, asserted that the sexual natures of the sexes were fundamentally different in character.

Reflecting evolutionary theories about sexual difference such as those of Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, who argued that men were essentially 'katabolic' (that is active, dominating, destructive, versus the passive, reproductive, 'anabolic' nature of women) many radicals understood male sexuality to be of an active nature.[111] Prominent *Adult* contributor Orford Northcote, for example, described how marriage had served to repress men's 'active desire', and described 'the initiative in love, with rare exceptions, resting throughout nature with the male'.[112] Other authors held similar views; unidentified author W. M. G, for example, emphasised the 'fever' they saw as characteristic of male sexual passion.[113] On the other hand, female sexuality was often described as being more passive and receptive; Herbert Edwards, for example, described female sexual desire in *The Adult* as being 'much less animal, much more receptive' and stated his belief that a woman's sexual needs were characteristically 'much more complex and intricate' than that of a man.[114] Similarly, while W. M. G compared man's sexual nature to 'the ardent rays from the

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[111] In *The Evolution of Sex* (1890), Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson argued that men were essentially 'katabolic' (active, dominating, destructive), and that women were 'anabolic' (passive, reproductive) in nature. For further information on these theories see Hamlin, 'The Birds and the Bees', pp. 59-61; Jill Conway, 'Stereotypes of Femininity in a Theory of Sexual Evolution' in Martha Vicinus (ed.) *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 140 – 154;Nathan Q Ha, 'The Riddle of Sex: Biological Theories of Sexual Difference in the Early Twentieth-Century', *Journal of the History of Biology* 44 (2011), 505-546; Susan Sleeth Mosedale, 'Science Corrupted: Victorian Biologists Consider "The Woman Question"', *Journal of the History of Biology* 11:1 (Spring 1978), 32-37.
Radical's engagement with evolutionary theories of sexual difference will be examined in greater depth in chapter 5 of this thesis.
[112] Orford Northcote, 'Dress in its Relationship to Sex', *The Adult* 1:5 (December, 1897), 79.
[113] W. M. G, 'A Note on Women's Love', *The Adult* 2:5 (June, 1898),144.
[114] Herbert Edwards, 'The Question of Children', *The Adult* 2:3 (April, 1898), 67.

sun', they equated the 'love of woman to the cool beams of the moon'.[115] As such, while radical authors emphasised the power of the sexual instinct in all humans, they nevertheless often constructed it around the idea that the sexual natures of men and women were profoundly different.

This belief in the natural, evolutionarily defined passivity of women and the activity of men served to provide a template for different sexual roles. For instance many radicals insisted that it was a woman's role in sex and courtship to exist in a 'calm and contained state of receptivity', and to exact 'homage, flattery, gifts, services, caresses and kisses' from her suitors.[116] Reflecting the theories of sexologists like Havelock Ellis, who discussed the role of the 'coyness of the female' in the 'drama' of human courtship, emphasis was often placed on adornment, modesty and submission when discussing female sexuality.[117] Men, on the other hand, were assumed to play a more active sexual role, and a number of radicals argued that it was 'instinctive in the masculine mind to *actively* gain possession' of a woman's 'charms'.[118] Mirroring the theories of sexologists such as Ellis and Freud, who argued that the 'sexuality of most male human beings contains an element of *aggressiveness* – a desire to subjugate', for men, it was important that they be seen as strong and vigorous.[119] These differences, many assumed, were naturally defined. For example, one *Adult* author argued that a man would be more likely to give his seat away on a train to a pretty girl (rather than one that was 'plain or

[115] W. M. G, 'A Note on Women's Love', 144.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex Vol. 3* (Philadelphia, F. A. Davis, 1913), p. 229.
[118] Orford Northcote, 'Dress in its Relationship to Sex', 79.
[119] Quoted in Edward Erwin, *The Freud Encyclopedia: Theory, Therapy, and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.15.

soured'), and a woman more likely to admire a man with 'strength of will' than 'a gentle husband who has not an ounce of authority in him' due to a naturally defined, 'healthy selective power'.[120] Thus while many writers may have agreed that sexual urges were equally strong in both sexes, they nevertheless often maintained that the sexual natures of men and women were profoundly different in character. As such, they claimed, men and women had different sexual roles to play.

In addition to these assertions of female sexual passivity, some radical authors also emphasised the links between female sexual desire and woman's particular reproductive role. In this view, which reflected the works of evolutionary theorists like Charles Darwin, Geddes and Thomson, and Cesare Lombroso, as well as mirroring ideas espoused by sexologists like Havelock Ellis and Richard von Krafft-Ebing, female sexuality was understood to be directly motivated and formed around a woman's natural reproductive capacities.[121] Mirroring, for example, Ellis's belief that there was a 'cosmic conservatism' at work that meant that 'Woman breeds and tends; man provides', a number of radicals argued that female sexuality was a response to the more active sexuality of men, and was specifically adapted to her maternal function.[122] *Adult* contributor Herbert Edwards, for example, contrasted the 'simple and straightforward' nature of male sexuality with the more complex sexuality of women. In his view, while men were motivated by their desire for simple sexual

[120] Leighton Pagan, 'The Judgement of Paris, Up To Date', *The Adult* 1:4 (November, 1897), 66.
[121] I discuss the relationship between women's rights, sex radical views, and debates about reproduction in greater depth in chapter 5.
[122] Havelock Ellis, *Man and Woman: A Study of Human Secondary Characteristics* (London & Newcastle: Walter Scott, 1904), pp.440-452. For an overview of sexologists' discussions of sexual difference see Jeffrey Weeks, *The Languages of Sexuality* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011), p. 51; Mark S. Roberts, *The Mark of the Beast: Animality and Human Oppression* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), pp. 28-9.

gratification, for women 'the mere gratificatory act is *not* all – it marks the beginning of responsibility, it means conception, it means child-bearing'.[123] Mirroring this view, W.M.G drew from descriptions of the 'relative dispassionateness in the loves of female brutes, as distinguished from males' in anthropological literature in order to characterise 'normal' female sexuality as passive, indifferent, and reproductive.[124] The sexual irresponsiveness of women in the distant past and in 'savage' tribes, the author asserted, provided 'fair warrant for the opinion of Lombroso that love in women is only intense when it becomes a pathological condition, while the instinct of maternity is normal in the sex'.[125] As such, despite widespread assertions about the importance of sexual equality in the journals, a number of radicals drew ideas from disciplines like anthropology, ethnology, and evolutionary biology in order to maintain that sex – for women, in particular – was inherently reproductive.

It is important to note that this vision of sexual difference, and the emphasis placed on the passive, reproductive sexuality of women, did not go uncontested in the journals. For example Lillian Harman, a prominent American free lover and contributor to both *Lucifer* and *The Adult,* criticised sexual relationships based on ideas of the active male's 'insistence' and the passive female's 'submission', and instead used eugenic ideas to call for more egalitarian relations based on ideals of mutual respect, love, and pleasure.[126] However the clearest refutation of female sexual indifference and the idea of an integral link between female sexuality and motherhood came from *Freewoman* authors who insisted that female sexuality

[123] Edwards, 'The Question of Children', 67.
[124] W.M.G, 'A Note on Woman's Love', 144.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Lillian Harman, 'Pen Points', *The Adult* 2:4 (May, 1898), 96.

should be understood as separate from the reproductive function. As Lucy Bland has shown, these ideas about the legitimacy of non-reproductive sexual activity were often supported using sexological ideas in the journal.[127] For instance Stella Browne used the works of Havelock Ellis in her discussion of female masturbation to 'repudiate passing any "moral" judgement on these various forms of onanism, whose danger to health and sanity has, on the whole, been much overrated'.[128] It was editor Dora Marsden, in particular, who denied the exclusivity of the connection between sex and reproduction. She declared that 'it is surely a fallacy to hold that sex is primarily experienced with the motive of continuing the race. From the first protozoa up through the scale of life, it has been experienced for its own satisfaction'.[129] Marsden's 'New Morality' was based around female sexual expression separate from her maternal potential. Sex was, instead, an expression of spiritual self-realisation and the ascension to 'Freewoman'-hood. This idea of sex emphasised the idea that sex for reproductive purposes and sex for pleasure could and should be detached. She argued that a 'pair of humans wanting a child, and getting it, do not thereby experience the sex sense', and that reproduction should be seen as a 'wholly different proposition' to sexual gratification for its own sake.[130] In direct contravention to other radical authors who emphasised the importance of reproduction to the female sexual impulse, the question of the production of children was cast aside by Marsden as an 'incidental implication rather than a first factor', and

[127] Bland, *Banishing the Beast,* pp. 278-280. See also Lucy Bland, 'The Shock of the Freewoman Journal: Feminists Speaking on Heterosexuality in Early C20th England', in Jeffrey Weeks and Janet Holland (eds.), *Sexual Cultures: Communities, Values and Intimacy* (London: MacMillan, 1996), pp. 76-78.
[128] A New Subscriber, 'The Chastity of Continence?' *The Freewoman* 1:14 (February 22, 1912), 270.
[129] Dora Marsden, 'Interpretations of Sex', *The Freewoman* 1:24 (May 2, 1912), 461.
[130] Ibid, 461.

sex itself was touted as the most important facet of female and advancement and spiritual self-realisation. [131]

It is therefore clear that radical authors often had different ideas about the sexual natures of men and women and clashed, in particular, over the supposed link between female sexuality and woman's maternal function. However, these contested ideas about sexuality were often constructed and expressed using interpretations of similar scientific ideas, drawn by radicals from a range of disciplines. As such while an examination of radical discussions of sexual difference highlights the internal tensions and inconsistencies of radical circles it also demonstrates the approaches and ideas that united radical authors. Specifically, it implies the centrality and importance of broadly scientific ideas to all of the different constructions of sexuality present in the journals.

Engaging with ideas about the 'natural' sexual drive allowed these authors to posit their ideas about sexual reform as rational and logical, and suggested that their campaigns for sexual freedom were supported by the weight and authority of science. But scientific ideas about the natural basis of human sexuality and the importance of sex for a strong and healthy body and mind provided more than a set of persuasive rhetorical tools. These ideas also allowed these radicals to construct a particular understanding of sexuality through which they could challenge contemporary marriage customs and agitate for a new notion of sexual morality that included sexual freedom. Though, as analysis in this chapter has previously shown, radicals often clashed in their specific discussions of sexuality, they were

[131] Ibid.

nevertheless united in their use of 'scientific' ideas. These ideas were drawn from a range of disciplines, and were used to argue that sex had its own 'natural' meaning rooted in the body that came before, and existed outside of, culture. Many writers thus posited sex as an essential part of the self, and maintained that the sexual impulse was natural and instinctual. From this they argued that the restriction of this 'natural' sexual instinct by social, cultural, religious and legal customs was both damaging and unjust.

Putting Sex at the Heart of Reform

This scientific construction of a 'natural', independent, and innate sexuality therefore gave these sex radical authors a powerful tool in their campaigns for reform. Firstly, it provided them with a vantage point from which to criticise contemporary sexual attitudes and customs for being unnatural, injurious and oppressive. In contributions to *The Adult,* for example, important American free lover and *Lucifer* editor Moses Harman outlined his belief that sex and love were natural forces that had been distorted and perverted by what he saw as the particularly oppressive influence of marriage customs. He argued that marriage was an 'anti-natural requirement', which had served to turn it into 'the prolific breeding ground of deception, hypocrisy, falsehood'.[132] Similarly John Badcock Jr argued that placing restrictions on one's sexual urges in order to conform to sexual customs was 'dishonourable', and stated that 'In itself, as a mere suppression of pleasure, or as a suppression for other's benefit only, self-restraint is absolutely pernicious – from the

[132] Moses Harman, 'Why I Oppose Marriage', *The Adult* 1:6 (January, 1898), 170.

standpoint of the individual'.[133] In addition, Leighton Pagan argued that the 'bounds to human capacities and enjoyments' placed on individuals by contemporary marriage and courtship customs did not represent human progress, but rather signified 'a complete retrogression to simpler and less sensitive types'.[134] According to these authors the sexual customs of the day (and marriage in particular) were not working *with* nature to make sexual behaviour more moral or civilised. Instead they insisted that these customs were in direct tension with an important natural sexuality, thus rendering them harmful, regressive, and immoral. The construction of a 'natural' sexuality therefore allowed sex radical authors to call into question the validity of the restrictions placed upon it by legal and religious marriage customs, ideas about the necessity of self-restraint, and the emphasis placed on sexual purity and pre-marital chastity. The idea of a 'natural' sexuality that existed at the most basic level consequently played an important role in sex radical attempts to argue for a new system of sexual morality that included sexual freedom – authors argued that since sex was a natural urge and an essential requirement of the body, people should be free to indulge their sexual impulses, regardless of their marital status, without fear of reproach.

Leading on from this critique of sexual restraint, a number of radical writers insisted that 'right' sexual behaviour should not be dictated by rules and ideals imposed upon it but, instead, that ideas about what constituted 'moral' and 'healthy' sexual behaviour should be dictated by the expression of man's natural sexual urges. In *The Adult,* for example, Robert Braithwaite argued that the 'moral health of

[133] John Badcock Jr., 'Go to the Butterfly, Thou Slave', *The Adult* 1:2 (September, 1897), 20.
[134] Leighton Pagan, 'The Judgment of Paris', 61.

human Society absolutely demands *perfect freedom* as regards sexual unions – whether temporary or permanent, a freedom which neither law nor the voice of Mrs Grundy shall interfere'.[135] Charles J. Whitby also succinctly described this when he argued that in *The Freewoman* that 'The instincts are anterior to morality'.[136] Similarly, E. B. Auvergne argued that 'if any morality can be evolved from sex at all, it must lie in the selfish or unselfish use of the natural instincts'.[137] In this view, contemporary sexual customs and attitudes towards sex had warped the natural relations between the sexes. Demonstrating this, one author lamented the fact that man was 'the only organism on this earth which has managed to disturb the relations between the sexes, and has created a problem of the most natural facts'.[138] Many radicals thus drew from this scientific construction of sexuality in order to maintain that the morality of sexual behaviour should not be dictated or defined by whether or not the activity was sanctioned by marriage laws, or whether it adhered to popular codes of 'respectable' or 'civilised' sexual behaviour. Instead they stressed that it should be formed around the expression of what they saw as important, healthy, natural sexual instincts.

It was this construction of a rational, 'natural' sexuality that underpinned many radical arguments. In particular, authors asserted that that the restrictions placed on sex represented a distortion and perversion of this important 'natural' order. They insisted that marriage customs and ideals of chastity and restraint had forced

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[135] Robert Braithwaite, 'Self Reverence, Self Knowledge, Self Control', *The Adult* 1:5 (December, 1897), 88.
[136] Julian Warde, 'Modernism in Morality – II', 110.
[137] D'Auvergne, 'The Definition of Marriage', 6.
[138] August Schvan, 'The Right to Love', *The Freewoman* 1:23 (April 25, 1912), 449.

sexuality into ‘unnatural’ channels. It was this distortion - this impediment of a ‘natural’ instinct - that they argued had been a root cause of many troubling social issues, such as prostitution, sexual inequality, degeneracy, and racial decline. As such, building from their scientific construction of sexuality and the belief that morality should be informed by the expression of ‘natural’ sexual urges, sex radical authors believed that the best way to address pressing social issues was to directly reform the systems, social conventions and rules that governed the romantic and sexual relations between men and women. In particular, they argued that allowing people to be free to pursue unsanctioned sexual relationships - motivated not by social conventions, religious doctrines, or mercenary concerns, but based solely on the unchecked expression of natural desire – would allow sexuality to flow into more ‘natural’ channels. Allowing the sexual drive to run in this way, many sex radical authors maintained, would restore a ‘natural’ order. It was therefore seen as the best way to answer some of the most topical concerns of the day. A scientific construction of sexuality, which emphasised its ‘natural’, biological, innate character, was thus integral to radicals’ calls for sexual reform.

Building a Case for Radical Sexual Reform

This notion of sexuality supported sex radicals’ general belief that it was sexual freedom that could provide the answer to many of the most urgent contemporary anxieties about sex, marriage, and the family. In this section I will explore in greater depth the way in which radicals used this understanding of sexuality to support their campaigns for sexual reform. Firstly, analysis will examine radicals’ claims that sexual restraint and the suppression of ‘natural’ sexual urges

had caused a number of prominent social problems. Building from this it will then go on to explore the ways in which radical authors argued that sexual freedom could restore a natural order, and consequently help to cure a host of topical social ills.

Many radicals directly identified the restriction of sexual activity as the cause of worrying social issues. For instance, a number of writers emphasised the links between what they saw as sexually limiting marriage and courtship customs and the problem of degeneracy and ill health. A range of authors insisted that good sex, like good food, was vital to maintenance of a healthy body and argued that the placing of restrictions on the expression of desire was potentially injurious to an individual's physical and mental health. Reflecting medical debates about the damaging physical and psychological effects of celibacy, radicals asserted that sexual abstinence was harmful, and stressed instead the health benefits of an active sexual life.[139] *Adult* author Lucy Stewart, for example, argued that it was 'unsatisfied sexual longing that is responsible for the greater part of the hysteria, chlorosis, and menstrual disorders which are so common among young unmarried women'.[140] Additionally, she asserted that sexual abstinence would cause for both sexes a 'general weakening, and sometimes total decay of the sexual powers … [and] a melancholy and irritable turn of mind, which incapacitates them for either business or pleasure'.[141] Mirroring this, *Freewoman* contributor Charles J. Whitby M.D. stated that celibacy could 'only

[139] For information about contemporary debates about the physical and mental effects of celibacy see Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 60-62; Andreas Hill, ''May the Doctor Advise Extramarital Intercourse?': Medical Debates on Sexual Abstinence in Germany, c. 1900' in Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (eds.) *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes to Sexuality* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 284-302.
[140] Lucy Stewart, 'Free Thought and Free Love', *The Adult* 1:3 (October, 1897), 41.
[141] Ibid.

be practised by normal persons at the expense of sanity'.[142] Similarly, free love advocate Dora Forster Kerr claimed that celibacy had potentially severe effects on a person's mental health. She asserted that the 'unhealthy and unnatural condition of celibacy' had produced 'more lunacy victims that any other cause'.[143] She further argued that early death was an alarming possibility for celibate people, and that unsexed women were particularly likely to experience 'painfully excitable nerves', lunacy, or hysteria.[144] Radicals clearly asserted that the denial of the 'natural' sexual urges had potentially serious ramifications for an individual's physical and mental wellbeing. According to this view, sexual restraint and limitations placed on sexual expression could be understood as being the root cause of prominent social issues like degeneracy, failing health, and racial decline.

For authors like Stewart, Kerr, and Whitby, sexual freedom represented the best cure for the illness and fragility they believed was caused by a lack of sexual activity. As such these radicals believed that allowing people to pursue sexual activity regardless of their marital status would combat ill-health by allowing people to participate in 'normal, healthy, sexual gratifications'.[145] Lucy Stewart, for example, clearly emphasised that she considered sexual intercourse necessary 'in order to keep … bodies and minds in the best possible condition'.[146] In the radicals' view, sexual freedom also had important ramifications for racial health: as further chapters will discuss in greater depth, many writers argued that children produced by amorous

[142] Charles J. Whitby M.D., 'Aphorisms', *The Freewoman* 1:13 (February 15, 1912), 247.
[143] Dora F. Kerr, 'The Conversion of Mrs Grundy', *The Adult* 2:4 (May, 1898), 100.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Orford Northcote, 'Music, Religion and Sex – II', *The Adult* 2:2 (March, 1898), 44.
[146] Stewart, 'Free Thought and Free Love', 41.

couples outside of the limiting sphere of marriage would be stronger and healthier racial stock. Radicals can be seen to be linking the free expression of 'natural' sexuality outside of the confines of legal, religious and social conventions surrounding sex to improvements in physical and mental health. Their belief in sexual freedom was therefore evidently underpinned by the idea that free expression of 'natural' sexual urges could help to provide an answer to such pressing issues as degeneracy and the weakening of bodies and minds.

Contributors to these journals were particularly critical of the double moral standard, which tacitly condoned male sexual expression while condemning female sexual indulgence.[147] Radical authors, reflecting the views of a number of contemporary feminist reformers, asserted that it was the sexual attitudes, approaches, laws and customs of the day that had rendered relations between men and women so profoundly unequal.[148] Indeed Joanne Passet has noted that for American sex radicals, the 'sex slavery' and inequality of marriage, in particular, was

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[147] The double moral standard of the era has been discussed in numerous historical works, including Bland, *Banishing the Beast,* 60; Lesley Hall, 'Hauling Down the Double Standard: Feminism, Social Purity and Sexual Science in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Gender & History* 16:1 (April 2004), 36–56; Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power,* pp. 193-200. For a good general overview see Veronique Mottier, *Sexuality: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 49-53.

[148] Feminist campaigners had, for example, elsewhere agitated for changes to existing divorce laws due to the fact they treated woman's adultery more harshly than man's, thus upholding a double standard of sexual morality. In addition they had campaigned for legal reform that would grant married women greater economic dependence. This agitation led to some notable victories, including the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882 (which granted a married woman the right to hold on to her own property and wages), and the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1878 (which took steps to protect women from spousal abuse. For an overview of these campaigns see Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989). See also Ben Griffin, 'Class, Gender, and Liberalism in Parliament, 1868-1882: The Case of the Married Women's Property Acts', *The Historical Journal* 46:1 (Mar., 2003), 59-87; Lee Holcombe, *Wives and Property: Reform of the Married Women's Property Law in Nineteenth-Century England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); A. James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in C19th Married Life* (Routledge: London, 1992), p. 118. Excerpts the Acts can be found in Fiona A. Montgomery, *Women, Politics and Society in Great Britain C. 1770-1970: A Documentary History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

seen as a central cause of the social and economic oppression of women in wider society.[149] Many authors maintained that this inequality was due to the 'deception, hypocrisy, falsehood' they believed was characteristic of contemporary marriage laws and conventions.[150] Indeed one author maintained that this regime of 'professed monogamy, actual promiscuity – ostensible continence, real licence' had been created by a 'public opinion grounded in hypocritical ignoring of the facts' of human sexual nature.[151]

Therefore unlike those feminists who sought to make the relations between the sexes more equal through, for example, legal reforms, for radicals the answer to this inequality lay not in 'tinkering with the law' but in changing the social, legal and cultural customs surrounding sexual expression.[152] Allowing people of both sexes free reign to express their 'natural' sexual desires, they believed, would put an end to the idea held within it that a woman could be the 'property' of man – an idea which they labelled 'incompatible with any right definition of manly love or even self-respect'.[153] *Adult* editor George Bedborough summed this up succinctly when he told a correspondent, 'You must remember that one of the fundamentals of our position is the equal sex freedom of men and women. 'Free Love' for one sex at the expense of the other means neither freedom nor love'. [154] Sexual freedom could therefore signal a move towards a more equal sexual system, and thus help pave the way for a more

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[149] Joanne Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's* Equality (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 146.
[150] Harman, 'Why I Oppose Marriage', 170.
[151] Sagittarius, 'Love's Coming of Age', 14.
[152] George Bedborough, 'Editorial', *The Adult* 1:2 (September, 1897), 18.
[153] George Bedborough, 'What the Legitimation League Means', *The Adult* 1:1 (June, 1897), 4. See also Robert Braithwaite, 'The Last Citadel of Authority', *The Adult* 1:4 (November, 1897), 53.
[154] George Bedborough, 'Answers to Correspondents', *The Adult* 1:5 (December, 1897), 91.

widespread move towards sexual equality. As one *Lucifer* correspondent noted, through free love 'Slowly, I am removing the shackles that bind me'.[155] We can see that it was not through legal challenges to marriage that these radicals sought to address the double moral standard and the subordination of wives. Rather, their belief in the fundamental sexual natures of both sexes motivated their belief that equality could be achieved through basing relationships on the free expression of sexual desire for both men and women.

In addition, sex radical authors also linked the control of sexuality to the dysfunction and unease they saw as characteristic of many contemporary relationships. Legitimation League founder Oswald Dawson, for example, stated that he 'despaired' of monogamic connubialism as he believed that it 'asphyxiates love and devours the virtue it professes to preserve'.[156] He stated that he despised monogamic marriage due to the fact that it caused people to have sex out of duty, rather than in accordance with their own natural feelings of love and desire. He lamented the fact that sex within marriage was being 'performed like a penance of Ave Marias, till the meaning and charm has died away'.[157] Similarly, Leighton Pagan asserted that those who limited their sexual freedom by adhering to marriage customs 'ceased for ever to be as companionable or as interesting to us as of yore, and might almost go and hang themselves for that matter'.[158] In this author's view, controls placed upon man's natural sexual instincts had placed limitations on 'the springtime and hey-dey [sic] of our existence' and had rendered people unhappy and

[155] Virginia, Correspondence, *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* (29 October, 1886), 3.
[156] Dawson, 'Editorial', 104.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Pagan, 'The Judgement of Paris', 60.

unsatisfied.[159] Another author, who wrote under the pseudonym 'Sagittarius', argued that sexual customs based on the control and regulation of sexuality represented 'an unworkable system, a bold presentment of the hollowness and falsity of nineteenth century conventions'.[160] In his view, the 'deception and treachery' he saw as characteristic of relationships was 'a confession of the weakness and entire *un*morality of the restraints set up by an insincere society against the might forces of human nature'.[161] For these authors, among others, the restraints and limitations placed on people's sexual, romantic, and familial lives by customs, mores, and laws were directly to blame for widespread dissatisfaction and unhappiness. In these arguments we can clearly see radicals' investment in the idea that the restriction of a natural sexuality was inherently problematic, and to blame for what they saw as wider social problems.

Radicals therefore emphasised the ways in which sexual freedom and the indulgence of important 'natural' sexual urges could make relationships happier and more harmonious. Leighton Pagan, for example, criticised the fact that 'sex-love pure and simple—sex-love unqualified—has a reputation for upsetting happiness, instead of promoting it'.[162] Furthermore, Orford Northcote insisted that 'free love … guided by happier instincts, will give us a paradise of joy, instead of a Calvary of sorrow'.[163] Similarly Lucy Stewart argued that marriage had made people miserable, and had rendered relations between the sexes strained and dysfunctional. She maintained

[159] Ibid.
[160] Sagittarius, 'Marriage at the Criterion Theatre', 84.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Pagan, 'Judgement of Paris', 59.
[163] Northcote, 'Prostitution', 3.

that ‘Much misery would be avoided and much positive happiness brought about by the earlier gratification of the sexual passion which would take place if free love were in vogue’.[164] Clear here is the idea that the expression of supposedly ‘natural’ sexual urges could directly combat what they envisioned as prominent social issues surrounding sex, love, and family life.

From these examples we can see some of the ways in which radicals linked the restriction of sexual activity to a number of troubling social issues. Authors contributing to these journals believed, among other things, that the imposition of social controls on natural and important sexual urges had caused problems like ill-health and degeneracy, sexual inequality, marital dissatisfaction, and widespread sexual vice. Sex radical authors asserted that the free expression of sexual desire could therefore combat these issues. As analysis has shown radicals emphasised the role sexual freedom could play in improving physical and mental health, combatting sexual vice, and making sexual, romantic, and familial relationships happier and more equal. This belief in the importance of sexual reform to social reform was thus fundamentally grounded in their construction of sexuality, which asserted that sex was a powerful, natural, innate instinct that was best placed to guide the associations between the sexes.

Sex Radicalism and Sexual Science

While the sex radicals contributing to these journals did not always share a vision of how sexual freedom should function day to day, it is clear that these authors

[164] Stewart, ‘Free Thought and Free Love’, 41.

were interested in exploring sex 'scientifically', and shared a commitment to the notion that sex was a 'natural' force that had a legitimate role to play in shaping and reforming numerous aspects of social life. This was not a viewpoint restricted to sex radical circles – indeed these responses to the issue of sex and their interest in a scientific construction of sexuality link them to much broader discussions of human sexuality occurring in the period.[165] Particularly strong and interesting links can be drawn between this strand of sex radical discussion and the burgeoning field of sexual science, or sexology, which had begun to emerge in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

A number of explicit links can be drawn between contemporary sexological research and radical ideas about sex. For example authors contributing to the journals often drew directly from the works of a number of prominent sexologists in their work, including Iwan Bloch, Havelock Ellis, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, and Auguste Forel. Indeed Lucy Bland has argued that 'In their keenness to discuss sex, its role and potential, *Freewoman* contributors seem to have read as much sexology as they were able to lay their hands on'.[166] While, as Bland has shown, sexological ideas were vital to *Freewoman* discussions of sex, arguably one of the clearest and most important links lies in the under explored relationship between *The Adult* and key English sexologists Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter. It is now well documented that *Adult* editor George Bedborough was prosecuted for selling the first

[165] John H. Gagnon and Richard G. Parker, for example, have discussed contemporary sexual theorists' general agreement that 'that sex was a natural force that existed in opposition to civilisation, culture or society' and was instead 'embedded in the individual'. See John H. Gagnon and Richard G. Parker 'Conceiving Sexuality' in John H. Gagnon and Richard G. Parker (eds.), *Conceiving Sexuality: Approaches to Sex Research in a Postmodern World* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 7.
[166] Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, p. 279.

edition of Ellis's important *Sexual Inversion* (1897) which was published, like Bedborough's own journal, by the somewhat shady University of Watford Press.[167] While the relationship between Bedborough and Ellis was at times cool (due, according to Ellis's biographer Phyllis Grosskurth, to Ellis's belief that Bedborough's decision to plead guilty in his trial to avoid a prison sentence was 'not heroic'[168]) Bedborough nevertheless directly acknowledged in correspondence with him that his work owed a 'big and increasing debt' to Ellis's research.[169] It is perhaps to be expected, then, that Ellis is one of the sexologists most discussed in the journal; he is directly referenced in a number of articles, and his works were often advertised in its pages.[170] Carpenter was also a prominent figure in the journal, and in addition to being widely advertised and reviewed, contributed material to *The Adult* on three occasions: the poems 'Two Gifts' and 'I Saw A Fair House' in 1898, and an article, 'Evolution', in 1899.[171] Perhaps due to the dramatic nature of the Bedborough trial, in numerous historical accounts the stories of *The Adult* and the emergence of early

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[167] A good outline of the lead up to Bedborough's arrest and his subsequent trial for obscenity can be found in Sean Brady, *Masculinity and Male Homosexuality in Britain, 1861 – 1913*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). For information about the University of Watford Press see Edward Royle, *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866-1915*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), pp. 276-277.
[168] Phyllis Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis: A* Biography (New York: New York University Press, 1985), p. 204.
[169] Ibid, 203.
[170] References to Ellis are fairly common in *The Adult*. See, for example, Orford Northcote, 'Music, Religion and Sex – I', *The Adult* 2:1 (February, 1898), 7; R. A. Gordon M. D, 'Sexual Topics', *The Adult* 2:2 (March, 1898), 38.
[171] Edward Carpenter, 'Two Gifts', *The Adult* 2:1 (February, 1898), 18; 'I Saw A Fair House', *The Adult* 2:7 (August, 1898), 200-201; 'Evolution', *The Adult* 3:1 (January, 1899), 21-22. Carpenter also contributed material to the second incarnation of Marsden's *Freewoman* journal. See, for example, Edward Carpenter, 'The Status of Women in Early Greek Times', *New Freewoman* 1: 4 (August 1, 1913), 68-69. For information on Carpenter's engagement with the Freewoman circle, see Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London; New York: Verso, 2008), p. 328-9.

English sexology have become inexorably linked. Yet, until now, this radical group's engagement with contemporary sexual science has gone largely unexplored. [172]

It is perhaps unsurprising that the sexologists who featured most prominently in the journals tended to be those who were themselves sympathetic to radical sexual reform agendas. For example, much like the radical authors contributing to sex radical journals, Ellis asserted the importance of sex to both the lives of individuals and to the development of society.[173] As Nicholas Matte has shown, Ellis was committed to a range of sexual reforms at this time and lent his support to campaigns for birth control, abortion, and rights for women.[174] In addition Carpenter's work had attacked the values and customs of middle class life and instead advocated a return to nature.[175] In *Love's Coming of Age* (1896), for instance, he argued that men and women should be able to love openly and without the restraints imposed by marriage and repressive social attitudes.[176] Other sex radical authors certainly would have been sympathetic to Carpenter's view that 'marriage, in its squalid perversity as we too often have occasion of knowing it, is as the wretched

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[172] See, for instance, Anne Humpherys, 'The Journals That Did: Writing about Sex in the late 1890s', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 3 (2006); Anne Summers, 'The Correspondents of Havelock Ellis' *History Workshop Journal*, 32 (Autumn, 1991); Edward Royle, *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866 – 1915* (Manchester University Press, 1980); Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800* (Longman, 1981), p. 181; Water Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1996), p. 162; Chiara Beccalossi, 'Havelock Ellis: Sexual Inverts as Independent Women' in Mary McAuliffe and Sonja Tiernan (eds.) *Tribades, Tommies and Transgressives; History of Sexualities: Volume I, Volume 1* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp. 215-218.

[173] Jeffrey Weeks, 'Havelock Ellis and the Politics of Sex Reform' in Jeffrey Weeks and Sheila Rowbotham (eds.), *Socialism and the New Life: The Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London: Pluto Press, 1977), p. 141.

[174] Nicholas Matte, 'International Sexual Reform and Sexology in Europe, 1897-1933', *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 22.2 (2005), 263.

[175] For example Tony Brown has discussed Carpenter's criticism of middle class society for being 'diseased' and 'unhealthy', and shown how these 'made him a hero of English radicalism.' See Tony Brown (ed.), *Edward Carpenter and Late Victorian Radicalism* (London; Portland: Frank Cass, 1990), p. 1.

[176] Ibid, 9.

idol of the savage to the reality which it is supposed to represent'.[177] Radicals can therefore be seen to be keen to engage with sexological research and discussion that directly resonated with their radical views and calls for reform.

There are, of course, references to a host of other sexologists. For instance *Adult* contributor Orford Northcote referenced Austro-German sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing's important *Psychopathia Sexualis* (first published in 1886) in articles arguing the benefits of having a variety of sexual partners.[178] In *The Freewoman,* 'A Would-Be Freewoman' drew from the work of German sexologist Iwan Bloch to argue for the existence of a strong sexual drive in women.[179] In these cases, as in many others, the sexological works referenced spoke less clearly to radical agendas; Krafft-Ebing's belief that monogamous matrimony was the evolutionary highpoint of human society, for example, does not seem to obviously support Northcote's calls for polygamous sexual relations.[180] Reflecting the use of sexological ideas by feminist reformers as outlined by Lucy Bland, we see that sex radicals were often happy to use and interpret ideas gleaned from sexology in selective ways to support their calls for radical reform. That is, as Bland states, 'they may not have agreed with all they read, but many of them were determined to take…anything which appeared useful in their pursuit of sexual self-expression'.[181]

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[177] Edward Carpenter, *Marriage in a Free Society* (Manchester: Labour Press Society, 1894), p. 4.
[178] Northcote, 'Dress in its Relationship to Sex', 79.
[179] A Would-Be Freewoman, 'The Individualism of Motherhood', 353.
[180] Harry Oosterhuis has shown that Krafft-Ebing believed that human sexual behaviour had developed through a state of promiscuity, through matriarchal and patriarchal systems, to a sexual system based around monogamous marriage practices. He can therefore be understood to have viewed the Western nuclear family as 'the apex of the evolutionary development of humanity'. Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature,* p. 57.
[181] Bland, *Banishing the Beast,* pp. 279-280.

But the relationship between these groups went beyond these explicit connections and the radicals' selective use of sexological material. Indeed sex radicals and sexologists shared many distinct interests in and beliefs about sex. Firstly, radical authors and sexologists shared a general belief that man had a biologically innate, inborn sexual nature.[182] Many contributors to both groups agreed that sexuality was a core part of what it meant to be human, and believed it was a vital process as deep held as man's need to eat, drink, or sleep. For example, mirroring radical discussion of the 'natural' sexual drives outlined earlier in this chapter, Swiss sexologist Auguste Forel argued in his widely read and influential work *The Sexual Question* (1904) that 'Sexual instinct and sentiment … have their roots in life itself; they are bound up with humanity'.[183] Similarly, prominent German sexologist Iwan Bloch spoke in *The Sexual Life of Our Time* (1908) of the 'primeval and ever-active sexual impulse'.[184] Much like those radicals discussed above who based their discussions around the idea that sex should be understood as 'laws of nature'[185] or 'natural desires'[186], sexologists asserted that sexuality had a natural and

[182] Mirroring radical views outlined early in this chapter, Jennifer M. Harding has stated that even though they were divided on specific aspects of human sexuality sexologists generally agreed that sex had 'an ultimately discoverable essence'. Jennifer M. Harding, *Sex Acts: Practices of Femininity and Masculinity* (London: SAGE, 1998), p. 10.
[183] Auguste Forel, *The Sexual Question: A Scientific, Psychological, Hygienic and Sociological Study for the Cultured Classes* (New York: Rebman, 1908), p. 4. For information on the reception of Forel's work, see Edward Ross Dickinson, *Sex, Freedom, and Power in Imperial Germany, 1880-1914* (New York: University of Cambridge Press, 2014), p. 251.
[184] Iwan Bloch, *The Sexual Life of Our Time in its Relations to Modern Civilisation* (New York: Allied Book Co., 1908), p. 6. Bloch's work was originally published in 1906 under the title *Das Sexualleben unserer Zeit in seinen Beziehungen zur modernen Kultur*
[185] Sagittarius, 'Marriage at the Criterion Theatre', 87; Northcote, 'Prostitution', 37; Kerr, 'The Custom of Marriage', 63.
[186] Sagittarius, 'Sexual Freedom in Relation to Women and Economics', 27; Robert Braithwaite, 'Self-Reverence, Self-Knowledge, Self-Control', 89.

instinctive nature. Indeed, Krafft-Ebing's influential *Psychopathia Sexualis* opened with the discussion of the 'power of the sexual instinct'.[187]

Radicals and sexologists also often shared sympathetic views about the profoundly different sexual natures of men and women. As sociologist Janice Irvine has outlined in her work on gender ideology in sexual science, sexologists insisted that sexual difference had its roots in biology and was thus inevitable.[188] For example, mirroring those radical assertions of the activity of male desire versus the sexual passivity of females discussed earlier in this chapter, in the third volume of his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* Havelock Ellis contrasted the 'predominantly open and aggressive' nature of male sexuality with the passivity of female desire.[189] Krafft-Ebing, too, discussed the sexual 'activity' of man, and stated that 'without doubt the man has much more intense sexual appetite than the woman. As a result of a powerful natural instinct, at a certain age, a man is drawn towards a woman… In accordance with the nature of this powerful impulse, he is aggressive and violent in his wooing'.[190] In contrast, female desire was characterised as being weaker and more diffuse, 'more spiritual than sensual'.[191] For Krafft-Ebing, women 'had less sexual need than man', and he therefore asserted that 'a predominating sexual desire in her arouses a suspicion of its pathological origin'.[192] Additionally, Iwan

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[187] Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis,* p. 1.
[188] Janice Irvine, 'Difference to Sameness: Gender Ideology in Sexual Science', *The Journal of Sex Research* 27:1 *Feminist Perspectives on Sexuality. Part* 1 (Feb., 1990), 10. Lynne Segal has also discussed notions of sexual difference in contemporary sexological works in *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure* (London: Virago Press, 1994), pp. 79-80.
[189] Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex Vol. 3* (Philadelphia, F. A. Davis, 1913), p. 189.
[190] Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis,* p. 13.
[191] See Edward Ross Dickinson, '"A Dark, Impenetrable Wall of Complete Incomprehension": The Impossibility of Heterosexual Love in Imperial Germany', *Central European History* 40:3 (Sep., 2007), 467-497.
[192] Quoted in Claudia Nelson, 'Sex and the Single Boy: Ideals of Manliness and Sexuality in Victorian Literature for Boys,' *Victorian Studies* 32:4 (Summer, 1989), 529.

Bloch related the natural sexual difference between men and women to the supposed activity of the sperm cell and the passivity of the female ovum.[193] In Bloch's view, the natural difference between the sexes manifested itself at the most basic cellular level. Though, as Edward Ross Dickinson has shown, sexologists were not united in their views about the specific sexual natures of men and women, they nevertheless generally agreed that there were important and deep-set differences between the sexes.[194] This view clearly mirrors radical understandings of sexual difference, such as *Adult* author W. M. G's comparison of the 'fierce passion of the bull and the apparent impassivity of the cow'.[195]

Many sexologists emphasised that this female passivity did not represent a lack of female desire but instead was a manifestation of the comparative complexity of the female sexual response. As Irvine has shown, this complexity was directly linked to the belief that a woman's sexual and reproductive system was more 'intricate' and 'mysterious' than that of man.[196] Ellis, for instance, believed that the female sexual response was naturally 'more complex and laborious' than a male's.[197] This view was clearly shared by a number of sex radical authors. *Adult* contributor Herbert Edwards, for example, argued that 'The demands of a man's sexual nature are comparatively simple and straightforward, and therefore, easily satisfied'.[198] He contrasted this with a woman's sexual nature, which he understood to be 'much

[193] Bloch, *The Sexual Life of Our Time,* p. 9.
[194] Ross Dickinson, 'The Impossibility of Heterosexual Love in Imperial Germany', 472.
[195] W. M. G., 'A Note on Woman's Love', 44.
[196] Irvine, 'Difference to Sameness', 10.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Edwards, 'The Question of Children', 67.

more complex and intricate'.[199] Sex radical authors and sexologists can therefore be seen to have sympathetic beliefs about the fundamental nature of female sexuality.

As this chapter's analysis of sex radical thought and a comparison with sexological work has shown, radicals were interacting with many of the central questions of contemporary sexual science. Radicals' interest in exploring the 'truth' of human sexual behaviour, charting its physiological and biological foundations, their reliance on material and methodologies from a broad range of disciplines, and their commitment to examining ideas about sexual difference all resonated with the research of well-known sexologists like Bloch, Ellis, Forel, and Krafft-Ebing. These links show that while sex radical campaigns for sexual freedom were undoubtedly unorthodox, their discussions about sex should not be understood as isolated or anomalous. Indeed their interaction with sexologists – both through direct contact and references, and through sympathetic approaches, interests and methodologies – shows that they were deeply enmeshed in much broader intellectual debates about human sexuality. Consequently radical discussions can help us to better understand intellectual debates about sex at this time and to challenge those historians who categorise sexual science as a narrow medical field. Radical discussions do this by revealing that 'scientific' discussions of sex were not limited to a restricted group of medical men. Instead, their interventions into these debates show that the circle interested in 'sexual science' was populated by a diverse range of actors who held a diverse range of ideas about sex, and who were motivated by different political views.

[199] Ibid.

Conclusions

This chapter has outlined the basic understanding of ‘sex’ that lay at the heart of free lover’s campaigns for sexual freedom, and has therefore dealt with one of the most fundamental and important aspects of sex radical thought. My analysis has shown that radicals’ advocacy of sexual reform was often underpinned by a particular ‘scientific’ construction of sexuality. Firstly, this construction drew from a general belief in the importance of approaching the topic of sex rationally, and without trepidation. Furthermore, they drew from specific ideas about the important, powerful, essential sexual instinct of mankind as radicals emphasised that the sexual impulse was a ‘natural’ part of the self. In addition, authors argued that that sex was a basic biological imperative, and was vital to the health, development and wellbeing of the mind and body. Though, as an examination of their journals has shown, radical authors did often clash over some of the specific ways in which sexuality should be understood, they nevertheless used similar ‘scientific’ ideas to construct a notion of sexuality that was powerful, independent, and vital to the self.

This ‘scientific’ construction of sexuality allowed sex radical authors to create a vantage point from which to criticise marriage customs for being oppressive and harmful, both to the health and wellbeing of individuals and also to society more generally. Indeed, as an exploration of their journals in this chapter has shown, it was to the suppression of ‘natural’ sexual instincts that radicals attributed many of the most worrying social issues of the day such as racial decline, degeneracy, and sexual vice. Their particular notion of sexuality thus served to structure and fortify their campaigns for free love as it allowed them to posit sexual freedom as a key

remedy for a number of the pressing social ills of the day. This interest in thinking about sex scientifically and in constructing a sexuality that existed independently of society and culture was not isolated. As I have shown, radical discussions of sex took place alongside and in conversation with a much broader exploration of human sexuality and sexual behaviour occurring in scientific – and particularly sexological – circles. Therefore our historical understanding of contemporary sexual science can be transformed by the inclusion of radical texts, as their work implies the broad, diverse, and politically and socially interested intellectual circle taking part in the project of sexual science in this period.

It is this basic understanding of 'sex' as something important, natural, and vital that formed the basis of sex radicals' critique of existing institutions and their subsequent calls for sexual freedom. As such an understanding of radicals' belief in a 'natural' sexuality represents a good starting point from which to explore in greater depth radical debates about what it meant to be sexually 'free'. The following chapters will build from this basis; firstly analysis will consider how ideas about 'natural' sexuality allowed radical authors to critique existing social and cultural institutions they believed had injuriously 'bound' the sexual instincts and drives. Following on from this, chapters will look at what freedom from this 'bondage' looked like, how it could be achieved, and how it could function day to day. As such an understanding of the sex radicals' shared belief in the 'natural' sexuality of mankind as outlined in this chapter is key to broader examinations of contemporary 'free love'.

Chapter 2

‘Natural’ Sexuality and the Critique of Marriage

As the opening chapter has shown, sex radical authors believed that mankind’s innate sexuality exerted a powerful positive force. They argued that this force should not be controlled, limited, or suppressed by social, political, or cultural controls. These ‘external constraints’, they claimed, were distorting mankind’s true sexual nature and were thus forcing it to find expression in injurious and ‘unnatural’ channels. As I have shown, to counter the social ills that they believed were the outcome of these restrictions, radicals stressed the importance of allowing the natural sexual instinct free reign. Journal authors therefore highlighted the benefits of structuring intimate relationships around sexual freedom; they insisted that when allowed free expression the human sexual instinct would lead people to live happier, healthier, and more equal romantic, sexual, and familial lives. Radical writers therefore emphasised the need to ground relationships in the feelings and urges they saw as manifestations of this ‘natural’ instinct. They stressed, in particular, the importance of pursuing relations based on what they saw as naturally occurring feelings of desire, affection, and love.

It was this construction of sexuality and sex radicals’ particular belief in the positive nature of the ‘natural’ sexual instinct that most clearly informed this group’s specific critique of contemporary social institutions. Their explicit and outspoken criticism of the marriage institution, in particular, built from this starting premise. A range of sex radical authors (for all their differences) asserted that the institutional framework of marriage had served to impose a set of harmful and arbitrary restraints

over humanity's natural sexuality. They argued that the emphasis placed by marriage customs on permanence, control, and 'legitimate' sexual expression meant people's romantic and sexual lives were not being driven by their 'natural' and genuine desires, or by the powerful and complex forces of mutual love and attraction. Instead, they believed, they were being formed around a false and injurious set of customs and laws that had served to impede an individual's real sexual nature and distort the relations between the sexes. In essence they argued that the laws, values, and customs of the marriage institution, instead of acting as an appropriate framework for the sexual instincts, were in fact fundamentally antagonistic to the 'natural', honest, and right expression of mankind's true sexual nature.

Radicals supported their critique of marriage by asserting that the antagonism between what they saw as the true nature of human sexuality and the institution of marriage had led to a number of problematic social issues. For example, a range of sex radical authors discussed how the suppression of sex had harmfully inhibited the free expression of 'natural' sexual appetites. Not only did they believe this had this caused damage to an individual's mental and physical health - they also claimed that this had led people to find outlets for their powerful sexual urges with prostitutes, and was thus a direct cause of 'The Great Social Evil'. 'Free lovers' were also disparaging of contemporary beliefs about the 'pure' and passive nature of middle-class wives. Across the journals authors asserted that the typical middle-class wife, assumed to be sexually ignorant and sexually passive, was only able to maintain her 'pure' and 'respectable' status at the expense of the working-class prostitutes who

existed to serve the sexual 'needs' of her husband. As such they sought to show that the institution of marriage was directly to blame for a sexual system that required prostitution. They also blamed marriage for perpetuating prostitution in other ways. They claimed, for instance, that the focus placed by the marriage institution on conformity to custom rather than 'true' love meant women were entering marriages merely for financial reasons. Radicals believed that by giving their bodies to their husbands not out of love or desire but instead for financial stability and 'respectability', married women were in essence acting as prostitutes themselves. Marriage was consequently blamed for the proliferation of prostitution both on the streets and in brothels, and in the marital home. Sex radicals' calls for sexual reform and their advocacy of sexual freedom was therefore underpinned by a specific critique of the institution of marriage. Their particular understanding of marriage that saw it as a force of oppression and harm gave them a vantage point from which to argue that relations 'unbound by marriage or any similar contract, influenced only by mutual affection' could not only make people happier, but could also answer some of the most problematic social issues of the day.[200]

To some extent sex radicals have been included in historical considerations of contemporary debates about marriage before. Jane Lewis, Christina Simmons and Lucy Bland, for example, have all examined the relationship between sex radicalism and feminist agitation for marriage reform in their work.[201] In these accounts calls for

[200] Lucy Stewart, 'Free Thought and Free Love', *The Adult* 1:3 (October, 1897), 40.
[201] Jane Lewis, *The End of Marriage? Individualism and Intimate Relations* (Edward Elgar, 2001); Christina Simmons, 'Women's Power in Sex Radical Challenges to Marriage in the Early-Twentieth-Century United States', *Feminist Studies* 29:1 (Spring, 2003), 168-198. Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast*: *Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Tauris Parke, 2001).

free love are discussed as a fringe part of feminist debates, often included as an example of the seemingly extreme lengths to which some reformers were willing to go to increase social and legal rights for women. However, despite this interest, few scholars have explored in any depth the key ideas and beliefs that lay at the heart of sex radical critiques of marriage; as such our understanding of sex radicalism and its place in contemporary marriage debates has been notably limited. By exploring the specific ways radicals constructed and articulated their critique of marriage, and how this critique underpinned their calls for reform, this chapter will therefore add much to historical understandings of sex radicalism at this time.

This chapter will explore the sex radicals' interventions into highly topical contemporary debates about the 'marriage question'. Firstly it will outline how their particular understanding of sexuality framed their views; it will show how radicals envisioned a human sexual nature that had been harmfully oppressed by the marriage institution. Building from this, it will look at the radicals' specific critique of marriage, and discuss how a considerable part of this critique was formed directly around their beliefs about human sexual nature and the idea that it had been bound by attempts to control and regulate sexual behaviour. In essence, it will demonstrate how radicals refuted the idea that sexual morality was 'rooted in social conventions and legal institutions' like marriage, and was instead inherently linked to free and 'natural' sexual expression.[202] Furthermore, it will explore radicals' arguments about how the oppression and bondage of marriage had caused a number of the most

[202] Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Marriage and Morals among the Victorians* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986). P. 18.

problematic social ills of the day. In particular it will focus on how radical authors perceived links between marriage and the proliferation of prostitution. This research will therefore go further than existing historical work that has situated sex radicalism on the periphery of contemporary marriage debates, as it will discuss in depth the way that free lovers drew from a specific construction of sexuality to underpin both their critique of existing social institutions and their calls for sexual reform.

Identifying the Flaws of Marriage

Discussion of the harmful nature of marriage was common in these sex radical journals, and authors viewed the customs, laws, and values of the contemporary marriage institution as being flawed in a number of different ways. The clearest criticisms were directly framed by their belief that mankind's natural sexuality was dynamic, diverse, and complex, and thus ill-suited to a marriage system that was inherently focussed on conformity and permanence. Authors claimed that by not catering for the complexity of individual sexual natures and forcing people to stay in relationships even when 'natural' feelings of love and desire had departed, marriage trapped people into dysfunctional and unfulfilling sexual lives. Authors in all of these journals shared the common belief that marriage had bound and oppressed an individual's 'true' sexual nature, and had thus harmfully distorted the relations between the sexes. As such, despite their many differences, these radicals framed their calls for sexual reform with a shared a vision of marriage as a form of bondage.

The sex radicals' critique of the marriage institution was underpinned by a set of assumptions about the diversity and mutability of mankind's sexual nature. Firstly,

they asserted that human sexualities were hugely diverse, and thus supported the expression of 'natural' sexual urges in a variety of kinds of 'ideal' relationships. While, as the next chapter will show, they often clashed about what the 'ideal' looked like, they nevertheless shared the belief that human beings experienced natural feelings of love and desire in a number of different ways. For example, one *Adult* author discussed love as a 'complex emotion finding expression in a multitude of constituent elements variant with the infinite variety of human minds and needs'.[203] Furthermore, E. C. Walker outlined this clearly in his discussion of the 'great diversities of intellect and tastes' that he believed formed the basis for sexual desire.[204] He contrasted those people who had 'dominant exclusive instincts', and were thus naturally geared towards exclusive and long-term relationships, with others whose particular natural sexual inclinations made them seek out a variety of sexual partners.[205] For Walker, then, the 'wide diversity of development' in mankind served to 'render it as impossible to secure a real, a just and healthful uniformity in the relations of the sexes'.[206] *Freewoman* authors also challenged a notion that there was one sexual 'ideal'. Lesley Hall has outlined the ways that Stella Browne, in particular, believed in 'the desirable variousness [sic] of mankind, and discusses her wish for a 'free and various humanity'.[207] *Lucifer* and *Adult* author R. B. Kerr also espoused similar views in the *New Freewoman;* he argued, for instance, that in sexual matters 'men and women vary infinitely'.[208] As such we can see that radical

[203] Sagittarius', 'Love's Coming of Age', *The Adult* 2:1 (February, 1898), 12.
[204] Edwin C. Walker, 'The Moloch of the Monogamic Ideal', *The Adult* 2:2 (March, 1898), 47.
[205] Ibid.
[206]E. C. Walker, 'Variety vs. Monogamy', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 1:31 (August 4, 1897), 241.
[207] Lesley Hall, '"I have never met the normal woman": Stella Browne and the Politics of Womanhood', *Women's History Review* 6:2 (1997), 175.
[208] R. B. Kerr, 'The Dangers of Marriage', *The New Freewoman* 1:9 (October 15, 1913), 178.

authors with a range of different views called for the establishment of a sexual system that would allow the recognition of the 'extreme mobility of human emotions, the mutability of the human organism'.[209]

Given this belief in natural sexual diversity, authors were suspicious of a marriage institution that served to set up a singular ideal to which everyone should aspire – that of an exclusive, life-long marriage. Indeed Robert Braithwaite argued that it was 'one of the most fatal of mistakes … to suppose that, in the present development of humanity, one ideal or one standard is to be set up for attainment by all, and the most fatal is to seek or hinder further or carried developments by legal enactments or consecrated customs'.[210] Reflecting this, Walker argued in *The Adult* that the single standard of monogamy represented an attempt to 'suppress diversity, to choke out variety' and resulted in 'the most atrocious cruelties, in wholesale blighting of lives, in mental, emotional, and physical maimings, in judicial and extra-judicial murder'.[211] Therefore, in his view, 'the attempt to secure conformity' through marriage had ignored the natural diversity of human sexuality, and had thus resulted in 'immense suffering'.[212] Radicals' visions of sexuality as something diverse and individual thus clearly framed their critique of existing marriage customs, and their calls for sexual reform.

Other beliefs about the nature of sexuality also supported their criticisms of the single, 'ideal' marriage. For example further reflecting their investment in a

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[209] Edwin C. Walker, '"The Monogamic Ideal" and "The Ideal Man"', *The Adult* 2:5 (June, 1898), 140.
[210] Robert Braithwaite, 'Self-Reverence, Self-Knowledge, Self-Control', *The Adult* 1:5 (December, 1897), 89.
[211] Walker, 'The Moloch of the Monogamic Ideal', 48.
[212] Ibid.

diverse and complex sexual nature, the sex radicals in this circle also contended that feelings of love and desire were not static, but dynamic and liable to change. E. C. Walker, for instance, discussed how 'all the changing conditions and epochs of a long life' rendered it nearly impossible to maintain exclusive, lifelong desire for a single person of the opposite sex.[213] He argued that desire had the capacity to be intense, but also had the potential to wane over time; he asserted in an argument that criticised the 'monogamic ideal' that 'the sexual attraction and adaptation, which are at the base of all sex unions, tend to reach a point of rest' in long term relationships, and as such 'the man and woman who once thrilled at the mere thought of each other, now calmly meet, coldly touch hands, perfunctorily kiss as they retire at night, or part for the day, or even yawn in each other's faces across the breakfast table'.[214] Other authors agreed; for example Orford Northcote claimed that 'The only thing certain to be predicated of any particular desire is the present existence of it. Because a desire exists to-day, you cannot posit that it will exist tomorrow. It may or it may not'.[215]

Drawing from these beliefs about the dynamic and mutable nature of love and desire, they envisioned sanctioned marriage (assumed to represent the restriction of sexual activity to a single partner with a lifelong tie) as a force that had served to hinder individual sexual natures by setting up a restrictive ideal that only suited a very small minority of people. An editorial in the opening edition of *The Adult,* for example, stated that 'In our present marriage customs too much is taken for granted

[213] Walker, 'The Ideal Man', 140.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Orford Northcote, 'The Mutability of Sex Love', *The Adult* 1:2 (September, 1897), 22.

– the future is enslaved to an emotion of the present or the past … and consequently self-realisation becomes impossible'.[216] For author George Bedborough, the theory of 'perpetual marriage' was based on the idea that 'a man and woman's love for one another must be given once and for all, and exclusively'; this, he claimed, went against 'universal experience', which showed 'that such love is rarer than a December rosebud'.[217] For Bedborough, marriage customs that placed restrictions on sexual freedom therefore represented a system through which 'The happiness of millions is sacrificed to an ideal, fit for only a few'.[218] Reflecting this, his *Adult* colleague Leighton Pagan argued that 'The mistake that has been made by marriage law is in assuming that a man's and a woman's requirements in each other, unlike their requirements in most other matters, can be satisfied and settled, at once and for ever, at one particular period half-way or a quarter-way through their lives, regardless of the fact that the pursuit of the beautiful and harmonious in human relationships is, especially with highly-endowed natures, a life-long process'.[219] Similarly, former Legitimation League member Wordsworth Donisthorpe reasoned in *The Freewoman* that the permanent nature of marriage and the impermanent nature of feelings of love and desire rendered lifelong wedlock problematic, and he contended that 'no promises should be made which circumstances may render unredeemable. You have no moral right to promise to believe to-morrow what you believe to-day'.[220] He argued for a complete overhaul of contemporary marriage on the grounds that 'the initial oath is wrong. The marriage vow, in its present form, is

[216] George Bedborough, 'What the Legitimation League Means', *The Adult* 1:1 (June, 1897), 3.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid.
[219] Leighton Pagan, 'The Judgement of Paris, Up To Date', *The Adult* 1:4 (November, 1897), 67.
[220] Wordsworth Donisthorpe, 'Problem Plays and Novels', *The Freewoman* 2:30 (June 13, 1912), 67.

wrong, and must be utterly discarded'.[221] Radicals were therefore highly critical of marriage customs and laws, as they believed they stopped people from finding expression for natural feelings of love and desire; Robert Braithwaite, for instance, criticised the fact that marriage held people in relationships 'where there has been no mutual love between the principal parties, or where that love has ceased to exist' and instead encouraged people to seek fulfilment 'where alone they might find it'.[222]

Sex radical authors therefore asserted that by attempting to confine a person to a single partner for life, marriage was negatively interfering with, rather than positively directing, mankind's natural sexual instincts. Marriage, they insisted, placed arbitrary restrictions on 'natural' sexual expression, and was thus seen to be oppressive and 'anti-natural'.[223] This notion of marriage working against a natural sexual order was shared by a range of authors and was commonly expressed in the journals.[224] In *The Adult*, for example, Leighton Pagan argued that the 'placing of bounds to human capacities and enjoyments is *not* improving upon Nature…but a complete retrogression to simpler and less sensitive types'.[225] For him, 'the springtime and hey-day of our existence…is not limited by Nature in the way our marriage usages limit it'.[226] In his view, the marriage system had led to love

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[221] Ibid.
[222] Robert Braithwaite, 'The Home and the Family', *The Adult* 2:1 (February, 1898), 20.
[223] For a discussion of how radicals' ideas about the importance of expression rather than restraint, as well as a consideration of the arbitrary and unnatural nature of marriage customs, see Anita Clair Fellman and Michael Fellman, 'The Rule of Moderation in Late Nineteenth-Century American Sexual Ideology', The *Journal of Sex Research* 17:3 History and Sexuality (Aug., 1981), 248.
[224] Elizabeth Miller has discussed how writers like Grant Allen and Havelock Ellis also shared a belief in a 'natural sexual order'. She discusses, for instance, Grant Allen's call for people to 'embrace and follow every instinct of pure love that nature, our mother, has imparted within you' in his notorious novel, *The Woman Who Did* (1895). See Elizabeth C. Miller, *Slow Print: Literary Radicalism and Late Victorian Print Culture* (Stanford University Press, 2013), p. 257.
[225] Pagan, 'Judgement of Paris', 61.
[226] Ibid, 60.

becoming 'shamefaced, regulated by codes, legal, ecclesiastical, or ethical, and well-nigh smothered under obligations'.[227] Other contributors agreed; anonymous author Sagittarius spoke of marriage as an 'unworkable system', and stated that it represented the 'weakness and entire *un*morality of the restraints set up by an insincere society against the might forces of human nature'.[228] Similarly, American free lover Moses Harman argued against the 'anti-natural requirements' of marriage due to his belief that 'marriage opposes Truth'.[229] Contributors to his paper held similar views; Karl Heinzen, for example, described sexual desire as 'the most beautiful impulse', and attacked the 'unnatural conditions which hinder thousands, yes, millions, from living out their natural instincts in a moral relation'.[230] Later contributions to *The Freewoman* also reflect this belief in the unnaturalness of placing restrictions on sexuality. Charles J. Whitby, for example, argued that the idea that 'it is so far from natural for a man and woman to live in a state of marriage that we find all the motives they have for remaining in that state, and the restraints which civilised society imposes to prevent separation are hardly sufficient to keep them together' was 'the naked truth in a nutshell'.[231] Similarly, G. Granville stated that existing customs and values 'are instruments forged and shaped … for the benefit of the few and the misery of the many; they are the means by which natural pure humanity has been duped into believing itself impure'.[232] Mirroring this, editor Dora Marsden contended in her editorials that legal marriage was 'an unjustifiable

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[227] Ibid, 70.
[228]Sagittarius, ''The Liars'; Or, Marriage at the Criterion Theatre', *The Adult* 1:5 (December, 1897), 87.
[229] Moses Harman, 'Why I Oppose Marriage', *The Adult* 1:6 (January, 1898), 170.
[230] Karl Heinzen, 'Morality, False and True', Lucifer, Light-Bearer 5:24 (June 29, 1901), 185.
[231] Charles J. Whitby, 'The Tragedy of a Happy Marriage', *The Freewoman* 1:2 (November 30, 1911), 25.
[232] G. Granville, 'The Tyranny of Words', *The Freewoman* 1:2 (November 30, 1911), 35.

tyranny', and that 'the law has no appropriate business in the affairs of the human spirit. Its operations lie in cruder spheres. It might as well legislate upon the tints of the clouds and the curves of the sea-waves'.[233] Therefore in the sex radicals' view, marriage was defined as an injurious, unnatural, and oppressive system through which the 'affinities and longings towards sexual companionship – probably the most powerful motive force of humanity – are suspiciously watched, circumscribed, confined'.[234]

From these arguments we can see that the sex radicals' construction of sexuality, and specifically their understanding of the character of love and desire, directly underpinned their views and criticisms of the institution of marriage. Many free lovers argued that the contemporary idea that marriage was the only legitimate site for sexual expression had driven people into relationships that served to restrict and confine their natural sexual urges and inclinations – in short, to trap people into a kind of union that potentially worked against their natural sexuality. The lifelong nature of the marriage contract and the difficulty of obtaining a divorce raised even more problems; sex radicals believed that if people were unfortunate enough to fall into the 'trap' of marriage, this confinement and control was permanent and near inescapable. Therefore it is clear that some of the most important aspects of sex radical debate centred on the idea that the customs, laws, and values associated with marriage represented a form of oppression and control, equivalent to a form of bondage.

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[233] Dora Marsden, 'The New Morality – III', *The Freewoman* 1:7 (January 4, 1912), 122.
[234] Sagittarius, 'Marriage at the Criterion Theatre', 84.

Female Bondage and Sexual Inequality

While radicals believed this state of bondage was injurious to people of both sexes, many agreed that it weighed on women most severely. In part, this view drew from their beliefs about mankind's sexual nature; as earlier chapters have shown, while they acknowledged that the sexual natures of men and women may have differed in character, they rejected the views of a number of earlier medico-scientists who emphasised that women were naturally 'passionless' and largely uninterested in sex.[235] Instead they asserted that people of both sexes had a powerful, natural sexual drive, and lamented the 'sexual starvation' of both men and women. Reflecting their views about the importance of free sexual expression, free lovers therefore believed that both men and women had the equal right and responsibility to structure their intimate lives around their own powerful 'natural' needs and urges. A number of sex radical campaigners were thus especially critical of those aspects of marriage laws and customs that they believed had disturbed this natural equality and denied women, in particular, the freedom to dictate their own intimate lives.

In many ways, the radicals' general unease about the position of women in marriage reflected wider feminist criticism of the unequal and oppressive conditions of matrimony. Indeed feminist campaigners had for some time been agitating for

[235] For evidence of this a number of historians have discussed the views of such figures as British gynaecologist William Acton, who stated in *Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* (1857) that 'women are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind'. For an overview of medico-scientific views on female sexuality see Bland, *Banishing the Beast,* pp. 54-58; Steven Seidman, 'The Power of Desire and the Danger of Pleasure: Victorian Sexuality Reconsidered', *Journal of Social History* 24:1 (Autumn, 1990), 47-67; Carol Groneman, 'Nymphomania: The Historical Construction of Female Sexuality', *Signs* 19:2 (Winter, 1994),337-367; Anna Katharina Schaffner, *Modernism and Perversion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 16-17; Stephen Garton, *Histories of Sexuality: Antiquity to Sexual Revolution* (London: Equinox, 2004), pp. 112-116.

marriage reform due to its perceived negative impact of women. Many contemporary feminist authors in this period criticised the contemporary matrimonial laws that not only dictated that a wife lost her legal autonomy in the event of her marriage, but also (following Sir Matthew Hale's 1736 marital rape exemption) meant that women were assumed to have granted their husband unfettered and unlimited access to their bodies.[236] Mona Caird, for example, had written on the 'acknowledgement of the obvious right of the woman to possess herself body and soul, to give or withhold herself…exactly as she wills', and Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy had publicly campaigned against coverture and for the abolishment of the marital exemption of rape.[237] Even Josephine Butler, who firmly asserted the importance of sanctioned marriage, emphasised women's right to 'an absolute sovereignty over her own person, and of this no man, no legislation on earth has any right to deprive her'.[238] Feminist accounts from across the spectrum revealed discontent with the loss of legal and political power, the unequal divorce laws, the economic dependency of women on men, and perhaps most importantly, the consensus that marriage ultimately signalled a husband's ownership of his wife.[239] Therefore, as Lucy Bland has stated, one of the key themes of contemporary discussions of marriage was the idea that 'It was, above all, a married woman's right over her own person that needed to be won'.[240] Radicals shared similar views to these feminist campaigners.

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[236] Joanne Bourke, 'Sexual Violence, Marital Guidance, and Victorian Bodies: An Aesthesiology', *Victorian Studies* 50:3 (Spring, 2008), 421.
[237] Quoted in Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, p. 129 & p. 138.
[238] Josephine Butler, *An Appeal to the People of England on the Recognition and Superintendence of Prostitution by Governments* (1870). Originally published anonymously by 'an English Mother' in 1869, Butler republished this pamphlet under her own name in 1870. The edition I have used for reference is reprinted in Sheila Jeffreys, *The Sexuality Debates* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 111-150.
[239] Bland, B*anishing the Beast,* p. 124.
[240] Ibid, 125.

They claimed, for instance, that marriage deprived woman 'of her right of ownership and control of her person, of her children, her name, her time, and her labour',[241] and framed their radical views as a 'protest…against the theory underlying laws, marriage settlements, and popular practice, that a woman's person can be the 'property' of her husband'.[242] As such we can see that radicals' more general assertions of the injustice of marriage laws and their emphasis on the importance of giving women the 'right of ownership and control of her person' clearly resonated with much broader calls for female autonomy.[243]

However, a distinct part of radicals' specific critique of the marriage institution and their views about the subjugation of women drew from their particular understanding of human sexual nature. Many authors asserted that the sexual instinct of women was as urgent and vital as that of men, and as such they believed they should have the same freedom to indulge their natural sexual urges. Marriage laws and customs, they claimed, had failed to adequately cater for this, and had instead wrongfully privileged male sexual expression. They believed this male privilege worked in a number of different ways: through the emphasis on the importance of sexual passive wives, through the denial of a woman's bodily autonomy, and through the upholding of a double moral standard that granted men a degree of sexual freedom but denied married women a comparable outlet for their sexual urges. Therefore, while the bondage of marriage was viewed as being

[241] Harman, 'Why I Oppose Marriage', 170.
[242] George Bedborough, 'What the Legitimation League Means' *The Adult* 1:1 (June, 1897), 4.
[243] Harman, 'Why I Oppose Marriage', 170.

injurious to people regardless of their sex, many radicals emphasised how it had served to bind and oppress women in particular.

A number of authors claimed that the particular lack of autonomy granted to women in marriage had taken away woman's freedom to follow her own powerful sexual instincts and indulge her natural sexual urges. Moses Harman criticised the fact that marriage decreed that women's sexuality belonged 'first to the state (or to the state and the church) and secondly to [her] husband'.[244] He therefore criticised the institution of marriage for taking away a women's right to sexual self-determination and bodily autonomy, and the freedom to express her own natural sexuality. He complained that a woman's 'sex-nature' was never her own, 'to do with it as [her] own judgement deems fit'.[245] Reflecting this, Lillian Harman contributed articles to *The Adult* that discussed the submission and slavery of marriage; she called for women to pursue free love relations so that they could 'sustain only the relations which she herself desires…be happy in the love of her lover, and tenacious of her own self-respect'.[246] Sex radical authors were also highly critical of a sexual double standard that granted men, but not women, opportunities for sexual expression. Not only was this system seen to be a major cause of unhappy, dysfunctional and deceitful relationships – a number of authors also claimed that it imposed harmful and unjust restrictions on female sexuality. Dora Forster, for instance, criticised the marriage laws that through the double standard 'grudgingly allow enjoyment to the man, because this is obviously inevitable', but 'would deny

[244] Moses Harman, 'Freedom and Love, versus Marriage and Hate', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 1:15 (April 14, 1897), 116
[245] Ibid.
[246] Harman, 'Pen Points', 96.

participation in enjoyment to the women, and teach her that her sexual submission must be bartered for material good'.[247]

This sex radical circle therefore viewed marriage as a form of bondage, in which people – and particularly women - were prevented from the free experience and expression of natural feelings of love, desire, and affection. As I will discuss in greater depth in later chapters, authors claimed this bondage was perpetuated in a number of ways. They discussed how controls and sanctions were placed upon sexual expression both through the interference of the church and state and, importantly, through social customs and notions of respectability. Building from their beliefs about the importance of allowing the sexual instincts to guide people's sexual lives, authors asserted that it was this binding marriage institution that had disturbed an important natural order; as such they asserted that it lay at the heart of some of the most troubling social issues of the day. As I demonstrated in the opening chapter a number of authors viewed the suppression of sex by marriage as physically and mentally debilitating and as such linked it to worrying degeneracy. Moses Harman, for instance, argued in eugenic terms that marriage, due to its repressive nature, represented 'Bad governmental and economic systems' that would 'curse humanity, and retard progress and happiness of the race'.[248] His daughter, Lillian, also argued against marriage in these terms; she rejected the tyranny and inequality of marriage and advocated instead the 'liberty and responsibility of free love', arguing it alone could 'save humanity from degeneration'.[249] British free love advocates employed

[247] Dora Forster, *Sex Radicalism: as seen by an emancipated woman of the New Time* (Harman, 1905), p. 36.
[248] Harman, 'Freedom and Love, versus Marriage and Hate', 117.
[249] 'Lillian Harman on Liberty of Women', Lucifer, Light-Bearer 2:16 (April 20, 1898), 126.

similar tactics in *The Adult*, and asserted that the 'nemesis of any foolish attempt at control is deceit, hypocrisy, degeneration'.[250] As later chapters will outline in depth, a number of sex radical authors also emphasised the links between the oppressive and unequal nature of marriage and racial decline. Alongside these fears about degeneracy and decline, radicals also explored what they believed were explicit links between the institution of marriage and problematic aspects of society. As my analysis in the following section will show, they emphasised in particular the ways in which marriage was to blame for widespread prostitution, and the proliferation of loveless, deceitful, and mercenary marriages. As such we are able to clearly see how radicals' views about sexuality underpinned their specific critiques of marriage, as well as their belief that sexual reform was vital to social progress.

Marriage as the 'the Parent of Prostitution'

The limitations and constraints of marriage were not only believed to have had a direct impact on an individual's health and development, as the sex radicals contributing to these journals also viewed marriage as being inextricably linked to a number of topical social issues. In particular, like many contemporary campaigners for reform, they emphasised the specific links between existing marriage laws and customs and the prominent issue of prostitution. Clearly encapsulating this belief in the link between the two, Upton Sinclair stated that 'the real truth about the sex institutions of modern society … is it is not the institution of "marriage" at all…it is an entirely different thing, the institution of "marriage plus prostitution"'.[251] Reflecting this

[250] 'Sagittarius', 'Marriage at the Criterion Theatre', 87.
[251] Upton Sinclair, 'Divorce' *The Freewoman,* 1:9 (January 18, 1912), 165.

view, a number of authors argued that the idea that sex was only moral and legitimate within marriage had meant the free expression of the 'natural' sexual appetites was being inhibited; as such, they claimed that the system of marriage had served to force people to find outlets for their sexual instincts in undesirable channels. The sex radicals were also highly critical of contemporary beliefs about the 'pure' and passive nature of middle-class wives. Many authors believed that the passive middle-class wife was only able to maintain her 'pure' and 'respectable' status at the expense of the working-class prostitutes who existed to serve the sexual 'needs' of her husband. As such, as an exploration of these themes will show, radicals were highly invested in the idea that the institution of formal, sanctioned marriage was directly responsible for perpetuating a sexual system that required prostitution.

A number of radical authors contended that prostitution was the outcome of an oppressive marital system that restricted the free expression of natural and vital sexual instincts. *Adult* author Sagittarius, for instance, asserted that 'Very many of the evils of modern life proceed from the unnatural suppression enforced upon the sexual instincts. The natural desires denied expression when Nature demands their satisfaction have created an army of prostitutes and given prominence to many 'unnatural' methods of sexual indulgence'.[252] A particularly clear demonstration of this can be seen in articles by *Adult* contributor Orford Northcote. In an 1897 article, for example, Northcote looked to show that prostitution was the direct outcome of the

[252] Sagittarius', 'Sexual Freedom in Relation to Women and Economics' *The Adult* 1:2 (September, 1897), 27.

‘tyranny of monogamic custom’.[253] He argued that ‘The human body is a sanctuary of the highest known form of life. To maintain it in its perfection, the laws of its nature must be obeyed. One of the most imperative of these laws is that which demands the fulfilment of sexual functions’.[254] Conforming to marriage customs and notions of ‘respectable’ sexual behaviour, he believed, meant people (and particularly men) were limiting their opportunities for sexual activity and were thus denying the ‘needs of the body’; he stated that this was tantamount to a ‘sin against one's self’ akin to ‘partial suicide’.[255] He maintained that in order to indulge their natural sexuality and maintain humanity’s ‘perfection’ man had little option but to revert to the use of prostitutes and ‘to purchase what by nature should be given freely’.[256] He thus argued that the prevalence of prostitution was the outcome of a strong and important sexual instinct ‘darkly demanding freedom’ from the restrictions of monogamous marriage customs. [257]

While Northcote’s work provides us with a particularly clear example, discussion of the links between the bondage of marriage and the problem of prostitution was common throughout the works of the sex radical authors in this circle. *Adult* and *Lucifer* contributor Dora Forster, for example, discussed the ‘vicious circle of celibacy, bond marriage and prostitution’ in which prostitution functioned as ‘a mere substitute for the mutuality of true sexing’.[258] She argued that in a system of free love, in which she believed ‘love will be allowed expression in a hundred

[253] Orford Northcote, ‘Prostitution’, *The Adult* 1:3 (October, 1897), 36.
[254] Ibid.
[255] Ibid, 37.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Ibid, 38.
[258] Forster, *Sex Radicalism*, p. 12.

ways'[259], men would have no need to resort to the use of prostitutes to express their natural sexuality as they would be free to form sexual partnerships with 'one or more educated and responsible women, his equals, under a code of freedom'.[260] *Lucifer* correspondents held similar views. An article from 1901, for instance, argued that prostitution was the outcome of 'disobedience to the physiological law of sexual exercise' as people resorted to the use of prostitutes to 'reconquer that which has been so disastrously refused them by … laws and customs'.[261] Furthermore, American anarchist Kate Austin stated that 'the restriction of the sexual nature by law and custom' had created both the 'demand and supply' in the market of prostitution.[262] For a range of sex radical authors, then, marriage had forced men into finding an outlet for their natural and vital sexual urges with prostitutes; as such, they stated, it was directly from the harmful and oppressive marriage system that prostitution was born.

Sex radical authors also directly linked the problem of prostitution to ideas about wifely 'purity', and the notion that married women should ideally be sexually passive. As Lucy Bland has argued, many contemporaries believed women should be 'pure, inherently modest, and barely sexual'.[263] Free lovers claimed that by restraining themselves in order to conform to these wifely ideals, married women were directly involved in perpetuating a sexual system dependent on prostitution for

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[259] Ibid, 29.
[260] Ibid, 44.
[261] Paul Robin, 'Free Love, Free Maternity', Lucifer, Light-Bearer 5:11 (March 30, 1901), 81.
[262] Kate Austin, 'Who Are the Fallen?' Lucifer, Light-Bearer 6:17 (May 8, 1902), 130. Kate Austin, born Catherine Cooper, was a journalist and prominent free love advocate with close ties to well-known radical figures like Emma Goldman. For further information see Candace Falk, *Emma Goldman: Made for America, 1890-1901* (University of Illinois Press, 2008), p. 517.
[263] Bland, *Banishing the Beast,* p. 116.

the outlet of the sexual 'needs' of men. For example *Adult* author E. Wardlaw Best stated that marriage had caused women to be 'divided into two sets, trained to detest each other'.[264] In her view, wives represented a trade union while the prostitute was 'the blackleg of the marriage system'.[265] For Wardlaw Best, it was male interest that had created the dichotomy between the perceived respectability of wives and prostitutes, and had caused a rift between women jointly oppressed by men. She saw the 'two sets' of women created by marriage as kept apart 'by interest, and by the man who has created that interest'. [266] Legitimation League founder Oswald Dawson also attacked the 'monogamic connubialism' of marriage for being 'the parent of Prostitution'; much like Best, he saw the restrictions placed on sexual activity by notions of 'respectability' as creating a system in which 'married women are, as it were, a trades-union, and…prostitutes are the blacklegs'.[267] Reflecting her radical feminist views, *Freewoman* editor Dora Marsden held similar views. She criticised the concept of female purity upheld by marriage as not only personally limiting but as representative of male control, as well as proof of the negative impact of religion on women. In part of a series of articles on 'The New Morality', for example, she asserted, 'Women…are the social ascetics. They have become ascetic through their long exercising of restraint. They have restrained themselves in order to remain "pure." They have remained "pure" because men like them "pure," and men's likings in this matter are backed up by women's religion'.[268] She directly contrasted the ascetic, pure wife with those who allowed her to maintain her position

[264] E. Wardlaw Best, 'Our Troops in India [A Reply]' *The Adult* 1:2 (September, 1897), 32.
[265] Ibid.
[266] Sinclair, 'Divorce', 165.
[267] Oswald Dawson, 'Two Editorials' *The Adult* 1:6 (January, 1898), p. 104.
[268] Dora Marsden, 'The New Morality – II', *The Freewoman* 1:6 (December 28, 1911), 101.

in society and culture, stating that the wife had 'based upon intellectual apathy and unsensitiveness…fulfilled [her] own moral ideal at the expense of the Spinster and the Prostitute'.[269]

An exploration of this group's views about the flaws of marriage and the evils of prostitution means that we are not only able to see how they understood the binding and limiting nature of marriage as being at the root of a prominent social issue; it also illuminates the close links between radical groups and wider calls for marital and sexual reform. As Judith Walkowitz has shown, from the mid-nineteenth century prostitution had become known as the 'Great Social Evil' and was widely discussed and commented on in a range of contemporary media.[270] As such the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries saw a proliferation of debates about what caused prostitution, and what action could be taken to put an end to what anti-prostitution campaigners saw as 'the scourge of humanity'.[271] These debates included interventions from a diverse range of actors who interpreted the causes (and therefore the potential cures) of prostitution in different ways; for example, as Lucy Bland has shown, there were divisive debates between feminist groups about whether prostitution should be 'repressed', and how the prostitutes themselves should be treated.[272]

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[269] Marsden, 'The New Morality – III', 121.
[270] Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 32.
[271] For example Josephine Butler, the prominent reformer and key campaigner for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, discussed prostitution as 'the scourge of humanity, the typical crime of the universe from the beginning till now'. See Josephine E. Butler, 'Grave Words to Electors and Non-Electors, and Moral Reformers, On Immoral and Unjust Legislation' in Jane Jordan and Ingrid Sharp (eds.), *Josephine Butler and the Prostitution Campaigns: The Constitution Violated* (London & New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 67.
[272] Bland has outlined, for instance, the debates between 'repressionists' like Laura Chant and members of the National Vigilance Association, and figures like Josephine Butler and Elizabeth

These debates took a number of different forms and explored numerous different facets of the prostitution question. A notable theme in these discussions, however, is that of 'nature' and, in particular, of the sexual nature of men. Feminist author Christabel Pankhurst, for instance, criticised the widely held idea that 'a man who consorts with prostitutes, and does this over and over again throughout his married life, has, according to man-made law, been acting only in accordance with human nature, and nobody can punish him for that'.[273] In place of this system she argued for chastity and continence for men since she believed they were 'natural and healthful'; she argued that 'prostitution and immorality are not in accordance with Nature' but should instead be seen as 'a violation of Nature's laws'.[274] Their agendas and interpretations of 'natural' sexuality were, of course, different; as the opening chapter demonstrated, radicals believed chastity and continence were not natural at all, and instead asserted that the drive towards both multiple sexual desires and a vibrant and urgent sexual expression was natural for both men and women. However despite this profound disparity, radicals' views were couched within a similar framework, and relied upon similar imaginings of an innate and urgent human sexual drive. As such, despite their radical views, we should understand them as being participants in a much wider debate about one of the most topical social issues of the day.

Wolstenholme Elmy. While the 'repressionists' sought to repress prostitution through clamp downs on brothels and music halls, critics of this view saw repression as cruel and degrading to 'fallen' women. See Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 97-104.

[273] Christabel Pankhurst, *Plain Facts About a Great Evil* (New York: The Sociological Fund of the Medical Review of Reviews, 1913), p. 19.

[274] Ibid, 126.

‘Prostitution disguised by a wedding ring’: the Problem of Mercenary Marriages

Sex radical authors also asserted that marriage had distorted relations between the sexes in other ways. In particular they contended that the institutional framework of marriage had led people to overlook important natural feelings of attraction, love and desire, and had instead encouraged them to base their romantic and intimate lives on social and economic concerns. As one *Freewoman* author succinctly stated in a criticism of church and state sanctioned marriage, outside concerns had led people to ‘forget the spirit and the purpose’ of sexual unions.[275] Intimate relationships, they asserted, were only moral and legitimate when they were based on ‘natural’ and mutual feelings of affection, desire, and love. George Bedborough, for example, argued that the only justification for relationships was ‘absolute mutuality of concurrent desire’.[276] Similarly, Leighton Pagan proclaimed that ‘only where love is free from legal bonds and sordid pressures, and mutual attraction guides voluntary association between the sexes, is the realisation of the most complete life possible’.[277]As such those based on outside concerns were deemed immoral and degraded, and characterised as unnatural and injurious. Building from these views, authors were particularly critical of women who entered marriages not for love but rather for the promise of financial security and the prestige of marital ‘respectability’. Many contributors to the journals argued that this was merely prostitution in another form; as such the customs, laws, and values of the marriage system were seen to aid the proliferation of prostitution and sexual

[275] E.B. D’Auvergne, ‘A Definition of Marriage’, *The Freewoman* 1:11 (February 1, 1912), 5.
[276] Bedborough, ‘What the Legitimation League Means’, 4.
[277] Leighton Pagan, ‘To the “Obscure Judes” and Distracted “Sues”’, *The Adult* 1:1 (June, 1897), 6.

immorality in a number of different ways. Therefore for these authors, it was the 'unnatural' marriage system that was at the core of many of the flaws of the contemporary sexual system.

Reflecting the view of a range of contemporary writers such as George Drysdale, Mona Caird and George Egerton, many of the free love advocates in this circle challenged marriage for encouraging women to sell control of their bodies and their rights to legal autonomy for material gain. [278] These criticisms most often centred on the idea that marriage was compelling wives to act like prostitutes. For example *Adult* contributor Robert Braithwaite stated that the church and state sanctioning of marriage 'systematically encouraged, or at least blessed and approved, thousands of so-called marriages of convenience— loveless matches for mere mercenary considerations'.[279] He attacked the hypocrisy of calling these mercenary unions 'pure' and 'respectable' at the expense of unsanctioned but loving free relationships, and asserted that 'The rising and coming generation must be rescued from the entanglement of false ideas of what would constitute purity and impurity'.[280] For Braithwaite, sanctioned marriage had created false ideals of morality and respectability; in his view, the wife was not the 'angel in the home' or a paragon of virtue, she was instead prostituting herself for material gain. Anonymous author 'Sagittarius' also criticised marriage in this way, and compared a marital relationship based on social and financial concerns rather than love as 'prostitution disguised by

[278] Drysdale wrote on the legalised prostitution of marriage in an anonymously authored book *Physical, Sexual and Natural Religion* (1855). For further information see Angus McLaren, 'Sex Radicalism in the Canadian Pacific Northwest, 1890-1920', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2:4 (Apr., 1992), 530. Details of Caird and Egerton (the pseudonym of Mary Chavelita Dunne) can be found in Bland, *Banishing the Beast,* pp. 132-133.
[279] Robert Braithwaite, 'The Last Citadel of Authority' *The Adult* 1:4 (November, 1897), 55.
[280] Ibid.

a wedding ring'.[281] He went on to criticise what he saw as the hypocritical dichotomy between the 'respectability' of the wife and the female free lover, stating 'Many a loving mother will see her daughter enter loveless wedlock – become a prostitute – without regret, and bow her head with life-long shame and sorrow at an extra-legal union'.[282] This comparison between prostitution and those mercenary marriages not based on 'natural' feelings of love and desire was a prevalent one, and *Lucifer* authors also discussed marriage in this way. Lillian Harman's free love partner E. C. Walker, for example, praised women in free love relationships for being self-sustaining, and knowing that 'they must not prostitute themselves in marriage any more than outside the institution, nor encourage their sisters in prostituting themselves in a loveless legal arrangement'.[283] Furthermore, a Texan correspondent argued against marriage and for increased sexual freedom with the assertion that 'to sell oneself for a lifetime is no less prostitution than to sell oneself for a night'.[284]

This view is outlined particularly clearly in the work of American free lover James F. Morton Jr. Demonstrating his belief in the mercenary nature of marriage Morton directly compared the roles of wife and prostitute, and argued that as 'both wife and prostitute dishonour the name of love…the former has no ground for towering in conscious rectitude over the latter'.[285] Indeed Morton argued that the prostitute actually had a higher moral standard than the wife:

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[281] Sagittarius, 'Marriage at the Criterion Theatre', 85.
[282] Sagittarius, 'Sexual Freedom', 29.
[283] E.C. Walker, 'Some Causes of Prostitution', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 6:34 (September 4, 1902), 265.
[284] Frank Harman, *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 3:25 (July 1, 1899), 198.
[285] James F. Morton Jr., 'Wife and Prostitute', *Lucifer the Light-Bearer* 3:5 (February 4, 1899), 34.

> 'The prostitute, however deep her degradation makes no…servile and contemptible sacrifice of her individuality, hence does not become so abject and spiritless a slave. She seeks to reap the fruits of her prostitution, and at the same time to pose before the world as an exemplar of eminent respectability: the prostitute claims to be no other than she is'.[286]

Therefore in Morton's view, reflecting the views of many of his colleagues contributing to the journals, by giving up her individual autonomy and the right to control her own body a wife was participating in prostitution 'sanctioned by church and state'.[287] As such, rather than embodying virtue and sexual respectability, the wife was herself degraded and immoral.

Radical writers in *The Freewoman* circle also shared a distrust of the material concerns they believed lay at the heart of contemporary marriage, and argued against wedlock as 'a mere trade for idle and un-enterprising women'.[288] Dora Marsden, in a powerfully titled editorial on the 'Immorality of the Marriage Contact', questioned women's reliance on men within marriage; like *Adult* authors such as Braithwaite she questioned the 'materialistic desire for maintenance' she saw as characterising most women's motivation to enter into wedlock and instead sought to prioritise love and a natural or 'spiritual connection' over material upkeep.[289] Like those sex radical authors writing before the turn of the century, she challenged women who married for economic gain, blaming them for the creation and perpetuation of false ideas of purity and morality. She claimed that 'responsibility for

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[286] Ibid.
[287] Ibid, 33.
[288] D'Auvergne, 'A Definition of Marriage', 6.
[289] Dora Marsden, 'The Immorality of the Marriage Contract: A Commentary', *The Freewoman* 2:35 (July 18, 1912), 162.

most of the social ills from which we suffer' could be traced 'to the door of the "legitimate mother", and to the "protection" accorded her by popular sentiment'.[290] These radicals thus shared the idea that marriage was not just limiting to women in practical everyday terms, it was also the cause of a wider oppressive trend. The lack of responsibility and autonomy held by married women, as well as their mercenary motivations for entering marriage in the first place was, for Marsden, the root of much of the oppression of women in society. She contended, for example, that a wife's 'exemption from responsibility to earn her own livelihood in solid cash…is to be traced her incapacity to do so'.[291] For Marsden, monogamous marriage and the conventions of the nuclear family were evidence of the oppressed nature of all women; she stated in the third instalment of the 'New Morality' series in *The Freewoman* that marriage had 'maintained itself by means of the support of men's hypocrisy, the spinsters' dumb resignation, the prostitutes' unsightly degradation, and the married women's monopoly and satisfaction'.[292] As such she claimed that women were 'locked in' to the repressive roles that defined and perpetuated each other – mothers, wives, prostitutes and spinsters – preserving, in turn, the 'old morality' that was seen to suppress the capacity of women to live fuller, more evolved lives. Marsden's own radical sexual views were thus formed partly as a response to the aspects of marriage laws and customs that made wives economically dependent on men. To counter this she advocated a freer, spiritual, more organic union based on natural feelings of love and mutual respect in order to

[290] Dora Marsden, 'The New Morality – IV', *The Freewoman* 1:8 (January 11, 1912), 141.
[291] Ibid.
[292] Marsden, 'New Morality – III', 121.

remove mercenary considerations and restore autonomy and responsibility to women. Like earlier sex radicals, then, she saw the marriage contract as inherently depraved and unjust for shifting the impetus for sexual relationships away from 'true' desire and towards external concerns. Demonstrating this she argued that 'The marriage law rests upon the two pillars—sexual coercion and maintenance, both of which are self-evidently immoral'.[293]

The links being drawn between marriage and prostitution in radical literature show that authors in this circle perceived a clear relationship between the institution of marriage and sexual immorality. They argued that the customs and values of marriage had not placed great enough emphasis on true feelings of love, desire, and affection; as such people were encouraged into relationships not based on organic connections but on external concerns, such as monetary recompense and conformity to notions of social 'respectability'. The radicals therefore believed it had served to pervert the relations between the sexes and render them immoral and unjust. Therefore, in the sex radical view, it was not unmarried sexual activity that epitomised problematic sexual immorality – rather it was marriage itself.

Combatting the Social Problems of Marriage

Many sex radical views were constructed around this specific critique of marriage as an oppressive, injurious, and immoral force that they believed lay at the heart of a number of contemporary social problems. Sex radical authors, despite their diverse and often contradictory views, generally believed that allowing people

[293] Marsden, 'The Immorality of the Marriage Contract', 82.

greater sexual freedom would mean relationships would be guided by natural feelings of affection and love, and as such would lead to moral and social improvements. To some extent freedom from marriage could be achieved through divorce, and radicals were generally supportive of any reforms that could make relationships less rigid and permanent. But for the most part these sex radicals were most supportive of a sexual system in which divorce would be a superfluity – that is, one that didn't sanction or formalise unions in the first place. While their critics asserted that this amounted to sexual immorality, free love advocates insisted that removing the institution of marriage would remove unnatural and injurious constraints placed on diverse and dynamic sexual desires. By removing these limitations and allowing people to base their intimate lives on their own natural feelings and desires they believed relationships would be rendered more equal, more rational, and more moral. As such it was a rejection of the bondage of marriage and a turn to complete sexual freedom (in its many forms) that was touted as the best answer to the flaws of the contemporary sexual system.

Debating Divorce

For many of the diverse range of contemporary reformers discussing the flaws of the marriage system at this time, a potential answer lay in facilitating divorce. Indeed divorce itself was a prominent and contentious contemporary issue.[294] Some feminist campaigners were agitating for divorce reforms to address the double moral

[294] Bland, *Banishing the Beast,* pp. 133-4. For further information on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century debates about divorce see Allen Horstman, *Victorian Divorce* (New York : St. Martin's Press 1985); Olive Anderson, 'State, Civil Society and Separation in Victorian Marriage' *Past & Present* 163 (May, 1999), 161-201; John R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage and the Law in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

standard and make the relations between the sexes more equal; Annie Besant, for example, called for the reform of divorce law since 'half the unhappiness of married life arises from the too great feeling of security which grows out of the indissoluble character of the tie…If divorce were the result of jarring at home, married life would rapidly change'.[295] Others, however, opposed making divorce more accessible. For instance Elizabeth Rachel Chapman argued that 'the way to make the marriage relation all it should be as a means of inspiration and purification to mankind' was not by free divorce but by maintaining the 'strict monogamic union' of indissoluble marriage.[296] While the divorce debate was often divisive outside of radical circles, writers in all of the journals discussed here were generally supportive of any divorce reform that would make it easier and more attainable, and would thus allow people to free themselves from the bondage of the oppressive marriage system.

While only specifically discussed in editorials in later editions of *The Adult*, the idea of free and equal divorce was embraced as 'a step in the line of true progress' as long as nothing was done 'to prejudice the claims of equal justice between the sexes, and if in cases where there are children the material interests of the latter are secured'.[297] Writers here supported divorce as they were sympathetic to any change that gave those in unhappy, unloving, or dysfunctional partnerships the power to separate at will. Second *Adult* editor Henry Seymour, for example, saw the attempt to hold couples together, particularly in instances where one partner was

[295] Annie Besant, *Marriage: As It Was, As It Is, and As It Should Be* (London: Freethought Publishing Company, 1882), p. 49.
[296] Elizabeth Rachel Chapman, *Marriage Questions in Modern Fiction, and Other Essays on Kindred Subjects* (London: J. Lane, 1897), p. 202.
[297] George Bedborough, Editorial, *The Adult* 2:3 (April, 1898), p. 61.

diseased or insane, as an example of 'unsound policy and inverted morality'.[298] The inability to obtain a divorce, and thus the forced continuation of relationships that weren't working, was deemed immoral and retrogressive. This linking of a lack of divorce and the bonding nature of marriage to immorality went further, and Seymour argued that 'in those Catholic countries where divorce is forbidden the most flagrant immorality is rife'.[299] He characterised France, where divorce had been illegal for much of the nineteenth century,[300] as 'the sexual cesspool of the world, as everyone knows who knows anything at all'.[301] Once again, for Seymour, refusing to allow people in unhappy or dysfunctional marriages to divorce signified retrogression and immorality as it served to bind and oppress the free and organic expression of true sexual feelings.[302] While critics of divorce like Elizabeth Chapman saw marriage as 'the basis, the cornerstone of the whole fabric' of a higher morality, radicals in these journals saw less strict marital laws as the most moral and progressive choice.[303]

Many contributors to the *Freewoman* also supported reform of divorce laws. in the correspondence pages, for example, W. G. Ramsay-Fairfax (chairman or the Divorce Law Reform Union) attacked the 'gross injustice and intolerable hardship' refusing divorce inflicted, and criticised the existing legislation's refusal to recognise 'such grounds as malicious desertion, incurable insanity, chronic alcoholism, and the

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[298] Ibid, 62.
[299] Henry Seymour, 'Editorial Memoranda', *The Adult* 2:9 (October, 1898), 256.
[300] Gail L. Savage, 'Divorce and the Law in England and France Prior to the First World War', *Journal of Social History* 21:3 (Spring, 1988), 499.
[301] Seymour, 'Editorial Memoranda', 256.
[302] It is important to note that this specific discussion and support of divorce came at a time when the journal was under the editorial control of Henry Seymour and not outspoken free love advocate George Bedborough. Divorce, normally a secondary concern, only came to have more prominence in this journal in later editions.
[303] Chapman, *Marriage Questions in Modern Fiction,* p. 195.

open and continued adultery of a husband…as good causes for the dissolution of marriage'.[304] For Ramsay-Fairfax, preventing people in unhappy marriages from getting a divorce was directly responsible for bigamy, prostitution, the production of illegitimate children, and other 'social evils'.[305] Though, given his fear of illegitimacy, he did not appear to support a system of sexual freedom, he participated in the broader discussions of the benefits of divorce reform taking place in this radical journal. Other authors, including Upton Sinclair and Charles J. Whitby, also campaigned for divorce reform in the *Freewoman*'s pages, and relied on ideas about the immorality and retrogression of anti-divorce campaigns to bolster their ideas. Sinclair, for example, stated that he observed anti-divorce advocates with 'a mixture of amazement and fear that in practically every argument it is taken for granted as a truism that divorce is an *evil,* and that its abolition would make for the protection of the home and of women'.[306] This fear came from his perception that this view represented the 'triumph of ignorance and superstition in this matter'.[307] By describing anti-divorce campaigns as 'degradation' he was, like authors in *The Adult,* defining them as degenerative and immoral. Free divorce was thus stated to be vital to the creation of a progressive, moral sexual system. Charles J. Whitby also supported divorce in these terms by describing those with enough courage to procure a legal divorce as 'heroic' and 'exceptional' for refusing to remain in unhappy marriages and thus 'making the outward form of [their] lives a true expression of

[304] W. G. Ramsay-Fairfax, Correspondence, *The Freewoman* 1:8 (January 11, 1912**),** 151.
[305] Ibid.
[306] Sinclair, 'Divorce', 164.
[307] Ibid.

their inmost reality'.[308] Whitby argued that divorce was not immoral or 'mere disintegration and spiritual decay', but a 'quite normal incident of spiritual growth and development'.[309] For these authors, divorce reform signalled a positive, progressive change, and a constructive shift away from the oppression and inequality of the existing marital system.

For the most part then, contributors to these journals were sympathetic towards broader calls to reform contemporary divorce laws. For many sex radicals concerned with the social ills caused by the bondage of natural feelings and desires by marriage, any reform that had the potential to make boundaries of marriage less rigid and oppressive, relations between the sexes more equal, and relationships happier was a step in the direction of progress. Divorce was, however, a rather peripheral concern for many free lovers, who viewed it as secondary to their broader aim of establishing a system of sexual freedom. In early editions of *The Adult,* for instance, editorials stated that the Legitimation League advocated 'the absolute freedom of two individuals of full age, to enter into and conclude at will, any mutual relationship, where no third person's material interests are concerned'.[310] A discussion of divorce law, then, was somewhat peripheral, even extraneous to sex radical debates; attention was instead largely focussed on the importance of removing the rigid boundaries of institutional marriage itself. If, as the free lovers here advocated, all relationships were free, equal, and unsanctioned there would be little need for divorce. Discontented free lovers, unbound by official intervention in

[308] Charles J. Whitby, 'The True Inwardness of Divorce', *The Freewoman* 2:42 (September 5, 1912), 307.
[309] Ibid.
[310] Bedborough, 'Editorial', *The Adult* 1:1 (June, 1897), 1-2.

their intimate affairs, could merely dissolve their relationships at will. Demonstrating a sympathetic view, *Freewoman* editor Dora Marsden also discussed divorce in this way. Directly addressing the discussion of divorce occurring in her paper, she argued that correspondents had missed the point as 'Divorce has to do only with power to terminate a contract. It does nothing to alter the nature of the contract'.[311] Her concern was thus not facilitating easier divorce or making divorce more equal but rather changing the very nature of intimate relationships. She argued that if the very nature of formal, sanctioned marriage itself was poor, then 'the question as to its dissolubility [was but]… a secondary affair'.[312] It was not divorce, then, but sexual freedom – a system of unsanctioned unions dictated only by the existence of mutual feelings of love and desire – that sex radical authors believed represented the best answer to the bondage and immorality of marriage.

The Benefits of Sexual Freedom

Moving away from the deliberation of divorce, sex radical authors asserted that the best answer to the myriad social ills they believed had been caused by the bondage of marriage was to do away with the institutional frameworks designed to control and regulate relations between the sexes. This unorthodox stance on the marriage question led many of their contemporaries to accuse the free lovers of being immoral and promiscuous; anti-feminist author Eliza Lynn Linton, for instance, saw free love as nothing more than a dangerous and immoral form of promiscuity, and argued that the abolition of marriage would lead to the destruction of the family.

[311] Marsden, 'The Immorality of the Marriage Contract', 163.
[312] Ibid.

Linton believed that free lovers represented ‘a nation’s curse and its own shame’, and asserted that ‘if we adopt the code of the free lovers…we shall make all society one huge whirlpool of vice’.[313] However, radicals rejected accusations of immorality and instead insisted that it was through unsanctioned unions, what they saw as the freeing of love, that some of the most pressing social problems of the day could be solved. Therefore, underpinned by their beliefs about the importance and power of mankind’s sexual nature and the dangers associated with the suppression of the sexual ‘forces’, these radical authors maintained that sexual reform and a turn to sexual freedom was the key to positive social change.

Contributors to the journals therefore contended that sexual freedom (in a number of forms) would allow naturally occurring feelings of love, desire, and affection to guide people’s intimate lives; as such they believed it would make relationships happier, more equal, and more moral. In *The Adult,* Leighton Pagan argued that equal sexual freedom for men and women represented the best possible answer to the inequality and subjugation of the existing marriage system. In an 1897 article, for example, he asserted that sexual freedom signified ‘the progressive alternative to a subjection of one sex by the other, or their mutual subjection by each other and the law’.[314] He claimed that intimate relations in which ‘mutual attraction guides voluntary association between the sexes’ and that were ‘free from legal bonds and sordid pressures’ allowed for the ‘realisation of the most complete life possible’.[315] His colleague Lucy Stewart agreed, and argued that free love

[313] Eliza Lynn Linton, ‘The Revolt against Matrimony’, *The Forum* 10 (January, 1891), 587.
[314] Pagan, ‘The Judgement of Paris’, 65.
[315] Pagan, ‘To the Obscure Judes’, 6.

relationships represented a key solution to the oppressive and dysfunctional marriage system. She claimed 'Much misery would be avoided and much positive happiness brought about by the earlier gratification of the sexual passion which would take place if free love were in vogue'.[316] Similarly, Gerald Moore argued that rather than representing immorality or sexual licence, 'Free-Love [was] simply two of the noblest principles of human relations – freedom and love – merged together', and believed it was the key to escaping binding marriage customs that he characterised as the 'most intolerable tyranny'.[317] His advocacy of sexual freedom was therefore based on the belief that 'freedom is the only rational solution of the problem of sexual relationships'.[318]

This emphasis on the positive effects of sexual freedom endured in later sex radical texts. While some *Freewoman* authors remained sceptical about the power of greater sexual freedom to address the flaws of marriage, others asserted that allowing couples to form and dissolve monogamous sexual relationships at will would allow the individual to better act on their own inclination and feeling, and to live their sexual lives concurrent with personal desire and mutual affection. Selwyn Weston, for example, argued that abolishing marriage laws and turning to freer, self-governed relationships represented 'continued social development around the central idea of freedom; not a reversion to the bestiality which we commonly associate with primordial ages, but the attainment to a more moral plane whereon coercion, either emotional or physical, shall have neither place nor meaning'.[319] A

[316] Stewart, 'Free Thought and Free Love', 41.
[317] Moore, 'The Logic of Free Love', 240.
[318] Ibid, 240.
[319] Selwyn Weston, 'Women – and the Revolution', *The Freewoman* 1:6 (December 28, 1911), 107.

free love system was therefore believed to give people more freedom to live their lives according to their own sexual natures, and to allow their natural and dynamic feelings of love and desire to dictate the terms of their romantic, sexual, and familial lives. This reflected a broader investment in the idea that it was through freer, unsanctioned unions that positive social changes could be achieved. Though drawing from a more introspective view, Dora Marsden similarly argued that by freeing relationships from the bounds of marriage they would be more likely to be based on mutual desire and true affection; through these relationships and a spiritual understanding of 'passion' Marsden argued that women could achieve a greater level of autonomy. Her particular critique of the marriage system and her support for radical sexual reform, then, was based around a critique of the loveless nature of marriage and a belief in the importance of 'passion' and mutual desire to female self-realisation and development.

From their contributions to these journals we can see that the free love advocates in this circle, despite their different views and agendas, were generally united by a belief in sexual freedom. Giving people the power to dictate their own sexual lives as per their own needs and desires, they claimed, would free the natural instincts from the bondage of oppressive marital customs. They believed that this emancipation was of central importance, as it represented the solution to the various social problems they believed had been caused by the suppression of natural sexuality by the 'unnatural' marriage institution. Orford Northcote, for instance, argued for a free love system in which the sexual instincts would find 'beautiful expression' and, 'guided by happier instincts, will give us a paradise of joy, instead of

a Calvary of sorrow'.[320] This investment in the idea that sexual freedom was a vital change for a better society was neatly summed up in the articles of Robert Braithwaite, who stated, 'The moral health of human Society absolutely demands *perfect freedom* as regards sexual unions – whether temporary or permanent, a freedom which neither law nor the voice of Mrs Grundy shall interfere'.[321]

Conclusions

This chapter has shown how the radicals' particular understanding of sexuality clearly informed their explicit and outspoken criticism of the marriage institution. As analysis of their journals has illustrated a range of sex radical authors, often with different viewpoints and agendas, were united in the belief that the institutional framework of marriage had injuriously restricted and restrained mankind's natural sexual instincts. They argued that the idea that there was one, singular ideal to which people could aspire meant that individual's intimate lives were not being determined by their 'natural' sexual inclinations, or by the diverse, dynamic and complex forces of mutual desire and attraction. Instead radical authors asserted that they were being shaped by a set of customs, values and laws that had served to obstruct the free expression of 'natural' sexuality and disturb the natural order that they believed governed relations between the sexes. In short this chapter's analysis has illustrated radicals' belief that marriage did not function as a suitable framework for the sexual instincts, and was instead fundamentally at odds with the free and 'natural' expression of mankind's true sexual nature.

[320] Northcote, 'Prostitution', 38.
[321] Braithwaite, 'Self-Reverence, Self-Knowledge, Self-Control', 88.

The oppression and bondage characteristic of sanctioned marriage was seen by radicals to be a key cause of a number of prominent social ills. In particular, reflecting the views of other contemporary reformers, radical authors linked marriage to the proliferation of prostitution. Firstly, radicals stated that the suppression of 'natural' sexuality and the ideal of the sexually passive middle-class wife had restricted opportunities for sexual expression; as such it forced people to find outlets for their powerful sexual instincts in whatever way they could. Authors asserted that for most this meant resorting to the use of prostitutes, and therefore drew direct links between the institution of marriage and the spread of prostitution. But prostitution was also seen to be linked to marriage in other ways; radicals argued that women who married not for 'true' feelings of love and desire but instead for financial security were also selling their bodies, and were thus no better than prostitutes on the streets and in brothels. Marriage was therefore not a purifying force in the radical view and instead had caused relations between the sexes to become typified by hypocrisy, falsehood, and dysfunction. Radicals therefore emphasised the way that marriage had perverted and distorted relations between the sexes, and had contributed to the proliferation of immoral and unjust prostitution – in a number of different forms.

This chapter has explored radicals' assertions that sexual freedom could combat the social ills they believed had been caused by the oppression and immorality of marriage. Despite the varied and contested nature of free love debate, a broad range of sex radicals maintained that sexual freedom would better allow 'true' and 'natural' feelings to guide associations between the sexes; as such, many authors claimed, 'natural' sexuality would be more easily expressed, and

relationships would be purer and more honest. Sexual freedom and the rejection of marriage was therefore understood to lead to important moral and social improvements as radicals believed it would free sexuality of what they saw as the unnatural and injurious restraints placed upon it. As I have shown, radicals' calls for freedom were therefore directly framed by their understanding of the sexual nature of mankind, and their belief in the oppressive and binding nature of contemporary marriage laws and customs.

The control of clean and 'natural' sexuality was, however, seen to be perpetuated in ways other than marriage. Further to their critique of marriage customs, radicals also believed that the suppression of free discussion about sexual topics and the restriction of access to sexual knowledge had worked to oppress mankind's innate and powerful sexual instincts. In the next chapter I explore how radicals used ideas about sexual ignorance and sexual knowledge to criticise the sexual customs of the day, and to support their calls for sexual freedom. Furthermore by exploring their different constructions and understandings of what it meant to 'know' about sex I explore the different ways in which contemporary notions of 'sexual knowledge' can be understood.

Chapter 3

Sexual Knowledge and Sexual Ignorance

As the previous chapters have shown, radical authors believed that a diverse range of contemporary social problems could be understood as the outcome of the suppression of mankind's 'natural' sexual instincts. They understood this suppression as working in a variety of ways, and as involving a number of what they saw as outdated and injurious social customs. Not only did they relate it to marriage; writers were also particularly critical of customs, laws, and values that sought to restrict access to sexual knowledge and keep people ignorant about their own sexual natures. A refusal to talk about, discuss, and share information about sex, many contributors to these journals believed, left individuals confused and unable to understand, process, and make sense of their own 'natural' bodily imperatives. They emphasised that it was this confusion, and a lack of recognition of one's own sexual nature, that was the cause of many problematic social issues. *Freewoman* correspondent Jennie C. Bruce, for instance, directly questioned the logic of leaving the 'sexual instinct…to evolve unchecked' and challenged a system in which a child's questions about sex were 'either not answered at all, or in such a ridiculous manner as to stimulate and pervert the quite natural curiosity, and force it to obtain satisfaction by appeals in undesirable quarters'.[322]

Writers contributing to these journals therefore sought to challenge the view that the dissemination of sexual information would be injurious to public morals as it

[322] Jennie C. Bruce, Correspondence, *The Freewoman* 1:8 (January 11, 1912), 152.

would ‘give people ideas’, or inspire them to participate in immoral sexual behaviours. Instead they depicted an individual’s ignorance about their own sexuality as being the cause of many of the most pressing social and sexual issues of the day, including prostitution, masturbation, and degeneracy. For example in his opening editorial in *The Adult* George Bedborough argued that ‘The sex perversion and abuses of modern times are largely the result of the fact that knowledge on sex matters comes to most of us at the wrong time, and in the wrong way’.[323] In addition William Platt, in his work on the ‘Worship of Ignorance’, criticised the ‘triumph of the cankering cowardice of ignorance’ bred by the censure of sexual information, and claimed that like ‘all mean and insidious vices … [ignorance] seems to lurk like a hidden plague seeking what poor human creature it can fasten upon and cause to rot’.[324] Contributors to North American free love paper *Lucifer* also drew links between a lack of knowledge about sexual topics and what was seen as the inevitable outcomes of a harmful sexual culture; prominent free love advocate Lois Waisbrooker, for instance, defended her publications on birth control and refused to bow to the pressures of press censorship while people were ‘perishing from the lack of knowledge’ in brothels and insane asylums.[325]

Sex radicals’ investment in the idea that ignorance was a key cause of sexual immorality and sexual vice pitted them against those of their contemporaries who believed that a lack of knowledge about sexual matters could preserve innocence and purity. In the view of vice crusaders like E. M. Sewell in Britain and, perhaps

[323] George Bedborough, ‘What the Legitimation League Means’, *The Adult* 1:1 (June, 1897), 4.
[324] William Platt, ‘The Worship of Ignorance’, *The Adult* 2:7 (August, 1898), 200.
[325] Lois Waisbrooker, ‘The Wail of Ignorance’, *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 4:8 (March 3, 1900), 59.

most notoriously, Anthony Comstock in America, the mind represented a perfect blank slate that was vulnerable to the corruptive and sullying influence of information about sex. The restriction of access to information about sexual matters was thus part of a particular moral crusade that sought to protect people from the contaminative impact of knowledge. For instance in an 1883 work on *Traps for the Young,* Comstock (who had been a key figure in the foundation of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice in 1873), compared the innocent and uninformed mind to a clean glass of water that would 'sparkle like a gem, seeming to rejoice in its purity, and dance in the sunlight, because of its freedom from pollution'.[326] He depicted the impact of a sexual education as comparable to placing a drop of ink into the water, stating 'at once it is discoloured. Its purity cannot be easily restored'.[327] Comstock understood the absolute suppression of sexual knowledge, particularly by legal means, as a process in which the 'law stretches out its strong arm over the heads of innocent children and says, "You shall not approach these innocent ones and contaminate them."'[328] Similarly, writers like E. M. Sewell believed that sexual ignorance signified a state of 'innate purity … perfect simplicity and innocence'.[329] Sewell emphasised in particular the importance of maintaining this ignorance in girls,

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[326] Anthony Comstock, *Traps for the Young* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883), p. 240.
[327] Ibid.
[328] Anthony Comstock, *Morals versus Art* (New York: J. S. Ogilvie and Co., 1887). Comstock had a long career prosecuting free lovers for obscenity and lent his name to the 1873 Comstock Act – legislation which made it a federal offence to disseminate information about birth control through the post or across state lines. For information see Marsha Silberman, 'The Perfect Storm: Late Nineteenth-Century Chicago Sex-Radicals: Moses Harman, Ida Craddock, Alice Stockham and the Comstock Obscenity Laws', *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (1998 -)* 102:3/4 (Fall-Winter, 2009), 326; Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, 'Victoria Woodhull, Anthony Comstock, and Conflict over Sex in the United States in the 1870s', *The Journal of American History* 87:2 (Sep., 2000), 403-434; Nicola Kay Beisel, *Imperilled Innocents: Anthony Comstock and Family Reproduction in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
[329] Elizabeth M. Sewell, *Principles of Education: Drawn from Nature and Revelation, And Applied to Female Education in the Upper Classes* (New York: D. Appleton and company, 1866), p. 277.

and stated that a lack of sexual knowledge served as a 'remnant of the innocence of Paradise in the natural purity of a young girl's mind'.[330] These moral crusaders therefore remained resolutely convinced that ignorance represented a state of sexual purity, and that freer access to sexual information could only undermine ideas of sexual virtue. Their views were thus in direct opposition to those of radicals such as those contributing to *The Adult,* who emphasised what they saw as the direct links between a lack of sexual knowledge and what they perceived as the harmful and degraded aspects of contemporary sexual culture.

But radicals weren't unique in their criticism of this view, and their fears about the harmful impact of a lack of sexual knowledge. Indeed these beliefs linked them to a much broader contemporary critique of the equation of ignorance with sexual purity. Alongside a variety of other contemporary reformers they argued that passing on 'right' knowledge about sex and allowing people to better understand their own natural sexual faculties was the key to a moral society, and to the elimination of sexual vice. Perhaps most famously, *Pall Mall Gazette* editor W. T. Stead discussed the dangers of sexual ignorance in his 'Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' (1885).[331]

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[330] Ibid, 282. Jeffrey Moran has discussed the different interpretations of the impact of sexual knowledge in '"Modernism Gone Mad": Sex Education Comes to Chicago, 1913', *The Journal of American History* 83:2 (Sep., 1996), 481-513. In addition, Jennifer Burek Pierce points out that a belief in the idea that ignorance equals innocence should not be understood as confined to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and is still manifested in modern Republican campaigns for abstinence-only sex education in America. As she states, 'Ignorance still has its champions'. Jennifer Burek Pierce, 'What Young Readers Ought to Know: The Successful Selling of Sexual Health Texts in the Early Twentieth Century', *Book History* 14 (2011), 30.

[331] Stead's 'Maiden Tribute' series has been the subject of much historical analysis and appears frequently in historical works on the period. See, for example, Emma Liggins, 'Prostitution and Social Purity in the 1880s and 1890s', *Critical Survey* 15:3, 'New' Female Sexualities 1870-1930 (2003), 50; Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992). A number of historians have conducted more in depth explorations of Stead's work. See Deborah Gorham, 'Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" Re-Examined: Child Prostitution and the Idea of Childhood in Late-Victorian England', *Victorian Studies* 21:3 (Spring, 1978), 353-379; Cecily Devereux, '"The Maiden Tribute" and the Rise of the White Slave in the Nineteenth Century: The Making of an Imperial Construct' *Victorian Review*, 26:2 (2000), 1-23.

In this week-long (and highly dramatic) exposé of child prostitution in London, Stead claimed that many young girls were so entirely ignorant about matters of sex that they were seduced without any knowledge of the 'nature of the act to which they assent'.[332] Stead further emphasised how treacherously vulnerable ignorance about sexual matters made girls, and criticised the 'scandals of Protestant training' that meant that women were 'turned loose to contend with all the wiles of the procuress and the temptations of the seducer without the most elementary acquaintance with the laws of their own existence'.[333] Though some historians have assumed that Stead was the guiding force behind the furore around ignorance and prostitution, his work is best understood as a particularly vivid manifestation of pervasive contemporary concerns; as Stead himself admitted, his works 'only struck the match that fired a charged mine of enthusiasm'.[334] This enthusiasm was reflected, in particular, in late nineteenth-century social purity campaigns. Like Stead, social purity campaigners emphasised the necessity of sex education, particularly for women and children, in order to guard against the dangers of seduction and a potential fall into immorality. Stressing the importance of prevention as cure, social purity reformers like Elizabeth Blackwell and groups like the White Cross League urged parents to teach their children about sexual matters in order to forearm them against vice and the dangers of sexually transmitted disease. [335] In this view,

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[332] W. T. Stead, 'The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', *The Pall Mall Gazette* (July 7, 1885), 5.
[333] Ibid, 6.
[334] Gorham, 'Maiden Tribute', 354.
[335] For further information on the specific links between social purity movements and sex education see Martha Cornog and Timothy Perper, *For Sex Education, See Librarian: A Guide to Issues and Resources* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), p. 26. Social hygiene reformers also advocated sex education with prevention in mind, though this was specifically geared towards the prevention of venereal diseases. For information on social hygiene movements see Laura A. Abrams, 'Guardians of Virtue: The Social Reformers and the "Girl Problem,"1890-1920', *Social Service Review* 74:3 (September 2000), 436-452; Ruth C. Engs, *Clean Living Movements: American Cycles of Health*

ignorance offered no assurances of safety or morality – instead, advocates promoted a programme of highly moralised schooling in sexual matters in order to combat sexual impurity by encouraging what Danielle Egan and Timothy Perper call the 'the gradual growth of intelligent self-control' of sexual urges.[336]

Sex radical authors, often accused of obscenity and of encouraging 'gross outrage' and 'naked hideousness' by seeking sexual freedom, might on the surface seem to be unlikely allies for a social purity movement staunchly committed to advocating sexual self-control.[337] However, despite having competing ideas about what sexual purity looked like and what sexual knowledge could achieve, radical authors displayed distinct sympathies with the highly moral framework of social purity campaigns for sex education. In particular radicals emphasised the purity of humanity's 'natural' sexuality. They asserted that nurturing and protecting this sexuality from the injurious impact of outside forces – particularly through the gaining of sexual knowledge and through rational education on sexual matters - would combat sexual immorality and vice, and answer a number of problematic social ills. As such, like contemporary social purity campaigners, they refuted the idea that a lack of sexual knowledge necessarily signified virtue and instead emphasised the potentially purifying role of education in matters of sex.

Reform (London : Praeger, 2000); John C. Burnham, 'The Progressive Era Revolution in American Attitudes Toward Sex', *The Journal of American History* 59:4 (Mar., 1973), 885-908.
For an overview of contemporary sex education movements see Rachel Thomson, 'Moral Rhetoric and Public Health Pragmatism: The Recent Politics of Sex Education' *Feminist Review* 48 (Autumn, 1994), 40-60.

[336] Danielle R. Egan and Gail Hawkes, *Theorizing the Sexual Child in Modernity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 41.

[337] For example The Legitimation League faced widespread criticism and accusations of immorality, particularly from the press. See *Leeds Times*, 5 Aug., 1893 and 10 June, 1893; *Yorkshire Evening Post* June 7, 1893.

In their contributions to these journals, sex radical writers most often employed a moral framework to criticise the idea that sexual ignorance was a preferable and important condition in their discussions of women and children. In this view, echoing the ideas of social purity writers like Elizabeth Blackwell who described the 'mental or moral disease springing directly or indirectly from … ignorance of physical laws', keeping women and young people uninformed about sexual topics did not guarantee their purity or protection.[338] Instead their lack of self-awareness and their confusion about their own sexual desires and faculties was seen to have left them particularly vulnerable to a fall into prostitution, immorality and vice. *Adult* author R.A. Gordon M.D, for example, claimed that the mystification of sex created by the suppression of discussion had done 'a great harm to humanity' and had 'produced an incredible amount of misery and wretchedness, and last, not least … fostered an immorality, which would be unknown if the subject had been treated more openly and more honestly'.[339] *Lucifer* authors shared this view; James S. Denson, for example, criticised vice crusaders like Comstock for being an 'active promotor of the very evils which he professes a desire to remove'.[340] For Denson, education about sexual topics would 'do a thousand fold more for purity than can be done by all the conventional moralists in a century'.[341] Radical campaigns for freer access to sexual knowledge and the right to discuss sex freely in the public domain

[338] Elizabeth Blackwell, *The Laws of Life: With Special Reference to the Physical education of Girls* (New York: Putnam, 1852), p. 34.
[339] R. A. Gordon M.D., 'Sexual Topics', *The Adult* 2:2 (March, 1898), 35.
[340] James S. Denson, 'Popular Follies and Crimes', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 2:8 (February 23, 1898), 57.
[341] Ibid.

were thus framed as part of a moral crusade to purify contemporary sexual culture and combat sexual immorality.

As analysis in this chapter will show an exploration of sex radical journals clearly illustrates that these authors were participating in a much wider attack on sexual ignorance. Alongside other contemporary reformers, particularly social purity campaigners, radical authors rejected the idea that ignorance about sexual matters would help maintain a state of purity, morality or innocence. Instead, demonstrating sympathies with broader contemporary calls for reform, they posited 'right' and rational knowledge about mankind's 'natural' sexuality as the key to a purer, more moral, and more equal society. Despite their unique conception of how knowledge could help to cure sexual vice and their unorthodox views about what sexual 'purity' looked like, it is therefore a mistake to see radical assertions about the importance of sexual knowledge as an aberration or a symptom of their marginality. Rather they should be understood and studied as part of a much wider and more diverse intellectual circle involved in challenging ideas about ignorance and purity occurring at this time.

Reframing 'Sexual Knowledge'

But what did these sex radical authors mean when they discussed sexual knowledge in their publications? What did they think it meant to really 'know' about sex? In part, radicals emphasised the objective, rational, and 'factual' nature of sexual knowledge. For example, *Adult* contributor William Platt criticised those campaigning against the discussion of sexual topics who thought 'ignorance of facts

is better than knowledge of facts'.[342] Similarly, in an article published in American free love paper *Lucifer,* British radical R. A. Gordon criticised the 'prurience and ribaldry born of fatal obfuscation, suppression and evasion of facts', and instead called for a system of sexual education grounded in the 'passionless statement of the truths in plain terms'.[343] These 'facts' and 'truths' often involved topics like physiology and reproduction; George Bedborough, for example, believed that a key aim of sexual education was 'to teach the child first, quite openly, its physical relation to its own mother'.[344] Part of what radical authors understood as 'knowledge' thus involved agitation for clear access to rational information about topics such as physiology, pregnancy, and disease. However it is important to note that radical discussions of sexual knowledge also involved other understandings of what it meant to 'know' about sex. Indeed many radical authors moved away from a discussion of 'factual' sexual knowledge and instead emphasised the importance of actual sexual experience. For a number of radicals contributing to these journals, 'knowing' about sex involved more than a grasp of information about the processes of human reproduction, the prevention of disease or the control of fertility; instead they argued that it was inherently linked to both the physical and emotional experience of sex, romantic friendship, and love. For these authors, whose ideas will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter, a real and comprehensive knowledge of sex was only made possible by experience.

[342] Platt, 'The Worship of Ignorance', 197.
[343]; R. A. Gordon, 'What Repression Does', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 2:2 (January 12, 1898), 427.
[344] George Bedborough, Editorial, *The Adult* 1:1 (June, 1897), 4.

Interestingly, this notion of a subjective, experiential knowledge exists in distinct tension with the way that many historians have treated the subject of sexual knowledge in the past. To date, historians have tended to conceptualise sexual knowledge as a tangible, graspable category comprised almost completely of objective, theoretical information that could be misinterpreted or properly understood. Integral to their historical discussions of sexual knowledge, then, is the idea that 'knowledge' can be conceived of as a level of understanding that a person could have, or have partially, or not have at all. Janice Irvine's work on sex education in the twentieth century, for example, draws evidence of levels of ignorance and knowledge from a study of American teenagers conducted in 2000. In this study, and subsequently in Irvine's work, levels of knowledge are measured in fractions and percentages - as evidence of an enduring lack of sexual knowledge, for instance, we are told that 'Of the seventy-five test items, the teenagers scored, on average only 40 percent correct'. [345] Reflecting this approach, John P. Elia uses evidence from a similar study in which students only got on average 30% of a 20 question test correct to point out general sexual ignorance among their age group.[346] Donna J. Drucker has similar ideas about the quantifiable nature of sexual knowledge; in her research into the work of Alfred Kinsey, for example, she discusses how 'sexual knowledge' could be charted and recorded through the use of punched card

[345] Janice M. Irvine, *Talk about Sex: the Battles over Sex Education in the United States* (Berkeley, 2002), p.5. Irvine's work makes use of Michael Carrera, Jacqueline Williams Kaye, Susan Philliber and Emily West, 'Knowledge about reproduction contraception and sexually transmitted infections among young adolescents in American cities', *Social Policy* 30 (2000), 41-50.
[346] John P. Elia, 'School-Based Sexuality Education: A Century of Sexual and Social Control' in Elizabeth Schroeder (ed.) *Sexuality Education: Past, Present, and Future* (ABC-CLIO, 2009), p. 44.

machines.[347] Clearly, for writers such as Irvine, Elia, and Drucker knowledge about sex is definable and measureable enough to fit into questionnaires and spreadsheets, and can be marked as either right or wrong.

The idea that sexual knowledge exists as an empirically solid body of information has tended to direct scholarly attention towards particular issues. In particular it has motivated attempts to discover who had access to 'true' information about sex, and efforts to chart the development of more 'accurate' understandings of sex over time. Demonstrating this focus there is a frequent reliance in historical analysis on the problematic notion of the acquisition of knowledge of the real 'Facts of Life', as if knowledge about sex could be reduced to a single, timeless, 'factual' account.[348] Historians such as Irvine and Elia, then, persist in attempts to measure and define the extent of knowledge in the past, and thus continue to work with and frame research around the idea that there is an 'accurate' understanding of sex that historical actors had or didn't have.

This tendency to assume that knowledge about sex can be right or wrong, and can be quantified via tests, interviews and questionnaires has led many scholars to treat knowledge as something that should be understood as essentially theoretical. The idea that knowledge about sex can be recorded accurately and passed on serves to separate it from embodied experiences, and instead posit it as something largely hypothetical. This idea has influenced what historians have looked

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[347] Donna J. Drucker, 'Keying Desire: Alfred Kinsey's Use of Punched-Card Machines for Sex Research,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 22:1 (2013) 105-125.
[348] Lucinda McCray Beier's oral interviews about sex education in Lancashire, for example, opened with the question 'How did you learn the Facts of Life?' Lucinda McCray Beier, "We were Green as Grass': Learning about Sex and Reproduction in Three Working-class Lancashire Communities, 1900-1970', *Social History of Medicine* 16 (2003), 465.

for and where they have looked when seeking accounts of sexual knowledge in the past. In particular, many existing histories of sex education in the period have tended to overlook more subjective experiential accounts of sexual knowledge, choosing to focus instead on the pedagogical transmission of information about topics such as physiology, disease, and sexual morality in schools, the workplace, and the home.[349] Tellingly, historian Mariana Valverde discusses experience not as first-hand experience of sex, but rather as either accurate or inaccurate information gleaned from either 'experts' or 'bad books'.[350]

This conception of sexual knowledge - based around a grasp of theoretical information and understood as separate from lived experience – is certainly not one that is limited to modern accounts. Instead this approach can be seen as part of an enduring practice of attempts to create distance between 'knowing' about sex and experiencing it. For example late-nineteenth century purity reformers, whose treatment of ideas about sexual knowledge will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter, emphasised the importance of a rational, chaste sex education grounded in bible teaching and facts from the natural sciences rather than 'vulgar stories and unfortunate personal experience'.[351] The ideas, theories, and

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[349] See for example Susan K. Freeman, *Sex Goes to School: Girls and Sex Education before the 1960s* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008); J. Hampshire, 'The Politics of School Sex Education Policy in England and Wales from the 1940s to the 1960s', *Social History of Medicine* 18:1 (2005), 87-105; J. Pilcher, 'School Sex Education in England 1870-2000', *Sex Education* 5:2 (2005), 157-174; Alison Bashford and Carolyn Strange, 'Public Pedagogy. Sex Education and Mass Communication in the Mid-Twentieth Century' *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 13 (2004), 71-99; Christine Farrell and Leonie A Kellher, *My Mother Said: The Way Young People Learned about Sex and Birth Control* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).
[350] Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 68.
[351] Rev. J. B. Welty, 'The Need of White Cross Work', in Aaron M. Powell (ed.), *The National Purity Congress, its Papers, Addresses, Portraits* (New York: American Purity Alliance, 1896), p. 246.

approaches of those historians discussed above can therefore be understood as being reliant on a particular, enduring framing of what 'knowledge' means.

Like knowledge, historical accounts of sexual ignorance in the past are also framed by a particular set of assumptions**.** Many of these assumptions are predicated on a modern belief in the idea that much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be characterised by profound and widespread ignorance about sexual topics. In particular, historians have emphasised the contemporary 'conspiracy of silence' around sex. Susan Kingsley Kent, for example, has argued that discussion of sex was banished from late-Victorian drawing rooms as it was considered dangerous and subversive;[352] similarly, in *The Long Sexual Revolution* Hera Cook charts a culture of ignorance from the mid-nineteenth into the twentieth century, with claims that 'what passed for sexual knowledge was still very limited even in the 1930s'.[353] Historians have also asserted the limitations of the few available sources of information about sexual matters (such as popular media, medical and advice texts, and pornography) and the difficulty faced by those attempting to access rational, clear information about sex.[354] Much of the existing research to date tells us a story about attempts to stifle discussion of sexual topics in the public sphere, and the embarrassment and discomfort with which attempts to break the 'conspiracy of silence' were met.[355] In addition, historians have emphasised the harmful impact of

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[352] Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860-1914*, (Routledge, 2005), p. i.
[353] Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex, and Contraception 1800-1975* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 169.
[354] Mcray Beier, "We were Green as Grass', 461-80; H. Michie, *Victorian Honeymoons: Journeys to the Conjugal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
[355] Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution;* Lucinda McCray Beier, *For Their Own Good: the Transformation of English Working-Class Health Culture, 1880-1970* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2008).

this ignorance. There is common recourse, for example, to stories such as that of Effie Gray and John Ruskin; Gray's ignorance of the mechanics of the sexual act and Ruskin's inexperience of real naked women are identified as fundamental causes for their severe sexual dysfunction and the subsequent failure of their marriage.[356] As historian Kate Fisher has noted, these accounts of ignorance have an enduring hold on both the scholarly and popular historical consciousness, and narratives of a fundamental lack of knowledge in the past have become 'stories we like to tell'.[357]

But this profound and enduring ignorance shouldn't be taken for granted as an objective historical artefact, and can instead be understood as being constructed to serve an important modern agenda. For all of their evidential basis, narratives of a past populated by people who knew very little about sex are part of a particular framing that owes much to modern attempts to contrast ignorance of the past with notions of sexual liberty in the present. [358] By investing in the profound sexual ignorance, discomfort and unhappiness of many people in the past we look to create a starting point for sexual enlightenment, away from which we can chart a teleological narrative of progressive enlightenment, education and expression. The ease with which we perceive we can discuss and access clear information about sex

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[356] Michie, *Victorian Honeymoons*, chap. 1; Angus McLaren, *Impotence: A Cultural History*, (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 101; Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Love: Victorians to Moderns,* (Harvard University Press, 1994), 145; Jennifer Phegley, *Courtship and Marriage in Victorian England,* (ABC-CLIO, 2011), 139; Phyllis Rose, *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages* (Vintage Books, 1984), chap. 2; Jennifer M. Lloyd, "Conflicting Expectations in Nineteenth-Century British Matrimony: The Failed Companionate Marriage of Effie Gray and John Ruskin." *Journal of Women's History* 11:2 (1999), 86-109.

[357] Kate Fisher, 'Modern Ignorance' in Rebecca Flemming, Nick Hopwood and Lauren Kassell (eds.) *Reproduction: Antiquity to Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2016).

[358] Ibid. Fisher argued that despite the proliferation of material about sex over the last two centuries, historians continue to characterise the period before the so-called sexual 'revolution' of the 1960s as being mired in sexual and reproductive ignorance.

in the modern day appears to prove just how far we have come, and how much more progressive and educated we are.[359] As such the trope of the sexually ignorant ancestor has played an integral role in the construction of modern sexual identities, as we structure what it means to be 'modern' about sex against an image of sexual repression and ignorance in the past.[360]

However, this fashioning of 'modern' sexual identities around attacks on sexual silence is certainly not restricted to the present day, and should instead be understood as part of an enduring tradition of contrasting sexual modernism and ignorance. For example, as Lisa Sigel and Hilary Marland have shown, campaigners for access to sex education in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries posited themselves as an antidote to 'Victorian' sexual silence.[361] There was a proliferation of texts whose stated purpose was to confront the 'conspiracy of silence': radical pamphlets, marriage advice books, and sexological texts alike justified their attempts to provide people with access to information on sexual topics by asserting that their readers had previously been kept in the dark about the 'facts' of sex. Marie Stopes, for example, described a profound silence on sexual matters, and a 'lack of knowledge so abysmal and so universal that its mists and shadowy darkness have

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[359] For ideas about the liberalisation of sex, particularly following the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s, see Marcus Collins (ed.), *The Permissive Society and Its Enemies*: *Sixties British Culture* (London: Rivers Oram, 2007); Jeffrey Weeks, *The World We Have Won: the Remaking of Erotic and Intimate Life* (London: Routledge, 2007). Weeks, for example, asserts that 'profound revolution' of the 1960s has been 'overwhelming beneficial'. (p. x)

[360] For example in Kate Fisher and Simon Szreter's oral history of sex after 1960, they noted that a number of respondents discussed the idea that the absence of sex education, among other facets of a 'repressed' past, were seen 'to have caused problems which they assumed modern couples no longer had to face'. Kate Fisher and Simon Szreter, *Sex before the Sexual Revolution*: *Intimate Life in England 1918–1963* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 377.

[361] Lisa Z. Sigel, *Making Modern Love: Sexual Narratives and Identities in Interwar Britain* (Philadelphia, 2012), p.48; Hilary Marland, *Health and Girlhood in Britain, 1874-1920* (Basingstoke, 2013).

affected even the few who lead us, and who are prosecuting research in these subjects.'[362] She therefore stated in *Married Love* that she believed her life's work was to replace 'blind questioning in the dark; with enlightenment'.[363] The idea that ignorance is somehow retrogressive, and that access to clear and rational information about sex is vital to the creation of a more enlightened sexual culture can therefore be understood as an understanding of sexual modernism we have inherited from radicals and progressive writers in the past. Narratives of sexual ignorance are thus not created in a vacuum, and do not give us an objective account of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century 'sexual silence'. Instead the histories we write can be understood to be inherently linked to the construction of our own modern sexual identities, shaped against ideas about the anxiety, guilt and confusion of the past.

Many of the questions historians have asked about sexual knowledge in the past, and indeed how they have sought to answer them, have rested on the idea that ignorance is a solid category that can be defined and measured, and whose effects can be observed and reported. Historians focus on how much people knew or didn't know and, to find answers to these questions, have explored, for example, the spread of venereal disease, the confusion surrounding puberty and menstruation, and the unhappiness caused by a lack of knowledge on a couples' wedding night.[364]

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[362] Stopes, quoted in Karen Chow, 'Popular Sexual Knowledges and Women's Agency in 1920s England: Marie Stopes's Married Love and E.M. Hull's The Sheik', *Feminist Review* 63 (Autumn, 1999), 65.
[363] Marie Carmichael Stopes, *Married Love or Love in Marriage* (London, 1918), p. xvii.
[364] For instance see Joan J. Brumberg, '"Something Happens to Girls": Menarche and the Emergency of the Modern American Hygienic Imperative', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4.1 (1993), 99- 127; Julian B. Carter, 'Birds, Bees, and Venereal Disease: Toward an Intellectual History of Sex Education', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10.2 (2001), 213-249.

But these questions and approaches are often grounded in the assumption that ignorance, much like understandings of knowledge, is something tangible that can be easily defined and studied empirically. As such, if we recognise that ignorance is not an objective category but is instead imbued with significant political and cultural meaning in both the past and present, we are encouraged to ask different questions. Instead of asking who knew what and when, we should be investigating the politically strategic construction of different notions of ignorance.[365] As part of this we should explore how and why these notions differ, the methods through which people in the past instilled ignorance with particular meaning, and indeed why different groups were so invested in the idea of ignorance.

Historians have often made the mistake of leaving these understandings of ignorance and knowledge unchallenged, and of taking for granted the way these concepts should be understood. They have largely failed to question, interrogate and historicise the notions of knowledge and ignorance around which they work and base their research. By continuing to reduce sex to a set of factual data that can be understood correctly or incorrectly, historical accounts have often obscured the agendas and motivations at play in different constructions of sexual knowledge in the past. Janice Irvine, for example, uses a survey's finding that 'almost three quarters of [participants] believed that letting semen drip out of the vagina after intercourse prevents pregnancy' as evidence of widespread sexual ignorance.[366] However, if we

[365] While her research has a difference focus, Nancy Tuana has also noted that 'ignorance should not be theorised as a simple omission or gap but is, in many cases, an active production'. In her work on orgasm she calls for the 'politics of ignorance' to be explored. Nancy Tuana, 'Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the Epistemology of Ignorance', *Hypatia* 19:1 (Winter 2004), 195.
[366] Irvine, *Talk About Sex*, p. 5.

reframe the way we understand 'knowledge', these responses can be interpreted differently; for example such findings can actually be understood as an indication that survey participants had a coherent understanding of the mechanics of human reproduction and the risks of becoming pregnant. Instead of signifying 'raw ignorance', we can instead understand these responses as an expression of these teenagers' particular formulation of sexual knowledge shaped by their own requirements and experiences. Even 'inaccurate' responses, then, can offer us a valuable insight into the way that these young people formulated ideas about sex. Merely looking at and judging whether people in the past did or did not have 'correct' sexual knowledge thus obscures the variety of dynamic and nuanced ways 'knowledge' can be constructed and understood. This example suggests that if in our historical explorations of the past we only perceive what we consider to be 'accurate' information about sex to be evidence of sexual knowledge, we risk overlooking the other ways in which historical actors understood and made sense of sexual topics. An important task for historians is therefore to interrogate and challenge ideas about what sexual knowledge is. We need to reframe our understandings of knowledge in the past so as to recognise, as E.Doyle McCarthy has argued, that is best conceived of and studied not as a set of objective facts but as a cultural construction invested with particular social meanings.[367]

An exploration of sex radical debates about knowledge, ignorance, and education can help us to begin to answer some of the questions raised by these calls for a methodological reframing of contemporary accounts of sexual knowledge. By

[367] E. Doyle McCarthy, *Knowledge as Culture: The New Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 1.

examining radical discussions of sexual ignorance and knowledge alongside the discussions of social purity campaigners (another contemporary reform group committed to extolling the benefits of sex education), this chapter will begin to break down and explore what it meant to ‘know’ or ‘not know’ about sex at this time. In doing so it will examine the constructed nature of ignorance and knowledge present in these contemporary debates.

Firstly, analysis will show that radicals and social purists constructed different notions of ignorance infused with different political meanings. While they were united in their belief that ignorance had been harmful and that knowledge about sex would help combat topical social issues, they nevertheless constructed opposing ideas of ignorance that were directly linked to their very different political agendas. Instead of being represented as an easily definable, value free, simple omission of facts, ignorance will be shown to be a politically charged status fashioned around different (and often conflicting) views about sex and society. Furthermore, analysis will show that these reformers also had very different understandings of sexual knowledge that were inherently linked to their particular political beliefs: while purity advocates conceptualised a view of knowledge that emphasised the control of sexual behaviour and the curbing of sexual ‘excess’, radicals constructed a vision of knowledge that they believed could pave the way for what they saw as a more liberated, happier, freer sexual system. Rather than being characterised as a set of empirical data to be understood accurately or inaccurately, analysis of these sources will show sexual knowledge to be a construction that took various forms, was disseminated in various ways, and was heavily linked to these refomers’ attempts to exercise and compete

for authority on matters of sex. Finally, an exploration of ideas about knowledge and experience in radical and social purist accounts will challenge the view of knowledge as something mainly hypothetical. It will show that, despite their opposing agendas, both of these groups sought to derive authority for their views from lived experience of sex.

The 'dastardly conspiracy of silence': Ignorance versus Knowledge

In some ways, radical authors and social purity advocates can be seen to have had similar views about the harmful impact of sexual ignorance on contemporary society. Campaigners from both groups expressed particular concern, for example, that ignorance about sexual matters had led to a proliferation of sexual vice and immorality. Clearly reflecting social purists' concerns about the 'low appetites and perverted passions'[368], George Bedborough stated his belief that a lack of sexual education was the cause of the growth of what he called the 'perverted sexual life'.[369] For him the contemporary stigma surrounding speaking about natural sexuality had created a 'darkness' in which a 'strange fascination [with] repulsive and bestial habits' could be bred.[370] Reformers from both groups also agreed that ignorance had affected some groups more severely than others. In particular they outlined the harmful impact of ignorance on women. Many radical discussions of sex education, for example, echoed the increasingly feminist impetus of contemporary social purity campaigns. Clearly reflecting ideas about the dangers of ignorance articulated by W. T. Stead in his 'Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' which stressed

[368] Blackwell, *The Laws of Life,* p. 17.
[369] George Bedborough, 'Editorial Notes', *The Adult* 2:4 (May, 1898), 93.
[370]Ibid.

the danger of the 'wiles of the procuress and the temptations of the seducer', for example, *Adult* writer R.A. Gordon discussed the way in which women were put at risk by sexual ignorance. Rather than helping to promote chastity or purity, Gordon believed ignorance left women susceptible to become the 'prey' of the debauched *roué* who saw the 'conquering of [their] sweet innocence … as a kind of sport'.[371] Mirroring this, Lillian Harman recounted the story of a young dancer from a respectable family who, 'raised in childish ignorance', had fallen into prostitution and then died of consumption.[372] Harman argued that it was a sad story fated to be 'repeated again and again, thousands of times, until fathers and mothers learn to train their daughters to take care of themselves in all ways'.[373]

Both sex radicals and social purists also both emphasised the particularly harmful impact of ignorance on children. Mirroring a vast amount of social purity literature dedicated to detailing the danger of keeping young people ignorant about sex, prominent free love figure E. C. Walker produced a pamphlet called 'What the Young Need to Know: A Primer of Sexual Rationalism' that argued for early sexual education in order to properly guide a child's natural sexual instincts. Walker argued, for example, that a proper sexual education would 'guard against the misdirection and abuse of … sexual forces' in children.[374] Lois Waisbrooker espoused similar ideas in *Lucifer.* She stated that 'ignorance is very likely to conceal vice', and discussed 'depraved' children who had 'not been properly instructed at home'.[375]

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[371] Gordon, 'Sexual Topics', 35.
[372] Lillian Harman, 'The Fatal Folly of Ignorant Innocence', *Lucifer the Light-Bearer* 1:5 (February 10, 1897), 3.
[373] Ibid, 4.
[374] E. C. Walker, *What the Young Need to Know: A Primer of Sexual Rationalism* (Harman: Chicago, 1897), p. 40. A second, self-published, edition of this work was produced in 1905.
[375] Waisbrooker, 'The Wail of Ignorance', 59.

These ideas continued to be manifested in later radical works. For instance *Freewoman* authors argued for more outspoken and frank sex education in the place of silence and mystery to combat undesirable aspects of the contemporary sexual culture. Jennie Bruce argued that 'A sounder method for bringing about a more healthy and desirable condition of mind and body would surely be that every child, especially boys, should be taught … to keep in check and control those *three* tyrant instincts that are such bad masters but can be such useful servants—sexual desire, greediness, and ill-temper.[376]' For Bruce, 'Every human babe [was] born a savage', and sound education about sex would ensure children would grow up to be sexually responsible and civilised individuals.[377] Her *Freewoman* colleague William Foss espoused similar views; in an article advocating increased sexual education for children, he challenged the 'dastardly conspiracy of silence' surrounding sexual subjects due to the fact that it caused young people, counterproductively, to become unhealthily 'obsessed by sex'.[378]

From this small collection of examples we can see that both sex radicals and social purity campaigners sought to exploit the common contemporary idea that ignorance was a state of retrogression in order to support their campaigns for access to sexual knowledge. But if we take our analysis further than this surface view we see that radicals and purity advocates depicted what it meant to be 'ignorant' in different ways. Supporting my assertion that ignorance should not be understood as an objective state but one infused with significant political and social meaning,

[376] Bruce, Correspondence, 152.
[377] Ibid.
[378] William Foss, 'The Problem of Illegitimacy - II', *The Freewoman* 2:27 (May 23, 1912), 7.

further in depth analysis of radical and social purity notions of ignorance shows that they were being strategically constructed to support different visions of sexual progress and enlightenment.

Sex radical authors contributing to journals like *The Adult*, for example, envisioned a version of sexual progress in which people would be free to engage in sexual activity outside of marriage and in which sex was treated as something natural, pleasurable, and clean. In order to support this particular vision, they constructed an idea of ignorance that emphasised its role in rendering sex base by shrouding it in shame and fear. *Adult* authors, for example, linked ignorance to 'bigotry and splutter'[379] and objected to the way that clean and natural sexual instincts had been 'Chained to the earth by myriad bonds of priestcraft, convention, 'respectability', and ignorance', and decried the fact that a lack of open discussion about sexual topics had led to sex becoming an 'object of fear and contumely'.[380] Mirroring this, R. A. Gordon argued that 'Neither the historian nor the theologian can truthfully assert that the world has been better or more moral for this spell of mystery and ignorance, and we are only just now at the end of a practical century awakening to the fact that this mystification has done great harm to humanity, and has carried a number of evil consequences'.[381] *Lucifer* authors similarly emphasised the idea that ignorance signified inequality, unhappiness and dissatisfaction; Edwin C. Walker, for instance, argued that 'The fear of pleasure is the fruit of ignorance', and insisted that

[379] Platt, 'The Worship of Ignorance', 199.
[380] Sagittarius, ''The Liars'; Or, Marriage at the Criterion Theatre', *The Adult* 1:5 (December, 1897), 84.
[381] Gordon, 'Sexual Topics', 35.

a lack of knowledge had served to cause 'sick minds and sick bodies'.[382] By characterising ignorance as a retrogressive and injurious state in which people viewed sexuality as degraded they sought to create for themselves a zero-point from which they could chart a progressive course towards sexual freedom.

Reflecting their different social and political agendas, sex radicals' construction of sexual ignorance was rather different from that of the social purity campaigners. Radical authors, drawing from their understanding of sexuality as outlined in the previous chapter, depicted ignorance as a state in which clean and natural sexual desires had been artificially curbed by the idea that sex was base and shameful. Social purists, however, portrayed ignorance as a state in which dangerous and antisocial sexual impulses threatened to run rampant and untamed. This particular construction of what it signified to be ignorant drew heavily from the undoubtedly conservative character of contemporary social purity campaigns, which sought to preserve and protect the family unit from what they understood to be the corruptive influence of urban vice and radical campaigns for reform.[383] As historians Robin Jensen and Linda Gordon have noted, purity reformers continued to equate sex with danger and disease and did not endorse sexual pleasure; for example Clara Cleghorne Hoffman, a social purity advocate and member of the National Women's Christian Temperance Union (NWCTU), likened sexual desire to the 'covered fires of Lucknow, only needing the occasion, only needing the temptation, to burst forth into flame, carrying death and destruction to every pure, and true and lovely attribute of

[382] Walker, *What the Young Need to Know,* pp. 11-12.
[383] On the conservative moral politics of social purity campaigns see Sue Morgan, '"Wild Oats or Acorns?" Social Purity, Sexual Politics and the Response of the Late Victorian Church', *Journal of Religious History* 31:2 (June, 2007), 151-168.

heart and soul'.[384] Reflecting their belief that the sexual instincts were an inherently dangerous force, they frequently attacked 'sexual excess' both inside and outside of marriage, and advocated the severe limitation of sexual activity (particularly for men) in order to create a more equal, pure society.[385]

The notion of ignorance social purists worked with was constructed to support their vision of sexual progress characterised by chastity and self-control. They portrayed ignorance to be a perilous state in which people could, at any moment, fall prey to temptation. Key social purity advocate Frances Swiney, for instance, asserted that many of the 'evil effects of the social evil' were not the product of malice or ill-intent, but rather of ignorance.[386] Similarly, Ellice Hopkins argued that ignorance (particular in boys) would harmfully 'strengthen the animal instincts' and would lead the sex function to become 'in a measure disordered and source of miserable temptation and difficulty'.[387] By characterising ignorance in this way purity campaigners, like their radical counterparts, sought to create a point of retrogression away from which they could tell a story of sexual progress. For radicals this story led towards the undoing of the vilification of sex in the public mind and a sexual system in which a wholesome, natural sexuality could find opportunities for free expression. However social purists depicted a path away from ignorance towards greater restraint of dangerous, 'animalistic' instincts.

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[384] Quote from Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* (University of Illinois Press, 2002), p. 73. Social purists' desire to limit and regulate sexual activity is also outlined in Robin E. Jensen, *Dirty Words: The Rhetoric of Public Sex Education, 1870-1924* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010), p. 10.
[385] Morgan, 'Wild Oats or Acorns', 151.
[386] Frances Swiney, *The Awakening of Women, or, Woman's Part in Evolution* (London: W. Reeves, 1899), p. 150.
[387] Ellice Hopkins, *The Power of Womanhood, Or, Mothers and Sons: A Book for Parents and Those In Loco Parents* (E. P. Dutton, 1899), pp. 54 – 55.

Despite the fact that both of these groups emphasised the dangers of ignorance, my analysis here has shown that they constructed ignorance in vastly different ways in order to support very different visions of sexual progress and enlightenment. While radical authors insisted that ignorance had falsely sullied sex in the public mind, and had thus suppressed what they believed to be natural and healthy sexual urges, purity advocates described ignorance as a precarious state of vulnerability, from which people could easily fall into unchecked and unrestrained sexual activity. Though sympathetic on the surface, their particular conceptions of ignorance were in fact fashioned around political beliefs that were fundamentally at odds.

The different political and social agendas of these groups and their opposing conceptions of what sexual progress should look like also impacted the way in which they constructed ideas about sexual knowledge. Much like ignorance, knowledge was a concept that was socially and politically charged. As such, sex radicals and social purity reformers alike looked to manipulate ideas about what effect knowledge could have in order to support their particular views. Purity reformers asserted that knowledge would provide people with the tools to better understand and thus subdue their sexual urges, and as such often portrayed knowledge as a powerful instrument of regulation. Reflecting this, in her 1899 work *The Power of Womanhood* social purist Ellice Hopkins argued that it was a mother's duty to teach their sons about the 'sacredness of the body'[388] and the importance of a 'reverence for motherhood'[389] in order to 'guard him from the danger of having all sorts of false, and often foul,

[388] Ibid, 53.
[389] Ibid.

notions palmed off on him'.[390] In Hopkins' view, sexual education for children (particularly boys) would work to combat 'the hidden dangers that beset him, in seeing that his young feet rest on the rock of true knowledge, and not on the shifting quagmire of the devil's lies; but above all, in inspiring him with a high ideal of conduct, which will make him shrink from everything low and foul'.[391] This was a sentiment shared by many figures in the movement; key social purity campaigner Frances Swiney, for example, believed that many 'fallen' youths 'might have been saved from ruin and remorse…by a timely warning, given, not in veiled innuendoes, but with delicate discrimination that distinguishes pure knowledge of natural facts from prurient inquisitiveness!'[392] She therefore believed that 'The most vital interests of life, health and happiness' – which social purists would have understood to be such qualities as temperance, chastity, and sexual self-restraint - were closely bound to the 'possession of a right … introduction to the knowledge of human physiology'.[393] This focus on the prevention of vice, the importance of Christian values, and the need to control dangerous and corruptive sexual urges indicates that social purity reformers were constructing their views on knowledge around the same values as ultra-conservative vice reformers like Comstock and Sewell.[394] However, while followers of Comstock emphasised the necessity of withholding information about sex in order to shield people from immorality, social purists depicted education

[390] Ibid, 222.
[391] Ibid, 16.
[392] Swiney, *The Awakening of Women,* p. 150.
[393] Ibid.
[394] For information on the relationship between Comstock and social purity movements see Jensen, *Dirty Words,* p. 10. As Jensen has noted, purity reformer's equation of sex with 'danger, death, and disease' was an approach with which Comstock would have been to some extent sympathetic.

as a key part of efforts to sustain a system of sexual morality based around self-control, chastity, and the preservation of orthodox marriage.

However, sex radical reformers had a much different agenda to those waging the 'Holy War' of social purity, and fashioned their ideas about the power of knowledge around justifying a radical system of sexual freedom. As discussed above, purity campaigners insisted that being knowledgeable about sex would help to purify sanctioned marriage and aid the regulation of what they saw as immoral sexual behaviour. Counter to this, sex radical authors asserted that those who were knowledgeable and enlightened about sexual matters would view it without fear and disgust. Their notion of knowledge was thus constructed around attempts to facilitate a radical redefinition of sexual respectability that included sexual freedom. The depiction of sex as something degraded and dangerous was in direct contravention to sex radicals' view of the sexual impulse as a natural and positive force, best released from the controls of legal and social sanctions. American free lover Edwin C. Walker, for example, discussed the natural beauty of sex in his works on sex education for children, while in *The Adult* British-American radical Dora Kerr praised sex researchers for attempting to guide 'the sex forces in accordance with the laws of nature, instead of attempting to suppress these forces'.[395] Later works also reflect this view, as a *Freewoman* correspondent discussed sex as 'one of the most beautiful things in life', and called for it to be 'frankly recognised as a natural faculty capable of education and civilisation'.[396] Their vision of sexual knowledge, then,

[395] Walker, *What the Young Need to Know,* p. 30; Dora Kerr, 'The Custom of Marriage', *The Adult* 3:3 (March, 1899), 63.
[396] E.S.P. Haynes, 'Pruriency and Sex Discussions', *The Freewoman* 1:15 (February 29, 1912), 291.

looked to justify a system of sexual freedom by showing sex to be a natural, affirmative force.

Sexual knowledge therefore played an important part in lending authority to sex radical campaigns, as advocates directly linked access to information and open discussion of sexual matters to the elevation of sex in the public view. Radical publications, for instance, sought to emphasise the importance of 'outspoken' teaching about sex due to the belief that it would help to 'bring the sentiment of the general public into line with the more tolerant views of the best spirits of the age'.[397] These radicals believed that 'in the light of fuller knowledge' much of the prevailing prejudice surrounding sex would die away, paving the way for a sexual system in which mankind's 'natural' sexuality could find freer expression.[398] Reflecting this assessment, in a call for scientific research and teaching about sex Orford Northcote argued that free discussion of sexual topics would 'do much towards destroying Mrs Grundy's influence, and that in itself is an end worth gaining'.[399] In this view, sexual knowledge was not seen as a method to regulate dangerous sexual urges; instead reformers constructed a vision of knowledge that justified freer, unsanctioned sexual unions by stating that it would help people to realise that sex was something natural, beautiful, and enjoyable. While social purists envisioned knowledge as a purifying force, tied to the combatting of the sexual double standard and sexual activity outside of the 'sanctity' of the marital bed, radicals portrayed knowledge as a force that could help challenge a view of sex as something dangerous that needed to be

[397] Bedborough, 'What the Legitimation League Means', 4.
[398] Ibid, 4-5.
[399] Orford Northcote, 'Some Sex Problems Considered', *The Adult* 1:1 (June, 1897), 10.

regulated. In these accounts ideas about what sexual knowledge was, how it should be delivered, and what it could achieve were not focussed on the delivery of objective information about sex. Instead they were intimately bound to the sex radicals' belief in the benefits of unsanctioned sexual unions, and constructed as a means to claim authority on matters of sex.

Though sex radicals and social purity advocates agreed that ignorance was potentially harmful and having access to information about sex was beneficial, their notions of what 'ignorance' and 'knowledge' signified were inherently linked to opposing political agendas. As an exploration of their work has shown, social purity campaigners constructed a version of ignorance that allowed them to portray unchecked sexual activity as regressive. However, contributions to sex radical journals demonstrate the way in which free love advocates formulated a vision of ignorance that allowed them to criticise the vilification of sex in the public mind. Ignorance, then, was not an easily definable, value free, simple omission of facts – rather it was a politically charged status fashioned around different, and often conflicting, views about sex and society. Reformers also diverged in their constructions of knowledge. While purity advocates built their ideas about sexual knowledge around controlling sexual behaviour and curbing sexual 'excess', radicals attempted to construct a version of knowledge that would pave the way for what they saw as a more liberated, happier, freer sexual system. This analysis therefore implies that sexual knowledge should not be understood as something easily defined, or something that could be got right or wrong – instead the construction of 'knowledge' should be understood as an interested activity, linked to the values and

agendas of different groups and their efforts to compete for authority in matters of sex.

Experience and Knowledge

Raising a number of questions about what can be understood as 'sexual knowledge', those radicals who campaigned for the right to sexual knowledge in the journals often went further than merely agitating for clear access to rational information about physiology, pregnancy, and disease. Many key sex radical authors championed a form of sexual knowledge that held at its core what they saw as the purifying and educative power of actual sexual experience. For some radicals, 'knowledge' of sex was seen as something beyond information about the mechanics of reproduction, the prevention of disease, or the control of fertility; instead many envisioned it as linked to both the physical and emotional experience of sexual expression, romantic friendship, and love. While it would be easy to dismiss this view as illustrative of the extremes to which sex radical arguments went, this emphasis on the integral role experience should play in the construction of a full understanding of sex was not isolated. As my analysis will go on to show, radical views reflected broader discussions of the importance of experience occurring elsewhere in contemporary debates about sex education. This further demonstrates how radicals, often ignored in historical accounts of sex education in the period for being too marginal, were immersed in important contemporary debates about sex. By drawing attention to the status of experience in debates about sexual knowledge, the analysis of radical notions of knowledge here also raises bigger questions about existing historical work on sex education. Why, for example, have existing historical accounts

focussed on theoretical sexual knowledge when experience evidently formed an integral part of what it meant to 'know' about sex? An analysis of debates about experience and knowledge in journals like *The Adult, Lucifer* and *The Freewoman* will therefore not only highlight the rich discussion of education and sex occurring in sex radical circles. It will also serve to highlight the complex interplay between non-experiential and embodied sexual knowledge, and to stress the need for further explorations into the role of experience in broader constructions of sexual knowledge at the fin de siècle.

Many of the authors involved in this sex radical circle envisioned sexual experience as being an integral part of sexual knowledge. As such they argued that the freedom to engage in unsanctioned sexual activity (a central tenet of free love beliefs) therefore represented an important educative process. A number of historians have shown how many late nineteenth-century moralists saw the loss of virginity as a crucial turning point for the loss of innocence and virtue; Richard Davenport-Hines, for example, states that 'one lapse into illicit conduct had irreversible effects. A good character, once lost, could not be recovered.'[400] However, radical authors contributing to these journals believed that a more virtuous, spiritual, and comprehensive understanding of sex could be gained through acquisition of actual sexual experience. For example, an anonymous *Lucifer* correspondent stated in 1895 that 'Practical knowledge is the one thing most needed

[400] Richard Davenport-Hines, *Sex, Death and Punishment: Attitudes to Sex and Sexuality in Britain since the Renaissance* (London: Fontana Press, 1991), 164. Similar assertions about the importance of a loss of virginity can be seen in Carol Dyhouse, *Girl Trouble: Panic and Progress in the History of Young Women* (London: Zed Books, 2013), p. 34. Patricia J. Campbell, *Sex education Books for Young Adults, 1892-1979* (R.R. Bowker: New York, 1979), p. 25.

to make the most out of life in an onward and upward movement'.[401] In this view 'sexual knowledge' incorporated more than just a sound grasp of sexual theory –it also included real first-hand experience of the complex and subjective feelings of sexual desire and gratification, romantic friendship, and love. Reflecting this investment in the importance of experience to knowledge, *Adult* and *Lucifer* contributor Dora Forster argued that the approach taken by the Oneida community, in which a younger partner was introduced to sexual acts by elder members of the opposite sex, was a good example of sexual education 'carried out successfully'.[402] She believed that sexual ignorance was 'miserable preparation' for an equal, healthy and happy sexual life, and called for 'adequate training … for the most difficult of arts – the practice of love' in order to combat the carelessness and cruelty she saw as characteristic of contemporary sexual culture.[403] In addition, she stated that the educative process of prostitutes introducing young people (particularly men) to what she saw as natural sexual behaviour was 'perhaps often the best that can be done in the difficulties of Puritan surroundings', but argued that 'association with a freewoman and honoured friend would be far better'.[404] Echoing this approach,

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[401] 'Progress', 'Teaching Children', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 12:15 (September 6, 1895).
[402] Dora Forster, *Sex Radicalism: As Seen By An Emancipated Woman Of The New Time* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1905), p. 44. At the Oneida commune in Oneida, New York, they employed a system of 'complex marriage' in which a member was free to have sex with any other member who consented. In addition, older members of the community acted as sexual 'mentors' for younger members. Community founder John Humphrey Noyes, for example, played a key role in the initiation of female virgins due to his mastery of male continence and place in the community hierarchy. For further information on the sexual practices of Oneida, see Louis J. Kern, *An Ordered Love: **Sex** Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias--The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Chapel Hill, N.C. : University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Heather Van Wormer, 'The Ties That Bind: Ideology, Material Culture, and the Utopian Ideal', *Historical Archaeology* 40:1 (2006), 37-56; Lawrence Foster, 'The Psychology of Free Love in the Oneida Community', *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 5:2 (December, 1986), 14-26; Cathy Gutierrez, 'Sex in the City of God: Free Love and the American Millennium', *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 1:2 (Summer, 2005), 187-208.
[403] Dora F. Kerr, 'The Conversion of Mrs Grundy' *The Adult* 2:4 (May 1898), 97-98.
[404] Forster, *Sex Radicalism,* p. 43.

American free lover Edwin Walker encouraged people to pursue practical sexual experience so that they could 'look at sex honestly, candidly enjoying it, fearlessly enhancing its joys'.[405]

Despite the fact that, as previous chapters have shown, some of its more conservative contributors were ambivalent towards the idea of sexual freedom, the belief in the importance of an understanding of 'sexual knowledge' that incorporated actual sexual experience continued to be exploited in later sex radical works. In *The Freewoman* this emphasis drew from editor Dora Marsden's highly introspective and individualistic personal philosophy, which Lucy Delap has argued was not merely 'abstract, of the spirit, but embodied and passionate'.[406] For example Stella Browne, writing under the pseudonym 'A New Subscriber' in 1912, stated that she considered 'sexual experience, physical as well as psychic … necessary to the complete life, and to the knowledge of life'.[407] William Foss also emphasised the importance of physical sexual experience, and challenged the equation of ignorance with purity. 'Innocence can and does exist with Sexual Knowledge,' he argued, 'There are many virtues greater than chastity'.[408] Marsden had herself argued in a reply to a correspondent that it was considered 'an educational process of value and pleasure to play every note in the sexual scale'.[409] Marsden, alongside some of her *Freewoman* colleagues, believed that Freewomen could achieve individuality and agency and 'spring life higher' through sex as a passionate and creative experience.

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[405] Walker, *What the Young Need to Know,* p. 29.
[406] Delap, *Feminist Avant-Garde,* p. 122.
[407] 'A New Subscriber' [Stella Browne], 'Experience and Understanding', *The Freewoman* 1:18 (March 21, 1912), 354.
[408] William Foss, 'The Problem of Illegitimacy' *The Freewoman* 2:27 (Thurs. May 23, 1912), 7.
[409] Dora Marsden, 'The Editor's Reply to Caitlin Dhu', *The Freewoman* 1:5 (December 21, 1911), 93.

Though this view of sex was not adopted by all *Freewoman* contributors, a lived experience of sex for women, both physical and psychological, was integral to what Marsden and many of her contemporaries believed to be positive changes to contemporary sexual culture, and the key to self-realisation, creativity, and freewoman-hood.

An important part of radical discussions about the centrality of experience to sexual knowledge focussed on learning from mistakes. Rather than condemning people for experimenting with different partners and changing them if a relationship broke down, writers like Lillian Harman situated the freedom to experience desire, disillusionment, and heartbreak as an important facet of a complete understanding of sex. In her presidential address to the Legitimation League, for example, she praised unsanctioned unions for providing 'freedom to learn what is best for us … freedom to profit by our failures, as well as by our successes'.[410] Her father Moses also placed this freedom at the heart of his own free love politics; in his 1897 work *A Free Lover's Creed* he stated, 'I believe in wisdom; it is the result of the exercise of love in freedom – love profiting by its mistakes'.[411] For Harman, 'the right to make mistakes and to profit by them' was seen as 'vitally necessary to human happiness and progress'.[412] Other writers agreed; 'Ironicus', writing in *Lucifer*, argued that a more equal and spiritual understanding of sex would be achieved not through 'inquisitions' and 'repressions', but 'by the travail of experience'.[413] Like the Harmans this author called for the freedom to experience sex and learn from mistakes, as when 'mistakes

[410] Lillian Harman, 'Some Problems of Social Freedom': *The Adult Extra* 2 (April, 1898), 7.
[411] Moses Harman, 'A Free Lover's Creed', *The Free Thought Magazine* 15:4 (April 1897), 146.
[412] Ibid.
[413] Ironicus, 'For the Day and the Hour,' *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 6:10 (March 20, 1902), 72-73.

multiply, our knowledge of truth multiplies on the other hand'.[414] Radicals also believed that an individual should not only learn from their own mistakes, but also the experiences and mistakes of others. Edwin C. Walker, for example, called for an 'all-around education' that would allow 'children to profit by the experiences of the parents,' and lamented the fact that contemporary ideas of propriety and sexual respectability ensured that 'Each generation is forced to learn in sorrow what it should have received as a legacy of knowledge from the generations gone before'.[415] Both first-hand experience and learning from the experience of others was therefore considered integral to radical notions of what it meant to 'know' about sex.

This belief in the importance of experience was not merely an expression of marginal sex radical views. Instead it can be understood as a particularly clear (if somewhat extreme) manifestation of the contemporary idea that experience could lend authority to discussions of sexual education and knowledge. Until now we have tended to take our cue from the myriad of contemporary reformers who emphasised the importance of separating rational, clear information about sex from lived experience, and have ignored experiential accounts of knowledge in the histories we write. Modern accounts of social purity education in the period, for example, focus on attempts to provide people with highly moralised, theoretical knowledge. For instance, historian Sue Morgan discusses the way Ellice Hopkins relied on examples from nature to pass on information about human physiology and reproduction to children, and describes her treatment of sexual acts as 'considerably elliptical'.[416]

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[414] Ibid.
[415] Walker, *What the Young Need to Know*, p. 3.
[416] Sue Morgan, 'Faith, Sex and Purity: The Religio-Feminist Theory of Ellice Hopkins', *Women's History Review* 9:1 (2000), 25-26.

Similarly Bryan Strong has discussed that while Harriet Beecher Stowe believed that sexuality was 'pure', she believed it was only pure 'insofar as it was divorced from passion and sensuality.' [417] Reflecting Stowe's assertion that it was 'the *physicalness* [of sex] that is disgusting',[418] Alan Hunt has discussed Elizabeth Blackwell's emphasis on 'physiological truths' and the importance of sexual restraint.[419] This narrative serves to support a notion of sexual knowledge that is separate from experience; existing scholarship like that of Morgan and Hunt has emphasised the idea that writers like these social purists perceived a definite rift between rational information about sexual topics and lived experience of sex.

But despite purity advocates' attempts to separate bodily experience from 'scientific, chaste, and truthful'[420] knowledge about sex, examinations of their works on education suggest that experience did in fact have a role to play in their particular understanding of what it meant to 'know' about sex. Much like the sex radicals contributing to journals like *The Adult,* social purity advocates appear to have believed that having experience of sex meant that a person was more knowledgeable, and better equipped to educate others in sexual matters. As part of her discussions of sex education, for instance, Frances Swiney stated that she believed that God, 'in His immutable justice, made experience to be man's hardest, yet truest teacher',[421] and spoke favourably of 'the full consciousness of

[417] Bryan Strong, 'Ideas of the Early Sex Education Movement in America, 1890-1920', *History of Education Quarterly* 12: 2 (Summer, 1972), p. 131.
[418] Ibid.
[419] Alan Hunt, *Governing Morals: A Social History of Moral Regulation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 151.
[420] Mary A. Brinkman, 'The Promotion of Social Purity', *The North American Review* 152:413 (April, 1891), 511.
[421] Swiney, *The Awakening of Women,* p. 155.

responsibility born of knowledge and experience'.[422] Similarly, Ellice Hopkins herself stated that she based her advocacy of sex education on her belief that it was her duty to place 'the knowledge and experience gained in … years of toil and sorrow at the disposal of the educated women of the English-speaking world'.[423]

The investment in the idea that experience was an important factor of knowledge was particularly clearly manifested in the idea that it was the mother who was best placed to teach her child about sexual matters. The idea that mothers has been through the 'morally transfiguring' experience of sex and maternity, historian Claudia Nelson has argued, meant they were thought to be able to discuss sex with an authority that fathers lacked.[424] Despite American social purity advocate Mary Wood Allen's assertion that sex education should be taught as 'simple, scientific truths', for example, she in fact tied what children should be told to a mother's own experiences of maternity and childbirth.[425] A mother was encouraged to emphasise to her child how 'he had grown with the beating of her heart and had been moulded by the touch of her thought,' and to describe how she 'finally had gone down into the vale of physical pain, perhaps even the gates of death, with a brave courage to welcome him to his independent earthly existence'.[426] Despite Wood-Allen's assertions of the importance of distancing knowledge about sex from lived experience, she nevertheless grounded much of a mother's ability to provide

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[422] Ibid, 180.
[423] Hopkins, *The Power of Womanhood,* p. 2.
[424] Claudia Nelson, '"Under the Guidance of a Wise Mother": British Sex Education at the Fin de Siècle' in Claudia Nelson and Ann Sumner Holmes (eds.), *Maternal Instincts: Visions of Motherhood and Sexuality in Britain, 1875-1925* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), p. 100.
[425] Mary Wood-Allen M. D., 'Moral Education of the Young', in Aaron M. Powell (ed.), *The National Purity Congress, its Papers, Addresses, Portraits* (New York: American Purity Alliance, 1896), p. 226.
[426] Ibid, 230-231.

authoritative, comprehensive, and moral information about sex in the physical and emotional experiences of bringing her child into the world.

Sex radicals and social purists did, of course, treat the notion of experience differently. While radicals emphasised both the importance of passing on information from parents to children and gaining first-hand experience of sex, social purity advocates emphasised the role experience could play in warning young people of the dangers of engaging in sexual activity. There was undoubtedly a different conception of how experiential knowledge could be beneficial, and also opposing beliefs about the right way this experience should be gained. While free lovers emphasised the enlightenment that gaining sexual experience outside of marriage could bring, social purity campaigners stressed the importance of gaining experiential knowledge within the context of the marital bed. But despite these rifts, both sets of reformers nevertheless created narratives of sexual knowledge which derived authority from personal experience of sex. Explorations of radical accounts of sexual knowledge therefore encourages us to think differently about sexual knowledge in the past, as it gives us an important insight into the complex and often ignored relationship between theoretical information and embodied experience. Therefore these radical accounts – and the links that can be drawn between these accounts and the broader intellectual circle discussing sexual knowledge at this time – show that it is a mistake to envision experience and knowledge as separate. Instead they demonstrate that experience, albeit in different and often conflicting forms, was integral to the diverse range of contemporary notions of what it meant to 'know' about sex.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored sex radicals' interventions into a broad set of contemporary debates about sexual ignorance and sexual knowledge. Counter to the views of anti-vice reformers such as the notorious Anthony Comstock, the radical authors contributing to these journals believed that knowledge would not sully otherwise pure minds or inspire people to participate in 'immoral' sexual behaviours. Instead they believed knowledge about mankind's natural sexuality had the potential to be a powerful purifying force. They asserted that the injurious impact of sexual ignorance, which they believed had suppressed and perverted mankind's clean and natural sexual instinct, could be remedied if people had the knowledge required to understand and make sense of their own natural sexuality. As I have shown, this belief in the purifying power of knowledge linked the radicals to other groups who also challenged the equation of ignorance with purity. For example this chapter's analysis has demonstrated that, despite their rather different political and social agendas, particular links can be drawn between the views of sex radical authors and social purity campaigners. As such, we should not understand this sex radical group as functioning in isolation, but should instead see them as active participants in a much broader contemporary exploration of issues surrounding ignorance, knowledge, and morality.

This chapter's comparison of sex radical and social purist discussions of sexual knowledge also demonstrates the constructed nature of notions of knowledge and ignorance. I argue that through analysis of these sources we can see that ignorance, counter to the approach of existing historical research, did not merely

signify a simple omission of ‘facts’; rather I contend that it was a status that was infused with political meaning, actively constructed by different groups with different agendas in mind. My research also revealed the constructed nature of ‘knowledge’ which, like ignorance, I argue was not objective or empirical. Instead I have shown that there were different ideas about what it meant to have sexual ‘knowledge’ about sex that were formed around attempts to compete for authority on matters of sex.

As an examination of the discussion of sexual knowledge in these publications has illustrated, sex radical authors worked with a number of different understandings of what it meant to ‘know’ about sex. For some knowledge meant a grasp of objective information concerning the so-called ‘facts of life’, and involved an understanding of topics like physiology, reproduction, and the control of fertility. However radical writers also worked with a more subjective understanding of knowledge that viewed sexual experience as vital to a comprehensive knowledge of sex. But this understanding was not isolated, and as a comparison of radical and social purist’s texts has demonstrated, in fact reflects a wider – and often overlooked - contemporary belief in the centrality of lived experience to knowledge.

The previous chapters have discussed the ways in which radical authors believed that mankind’s clean and natural sexual instincts were being controlled and oppressed by social and legal customs. Not only did they believe this oppression worked through the influence of the customs, laws and values surrounding marriage; as this chapter has shown they also emphasised the ways in which the taboo around speaking freely about sexual topics and the equation of ignorance with purity had served to inhibit free sexual expression. But despite this shared investment in the

binding and oppressive nature of contemporary customs, radical authors were profoundly uneasy about what should take the place of the existing sexual system. In short, as the following chapters will explore, calls for ‘freedom’ raised questions about what ‘freedom’ looked like, how it functioned, who was capable of achieving it, and how it could and should be lived day to day. However, as my analysis will show, these divisive debates used many of the same ideas and theories to support their arguments.

Chapter 4

Evolution, Civilisation, and the Development of Mankind:

Debating Alternatives to Marriage

The sex radicals contributing to these journals clearly shared a belief in the injurious influence of restricting and controlling what they saw as mankind's powerful 'natural' sexual instincts. As previous chapters have shown, radical authors discussed the flaws of sanctioned marriage, and emphasised the oppressive and damaging nature of the existing marriage institution. Marriage, the sex radicals asserted, was fundamentally antagonistic to the expression of an important natural instinct and was thus to blame for a host of contemporary social ills. Similarly, journal authors emphasised the harmful impact of the restriction of sexual knowledge through notions of 'purity' and the taboo surrounding the open discussion of sexual topics. Radicals therefore believed that it was through the free and open expression of the 'natural' sexual instincts that important social improvements could be made. As such, sexual freedom became an issue of paramount importance. But this shared belief in the importance of sexual freedom and the expression of mankind's 'true' and 'natural' sexual urges raised a number of questions - What did mankind's 'natural' sexuality actually look like? Where did it come from, and how had it changed? What sexual system represented its most true and advanced expression? An analysis of their journals shows that authors operating in the same radical circle were often profoundly divided by these questions, and therefore clashed over what constituted the best alternative the oppression of marriage. Indeed an early *Adult* editorial explicitly stated that while sex radicals agreed that the marriage institution was

injurious, they were 'not united at all…not unanimous at all, as to what institution should take its place'.[427]

Sex radical authors profoundly disagreed about what humanity's 'natural' sexuality looked like and how it functioned, and therefore clashed over how it should be best expressed outside of what they saw as the oppressive confines of the contemporary marriage institution. Radicals' interpretations differed hugely, but can be largely reduced to two main camps – the monogamists (who believed in a system of monogamous but unsanctioned unions), and the varietists (who argued that mankind's complex sexuality could only be satisfied by a variety of sexual partners). It was these profoundly disparate interpretations or imaginings of mankind's 'true' sexual nature that informed the divisive debates about what system constituted the best alternative to marriage found in sex radical journals.

In the view of some sex radical authors, unsanctioned monogamous unions represented the best alternative to the existing marriage system. For example *Adult* contributor John Banaston looked forward to the 'monogamy of the future' which, unchecked by what he saw as the harmful impact of marriage, would be 'less rigid as to the finality of its restrictions, and more just in respect of the mutual liberties and responsibilities of the participants'.[428] Similarly, Oswald Dawson (who was himself in a long term monogamous free union with his partner Gladys) stated that he believed 'monogamy will answer the needs of millions in the future, as it has done in the past, is doing so in the present, and may to all time'.[429] *Lucifer* authors agreed; an 1897

[427] Oswald Dawson, 'Two Editorials', *The Adult* 1:6 (January, 1898), 110.
[428] John Banaston, 'The Moribund Morality', *The Adult* 3:2 (February, 1899), 34.
[429] Dawson, 'Two Editorials', 103.

editorial stated that the majority of free love unions were 'happy and permanent', and asserted that 'Free love will in the end resolve itself into Free Monogamy, as a substitute for enforced marriage'.[430] Much like marriage, this monogamous system involved an exclusive and perpetual relationship between a man and a woman; however, unlike marriage it was to be unsanctioned and unregulated, and thus could be formed and concluded at will. Monogamist free lovers argued that this system best answered the needs of mankind's 'natural' sexuality. *Adult* author Sagittarius, for example, defended monogamy.; He claimed that following 'Nature's methods' would mean that 'men and women would be unlikely to seek or to attract a variety of sexual associates to such an extent as to create in the main result other than a monogamic system'.[431] Reflecting this, *Freewoman* editor Dora Marsden argued that 'passion, in its own sphere, is absorbing, jealous, exclusive, and individual', and thus ruled out non-monogamy as an 'intolerable situation'.[432] In the view of the monogamists, then, monogamous but unsanctioned free relationships best reflected the expression of mankind's 'true' sexual nature, and thus represented the most suitable alternative to the existing marriage system.

However, other sex radicals read mankind's 'natural' sexual nature quite differently. For proponents of this view (often referred to as 'varietists' in radical literature) the sexual instinct could not be adequately satisfied by one mate, and was instead geared towards a variety of sexual partners. Orford Northcote spoke of

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[430] Moses Harman, 'The University Magazine on the American Movement', *Lucifer*, *the Light-Bearer* 1:24 (June 16, 1897).
[431] Sagittarius, 'Sexual Freedom and the Alleged "Mutability of Sex Love"', *The Adult* 1:3 (October, 1897), 47.
[432] Dora Marsden, 'The New Morality – III', *The Adult* 1:7 (January 4, 1912), 122.

mankind's 'urgent' need for sexual variety, while Dora Forster stated that she believed that 'no one who has deeply studied the philosophy of sex will endorse the view formerly prevalent that sex relations should be wholly and rigidly restricted to one partnership…all experience goes to show that at least occasional variety is very beneficial, both mentally and physically'.[433] These varietist authors, then, called for a sexual system based not on exclusivity but variety, and therefore emphasised the need for a diverse system of non-monogamous sexual relationships.

A particularly clear example of this varietist view is found in the work of prominent American free love advocate E. C. Walker. For example, Walker argued that the 'varietist requires the best for which his or her nature calls, and all of the best. The varietist is not satisfied to be chained of life to one person, for there is not be found on any one person the complements of all the qualities of one's self."[434] He claimed in contributions to *The Adult* that monogamous unions ignored humanity's 'true' sexual nature and thus came with 'the possibility 'nay, almost certainty of more bitter pain and disappointment than does the varietistic'.[435] Varietist free lovers, he asserted, better understood the 'facts' of a diverse human sexual nature and therefore sought to base relationships around a rational recognition of 'the extreme mobility of human emotions, the mutability of the human organism, and the almost impossibility of finding two persons who complement each other in all particulars'.[436] He viewed those who pursued monogamous relations as restricted and unfulfilled,

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[433] Orford Northcote, *Ruled by the Tomb: A Discussion of Free Thought and Free Love* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1898), p. 6; Dora Forster, *Sex Radicalism: As Seen By An Emancipated Woman Of The New Time* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1905), p. 47.
[434] E. C. Walker, *What the Young Need to Know: A Primer of Sexual Rationalism* (Harman: M. Chicago, 1897), p. 14.
[435] E. C. Walker, '"The Monogamic Ideal" and "The Ideal Man"', *The Adult* 2:5 (June, 1898), 140.
[436] Ibid.

describing them as ‘a man or woman bound, crippled in body, deformed in mind, and stifled in emotions’.[437] Thus for writers like Walker, and others varietists like Orford Northcote, Dora Forster, and R. B. Kerr, the complex sexual nature of mankind was best served by having various sexual partners. The debate between monogamists and varietists was undoubtedly a particularly divisive one in radical circles; indeed one American varietist called monogamists ‘fence-straddlers and mandarin-wobblers’ who represented ‘traitors in our own ranks’.[438]

A diverse range of sexual arrangements fell under the title of ‘sexual variety’. Some varietist sex radicals specifically discussed the possibility of polygamous relationships; an *Adult* editorial, for example, criticised the fact that ‘polygamy is usually condemned without a hearing’ and commissioned W. H. Abdullah Quillam, referred to as Sheikh-ul-Islam or head of the Islamic faith in Britain, to contribute a defence of polygamy to its pages.[439] For some varietist free lovers, forms of adultery represented the most effective varietist alternative to marriage. In this system, an individual would maintain one permanent relationship but would be free to pursue casual sexual relationships with others. *Adult* editor George Bedborough, for example, proclaimed that ‘the once abhorred and vicious crime of adultery’ was ‘the true corner-stone of Free Love’ through which ‘the higher types of mankind may possibly proceed to the haven of happiness’.[440] This statement reflected his own

[437] E. C. Walker, ‘The Moloch of the Monogamic Ideal’, *The Adult* 2:2 (March, 1898), 47.
[438] C. L. James, ‘The Logic of Progress – and the Progress of Logic’, *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 1:22 (June 2, 1897), 169.
[439] George Bedborough, Editorial, *The Adult* 2:2 (March, 1898), 31. Although announced in 1898, the series on polygamy did not appear until the final two editions of *The Adult* in February and March of 1899. See W. H. Abdullah Quillam (Sheikh-ul-Islam of the British Isles), ‘Polygamy Considered from a Muslim Standpoint – Part I’, *The Adult* 3:2 (February, 1899), 34-36; ‘Polygamy Considered from a Muslim Standpoint –Part II’, *The Adult* 3:3 (March, 1899), 64-66.
[440] George Bedborough, ‘How to be Happy Though Married’, *The Adult* 2:2 (March, 1898), 51.

radical lifestyle; though he and his partner Louie had married for the sake of their families, they maintained separate bedrooms in their London home in which to host their respective lovers.[441] Other varietists called for an even more radical sexual system of promiscuity.[442] Lucy Stewart for example, supported those free lovers who 'would never settle down with one mate, but would be continually changing about for the mere love of variety'.[443] Similarly, E. C. Walker argued that it was human nature to 'ever strive to increase the number and prolificness [sic] of the sources of pleasurable sensation'; as such he emphasised that it was 'imperatively necessary' for individuals to find frequent expression for what he called their sexual 'emotion' in a highly varied sexual life.[444]

It was therefore notably different interpretations and imaginings of the 'natural' or 'true' sexuality of man that informed radical debates about alternatives to the existing marriage system. Both monogamists and varietists looked to naturalise their views, and show that their chosen alternative represented the best expression of an innate and naturally formed sexual instinct. There was, then, much at stake in discovering and defining modern man's 'true' sexual nature - how it functioned, how

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[441] Details of the Bedborough's free love lifestyle can be found in a sexual profile taken of the couple by Havelock Ellis in 1922. This profile, as Phyllis Grosskurth has shown, describes the couple as freethinkers, communists, feminists, neo-Malthusians, and vegetarians, and provides details of their open sexual relationship. For information see Phyllis Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography* (Ney York University Press, 1985), p. 192. There is also a brief discussion of the couple in Judy Greenway, 'Speaking Desire: Anarchism And Free Love as Utopian Performance in Fin De Siècle Britain' in Laurence Davis and Ruth Kinna, (eds*), Anarchism and Utopianism* (Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 176.
[442] This system of very short term, casual relationships was called a number of things. In some cases it is just referred to as 'variety', whilst in others it is discussed as 'absolute freedom'. The phrase 'promiscuity' was specifically used at times, however – the first edition of *The Adult*, for example, states that it is open to the discussion of all kinds of relationships, including 'matriarchy, polygamy, polyandry and promiscuity'. George Bedborough, 'What the Legitimation League Means, *The Adult* 1:1 (June 1897), 3.
[443] Lucy Stewart, 'Free Thought and Free Love', *The Adult* 1:3 (October, 1897), 43.
[444] Walker, *What the Young Need to Know*, p. 13.

it had evolved over time, and what sexual behaviour represented its most civilised and advanced manifestation.

In order to do this and thus provide support for their particular views, monogamists and varietists alike turned to scientific disciplines concerned with changes and developments in human sexual behaviour. Both monogamist and varietist radicals drew, for example, from anthropological theories in order to discuss the sexual behaviours of the ancient past and chart the change and development of human behaviour over time. These authors sought to use the anthropological theories to tell a story of progressive human sexual development that culminated with their chosen mode of reform. They also used anthropological and ethnological ideas to discuss and describe the sexual customs of modern 'primitives' – understood in many contemporary anthropological narratives as being analogous to ancient Europeans. In doing so they sought to argue that the radical alternatives they advocated represented the most advanced and civilised expression of the sexual instinct. Furthermore, authors attempted to chart a progressive evolutionary sequence at which their chosen alternative to marriage was at the apex. To support these claims about what constituted the most 'evolved' sexual system radical authors framed their different views using ideas drawn from evolutionary science, and the theories of prominent intellectual figures such as Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer.

By framing their arguments in this way, both monogamist and varietist sex radicals were looking to use anthropological, ethnological and evolutionary ideas to show that their chosen alternatives represented the best and most advanced

expression of human sexuality possible. My exploration of these ideas helps to fill a notable gap in existing research into sex radicalism in Britain at this time; while historians have to some extent looked at radicals' critiques of marriage, until now research into the complex system of alternatives being advocated has been extremely limited.[445] But an examination of this approach does more than address this oversight and discuss radicals' desire to lend scientific credence to their divisive debates about a variety of alternatives to marriage. Exploring sex radical's interventions into debates about past and present, simple and the complex, and savage and civilised sexuality also allows us to draw clear links between authors contributing to these publications and some of the most important and pervasive contemporary debates about human sexual development. As this chapter's exploration of the debates about alternatives to marriage will show, these links mean we should not understand sex radicals and free lovers as merely anomalous, or ignore them because they were on the fringe of debate. Instead, I argue, we are able to see this group as active participants in a broad and diverse intellectual circle participating in scientific explorations of human sexual behaviour at this time.

This chapter will start by exploring radicals' use of anthropological research in their work. In particular it will consider how both monogamist and varietist sex radicals used anthropological ideas and theories about what sex was like in the ancient past to support their views. Analysis here will show how authors on both

[445] Most of the research into this area has focussed on the more established American free love movement. Joanne Passet, for example, has discussed how debates about the viability of sexual variety divided many sex radical authors. See Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 2003), pp. 163-165. To my knowledge there is no existing research on the debates between monogamists and varietists in British sex radical circles.

sides of the debate used these theories in a similar way in order to create a version of the past that supported their differing visions of the future. It will then go to consider how ideas about the sexual behaviour of modern ‘primitives’ were used to support their different ideas about viable alternatives to marriage. This approach, I argue, gave radicals a framework through which to claim that the particular alternatives they were advocating represented the most advanced and civilised sexual system. It also offered them an opportunity to tap into contemporary ideas about a racial hierarchy in which primitive ‘others’ were compared unfavourably to what many contemporaries believed was the ‘more developed’ Western man. Finally it will consider how radicals’ debates about alternatives to marriage engaged with evolutionary theory. In particular my research will explore how authors, drawing from a range of ideas from the evolutionary sciences, sought to claim that either monogamy or variety was the most evolved, complex, and differentiated sexual system. Through this analysis of radical debates this chapter will not only demonstrate how a variety of scientific ideas were used to construct different visions of sexual freedom; in addition, it will explore how this engagement with scientific theories linked these sex radicals to much broader contemporary intellectual debates about sex.

Anthropology, and the Sexual Nature of Ancient Man

Imagining the sexual cultures of the distant past and charting the evolution of sexual behaviour over time was therefore a key tool in radicals’ debates about what constituted the most viable alternative to contemporary marriage. Monogamist and varietist free lovers alike made claims about the sexual behaviour of mankind’s

primitive ancestors. In doing so they were able to support their chosen alternatives to marriage by tellinhl a story of progressive human development that culminated with their chosen mode of reform. They each sought to argue that the system they advocated represented the outcome of the positive development of mankind's sexual nature over time, and thus constituted the most modern, advanced, and evolved sexual system. Therefore like many contemporary anthropologists, sociologists, and evolutionary theorists they relied on the idea that from an understanding of how sexuality functioned in the ancient past it was possible to chart an evolutionary sequence out of savagery and towards a more civilised, modern sexuality. However, as was the case in both this group and in broader intellectual circles, what sexual system best characterised the barbaric past, and indeed the civilised present, was not a clear cut or established fact Indeed sex radical authors clashed over the sexual behaviour of their ancient ancestors, and thus diverged on what represented the most modern, evolved sexual system.

By attempting to evoke the sexuality of ancient man in their deliberations of sexual behaviour these radicals were drawing from a much more widespread intellectual debate about mankind's original sexual condition and development. From the mid-nineteenth century, anthropological scholars in particular had debated primitive sexual behaviour as a part of their discussions of the 'origin of marriage'. According to George Stocking, the fact that anthropological debates concerning the development of the patriarchal family unit emerged at this time isno coincidence. He particularly ties it to the contemporary social and political context, and concerns about a decline in family size, increasingly forceful attacks on the sexual status quo,

and the introduction of new legislation making divorce more accessible.[446] He argues that anthropological scholarship can therefore be understood, in part, as a manifestation of contemporary interest in (and indeed concerns about) the way that social change could affect the institution of marriage.[447] On one side of the contentious contemporary debate about the sexual behaviours and customs of the prehistoric age were a group of anthropological scholars such as John Lubbock, John Jakob Bachofen, Lewis Henry Morgan, Henry Summer Maine and John McLennan. In their anthropological works these scholars argued that original human societies practiced near indiscriminate promiscuity, and that notions of morality, regulation and control in regards to sex had thus evolved over time. [448] Their theories often diverged over the specific processes through which man's previously unchecked sexual indulgence had later been brought under control. Indeed histories of contemporary anthropology have shown that by the later years of the nineteenth century anthropological theories had fractured into three distinct and opposing schools with different views about mankind's original sexual state.[449] However despite their competing views, these writers nonetheless largely subscribed to a belief that the original state of humankind – what historians of anthropology Andrew P. Lyons and Harriet D. Lyons have called the 'zero point' of human progress - was one of unchecked promiscuity.[450] Their diverse theories were brought together by the assertion that early man lived in a society unrestrained by taboos around the issue of

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[446] Ibid.
[447] George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), p. 201.
[448] Lyons and Lyons, *Irregular Connections: A History of Anthropology and Sexuality* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), p. 75.
[449] Ibid, 82.
[450] Elizabeth Fee, 'The Sexual Politics of Victorian Social Anthropology' *Feminist Studies* 1:3/4 (Spring, 1973), 29. Lyons and Lyons, *Irregular Connections,* p. 75.

sex, and in which bestiality, incest, homosexuality, adultery and extensive infanticide due to the predictably high birth rate were thought to have gone on unimpeded.[451] The patriarchal family unit, seen by proponents of this view as the peak of humanity's social evolution, was therefore implied to be something learned, and was depicted as the outcome of millennia worth of 'civilizational improvement and the accompanying moral softening'.[452] In general, authors such as Morgan, Maine and McLennan believed that primitive man was promiscuous and sexually unrestrained. As such they assumed that monogamous sexual practices were evidence of the development and progress of human sexual behaviour away from its original, violent, unrestrained state.[453] Some scholars have argued that the charting of an evolutionary sequence from promiscuity to monogamy served to support a teleological view of social evolution that had at its apex the patriarchal family unit, and thus provided seemingly rational and scientific justification for orthodox monogamous marriage.[454] Elizabeth Fee, for example, has outlined the ways in which anthropological research that charted the evolution of monogamous marriage and the patriarchal family unit over time allowed them to 'be seen as the final culmination, the glorious end product of man's whole social, sexual and moral evolution from savagery to civilisation'.[455]

However, those radicals who saw unsanctioned monogamous unions as the best alternative to marriage used this progressive narrative to support a rather

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[451] Chris Manias, 'Scholarly Visions of Prehistoric Sexuality, 1859 – 1900', in Kate Fisher and Rebecca Langlands (eds.) *Sex, Knowledge, and Receptions of the Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 181.
[452] Ibid, 182.
[453] Fee, 'The Sexual Politics of Victorian Social Anthropology', 29.
[454] Ibid, 24.
[455] Ibid.

different set of aims. Instead of envisioning marriage as the end point of the development of human sexual behaviour, for example, monogamist free lovers instead insisted that unsanctioned monogamous unions were the high watermark of mankind's sexual development. Radicals shifted their attention away from (or indeed strategically ignored) specific discussions of marriage and instead discussed monogamous sexual customs as a part of a process of human sexual development over time. As such they were able to draw support from anthropological accounts to advocate monogamous free unions rather than orthodox marriage. For example *Adult* contributor Sagittarius, reflecting the theories of authors like McLennan, Lubbock, and Morgan, argued that promiscuity had existed in all past ages, and framed his advocacy of a system of monogamous free unions in terms that spoke of the development of human sexual behaviour away from a barbaric original state and towards a more civilised and refined modernity.[456] Likewise, in *The Freewoman*, Julian Warde argued that relationships had evolved towards monogamy. He argued that it had evolved from a system of polygamy and 'the crude idea of the capture of woman and her subjection, as the producer of stock, to the larger and later idea of a more or less formal and mutual union between two individuals for the satisfaction of their sexual needs'.[457] Mirroring this, second *Adult* editor Henry Seymour argued that monogamy represented the most evolved way of living. He argued that a study of sexual relationships 'from the historic standpoint' revealed that monogamy represented mankind's 'highest achievement'.[458] While anthropologists like Lubbock,

[456] Sagittarius, 'Sexual Freedom', 45.
[457] Julian Warde, 'Modern in Morality. The Ethics of Sexual Relationships III', *The Freewoman* 2:33 (July 4, 1912), 130.
[458] Henry Seymour, 'The Poetry of the Passions', *The Adult* 1:5 (December, 1897), 90.

McLennan and Maine were themselves highly respectable Victorian men, and as such their writings included little 'salacious or titillating detail',[459] sex radical authors here nonetheless attempted to draw from their constructions of a promiscuous past in order to advocate radical but monogamous alternatives to marriage in the present.

However, radical authors with competing varietist views were also able to draw from interpretations of anthropological theories in order to provide support for calls for non-monogamous relationships. In particular, they drew from other contemporary anthropological scholars concerned with examining the sexual behaviour of ancient man and its evolution over time who rejected the idea that man's primitive ancestors were promiscuous. Between the later years of the nineteenth century and the start of the First World War scholars like Edward Westermarck and Havelock Ellis challenged the assumption that early man's sexuality was rampant and unchecked. For instance in his classic 1891 work *The History of Human Marriage*, Westermarck argued that theories of prehistoric promiscuity were 'essentially unscientific'[460] and that it was 'unlikely that promiscuity had ever prevailed at any stage of human development'.[461] Instead, using a combination of biological and ethnographic data, he argued that primitive man was monogamous, and thus modern ideas of monogamy and sexual restraint could be seen as inherent and 'natural'.[462] He asserted that the modern nuclear family was an 'evolutionarily conditioned family unit' that had not been learned over time, but

[459] Lyons and Lyons, *Irregular Connections*, p. 73.
[460] Edward Westermarck, *The History of Human Marriage* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), p. 538.
[461] Ibid, 540.
[462] Erik Allardt, 'Edward Westermarck: A Sociologist Relating Nature and Culture', *Acta Sociologica* 43:4 (2000), 300-301.

instead had begun 'developing as soon as humans left the trees'.[463] Havelock Ellis, in the third volume of his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1903), gave support to Westermarck's views; in his work on the *Analysis of the Sexual Impulse,* for example, he argued that the sexual instinct of primitive man was 'habitually weak', and thus questioned existing stories of the 'unbridled licentiousness of savages'.[464] According to these scholars, monogamy was not the end stage of a clear sequence of development away from promiscuity; instead they argued that it should be understood as part of humanity's 'primate inheritance', naturally occurring but refined over time.[465]

The sexual behaviour of primitive man was therefore becoming increasingly contested in contemporary scholarly accounts of the ancient past. Challenging the characterisation of primitive man as brutal and licentious and instead imagining him as natural and complex may not, however, have been entirely unintentional. Some modern scholars argue that it can instead be understood as part of a broader attempt to understand, question and challenge the rise of the patriarchal family unit. Andrew and Harriet Lyons, for example, point out that works by scholars such as Westermarck and Ellis that challenged ideas about the promiscuous sexuality of primitive man were not created in a social vacuum, but were instead produced during a period of notable social discord, particularly around marriage.[466] As such they question whether it is a coincidence that the 'smug image of the sexualised,

[463] Manias, 'Scholarly Visions of Prehistoric Sexuality', p. 183.
[464] Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* Vol. 3 (Philadelphia, F. A. Davis, 1913), p. 265 & p. 259.

[465] Lyons and Lyons, *Irregular Connections*, p. 124.
[466] Ibid.

promiscuous savage was replaced by another, more ambiguous image at a time when the institution of marriage and sexual relationships of all kinds had become a matter for public scrutiny'.[467] Anthropological constructions of sex in the distant past therefore represented more than an abstract and intellectual debate about human behaviour; instead, as Chris Manias has noted, they signified 'an attempt to define how the family—a central topic of contemporary concern and debate—had developed as the key social and reproductive unit'.[468]The tendency of these later anthropological works to replace the image of the promiscuous savage with a less sexed, more restrained primitive man can therefore be understood as due, in part, to challenges to notions of sexual morality in broader fin de siècle society.[469] It is therefore clear that claiming the ancient past, or at least an imagining of the ancient past, was a key factor in debates about what constituted a civilised, evolved, modern sexual present.

In order to challenge monogamous sexual customs and support their calls for a varietist alternative to marriage customs, some of the sex radicals contributing to the journals in this circle tapped into these important contemporary debates and the ambiguity surrounding the sexual behaviours of the past. A number of varietists, reflecting these differing interpretations of the sexual habits of the past, rejected the idea that the distant past was characterised by sexual licence. For example British-Canadian free lover Dora Forster, a contributor to both *The Adult* and *Lucifer*, argued that it was monogamy, and not variety, that was characteristic of the past; she thus

[467] Ibid, 119.
[468] Manias, 'Scholarly Visions of Prehistoric Sexuality', p. 179.
[469] Lyons and Lyons, *Irregular Connections*, p. 103.

asserted that ‘men and women suffer much from a sex system that was made in the past and is unsuited to the present’.[470] Advocates of this narrative of human sexual development drew from the work of scholars like Westermarck in order to establish that primitive man was monogamous. Essentially they directly reversed the anthropological narrative of human development towards monogamy used by monogamist free lovers in order to argue that mankind had developed *away* from monogamous sexual customs, and towards a more open and unrestrained system of sexual expression. In the *Adult*, for example, Orford Northcote claimed that Sagittarius’s abhorrence of sexual variety (outlined previously in this chapter) was grounded in ‘the mistaken notion that the race is progressing towards the monogamic ideal, having originally lived in a state of promiscuity from which it has developed through polygamy to monogamy’.[471] This, he claimed, was not fact at all, but ‘the misconstrued and unreliable data of a discredited anthropological theory’.[472] He rejected the notion that monogamy was the achievement of modern man, and instead asserted that ‘Primitive man was a monogamist, even as were his ape-like ancestors; even as are the anthropomorphous apes to-day’.[473] This author specifically grounded his ideas about the monogamous customs of primitive man in the works of Westermarck, which he dubbed ‘epoch-making’.[474] This link to Westermarck would undoubtedly had lent credence to radical views; following the

[470] Dora Forster, ‘The Passing Ideal and the Coming Ideal’, *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 7:2 (January 22, 1903), 10.
[471] Orford Northcote, ‘Anthropology and Monogamy’, *The University Magazine and Free Review* 9 (October, 1897 – March, 1898), 429. Northcote’s article was reprinted in a slightly edited form in *Lucifer* in 1898. See Orford Northcote, ‘Monogamy and Evolution’, *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 2:3 (Janaury 19, 1898), 433.
[472] Ibid.
[473] Orford Northcote, ‘Sex Love and Mutability’, *The Adult* 1:4 (November, 1897), 50.
[474] Ibid.

publication of *The History of Human Marriage*, Westermarck became 'almost instantly famous', and his work was translated into a number of languages.[475] Northcote's belief in the modern and civilised nature of sexual variety was, however, based on a somewhat imaginative reading of Westermarck's theories. While Westermarck argued that monogamy was probably the prevalent form of marriage in ancient societies he maintained that monogamy was a characteristic of 'higher forms of civilisation'.[476] Varietist sex radical authors, though, used Westermarck's theories to offer seemingly empirical proof that the barbaric past was monogamous and thus create for themselves a new monogamous 'zero-point' of human sexual behaviour. Northcote, for instance, argued that monogamy was the 'sexual condition of primitive man', and thus asserted thatevolution had occurred not towards monogamy, as in the writings of his *Adult* colleague Sagittarius, but instead in the 'direction of change from monogamy to variety'.[477] The development of human sexual behaviour, he claimed, was 'marked by a progression from isolation to sociability', and therefore monogamy represented residual barbarism as it was evidence of the 'low development of the social spirit'.[478] Authors such as this therefore drew selectively from Westermarck's work in order to create their own evolutionary sequences that led towards sexual variety. By constructing an ancient past characterised by monogamy and charting the story of human sexual behaviour away from this, authors like Northcote were able to posit sexual variety not as the behaviour of

[475] Allardt, 'Edward Westermarck', 300.
[476] Harriet D. Lyons, 'Sex, Race & Nature: Anthropology and Primitive Sexuality' in Larry Reynolds and Leonard Liberman (eds.), *Race and Other Misadventures: Essays in Honour of Ashely Montagu in his Ninetieth Year* (Dix Hills, NY: General Hall, 1996), p. 353.
[477] Northcote, 'Sex Love and Mutability', 50.
[478] Northcote, 'Anthropology and Monogamy', 434.

barbaric ancestors, but as the pinnacle of a long process of human sexual development.

By reconstructing the ancient past and charting human behaviour over time, sex radicals were participating in and drawing support from broader intellectual discussions of original human sexual behaviour and the temporal relegation of the primitive 'Other' to a stage of lesser development.[479] It is clear that many of the writers that were contributing to the same publications and moving in the same circles had very different (and often opposing) ideas about what the past looked like, how human sexual behaviour had changed and progressed over time, and therefore what kind of sexual system represented the best alternative to contemporary marriage. However, despite these internal inconsistencies and opposing agendas, sex radicals' shared use of images of the past to frame debates about sexual behaviour in the present is testament to a common desire to structure their debates about sex around key facets of anthropological thought. The figure of the primitive man, whose sexual proclivities were becoming more ambiguous in anthropological narratives towards the end of the nineteenth century, could be read, interpreted or imagined in different ways. Anthropological theories therefore offered radicals the opportunity to invent a version of the sexual past that served to justify their (often different) notions of an ideal sexual present and future.

Ethnology and the 'Comparative Method'

[479] Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. xi.

Reconstructing the sexuality of the ancient past was not the only aspect of anthropological and ethnological debates from which radicals drew to chart the development and progress of human sexuality, and thus draw support for their different ideas about viable alternatives to marriage. They also discussed and described the sexual customs of modern 'primitives' – understood in many contemporary anthropological narratives as being analogous to ancient Europeans – in order to argue that the radical alternatives they advocated represented the most advanced and civilised expression of the sexual instinct. Discussing sexual behaviours in this way ensured that the sex radicals in this circle were framing their debates about radical alternatives to marriage scientifically by using one of the most dominant and persuasive methods of contemporary anthropology. By comparing different sexual systems to the sexual behaviours of non-Western societies in their calls for sexual reform they were also attempting to tap into contemporary views about a global racial hierarchy; in this narrative there was an 'immense evolutionary gulf' between 'backward' exotic, primitive 'Others' languishing at the bottom rung of a developmental ladder, and the 'advanced' Western Europeans who had made it to the top.[480]

In the context of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Britain, arguing that a particular sexual system was a marker of racial progress would have been a potentially powerful ideological and rhetorical device. This was due to the fact that this period is widely understood to have been preoccupied by concerns about

[480] Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain 1870-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 235. For a discussion of ideas about the 'racial superiority' of Western Europeans see Julia Bush, *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 2000), p. 106.

national and racial degeneration; indeed historian George Robb has stated that late-Victorian Britain was 'haunted' by pervasive fears of degeneracy.[481] At this time degeneration signified the dark and threatening side of popular ideas about human evolutionary progress, as it was thought that if humans could develop and adapt forward out of savagery they could also lurch backwards towards their original savage state.[482] In the context of these ideas a number of worrying social concerns were all seen as evidence that the race was starting to regress and decay. Problematic issues such as the fall in the birth rate, urban poverty and disorder, and notably poor military performance in the Boer War, for example, seemed to suggest that even the British 'imperial race' - understood by many to hold a place of cultural and biological supremacy - was not safeguarded against a 'backwards slide towards the beast'.[483]

Radical discussions of the different alternatives to marriage were informed by this contemporary preoccupation with degeneracy and racial decline. In particular, authors looked to show that the different radical alternatives they advocated were as far away from savage, non-Western behaviour as possible, and therefore that they represented the most civilised and advanced expression of humanity's sexual instincts. Writers argued that living sexually civilised lives in a free love system – guided by natural, evolved sexual instincts and not by the backwards and oppressive

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[481] George Robb, 'Race Motherhood: Moral Eugenics vs. Progressive Eugenics, 1880 – 1920', in Claudia Nelson and Ann Sumner Holmes, *Maternal Instincts: Visions of Motherhood and Sexuality in Britain, 1875 – 1925* (MacMillan, 1997), p. 58.
[482] Ross Forman has discussed racialized notions of decline and ideas about human devolution in 'Empire' in Gail Marshall (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 104.
[483] Patrick Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* (Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 80.

doctrines of marriage - would work as an important impediment to racial decline. By framing their views in terms that promised to reassert and reinforce Anglo-Saxon racial supremacy, these radicals were therefore not only tapping into an influential concept in contemporary social and biological sciences to support their work; they were also drawing from widespread fears about racial decline and degeneracy to strengthen their campaigns for radical alternatives to marriage.[484]

Their preoccupation with race and their belief in a racial hierarchy dominated by Western Europeans linked these radical authors to an important set of contemporary anthropological debates. In particular, it reflects the use of the 'comparative method' in anthropological and ethnological discussions of sex occurring at this time. Radicals were drawing from contemporary scholarship that saw modern 'savages' not as lesser derivatives of the human species, but as living examples of earlier stages of human sexual development.[485] In this system it was understood that all human groups , wherever they appeared temporally or geographically, could be positioned on the same scale of development which progressed through a sequence of phases from the 'bed rock savage' towards modern, industrial society.[486] As such scholars relied on observations of groups such as Inuits, the Andamanese, and the Australian Aboriginals in order to reconstruct the

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[484] Antoinette Burton has written widely on the contemporary preoccupation with ideas about race and nation. See, *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation* (Durham N.C; London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 3; '"The Roots That Clutch": Bodies, Sex and Race since 1750', in Kate Fisher and Sarah Toulalan (eds.), *The Routledge History of Sex and the Body, 1500 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 511-526.

[485] Chris Manias, 'The Problematic Construction of 'Palaeolithic Man:' The Old Stone Age and the difficulties of the comparative method, 1859-1914' *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* (2015), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsc.2015.01.014, 1; Rudi C. Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion: Male-to-Male Sexual Behaviour outside the West and the Ethnographic Imagination, 1750 – 1918* (London: Cassel, 1996), p. 161; Fabian, *Time and the Other.*

[486] Manias, 'The Problematic Construction of 'Palaeolithic Man', 1.

sexual practices of the past and to draw conclusions about the most advanced sexual behaviours. For example John Lubbock, in his 1870 work on *The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man*, discussed the various marriage customs of such groups as the contemporary Indian 'hill tribes of Chittagong'[487], the 'Mandingoes of West Africa'[488] and the 'Arawaks of South America'[489] as broadly representative of both the 'primitive' and the 'earliest social condition of man'.[490] Anthropologists like Lubbock were therefore not only creating a developmental ladder that simply ran from past to present; they also relied on a model that understood modern savages as present, living examples of humanity's original state. This idea that indigenous populations represented 'living fossils' led to the belief that ethnographic observations could chart the evolutionary processes that established the 'White European as the most adapted and developed subspecies of all'.[491]

Radicals adapted and drew from these ideas in their advocacy of various alternatives to marriage. Monogamist free lovers, in particular, found support for their alternative to marriage in a narrative that charted human development towards sexual exclusivity. One *Adult* author argued that monogamy was an important facet of a culture 'higher in the scale of evolution and civilisation'.[492] In support of this he drew from ethnographic scholarship to state that 'Turkey is polygamic, the Sandwich Islands are (or were) promiscuous'.[493] These examples reflect the influence of a

[487] John Lubbock, *The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1898), p. 80.
[488] Ibid, 83.
[489] Ibid, 82.
[490] Ibid, 98.
[491] Bleys, *The Geography of Perversion,* p. 162.
[492] Sagittarius, 'Sexual Freedom', 45.
[493] Ibid..

notable body of ethnological and anthropological work; among others, Lewis Henry Morgan's important 1877 *Ancient Society* had discussed the sexual customs of the Sandwich Islands in depth, and they were later discussed in Engel's important *Origin of the Family* (which was subtitled 'in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan).[494] Demonstrating a belief in a sexual hierarchy in which Western European customs were at the top, monogamist free lovers compared these customs unfavourably to the more 'civilised' monogamic conventions of contemporary England and Germany.[495] Reflecting this approach, former Legitimation League president Wordsworth Donisthorpe argued that there had been a 'gradual change from promiscuity, through polygamy, to monogamy'.[496] He claimed that among savage races of the day it was possible to see 'all the stages in actual operation … well fitted to the tribes who are passing through them' as they became more evolved over time.[497] *Freewoman* author E. G. R. Taylor (probably Eva Germaine Rimington Taylor, the first woman to hold an academic chair of geography in the United Kingdom) similarly looked to the 'polyandry practised in the restricted and unproductive area of the high valleys of the Himalayas' for support for monogamous sexual practice.[498] *Lucifer* authors also linked variety to the 'primitive' state; C. L. James, for example, drew from a variety of anthropological research in order to outline the non-monogamous sexual activities of a wide range of 'the most degraded

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[494] Lewis H Morgan, *Ancient Society; Or, Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery, Through Barbarism to Civilization* (H. Holt, 1877); Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State: in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan* (Hottingen : Zurich, 1884).
[495] Sagittarius, 'Sexual Freedom', 45.
[496] Wordsworth Donisthorpe, *Love and Law* quoted in Lucy Stewart, 'Free Thought and Free Love', *The Adult* 1:3 (October, 1897), 44.
[497] Ibid.
[498] E. G. R. Taylor, 'The Economic Basis of Polygamy', *The Freewoman* 1:17 (March 14, 1912), 332.

of savages' including the Andaman Islanders, the 'Dammaras' and 'Kerials', 'Californian Indians', and the 'Hottentots and Bushmen'.[499]

Varietist free lovers, while arguing for a much different sexual system, utilised the same approach in their publications. *Lucifer* author Jonathan Mayo Crane, for example, argued that while 'many persons regard monogamy as a sign of high development' it could instead be understood as the practice of 'the most degraded and least intelligent races of men'.[500] He discussed, for example, the monogamous habits of the 'Rock Veddahs of Ceylon, who are of such low order of intelligence that they do not even have names for numbers'.[501] Further demonstrating this approach Dora Forster argued that 'Exclusive sex possession … is a marked characteristic of the most primitive races of men, and also of the man-like apes'.[502] Like other radicals Forster also drew from the writings of Westermarck to challenge a story of human development towards monogamy, and emphasised the idea that monogamy should instead be understood as a behaviour characteristic of the 'rudest human tribes'.[503] Demonstrating her belief in the analogous relationship between ancient man and non-Western 'others', Forster commented on and compared the sexual behaviour of the 'lowest races and … the primitive ages of human history'.[504]

At a time when ideas about human development and progress permeated Western culture, the adoption such an important anthropological and ethnographical

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[499] C. L. James, 'Origin of Sex Slavery', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 2:35 (September 3, 1898), 285. James referenced a variety of anthropological and ethnological writers including McLennan and Lubbock, John Davy, Charles Lewis Metz, and John Hanning Speke.
[500] Jonathan Mayo Crane, 'Monogamy and Polygamy', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 4:6 (February 17, 1900), 41.
[501] Ibid.
[502] Forster, 'The Passing Ideal and the Coming Ideal', 11.
[503] Ibid.
[504] Ibid.

methodology would have given these radicals an authoritative scientific vantage point from which to advocate their radical views about different viable alternatives to the marriage system.[505] While their conclusions were undoubtedly different (and indeed rather more radical) than those of the anthropologists themselves, they nonetheless attempted – like writers such as John Lubbock, John McLennan, and Lewis Henry Morgan - to consider the sexual behaviours of exotic 'others' in order to discuss the origins and development of human sexual behaviour. The geopolitical context of these debates about sex meant that cross-cultural and cross-historical comparisons of a distanced, exotic 'Other' offered sex radicals debating substitutes for marriage here more than the mere credibility of an important anthropological methodology.

The emphasis placed on the analogous relationship between the modern and prehistoric primitive also allowed radicals to exploit a story of human development occurring not just over time but also over space. In this view, both monogamous and varietist sex radical alternatives to marriage did not only represent the apex of human progress from past to present; they also represented the behaviours of the advanced, civilised West. This was portrayed as existing in stark contrast to the barbaric conduct of (exotic, imagined) peoples existing outside of North-Western Europe. This approach tapped into prominent contemporary colonial anxieties about the advancement of Western civilization and the pressing danger of racial degeneration, a process that could be understood as a 'backward lapse into a more

[505] Peter J Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea* (University of California Press, 2009), pp. 274-275.

‘primitive’ stage of cultural or racial development’.[506] The discussion of ‘primitive’ behaviour in the modern world and the fears concerning the supremacy of the White European therefore provided radicals in this circle with an important tool. This narrative ensured that journal authors were able to exploit ideas about racial, as well as temporal, development in their advocacy of different alternatives to orthodox, sanctioned marriage.

Evolutionary Science, and the Journey from the Simple to the Complex

In their divisive debates about marriage alternatives, both monogamists and varietist free lovers sought to question whether the human organism had evolved and progressed towards or away from monogamous sexual practice. In doing so, they were framing their debates using ideas drawn from popular and pervasive evolutionary theories espoused by such important thinkers as Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. Some scholars, such as Richard Soloway, Cynthia Eagle Russett, and Fiona Erskine, have pointed out the ways in which theories drawn from evolutionary science reinforced the contemporary sexual status quo. They discussfor example, how evolutionary theories lentscientific authority to the concept of female inferiority and the necessity of the patriarchal family unit.[507] However, sex radical

[506] Kate Fisher and Jana Funke, “Let Us Leave the Hospital; Let Us Go on a Journey Around the World”: British and German Sexual Science and the Global Search for Sexual Variation’ in Jones, Veronika Fuechtner, Doug Haynes, and Ryan Jones (eds.) (book proposal under consideration with University of California Press; anticipated publication 2016).
[507] Soloway, for example, discusses how Darwinist science supported the idea that emancipation for women could have ‘serious implications for the future evolution of the race’. Richard A. Soloway, ‘Feminism, Fertility, and Eugenics in Victorian and Edwardian England’ in Seymour Drescher (ed.) *Political Symbolism in Modern Europe: Essays in Honor of George L. Mosse* (London: Transaction Books, 1982), p. 123. See also Fiona Erskine, ‘The *Origin of Species* and the Science of Female Inferiority’ in David Amigoni and Jeff Wallace (eds.) *Charles Darwin's the Origin of Species: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

writers in this circle interpreted theories about human evolutionary processes differently in order to try and justify sexual freedom and their different radical alternatives to marriage. Radical authors on both sides of the debate were particularly keen to chart a process of human sexual development that went from simplicity to complexity, and to argue that the particular alternatives to marriage they were proposing represented the most complex manifestation of human sexual behaviour. By emphasising the natural, biological origins of sex and charting its development in this way radicals in this circle were exploiting the intellectual authority of prevalent evolutionary theories in post-Darwinian Britain. In addition this approach allowed them topresent themselves as pioneers of progress and development in society that was dominated by fears of racial degeneration and social decline. [508]

In order to support their calls for a system of unsanctioned monogamous unions, monogamist free lovers attempted to chart a sequence of human development in which mankind moved away from promiscuity to be a monogamous animal. Proponents of this view asserted that monogamy was a characteristic of evolved man's sexual nature; reflecting the ideas of sociologist Herbert Spencer, who believed in an evolutionary transition (not just in biology, but in all spheres) from homogeneity to heterogeneity, they attempted to chart human sexual development through a primitive stage of simplicity to a more advanced stage of complexity.[509] For

[508] George Robb, 'The Way of All Flesh: Degeneration, Eugenics and the Gospel of Free Love', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6:4 (1996), 602.
[509] For information on Herbert Spencer and his evolutionary theories see David Popenoe, *Disturbing the Nest: Family Change and Decline in Modern Societies* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1988), p. 15; Michael Taylor, *The Philosophy of Herbert Spencer* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010); Guy Rocher, *Introduction to Sociology* (Academic Publishers, 1972); Nancy L. Paxton, *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer: Feminism, Evolutionism, and the Reconstruction of Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University

monogamists, sexual complexity was represented by sexual exclusivity and differentiation. *Adult* author 'Sagittarius', for example, argued that monogamy not only represented the endpoint of human's 'natural evolution' away from promiscuity but also represented 'a *differentiated* and far more complex' system than sexual variety because it required only one sexual partner.[510] He argued that this tendency towards differentiation served to suggest that sexual customs had become more discerning as mankind had evolved.[511] Like theorists such as Spencer, this author drew links between biological and social evolution. To provide evidence of the complexity of monogamy, for instance, he drew from examples from the natural sciences; he compared human promiscuity to an 'amoeba reproducing itself by simple fissure', while monogamy was seen as more akin to the common nasturtium, a beautiful flower that can only be fertilised by specific birds and insects.[512] Authors such as this therefore relied on evolutionary narratives to argue that monogamy represented a natural, complex, highly differentiated system, and ensured that 'with entire freedom of sexual choice and the elimination of all extraneous considerations' men and women would be unlikely to pursue any other kind of relationships than monogamy. [513]

But the journey mankind was seen to have taken through simplicity to complexity could be interpreted in different ways in order to support different views. Monogamist free lovers, following Spencer, saw sexual exclusivity as the most

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Press, 2014); Leonard Beeghley, 'Spencer's Theory of Kinship Evolution and the Status of Women: Some Neglected Considerations', *Sociological Perspectives* 26:3 (1983), 299-322.
[510] Sagittarius, 'Sexual Freedom', 46.
[511] Ibid.
[512] Ibid.
[513] Ibid.

complex sexual system, while advocates of sexual variety claimed monogamy was, in fact, the most simple manifestation of human sexual behaviour. In this view, the evolved man's complex sexual nature (both biological and social) was characterised by a desire for diversity; Dora Forster tellingly argued that 'in highly developed races, character and temperament are so various that bodily and mental adaptation to another can often not be found in the same individual'.[514] She contrasted this with monogamists, who she believed should be understood as 'living simple animal lives'.[515] Similarly, Leighton Pagan argued in *The Adult* that mankind's 'whole nervous development, with the gradual perfection and enlarged range of capacity of the sensory organs, brings to the fore the individuals and species most capable of appreciating the extensive range of pleasures that existence offers'.[516] Reflecting this, *Lucifer* author James S. Denson stated that 'as we become increasingly complex we must draw physical, moral, mental, aesthetic and emotional rations from an increasing number of our fellows. I am convinced that every appeal of the monogamist to the facts of human differentiation, of human evolution, must prove disastrous to his argument. I do not believe that a refined man or woman…is or can be content with only one friend of the opposite sex'.[517] Furthermore, American free lover E. C. Walker argued that 'The boor may be satisfied to plod along through life with but one companion, and he is not so very particular about who that companion is…The man of refinement, of varied education, of complex organisation, however is

[514] Forster, 'The Passing Ideal and the Coming Ideal', 11.
[515] Dora Forster, 'Varietism', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 6:48 (December 11, 1902), 381.
[516] Leighton Pagan, 'The Judgement of Paris, Up to Date', *The Adult* 1:4 (November, 1897), 64.
[517] James S. Denson, 'Arguments That Turn On Their Users', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 2:22 (June 5, 1898), 171.

almost sure to be dissatisfied with such a life'.[518] British free lover Orford Northcote similarly argued that 'The more complex is a man's sexual nature, the less is the probability that one woman will be able to satisfy that complexity', and that variety in sexual relationships thus offered the body a 'vital change of stimuli'.[519] He contended that differentiation did not mean that man's innate sexual nature was best satisfied by one partner, but rather by many; while he acknowledged that the fact that 'civilised men differentiate in love of course involves the possibility that the differentiation may be carried to such exclusiveness that only for one woman will there be sexual desire', he nevertheless believed that 'genuine cases of such exclusiveness are extremely rare, and are pathological'.[520]

Reflecting broader ideas about the parallels between children and savages expressed in works by a diverse range of contemporary scholars, varietists also attacked the simplicity of monogamous customs in terms of it being child-like and unrefined. In an article on 'Sex Love and Mutability', for example, Orford Northcote compared the development of monogamy to variety to the progression from childhood to adulthood; 'The hunger of a baby is not complex. It receives satisfaction from maternal milk. The hunger of an adult *is* complex, and demands satisfaction from a variety of food'.[521] This drew from Haeckel's hypothesis that *ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny* – that is, that the growth of any single organism mirrors the evolution of its species. The development of a human being from birth to adulthood

[518] Edwin C. Walker, 'The Moloch of the Monogamic Ideal', 48.
[519] Northcote, 'Sex Love and Mutability', 51; Orford Northcote, 'Dress in its Relationship to Sex', *The Adult* 1:5 (December, 1897), 80.
[520] Northcote, 'Sex Love and Mutability', 51.
[521] Ibid.

was thus understood as analogous to the evolution of mankind from the crudest organisms to civilised, modern man. This equation was a prominent and enduring one, and can be found throughout contemporary accounts of evolution progress and decline. Darwin himself argued that children embodied the early stages of 'savage' human life, and the idea is used by Lewis Henry Morgan in his anthropological work on *Ancient Society*;[522] Herbert Spencer also saw evidence of the differentiation of races 'in every nursery'.[523] When radical varietist Northcote compared monogamy to the hunger of a baby, then, he was not just calling monogamists childlike; he was also arguing that they were less developed, less complex, and less evolved than varietists by placing them at the bottom of a ladder of evolutionary development. Radicals thus used this approach to attempt to naturalise sexual variety, understood as a complex and 'adult' sexual system, through the use of a teleological account of human development that moved from child to adult, and thus from savage to civilised man.

While most of the existing research on the relationship between evolutionary theories and sex radicalism has focussed on gender, analysis of this group's debates about alternatives to marriage shows that ideas about evolution and human development (both biological and social) were also being used to explore other prominent issues. As an exploration of the debate between monogamist and varietist free lovers has shown, discussions about alternatives to marriage in these journals

[522] As described in Sally Shuttleworth, *The Mind of the Child: Child Development in Literature, Science, and Medicine 1840-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 229; Lewis H Morgan, *Ancient Society; Or, Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery, Through Barbarism to Civilization* (New York: H. Holt, 1877), p. 527.
[523] Herbert Spencer, *Progress: Its Law and Cause* (New York: J. Fitzgerald & co.: 1881), p. 237.

were structured around and informed by notions of simplicity, backwardness, immaturity, regression, and arrested development drawn from a diverse range of evolutionary theories. However divisive their debates, or disparate their views about the nature of mankind's innate sexuality, the aim for all these radicals was the same – to chart a progressive evolutionary sequence at which their chosen alternative to marriage was at the apex. What was up for grabs here was therefore not only the credibility afforded by scientific justification; evolutionary theories also offered radicals the opportunity to establish their chosen alternative to marriage as the potential antidote to human decline. Their argument that a particular alternative was representative of human progress, or of civilisation and complexity over savagery, would therefore have been an important ideological and rhetorical tool in a society haunted by the spectre of social and racial degeneration.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the divisive debates surrounding what constituted the best alternative to the contemporary marriage system. It has shown that although radicals were united by their criticisms of what they saw as the oppression of marriage there was no single, specific, agreed upon alternative. Instead of coming together to advocate a particular mode of living, radicals instead clashed on the issue of whether unsanctioned sexual unions should be monogamous, or whether they should be open to sexual variety in its diverse forms. Those historians that have explored *fin-de-siècle* sex radicalism have often ignored this fact, which has served to homogenise contemporary sex radical views. However, an exploration of their different views on the issue of what constituted the best alternative to marriage

instead shows that this group was better characterised by diversity, division and debate than by coherence or unity. In essence, the exploration of debates about monogamous and non-monogamous alternatives to marriage here shows that these radicals never agreed on a single preferred system to take the place of marriage. While some contributors advocated a system of unsanctioned but exclusive monogamous relationships, others had a rather different agenda and argued that relationships should involve non-exclusive, 'varietist' sexual activity.

Regardless of the disparity between monogamist and varietist views, we should be careful not to let the divisive nature of these debates obscure the way that radicals framed and articulated their discussions of possible alternatives to marriage in similar ways. In particular, free lovers on both sides of the debate attempted to show that their chosen system was the outcome of millennia of progress and development, and thus represented the manifestation of the best and most evolved version of human sexual nature. As this chapter has shown, in order to do this they relied on scientific ideas drawn from a number of scientific disciplines. Through anthropology radicals were able to chart the development of different sexual behaviours over time, and thus sought to argue that their views represented the apex of human development. Anthropological and ethnological ideas also allowed them to contrast their version of sexual freedom with the behaviours of savage and uncivilised others, allowing for links to be drawn between advocacy of free love and the civilisation of man. Ideas drawn from evolutionary biology also provided an important framework, as they supported author's visions of a human organism that had evolved towards sexual freedom. This scientific framework, I argue, means we

should understand the sex radical thought of both monogamists and varietists as existing alongside and in conversation with much broader scientific investigations of the change and development of human sexual behaviour.

A shared investment in the importance of scientific ideas did therefore not provide radical authors with a single or definitive answer to their questions about what sexual freedom looked like, and how it should be lived day to day. Indeed, as I have shown in this chapter, radicals interpreted scientific theories in a number of different ways, and thus formed and articulated notably different ideas about sexual freedom in their work. This is not only seen in radicals' debates about the best alternative to marriage; as the following chapter will show, a shared investment in thinking about sex 'scientifically' also framed their contentious debates about reproduction, eugenics, and the possibility of equal sexual freedom for both men and women.

Chapter 5

Women, Reproduction, and the Question of Equality

As I have shown in the previous chapter, different interpretations of scientific theories and the 'true' sexual nature of mankind allowed for vastly different notions of sexual freedom to exist side by side in sex radical literature. This not only led to divergence between authors on what represented the best, most evolved or developed alternative to marriage, it also caused divisive debates about exactly who was capable of achieving sexual freedom. In particular, sex radical authors exploited scientific frameworks in different ways in order to discuss the issue of gender, and to debate whether women were capable of being sexually free.[524]

This tension around sexuality and gender is especially clear when examining the sex radicals' discussions of reproduction, motherhood and maternity. As this chapter will go on to show, many sex radical authors were fundamentally at odds with each other about the role of women in a system of sexual freedom. While a number of male free love advocates debated their sex radical politics around maintaining male domination and thus emphasised female inferiority and vulnerability, numerous radical women used their female reproductive capacities to present themselves as champions of progressive social and racial change. Showing that there were inherent inconsistencies and tensions at the heart of free love debate, this has distinct ramifications for the way that we understand sex radicalism

[524] Parts of this chapter appear in Sarah L. Jones, 'Gender, Reproduction and the Fight for Free Love in the Late Nineteenth-Century Periodical Press' in Rae Ritchie, Susan Hawkins, Nicola Phillips, and Jay Kleinberg (eds.), *Women In Magazines: Research, Representation, Production and Consumption* (Abingdon: Routledge, forthcoming 2016).

at this time. This chapter will illustrate that radicals did not use the journals to promote one particular set of beliefs, but rather used them as a rhetorical space in which to negotiate integral aspects of radical thought: Who would benefit most from the lifting of restrictions they believed had been placed on sexuality? What was the most responsible and rational course of action? Who was actually capable of achieving sexual freedom? A consideration of the implicit gender questions in debates about reproduction in the journals therefore shifts the portrayal of free love from an indistinct set of radical sexual behaviours and beliefs to a more sophisticated negotiation of some of the most vibrant and topical debates of the time, engaging with questions about gender, sexuality and the rights and roles of women in late nineteenth-century society.

That these negotiations were framed using theories about sexual difference, the evolution of the species, and the progress of the race is also particularly significant. It demonstrates the ways in which radicals interpreted and drew from a range of scientific theories about the sexual development of mankind in different ways in order to posit their own often conflicting beliefs as logical, progressive, and grounded in nature. Drawing from the evolutionary theories of prominent intellectuals such as Charles Darwin, Jean-Baptise Lamarck and Herbert Spencer ensured that arguments from both sides of this debate were couched within the seemingly rational and credible framework of the science of human progress. It is therefore important that the sex radicals in this circle should not be understood as merely taking part in an isolated argument about the potential of women to achieve sexual freedom. Rather they should be recognised as participating in broader intellectual debates

about the progress of the race, the sexual development of mankind, the nature of women and the impact of the maternal function, and the proper role of women in wider society occurring at this time.

This study adds to a growing body of research that explores the relationship between evolutionary theories, eugenic ideas, and sex radical movements. Recent research by Jesse Battan, for example, has discussed the links between radicals' calls for improved rights for women and their eugenic aims.[525] Literary scholar Wendy Hayden has similarly considered how feminist free lovers in America used scientific rhetoric to promote sexual rights and reproductive freedom for women.[526] For the most part historical research in this area has focussed on free love movements in the United States; it is so far only really George Robb who has explored the way that British sex radicals exploited ideas about degeneration and declining racial health in their agitation for sexual reform.[527] The consideration of sex radical debates in this chapter can therefore contribute something new to existing research on women, reproduction, and sex radicalism. Firstly, an in depth analysis of the journals can give us a deeper understanding of how and why radical authors –

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[525] Jesse F. Battan, '"Sexual Selection" and the Social Revolution: Anarchist Eugenics and Radical Darwinism in the United States, 1850 – 1910' in Jeannette Eileen Jones and Patrick B. Sharp (eds.) *Darwin in Atlantic Cultures: Evolutionary Visions of Race, Gender and Sexuality* (New York; London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 33-52.
[526] Wendy Hayden, *Evolutionary Rhetoric: Sex, Science, and Free Love in Nineteenth-Century Feminism* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013); Wendy Hayden, '(R)Evolutionary Rhetoric: Science and Sexuality in Nineteenth Century Free Love Discourse' *Rhetoric Review* 29:2 (2010), 111–128.
[527] George Robb, 'The Way of All Flesh: Degeneration, Eugenics and the Gospel of Free Love', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6:4 (Apr., 1996), 589-603. See also George Robb, 'Race Motherhood: Moral Eugenics vs. Progressive Eugenics, 1880 – 1920', in Claudia Nelson and Ann Sumner Holmes, *Maternal Instincts: Visions of Motherhood and Sexuality in Britain, 1875 – 1925* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 1997), pp. 58-75. There has also been some limited research about sex radicalism and eugenics outside of Britain and America. See, for instance, Richard Cleminson, *Anarchism, Science and Sex: Eugenics in Eastern Spain, 1900-1937* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000).

and particularly radical women - in both Britain and America drew from scientific theories to support their calls for sexual reform. Furthermore, by exploring the specific theories and ideas that framed radical debates about motherhood and maternity it can offer an important insight into the way that radical publications were participating in broader contemporary debates about the rights and roles of women in society on both sides of the Atlantic.

This chapter will examine both sides of the debates about motherhood, reproduction, and the capacity of women to achieve sexual freedom. It will begin by exploring the views of those sex radicals that believed that women were less able to achieve sexual freedom due to the evolution of the maternal body and their unique capacity for motherhood. It will show that these radicals were invested in the idea that women had evolved differently from men, and were therefore seen to be less well adapted (both physically and mentally) for sexual freedom. It will demonstrate that these ideas were clearly framed and supported by evolutionary theories of sexual difference espoused by important contemporary thinkers such as Herbert Spencer, Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, and Charles Darwin. As the chapter will then go on to illustrate, however, feminist sex radicals rejected the idea that the social and sexual subordination of women was evolutionarily defined. While many of these authors did not refute that the sexes had evolved differently, they vehemently denied that this made women inferior; instead they attempted to answer claims about female physical and mental inferiority with their own particular eugenic narrative, drawn from prominent evolutionary theories, which glorified women's distinctive reproductive power. Exploring these debates in this way will not only

illustrate the internal tensions surrounding gender that lay at the heart of this sex radical group; its examination of the scientific theories that framed these contentious discussions will also highlight the specific links between radical debate and broader considerations of the evolutionary development of the sexes and the rights and roles of women in society.

Sexual Difference and the Evolution of Inequality

Reflecting their understanding of sexuality as outlined in the opening chapter, assumptions about the centrality of women's reproductive role and the belief in fixed biological sex difference structured the sex radical politics of contributors to these journals. On one side of debate there were writers with grave concerns about the ability of women to achieve a level of sexual freedom equal to that of men, as women were seen as being unable to continue living a free love 'lifestyle' after the birth of a child. Unlike men, who it was assumed bore little responsibility for their offspring, many believed that the free-loving mother would be burdened by her supposedly 'natural' responsibility towards her children. These ideas were based on a set of assumptions about the biology and psychology of the reproductive woman, and beliefs about the negative impact of child-bearing on women's physical and mental abilities.[528] Reflecting a reproductive double standard present in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that viewed the male reproductive apparatus as a source of power, but the female equivalent as a physical handicap, some authors were convinced that sexual inequality – even in a free love system –

[528] On the way science was used to legitimate ideas about sexual difference, see Ornella Moscucci, *The Science of Woman: Gynaecology and Gender in England, 1800-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

was biologically fixed and thus fundamentally natural. This viewpoint allowed some writers to deliberate a set of free love beliefs that challenged monogamous sexual customs, while upholding a gender status quo that sustained the social and sexual subordination of women and privileged male sexual expression. It also allowed them to tap into a set of prominent scientific theories that served to justify the subordination of women not only in radical circles but also in wider society.

These radical discussions drew from a long tradition of debates about differences between the sexes. Before the seventeenth century, Thomas Laqueur has argued, the views of Classical Greek writers prevailed.[529] According to writers like Galen, women were not seen as to be a separate sex but rather a lesser version of man.[530] In this model, women and men were in essence the same sex, but women lacked the 'heat' required to produce man's physically perfect form. These similarities extended even to reproductive organs and Galenic diagrams of male and female bodies, for example, show them with analogous organs.[531] In these images female ovaries were understood to be equivalent to testicles; the womb and vagina were thought to be an inverted penis.[532] However, by the end of the eighteenth century there was increased belief in the idea that the sexes were inherently different. The Enlightenment had seen the rising cultural authority of science and medicine, and as such scientific and medical understandings of gender began to replace 'divinely ordained hierarchies or immemorial custom as the basis for the

[529] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).
[530] Ibid, 149.
[531] Barbara Caine and Glenda Sluga, *Gendering European History: 1780- 1920* (London: Leicester University Press 2000), pp. 10-11.
[532] Ibid.

creation or distribution of power in relations between men and women'.[533] In this view, woman was no longer a lesser man but an entirely different type of human; her skeleton was now depicted as being different to that of a male, and the difference between the penis and uterus was increasingly seen as a specific determinant of woman's social role as wife and mother.[534] Rousseau famously synthesised this view in *Emile* (1762) in which he discussed how woman, unlike man, was irrevocably bound to her reproductive role: 'everything constantly recalls her sex to her, and to fulfil its functions, an appropriate physical constitution is necessary to her … the rigid strictness of the duties owed by the sexes is not and cannot be the same'.[535] It was now nature, and not God, who defined gender roles, and as such many were invested in the idea that biological differences (and in particular the maternal role) could justify women's place in the social order.[536]

The course of the nineteenth century saw increasing stress placed on ideas of sexual differentiation and hierarchy. This emphasis was spurred on by contemporary interest in evolutionary theories of adaptation and differentiation prevalent in work like Darwin's *Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871). It was also motivated by anxieties about the changing role of women in society as reforms in

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[533] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, p. 193.
[534] A number of historians have highlighted the increasing differentiation in images of men and women. See for example Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 29; Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 90-91.
[535] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile, ou De l'éducation* (1762). This work, originally published in French, was translated and published in English in 1763.
[536] For information about that way that biological differences were used to justify women's social role in the enlightenment see Moscucci, *The Science of Woman*, pp. 3-4; Ornella Moscucci, 'Hermaphroditism and Sex Difference: The Construction of Gender in Victorian England' in Marina Benjamin (ed.), *Science and Sensibility: Gender and Scientific Enquiry, 1780-1945* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p. 175.

education, as well as increasingly loud calls for female suffrage and demands for changes to personal (particularly marital) relationships, all threatened to destabilise a contemporary domestic ideology centred around the idea of 'separate spheres'.[537] In the face of this challenge, theories from disciplines such as biology, physical anthropology, psychology, physiology and sociology were marshalled in order to examine the inherent differences between the sexes that could explain and justify their different social roles. Many scientific works created within this context argued that women were fundamentally different – and indeed innately inferior - to men in anatomical, psychological, and intellectual terms. A range of contemporary scientists envisioned a set of biological distinctions, particularly related to the female reproductive functions, that they saw as demonstrative of the less developed nature of women. In this view, woman was less evolved than man as she needed to conserve energy for the taxing reproductive process. In addition, research into women's reproductive organs (particularly concerning the function of the ovaries) and the idea that they made women more instinctual allowed for clear links to be drawn between the human and the animal.[538] Woman's natural maternal role, then, was understood to have confined her to a lesser stage of human development, more akin to animals, children, or primitive man than the civilised white male. It also served to validate her subordinate social role by stressing that women's function,

[537] Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 40.
[538] Moscucci, *The Science of Woman,* p. 34.

ordained by nature and millennia of evolutionary change, was to be little more than the 'reproductive servants of the race'.[539]

As such, as historians we should not understand scientific discussions of sexual difference at this time as an objective discussion of women's biological makeup or the production of children, but rather as being inextricably embroiled in divisive and topical contemporary debates about the 'Woman Question'. By discussing the issue of maternity in terms of 'natural', evolutionarily defined sexual difference, the sex radicals in this circle were therefore not only taking part in an isolated argument about the potential of women to achieve sexual freedom. As analysis in this chapter will go on to show, they were also drawing from and intervening in broader intellectual debates about the impact of the reproductive function and the rights and roles of women in society. However radical their conclusions were, these radicals should be recognised as being part of broad intellectual circle, drawing material from a variety of sources, which sought to understand issues of sex and gender in rational and scientific terms.

Some writers in the journals drew from contemporary ideas about sexual difference as they linked the fact that women, and not men, bore children to their conviction that women were the physically and mentally inferior sex and were thus naturally subject to male authority. In this view, biological differences meant that gender inequality was an inevitable outcome of evolutionary processes. Second *Adult* editor Henry Seymour, for example, saw maternity as one of the 'natural

[539] From *Obstetrical Journal of Great Britain and Ireland* (1874) in Moscucci, *The Science of Woman,* p. 36.

disabilities of women'.[540] The idea that 'woman [was] naturally inferior, in her locomotive and mental systems, to man', in his view, explained her 'natural subjectivity', and he argued that 'no social rectification of the natural inequality can ever make possible an equality of the sexes unless by some revolutionary process of sexual inversion men take to bearing half the babies'.[541] While Seymour did not provide particular scientific rationale for his deductions, he nevertheless clearly linked women's perceived inferior position to her physical reproductive role. He questioned the very possibility of sexual emancipation of women in these terms: 'Is she really physically constructed so as to enjoy an equality of liberty with man? Does not the maternal function at once condemn her to an inferior plane of freedom?'[542] Similarly, John Banaston argued that 'physical equality she can never have, of limbs, of intellect or of generative and athletic liberty'.[543]Other contributors agreed. 'Egeria', for instance, argued that since women's lives were 'liable to physiological interruptions' they would never achieve the 'full development of her powers'.[544] While women had the capacity for genius, this writer believed, this could 'never really be proved, as the bulk of the work of society must always be carried on by men', due to the burdens of the maternal role.[545]

A particularly clear demonstration of the belief that female inferiority was linked to her role in the human reproductive can be found in the contributions of R. B. Kerr. For example Kerr, who contributed to all of the journals considered in this

[540] Henry Seymour, 'The Poetry of the Passions', *The Adult* 1:5 (December, 1897), 91.
[541] Henry Seymour, 'The Question of Children: A Symposium', *The Adult* 2:6 (1898), 166.
[542] Ibid.
[543] John Banaston, 'The Moribund Morality', *The Adult* 3:2 (February, 1899), 31.
[544] Egeria, 'The Economic Position of Women', *The Adult* 2:6 (January, 1898), 176.
[545] Ibid.

thesis, argued in 1898 that 'as a social ideal bare equality of opportunity between the sexes must be condemned as entirely unscientific and untenable'.[546] The untenable nature of total equality, he claimed, was due to the 'fundamental distinction between a man and a woman'.[547] Man, he believed 'was so constructed that all his powers can be applied to the advancement of his own personal objects. In him there is hardly any sacrifice at all of the individual to the perpetuation of the species'.[548] Kerr contrasted this sharply with women who, he stated, was 'sacrificed to a great extent to the continuation of the race [as] a large amount of her energy is expended in connection with those functions and their organs'.[549] Therefore, reflecting views expressed elsewhere in the journals, for this author the disabilities entailed on women by this physiological distinction between the sexes was too great for equality to be possible. As Kerr himself asserted, 'The long and short of the matter is that women are not able to fight the battle of life on an equality with men. They are rendered unable to do so by the fact that in them the individual is to a great extent sacrificed to the species'.[550]

This belief in female inferiority clearly reflects a double standard surrounding reproduction present in the late nineteenth century that viewed the female reproductive system as a source of physical deficiency.[551] This view was drawn from ideas about the way that men and women had evolved differently, each naturally adapted to a particular biological and social role. For example in his *Principles of*

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[546] R. B. Kerr, 'The Logic of Chivalry', *Lucifer the Light-Bearer* 2:49 (December 10, 1898), 395.
[547] Ibid.
[548] Ibid.
[549] Ibid.
[550] Ibid.
[551] Russet, *Sexual Science,* pp. 30-31.

Biology Herbert Spencer described the sacrifice of energy that reproduction required of women; this sacrifice, he claimed, confined them to a stage of arrested development as they were unable to spare the energy required to achieve the same physical and intellectual capacities as men.[552] Similarly, Henry Maudsley discussed the 'natural physical drain' of maternity and argued that it would be injurious for women to pursue roles outside of motherhood as 'When Nature spends in one direction, she must economise in another direction'.[553] Patrick Geddes and J Arthur Thomson also famously discussed the biological differences between the sexes in *Evolution of Sex* (1889). As Cynthia Eagle Russet has shown, in this work they described how women had evolved to conserve energy for reproduction and had thus become 'fragilely attractive' while men, unburdened by maternity, grew to be 'muscular and courageous'.[554] Any significant change in the role of women was therefore understood be both potentially injurious and fundamentally unattainable; as Geddes and Thomson asserted, 'What was decided among the prehistoric *Protozoa* can not be annulled by an act of parliament'.[555] Any transgression from these biologically determined gender spheres had potentially harmful effects. Richard Soloway has shown how women who 'pushed the boundaries' of their sphere provoked vocal disapproval from medical men who believed it could lead to a host of

[552] Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Biology Vol. II* (D. Appleton: New York, 1898), p. 486. For further information on Spencer's idea about evolution see Nancy L Paxton, *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer: Feminism, Evolutionism, and the Reconstruction of Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p.120. Historians have noted the influence of Spencer on other contemporary radicals. Peter Morton, for example, has studied the relationship between Spencer and Grant Allen, author of notorious free love novel *The Woman Who Did.* Peter Morton, *"The Busiest Man in England" Grant Allen and the Writing Trade, 1875-1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
[553] Henry Maudsley, *Sex in Mind and Education* (C. W Bardeen: New York, 1884), p. 5.
[554] Russet, *Sexual Science,* pp. 30-31.
[555] Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex* (London: Walter Scott, 1889), p. 267.

problems, including 'masculinising sterility, certifiable lunacy, or terminal cancer'.[556] Therefore in this view if change *did* occur it could be understood as a form of degeneration – an undoing or falling away of evolutionary processes that had decreed the sexes fundamentally different.

In these accounts, nature declared women the physically inferior sex, and authors drew from scientific ideas in order to highlight the tremendous burden placed on them by their reproductive role. Those radicals who argued that women were physically unsuited for sexual freedom thus drew from a significant intellectual understanding of sex that saw women as inherently and ineradicably different and inferior to men due to her physical role in the human reproductive cycle. Therefore, when radicals such as Herbert Edwards claimed that 'man has a physiological advantage, which must for ever place him in a position of greater sexual freedom than the woman' due to the fact he was not called upon to bear children, they were not simply commenting on the gender politics of free love; they should also be understood to be tapping into more widespread scientific interest in sexual difference and how this could be used to justify the continued subordination of women.[557]

Radicals further emphasised the inferiority and arrested development of women by discussing what was understood to be woman's 'savage' and animalistic state. Orford Northcote, for instance, discussed the naturally dependent nature of women by comparing them to his pets. He argued that women needed the support of men due to the 'hereditarily-acquired instinct that the companionship of the male [is]

[556] Soloway, 'Feminism, Fertility, and Eugenics', 122.
[557] Herbert Edwards, 'The Question of Children', *The Adult* 2:3 (April, 1898), 67.

necessary for the preservation of offspring'; his evidence for this, he rather cheerfully admitted, was 'pure speculation, but is founded on observations I have made upon the sexual habits of the domestic cat'.[558] Similarly, as discussed in chapter one, W.M.G used what they saw as the 'relative dispassionateness of female brutes', characterised by the contrast between the 'fierce passion of the bull and the apparent passivity of the cow', to comment on female sexuality and the maternal instinct.[559] In *Lucifer,* Albert Chavannes used similar themes in his contributions; he supported his view that the 'male is the result of a higher state of development' by examining changes in female chickens and cattle.[560] This approach of linking women to animals drew from ideas about the instinctual nature of women, as well as contemporary interest in theories of recapitulation – a biogenetic theory popularised by Ernst Haeckel that argued that the development of every individual mirrored the development of the species. In this view, civilised man 'only became man after traversing transitional organisatory states which assimilate him first to fish, then to reptiles, then to birds and animals'.[561] While men were thought to have become fully developed and therefore representative of the most advanced stage of human evolution, women lagged behind at the same stage as the animal. These radicals' use of animal analogies to describe human maternity, then, used a particular scientific framework to emphasise women's savage state, and also to highlight her perceived place on the lower rungs of the evolutionary ladder. This not only brought into question their capacity for sexual freedom and emphasised the centrality of men

[558] Orford Northcote, 'Sex Love and Mutability', *The Adult* 1:4 (November, 1897), 51.
[559] W.M.G, 'A Note on Woman's Love', *The Adult* 2:5 (June, 1898), 144.
[560] Albert Chavannes, 'Regulating the Sex', *Lucifer, the Light-bearer* 12:33 (January 31, 1896).
[561] Etienne Serres, quoted in Russett, *Sexual Science*, 50.

to sex radical campaigns; it also helped justify women's inferior position in the broader contemporary social hierarchy.

Like many of the widespread scientific texts of the nineteenth century that emphasised the mental and physical inferiority of women, some writers in *The Adult* stressed women's apparent intellectual mediocrity, her social and financial vulnerability and her savage, animalistic nature.[562] This rhetorical tactic provided them with an apparently solid, biological vantage point that legitimated their reservations about the implementation of increased sexual freedom for women. In this instance, by establishing female mental and physical inferiority as a biological 'fact', writers like Seymour, Northcote and Edwards were able to argue for a new moral and ethical code that considered sexual freedom for men but continued to subordinate women in social and sexual terms. While they acknowledged the mistreatment of women in contemporary marriage and challenged traditional monogamous customs that they argued fell 'so very short of the ideal', they did not advocate a system of total sexual equality due to the concerns that, under freedom, woman would 'be doomed … to go to the dogs'.[563] As historian Joanne Passet has noted, radical writers like Seymour who held this view had 'a vision of a new world order in which patriarchy remained intact'.[564] While writers such as these sought to change the way that people thought about sex and marriage, their reforms did not advocate change to an extent that would allow women any increased sexual

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[562] Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: Feminism, Sex and Morality* (London: Tauris Parke, 2002), pp.73-4. Bland discusses the construction of the idea of mentally and physically inferior women in popular nineteenth-century scientific texts, including the commonplace comparison of women and the 'lower races'.
[563]Seymour, 'The Poetry of the Passions', 90.
[564] Joanne Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 2003), p. 4.

freedom. In this view, the reproductive function of women was too dangerous, and indeed too debilitating, to allow women to experience the same sexual freedom as men in a free love system.

But attempts to challenge notions of female sexual freedom within sex radical circles should not be understood as an isolated attack on female liberty. The way that these radicals relied on prevalent scientific ideas about the physical and mental burdens of motherhood, notions of sexuality that emphasised woman's animalistic and instinctual nature, and her lower place on the evolutionary ladder suggest they were taking part in a much wider exploration of woman's nature and her subsequent place in contemporary society. Through an emphasis on biological differentiation between the sexes and the adaptation towards specific social roles, radicals were able to both question notions of female sexual freedom within their own circles and challenge more widespread feminist agitation for increased rights for women. While their views about male sexual freedom were undoubtedly unorthodox radical authors, like many scientific writers, were attempting to justify and explain women's secondary social position by emphasising man's physical and intellectual superiority and women's 'naturally' defined passive, maternal role. Journals such as those discussed here can therefore not only tell us about the internal gender politics of a sex radical group; they can also be used as an important source to explore the way that scientific ideas were used to understand and describe sexual difference within the context of broader anxieties about the changing role of women in contemporary society.

Female Superiority and the Power of Motherhood

However, the journals were characterised by diverse voices and offered writers with opposing views a rhetorical space in which to challenge the idea that women were the inferior sex.[565] While they did not attempt to refute the idea that men and women had evolved to be naturally different, sex radical feminists rejected the idea that this made women inferior and instead countered assertions of female physical and mental inferiority with their own particular eugenic narrative that glorified women's distinctive reproductive power. In this view, allowing women free sexual choice, regardless of marital status and based solely on individual desire, ensured they would produce strong, healthy, free children. Far from representing an obstacle, to these writers reproduction signified the unique power of women to become harbingers of sexual equality and racial improvement. Writers such as Lillian Harman and Dora Forster used the idea that sexually free women produced stronger, healthier children than women held within the confines of monogamous marriage to heavily criticise contemporary marriage customs from a racial vantage point, and allowed them to emphasise the importance of free female sexual choice.[566] By arguing that women had the power to impede national and racial decay by producing healthy children they countered assertions of female inferiority from writers within their own circles by placing women at the heart of their campaigns for reform. But their views had further ramifications; by emphasising women's vital role

[565] Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell, for example, have argued that while periodicals often present the 'illusion of unity' they were in fact formed by the 'multi-vocal discourse' of editors, writers, and readers. Laurel Brake and Julie F. Codell (eds.), introduction to *Encounters in the Victorian Press: Editor, Authors, Readers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 1-2.
[566] Canadian sex radical Dora Forster also wrote under the name Dora Kerr after her marriage to prominent Canadian radical Robert Bird Kerr. Forster's involvement in sex radical circles on both sides of the Atlantic is discussed in Angus McLaren, 'Sex Radicalism in the Canadian Pacific Northwest, 1890 – 1920', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2:4 (April, 1992), 527-546.

as ‘mother of the race’ they were able to challenge more widespread – and indeed scientifically reinforced - ideas about women’s naturally subordinate role.

These debates emerged against the backdrop of particular contemporary intellectual interest in reproduction and the health of the race. Partly, this interest was linked to the fear of racial decline that was widespread and entrenched in the authoritative framework of evolutionary science. In the wake of the popularisation of evolutionary theories from the mid-century, the decline of the race was understood in biological terms; the falling birth rate, inadequate military performance, the rise of the urban poor, and the spread of disease were all seen as evidence of the race entering ‘a downward spiral of reverse evolution’.[567] In addition, advances in the science of embryology over the course of the century had led to the discovery that the human organism was not preformed but rather open to the possibility of influence throughout the stages of its development.[568] This raised questions about the impact of parents, and particularly mothers, on their unborn children. Debates about reproduction were also influenced by sociological theories. Thomas Malthus, whose *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) had influenced Darwin’s work through his theories about natural selection due to competition for resources, had introduced questions about the need to limit the population in order to ensure there was enough sustenance to support it.[569] Social scientist Herbert Spencer was also influenced by

[567] Robb, ‘Race Motherhood: Moral Eugenics vs. Progressive Eugenics’, 58. Contemporary fears about degeneration are also discussed in Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c.1848–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Richard G. Olson, *Science and Scientism in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).
[568] Hayden, *Evolutionary Rhetoric*. See also Joseph Needham and Arthur Hughes, *A History of Embryology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
[569] Lance Workman, for example, has identified Darwin’s reading of Malthus as a ‘critical step in the argument that Darwin was beginning to develop since it focussed his mind on the notion of competition for survival’. Lance Workman, *Charles Darwin: The Shaping of Evolutionary Thinking*

these ideas: the concept (usually erroneously attributed to Charles Darwin) of the 'survival of the fittest' introduced in his 1864 *Principles of Biology* drew from the idea that the struggle for resources would encourage the strongest of the species to thrive.[570] Ideas about the control of the population were also prevalent in the works of Darwin's cousin, Frances Galton. Galton, who famously coined the term 'eugenics' in 1886, argued that the race would degenerate if allowed to reproduce unchecked and thus advocated conscientious, selective breeding in order to stop this degeneracy and produce better quality offspring.[571] In particular, he emphasised responsibility of parents to reproduce well so as to ensure the health and superiority of their children.[572] Though the eugenics movement did not become organised until the early twentieth century, its roots can clearly be traced back to these debates occurring from the mid-1800s.[573]

(Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillian, 2014), pp. 8-9. A number of historians have discussed the influence of Malthusian ideas on Darwinian science. See for example Banu Subramaniam, *Ghost Stories for Darwin: The Science of Variation and the Politics of Diversity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), p. 50; William M. Dugger and Howard J. Sherman (eds), *Evolutionary Theory in the Social Sciences: Early Foundations and Later Contributions* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 6; Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), p. 40.

[570] Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Biology Vol. 1* (New York: D. Appleton, 1871).

[571] For information on Galton and the emergence of his ideas about eugenics see Nicholas Wright Gillham, *A Life of Sir Francis Galton: from African Exploration to the Birth of Eugenics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Daniel Winkler, 'Can We Learn From Eugenics?' *Journal of Medical Ethics* 25:2 (April, 1999), 184; Debbie Challis, *The Archaeology of Race: the Eugenic Ideas of Flinders Petrie and Francis Galton* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

[572] See Peter J. Bowler, *Charles Darwin: The Man and His Influence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 213-214.

[573] Robert Wald Sussman, *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 51. Sussman has outlined how the eugenics movement became more organised following the creation of such bodies as the German Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene (the Society for Race Hygiene) in 1904, and the British Eugenics Education Society in 1907. For more information on the emergence and later organisation of eugenics in Britain see Richard G. Olson, *Science and Scientism in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), p. 290; Donald Mackenzie, 'Eugenics in Britain', *Social Studies of Science* 6:3/4 Special Issue: Aspects of the Sociology of Science (Sep., 1976), 499-532; G. R. Searle, *Eugenics and Politics in Britain. 1900-1914* (Leyden : Noordhoff International Pub. 1976).

This scientific and sociological context can be seen to have supported the subordination of women by strengthening concepts of biological and social difference. For instance, Cynthia Eagle Russett and Fiona Erskine have both argued that evolutionary theories implicitly supported ideas of female subordination by charting processes of differentiation, thus reinforcing a model of 'separate spheres' with scientific authority.[574] In addition, a number of works have emphasised how contemporary social and medical concerns ensured woman was tied to her reproductive role; for example Russett has argued that anxieties about racial decline and the falling birth rate meant that women were thought to have 'no right to self-fulfilment that could stand for a moment against the claims of society on their wombs'.[575] Similarly, Richard Soloway argues that 'no obstacle was more difficult for feminists to overcome than this pervasive belief in a biological imperative … [that] decreed that the female had been created or had evolved for the primary purpose of reproduction and nurture'.[576] However, theories of difference did serve to emphasise the unique and important role played by women in the process of human reproduction. Therefore this idea, as well as contemporary fears about racial degeneration, the ambiguity surrounding a mother's impact on her unborn child, and

[574] Erskine, for example, calls science a 'potent weapon' and states that it 'operated to produce the physical and mental inferiority that could be proved anatomically and demonstrated empirically'. See Fiona Erskine, 'The *Origin of Species* and the Science of Female Inferiority' in David Amigoni and Jeff Wallace (eds.) *Charles Darwin's the Origin of Species: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 96. Similarly, Russett has outlined the construction of a wide range of scientific theories that served to justify women's subordinate social role. Russett, *Sexual Science*, pp. 10-11.
[575] Ibid, 123.
[576] Richard A. Soloway, 'Feminism, Fertility, and Eugenics in Victorian and Edwardian England' in Seymour Drescher (ed.) *Political Symbolism in Modern Europe : Essays in Honor of George L. Mosse* (London : Transaction Books, 1982), p. 122.

the notion that parents had a responsibility to produce superior children also provided a basis for arguments about the importance of a woman's reproductive role.

In this context, discussing women's important eugenic role was not a tactic that was confined to free love circles. Indeed writers here were also participating in a wider appropriation of ideas about the superiority and importance of women due to their maternal role undertaken by feminists across the political spectrum. Social purists, in particular, drew from eugenic ideas in their feminist campaigns. In a social purity model particularly motivated by concerns about venereal disease, the medical was conflated with the moral; prominent social purist Frances Swiney, for example, argued that 'health and morality are synonymous terms''.[577] As such it was believed that it was the virtuous and reasonable that would produce the healthiest offspring. In this view, men were characterised as degenerate and brutish with a tendency towards infidelity, promiscuity and vice. Placing responsibility for reproduction in the hands of men, then, was understood to be irresponsible as they were understood to be potential drivers of degeneration.[578] In antithesis, female sexuality was depicted in biological terms as being naturally passive and virtuous, and thus placing reproductive responsibility in her hands was seen as racially more sensible.[579] For example, in her 1899 work *The Awakening of Woman*, Swiney contrasted men's role as 'destroyers' of the race, versus the 'steadying, abiding influence' of women.[580] In

[577] Frances Swiney, *The Awakening of Women, or, Woman's Part in Evolution* (London: W. Reeves, 1899), p. 125.
[578] Angelique Richardson has shown how social purists sought to characterise vice, immorality, and degeneration as inherently linked to men and masculinity. See Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, p. 52.
[579] Ibid. Richardson has shown how a number of prominent purity campaigners, including Swiney, Jane Clapperton, and novelist Sarah Grand, used this approach. She argues that these figures used biological ideas to present women as capable of halting 'the downward slide of humanity'.
[580] Swiney, *Awakening of Women*, p. 21.

this view, shared by diverse feminist thinkers such as Elizabeth Blackwell, Sarah Grand and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a woman's maternal role (whether realised or potential) meant she could be understood to be man's moral superior due to her inherently altruistic, protective, motherly nature.[581] Eugenic feminism in this system was based around the idea that it was women – naturally less passionate, more rational and discerning – who would make the most responsible sexual choices. Reversing the androcentric bias of popular evolutionary theories of sexual selection, women were appointed as the most important agents for positive racial development.

While they shared a belief in the importance of women's biological role and exploited similar ideas about the power of 'woman as mother', sex radical feminists envisioned the eugenic impact of women's freedom rather differently to their counterparts involved with social purity. Instead of dissociating sexual passion and responsible reproduction, radicals perceived them as having an important connection. In this view, the sexual treatment of women was a key factor in the production of healthy children. Free love feminists emphasised the right of women to express her important and powerful 'natural' sexual instincts, to choose a partner she found desirable, her right to engage in pleasurable sex, the importance of being knowledgeable about her own body, and the prerogative to choose to end relationships that made her unhappy regardless of legal ties or social customs.[582]

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[581] Angelique Richardson has discussed Grand's work in depth in *Love and Eugenics* (2008). For information on Elizabeth Blackwell see Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, pp. 68-70. Perkins Gilman also subscribed to the idea that the nurturant female was a key figure for positive racial change. Her views have been discussed by a number of historians, including Fiona Erskine and Dana Seitler. See Erskine, 'The Origin of Species', 112; and Dana Seitler, 'Unnatural Selection: Mothers, Eugenic Feminism, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Regeneration Narratives', *American Quarterly* 55:1 (Mar., 2003), 61-88.

[582] This view resonates with other radical groups discussing the links between female sexual fulfilment and racial improvement at this time. For example Helene Stöcker's *Bund fur Mutterschutz* (which had

Like many contemporary feminists, feminist sex radicals agreed that the future of the race lay in the hands of women – but not because they could strip away the passionate elements from the reproductive process, but rather because a happy, independent, sexually fulfilled woman was believed to be a key agent in the production of healthy, strong children.

While certainly not alone, it was contributors allied with the North American free love movement and *The Adult's* radical American 'sister' paper *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* who most forcefully employed a eugenic discourse based around these principles to defend a woman's right to control and dictate maternity in a free love system. Writers like Lillian Harman were proponents of a system of (as historian Hal Sears has termed it) 'anarchist free love eugenics'.[583] This system of beliefs, based on an attack on monogamous customs, a rejection of the necessity of state or church sanction of unions, and an emphasis on the right of the individual to free sexual choice, was favoured by many of the most prominent names in American free love politics, including Angela and Ezra Heywood, and Harman's father Moses.[584] Moses Harman had argued in editorials, for example, that what he saw as the coercion, misery and inequality of monogamous marriage customs had 'filled the prisons and asylums and so-called civilised lands with the degenerate products… of ignorant,

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clear ties to *The Freewoman*) emphasised both women's right to sexual enjoyment and the idea that free and conscious reproduction would produce healthier children. Ann Taylor Allen has written extensively on the *Bund*; see 'Mothers of the New Generation: Adele Schreiber, Helene Stöcker, and the Evolution of a German Idea of Motherhood', *Signs* 10:3 (Spring, 1985), 418-438; *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890 – 1970: The Maternal Dilemma* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005); 'Feminism and Eugenics in Germany 1900 – 1940: A Comparative Perspective' *German Studies Review* 23:3 (October, 2000), 477-505.

[583] For a discussion of the formation and application of free love eugenic ideas in American free love movements see Hal Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Kansas: Regents Press, 1977), p. 121.
[584] Ibid.

haphazard, reckless generation'.[585] That the American free love traditions of which these authors were a part were heavily linked to interest in eugenics is clear; indeed it was prominent free lover (and *Adult* contributor) Moses Harman who had begun to publish the first periodical dedicated to eugenics in the United States - the *American Journal of Eugenics*, which ran from 1907 until 1910 - as the direct successor to *The Adult's* American 'sister' paper *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer*.[586]

Reflecting these eugenic interests, radicals in this broad circle drew from theories about heredity and the transmission of characteristics from parents to children to assert the racially harmful impact of monogamous marriage, and the importance of female autonomy for racial health.[587] In this view, the 'inharmony, degradation and cruelty' of contemporary marriage customs was seen as detrimental to racial advancement.[588] Lillian Harman, for example, relied on a stark and unforgiving portrayal of contemporary marriage characterised by 'dependence and slavery' in which insatiable men and passive, sexually apathetic women were forced, via the confines of monogamy, to continue one-sided and coercive sexual relationships.[589] The weakness and misery of women in this arrangement, she believed, would impact poorly on her children. In an editorial in *Lucifer*, for instance, she stated that, 'the enslavement of woman in these relations reacts upon the race as a whole – thereby incarnating and perpetuating slavery for all, except the

[585] Moses Harman, 'Yesterday, Tomorrow, Today', *The American Journal of Eugenics* 1 (1907), 29.
[586] Moses Harman's subtle shift from simple advocacy of women's sexual emancipation towards a more eugenic understanding of free love is discussed in Passet, *Sex Radicals*.
[587] For discussion of ideas of pre-natal influence in feminist thought see Richardson, *Love and Eugenics*, pp. 46-51.
[588] Lillian Harman, 'Some Problems of Social Freedom', *The Adult Extra* 2 (April, 1898), 11.
[589] Lillian Harman, 'The New Martyrdom', *The Adult* 1:6 (January, 1898), 156.

prenatally and postnatally favoured few'.[590] This echoed other radical's beliefs about the injurious impact of enforced motherhood; Mattie Hursen, for example, argued in 1898 that the results of 'tortured motherhood' could be seen in 'the prisons and insane asylums, and in the halt, the lame and the blind, the imbecile, the idiot children who were born with the ineffaceable brand of their father's brute nature and of the mother's slavishness on their defenceless frames'.[591] Rather than believing that the traditional morality of the passive wife and the monogamous home could keep degeneration at bay, in this narrative the impact of the characteristically subordinate mother and unrelenting father on their children was described in harsh terms: 'The unwelcome, deserted children, which in themselves are a terrible indictment of present society are the fruit of the ignorance and weakness of their mothers, of the criminal carelessness and conscienceless insistence of their fathers'.[592] Those women who were coerced into sexual intercourse that did not reflect their needs and desires, and thus into producing children they did not necessarily want, were believed to be more likely to produce weak, miserable, unhealthy children; the unhappy, unfulfilled, 'unfree' mother could therefore be understood to be causing the degeneration of the race. Indeed, Moses Harman stated that marriage and the subordination of women had deprived children of 'their right to be born well''.[593] These radicals, then, stated that the subordination and

[590] Lillian Harman, 'The University Magazine on the American Movement', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 1:24 (1897), 188-9.
[591] Mattie Hursen, Correspondence, *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 2:39 (October 1, 1898), 318.
[592] Harman, 'Eve and Her Eden', *The Adult* 2:2 (March, 1898), 32.
[593] Moses Harman, 'Why I Oppose Marriage', *The Adult* 1:6 (January, 1898), 170.

degradation of women in the home, and indeed in society more broadly, had distinctly harmful racial ramifications.

Free motherhood thus offered more than justice for women – it also promised to pass on health, strength, and freedom to the next generation. By rejecting the perceived hypocrisy of contemporary monogamous marriage and turning to a system of free love that emphasised the importance of individual, free female sexual choice, writers like Lillian Harman believed that important racial improvements could be made. Combining these ideas about the transmission of characteristics with her anarchistic eugenic views she stated her belief, for example, that 'Only from free, self-respecting mothers can the highest type of children be born'.[594] She asserted that 'happily for the higher development of the race', the children of free love advocate women would 'imbibe the spirit of their free mother, and will be happy, healthy, and independent – in marked contrast to the offspring of the 'submitting' slave mother'.[595] She asserted that mothers could 'reach their highest development only in a state of freedom', and that this development would be passed down to her children.[596] Similarly, Dora Forster emphasised the eugenic importance of producing children in a home characterised by love, happiness and vitality rather than domination and discontent.[597] Sex radicals, then, contended that the positive emotional state of the mother (safeguarded in this view by what they saw as the 'harmony' of free love relationships and the autonomy of women in unsanctioned

[594] Harman, Pen Points', 96.
[595] Ibid.
[596] Harman, 'Eve and her Eden', 34.
[597] Dora Forster, *Sex Radicalism: as seen by an Emancipated Woman of the New Time* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1905), pp. 14-15.

unions) was vital to the health and happiness of the child. Mirroring this, a *Lucifer* editorial argued that sexual freedom would 'give her absolute ownership and control over her person, not once in her life but at all times', and as such would 'give to the child a right to be born well, and the right to be reared in an atmosphere of love and concord'.[598] A happy, independent, free mother was therefore seen to play an integral part in improving the race and as such her freedom was not just a personal concern - the dynamics of private life, particularly in the realm of female sexuality and motherhood, was thought to have the potential to address pressing public problems by combatting degeneration and racial decline.

While many of the radical authors contributing to journals like *The Adult* and *Lucifer* did not tie their ideas to any specific scientific works, the focus on the transmission of characteristics and tendencies from parent to child clearly owes something to the theories of environmental influence espoused by writers such as Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, Charles Darwin, and Herbert Spencer. For example, Lamarck's evolutionary theory, outlined in his 1809 work *Zoological Philosophy*, argued that a species could acquire characteristics through adaptation to an environment and that these characteristics (usually those that heightened the chance of survival) could then be transferred to their offspring.[599] This theory 'prevailed as the dominant theory of heredity for much of the nineteenth century' and influenced a huge array of writers interested in human evolution;[600] sociologist Herbert Spencer, for instance, referenced Lamarck in the first volume of his *Principles of Biology*

[598] 'Human Rights, *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 1:17 (April 28, 1897), 133.
[599] Hayden, *Evolutionary Rhetoric*, p. 172.
[600] Ibid.

(1871).[601] Evolutionary ideas influenced by Lamarckian theories were also popularised in Darwin's *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man*.[602] Darwin's assertion in the *Origin* that variation in nature could be due to 'conditions to which either parent' were exposed, and his discussion of the 'inherited effects of habit' made in the *Descent* could be read in such a way as to support the possibility that changes to the lives of parents could have hereditarian implications.[603] Theories of inheritance inspired by Lamarck and Darwin could therefore be used by those agitating for social reform as they afforded scientific credibility to the idea that a species could work to improve itself, and pass those improvements on to the next generation. Sex radical feminists, like other contemporary advocates of social reform and women's rights, drew from a range of scientific theories in order to question the poor treatment of women and to support the idea that it was through free, happy mothers that racial advancement could be achieved.

Sex radical feminists also drew from other aspects of evolutionary thought in their work. In particular, they attempted to construct a theory of sexual selection based on Darwin's assertion that in nature males compete for the possession of females, which emphasised the importance of free female sexual choice. Darwin's theories have often been read as being anti-feminist: for some, his theory of sexual selection (set out in both *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*) in which males evolved to be stronger and fitter in order to compete for the attention of

[601] Spencer, *The Principles of Biology Vol. 1*, p. 405.
[602] The relationship between Darwinian and Lamarckian evolutionary theories is complex. While Darwin did not agree with Lamarckian interpretations of many evolutionary processes, he nonetheless used Lamarckian ideas in many of his works. For further details see, Richardson, *Love and Eugenic*, pp. 10-12.
[603] Hayden, *Evolutionary Rhetoric*, p. 173.

evermore weak and passive females, served to naturalise female subordination.[604] In this view, the physical and mental differences between the sexes were explained by natural evolutionary processes and the struggle to be the 'fittest'. As such, women's evolutionarily defined role was to be passive and subordinate to men who were deemed to be more highly evolved. However, like other contemporary feminists, sex radical feminists refuted this androcentric reading of Darwin's theories and instead shifted their emphasis to the importance of female choice in the evolutionary fight for survival. The idea that men had to prove themselves worthy of a female mate, and that she maintained the right to choose or reject him, set an important precedent in both disputes about women's potential for sexual freedom and the wider challenging of women's social role.

Sex radical feminists exploited the authority of sexual selection theories to critique contemporary marriage and to question the broader subordination of women by men. Advocates argued that women should have the same right to choose a mate as their counterparts in the animal kingdom, and that the contemporary social customs that stood in the way of free female sexual choice represented a perversion of the natural order. Drawing from these ideas, authors asserted that women who were given free rein to choose their sexual partners would without doubt 'select the fittest men for fathers', and as such they argued for a more dynamic system of

[604] Wendy Hayden includes a specific section on 'Anti-Feminist Darwin' in her work on evolutionary rhetoric and sex radicalism. See Hayden, *Evolutionary Rhetoric*, pp. 59-60. Other historians have pointed to what they see as inherent sexism in other evolutionary theories. Jill Conway, for example, discusses how the evolutionary theories of figures like Spencer and Geddes and Thompson served to justify the subordination of women by emphasising her 'natural' weakness and passivity. Jill Conway, 'Stereotypes of Femininity in a Theory of Sexual Evolution' in Martha Vicinus (ed.) *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 140-154.

relationships based on free female sexual choice. [605] For writers like Lillian Harman and Dora Kerr, monogamous marriage signified a lack of female choice and thus represented a corruption of the natural sexual urge, as it placed unnatural restrictions on women's sexuality. Drawing from ideas about sexual selection as well as the concept of pre-natal influence, Harman argued that legal marriage was a barrier to human evolution: she argued in her presidential address to the Legitimation League in 1898 and later published in *The Adult,* 'Marriage is a woman's worst enemy, and is therefore the enemy of the race'.[606] Unsanctioned relationships based around female choice were instead posited as the most progressive sexual option. Reasoning that so long as woman had a secondary social role and that her sexual instincts were hampered by monogamous sexual customs, Harman sought to undermine conventional sanctioned marriage by showing it to be retrogressive and racially damaging: In a speech given in 1898 she argued that marriage laws had 'barred the way of evolution … [and] rendered natural selection of the best human characteristics impossible, by holding together the mismated and preventing those who are adapted to each other from claiming their right to reproductive association'.[607] In this interpretation of sexual selection theories, woman's reproductive role did not mean she was naturally inferior; instead it was stated that Victorian ideas of gender had served to hinder women's natural sexual urges and distort the natural order. As one correspondent succinctly argued in *The Freewoman*, 'it is society that has wronged woman, and not Nature'.[608]

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[605] Forster, *Sex Radicalism,* p. 52.
[606] Harman, 'Some Problems of Social Freedom', 11.
[607] Hayden, *Evolutionary Rhetoric,* p. 72.
[608] Margaret E. Hill, Correspondence, *The Freewoman* 1:2 (November 30, 1911), 31.

Rather than being tied to one partner for life, as in monogamous marriage, proponents of this view instead argued for 'freedom of choice' - the right to experiment with different partners and modes of living in order to ensure that she picked the most suitable genetic mate.[609] Although Harman herself did not rule out monogamy, or any other kind of sexual relationship, she emphasised the necessity of less rigid and less permanent relationship structures. With women's freedom to choose and change a partner at will, she believed, the race would stop the degradation caused by the 'disgust, aversion, [and] rape' of monogamy and benefit from the 'harmony of feeling, and unison of desire' seen to characterise free love relations guided by the expression of 'true' and 'natural' sexual urges.[610] Echoing Harman's views, a *Lucifer* correspondent similarly called for women to have the right to 'propagate off-spring under the most favourable conditions, selecting the most magnificent men, in their estimations, for their consorts' so that the 'human race will arrive at … [a] state of perfection'.[611] The health and happiness of the race was thus seen to depend on women's natural right to choose and change her sexual partners. This view was also reflected in *The Freewoman* as Margaret E. Hill, for example, argued that the 'female should play by far the most important part in the life of the race … Not merely, as we all admit, because she bears and rears the offspring, but rather because she selects her mate'.[612] Reflecting views about the important nature of sexuality discussed throughout this thesis, these writers believed that by allowing women to be free to choose the father of her children based on love and attraction,

[609] Harman, 'Problems of Social Freedom', 9.
[610] Harman, 'Eve and her Eden', 34.
[611] Paul L. Sautter, Correspondence, *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 5:47 (December 5, 1901), 382.
[612] Hill, Correspondence, 31.

regardless of marital status, a natural sexual order would be restored. Monogamous marriage, based around the dominance of men (which Darwin himself admitted was 'exceptional' in the animal kingdom[613]), was shown to be retrogressive and racially harmful, while free motherhood was stated to be the key to a new and superior race. Claiming that free women played an integral role in continuing the progress of the race therefore represented a way in which these writers could counter assertions of female inferior in radical circles, and also attempt to renegotiate women's broader social significance.

Demonstrating the disparity of views about female sexuality and gender at the heart of free love debates in *fin-de-siècle* Britain, the emphasis placed on the importance of mothers put sex radical feminist beliefs in direct opposition to writers in their own intellectual circles that saw the maternal function as limiting for women. Far from rendering women dependent and vulnerable, this eugenic narrative, which drew from the ideas about the nature of evolution, the potential power of the maternal female body and anxieties about racial degeneration, countered assertions of female inferiority and placed the powerful reproductive woman at the forefront of campaigns for the advancement of the race and as the driving force behind her free love politics.[614] Employing the influential rhetoric of progress versus decline, which would have been a powerful tactic in the context of a racially anxious society, these authors were able to both confront the perceived injustices experienced by women in

[613] Richardson, *Love and Eugenics,* p. 55.
[614] Joanne Passet has explored links between ideas about maternal power and free love; see Passet, *Sex Radicals*, p. 153. Passet argues that, despite advocating freer sexual relationships, most free lovers did not question prevailing domestic systems and saw maternity as the inevitable outcome of female sexuality. George Robb makes a similar point, and states that for many free lovers 'Freedom from babies was unthinkable'. Robb, "The Way of All Flesh," 602.

monogamous marriage and to battle against writers within her own free love circles who attempted to use biological narratives to prioritise male sexual freedom and advocate the continued subordination of women. [615] The grounding of sex radical feminist thought in evolutionary theory was also important for agitating for wider change: an understanding of free motherhood as a catalyst of evolutionary progress not only allowed these authors to battle against writers within their own free love circles who attempted to use biological narratives to prioritise male sexual freedom, but also to participate in a wider challenging of the image of woman as inferior and thus subordinate.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored some of the complex debates occurring around motherhood, maternity and the rights of women occurring in these journals. It has shown that some male free love advocates stressed the vulnerability and inferiority of women due to their particular maternal function, and thus understood them as being essentially incapable of achieving a level of sexual freedom comparable to that accessible to men. However, radical feminist authors strongly refuted contentions of female inferiority and weakness by emphasising the power of woman due to her unique reproductive role; in particular, they argued that women should be at the forefront of campaigns for sexual freedom due to their capacity to motivate and facilitate positive racial change. There was distinct and divisive disagreement

[615] For a discussion of the powerful influence of ideas surrounding degeneration, evolution and the concept of progress see Peter Bowler, *The Invention of Progress: The Victorians and the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

between contributors to these radical journals, then, about the role of women in a system of sexual freedom. An analysis of this fundamental disparity can help us to better understand the diverse views that characterised free love and sex radicalism at this time. Furthermore, their commitment to discussing issues surrounding women's rights, motherhood, and reproduction demonstrates how their debates were informed and shaped by an engagement with broader contemporary issues. While it is easy to view highly unorthodox sex radical views as merely anomalous or peripheral to wider social concerns, their interventions into debates about gender, sexuality and the rights and roles of women in *fin de siècle* society shows that they were participating in some of the most vibrant and topical debates of the time.

By drawing from the theories of such prominent figures as Darwin, Lamarck, Galton and Spencer, radicals on both sides of this contentious debate sought to lend scientific credibility to their views. Framing their views on sexual freedom in terms of biological sexual difference, the evolution of the species, and the progress and decline of the race ensured that the arguments of different radicals were all conveyed through the rational and credible framework of the science of human progress. That these radicals drew and interpreted material from a diverse range of scientific sources to support their arguments also helps to situate them within a broader intellectual circle. These sex radicals were not merely taking part in an isolated argument about the potential of women to achieve sexual freedom; rather it should be recognised that they were participating in broader intellectual debates about the progress of the race, the nature of women and the impact of the maternal function, and the proper role of women in wider society.

Chapter 6

Defining 'Freedom'

The previous chapters have shown that debates about what constituted 'free' love were being played out in a variety of areas. Chapter 1 illustrated sex radicals' attempts to underpin their calls for the importance of sexual reform to social reform through the use of scientific ideas. It demonstrated the ways in which radicals engaged with science in order to argue that sexuality was a powerful, natural force, and how the expression of this important 'instinct' was seen as vital to the health, development, and wellbeing of both the individual and society. Chapter 2 explored the free lovers' varied attacks on the institution of marriage, and outlined the ways in which their particular understanding of mankind's sexual nature underpinned their calls for unsanctioned sexual unions. It illustrated the way in which radicals developed a critique of matrimony which understood marriage as an institution which exerted a stifling and oppressive force against the free and right expression of an individual's natural sexuality. In short, the chapter looked to show how radical authors viewed marriages as anti-natural, and thus ill-suited to guide and govern individuals' sexual, romantic, and familial lives. Chapter 3 further investigated the idea that the suppression of sex was 'unnatural' and dangerous, and examined radical debates surrounding the danger of denying people opportunities to gain both theoretical and experiential sexual knowledge. It suggested that radicals understood the social taboo surrounding sex as harmful, and as being the root cause of a number of pressing contemporary issues. Moving away from discussions of

suppression and control, in chapter 4 I explored the different sexual systems radical authors saw as possible alternatives to existing marriage customs. I discussed, in particular, the divisive debates between monogamist and varietist free lovers who had notably different ideas about what constituted the best, most advanced, and most evolved alternative to marriage. As analysis of these debates revealed, radicals framed their views using important contemporary scientific ideas - they clearly engaged with anthropology, ethnology, and evolutionary biology when they explored ideas about the sexuality of 'other' cultures and the distant past, and notions of what constituted the most evolved manifestation of human sexuality. Chapter 5 specifically looked at the way that both sides of the divisive sex radical debates about motherhood and maternity were framed by evolutionary ideas about sexual difference, racial health, and eugenics. In its examination of the internal tensions surrounding gender in radical circles, it demonstrated that even though radicals were often divided on the practicalities of living a free love lifestyle they were nevertheless drawn together by a commitment to exploring issues surrounding sex and reproduction scientifically.

In essence, throughout this thesis I have explored the varied ways in which free lovers put a particular construction of sex at the heart of their campaigns for social reform. It has shown the different ways in which radical authors formed an understanding of sex as a powerful natural force in order to argue that it had been ill-served by the harmful controls imposed upon it by law, custom, and convention. Society, radical authors claimed, had not created structures which followed natural inclinations and evolutionary drives; instead they asserted that these structures had

served to oppress and restrict an important and powerful sexual force. Furthermore, by examining radicals' engagement with a diverse range of scientific ideas and theories, it has shown how these sex radical debates were grounded in broader intellectual (especially scientific) considerations of sex, gender, and the evolution of mankind. At the heart of the project of 'free love' or 'sex radicalism', then, was a shared belief in the importance of setting sex 'free' from the constraints placed upon it by contemporary social institutions and customs. As the previous chapters have all shown, radical authors argued that society would be improved in a variety of ways if sex was emancipated from social, political, legal, and religious controls. Journal authors, despite their various and often conflicting views, therefore shared a common cause – the creation of a new world in which free and 'natural' sexual expression, serving and responding to natural sexual inclinations, drives and desires, could exist. Therefore we cannot properly understand free love and sex radicalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries without an exploration of the crucial concept that lay at the heart of their diverse debates - freedom.[616]

Bringing together ideas discussed throughout this thesis, this chapter will show that despite the broad range of political and social agendas at play in sex radical debates, radical authors contributing to these journals were united by shared or sympathetic visions of what it meant to be sexually bound or sexually free. A consideration of what bondage and freedom meant to the sex radicals can therefore

[616] This focus on the construction of freedom resonates with research in other areas. Politics scholar Nancy J. Hirschmann, for example, has argued that understanding the way ideas about freedom are socially constructed (both as a practice and also as a legal and moral principle) represents a key way of understanding 'the self and the self's relation to the world'. Nancy J. Hirschmann, *Gender, Class, and Freedom in Modern Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 287-289.

help us to better understand the ideas, beliefs, and values that lay at the heart of this radical community. As such this chapter, drawing together many of the themes and issues discussed throughout this project, aims to provide an important insight into what brought such a diverse range of actors together under the banner of sex radicalism.

This chapter will start with an examination of how radicals linked their idea of freedom to what they believed was a 'rational' view of sexuality, and a recognition of the 'truth' of mankind's sexual nature. Bondage was therefore linked to ideas about irrationality and the injurious influence of forces that obscured or ignored the 'facts' of human sexuality. These beliefs, I will argue, were particular clearly manifested in the idea that sexual bondage was linked to the contemporary 'superstitions' and taboos surrounding sex. My research will then explore the idea that sexual bondage was connected to a lack of personal liberty; radicals emphasised how 'external restraints' had harmfully interfered with people's intimate lives. These 'external' forces took a number of forms in the radical view. Not only were they highly critical of the role played by church and state in the regulation of sexual activity through marriage; authors also emphasised the invasive and oppressive role of less tangible, but nevertheless powerful, social customs, conventions, and notions of respectability. Drawing from these ideas, as well as from a range of anti-slavery traditions, radicals asserted that sexual bondage was analogous to a form of slavery; they therefore sought to argue that sexual freedom was a kind of emancipation. But this recognition of individual autonomy went further than calls for personal liberty – radical authors also asserted that people had a right to dictate and govern their sexual lives in

accordance with their own highly individual sexual needs and desires. Freedom was therefore linked to both personal liberty and the right to individual self-expression. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that ideas about freedom and bondage that circulated in this radical circle were also discussed in terms of being 'new' or 'old'. A range of authors characterised bondage as being old and regressive, in antithesis to freedom that was described as being 'new', innovative, and progressive. Radicals therefore created a clear progress narrative in order to contend that sexual freedom was characteristic of a progressive, civilised world. Exploring ideas about rationality and irrationality, slavery and liberty, and old and new in radical discussion is therefore an important part of understanding these free love debates; for all their differences, this chapter will show, they were brought together by their beliefs about bondage and freedom.

Rationality and Irrationality: Recognising the 'Truth' of Sex

Radical authors believed that mankind had an innate and vital sexuality that manifested itself in important and powerful sexual instincts. As shown throughout this thesis they emphasised the importance of creating structures and systems that allowed free sexual expression, and thus worked with these 'natural' instincts or drives. For these radicals society had failed to do this, and had instead worked to create structures that served to impede what they believed was a 'natural' human sexuality. This impediment, they claimed, meant that sex was not 'free' but rather bound and oppressed by the laws and customs designed to control it. Thus in the radicals' view, the sexual laws, values, and customs of the day which worked against mankind's sexual instincts were fundamentally flawed and misguided, and had

ignored the ‘truth’ of human sexual nature. Radicals claimed that by ignoring the ‘facts’ and ‘truths’ of this natural sexuality society had grounded its attitudes and approaches to sex in unfounded ideas. As such they sought to show how society’s ideas about sex were irrational and illogical, and antagonistic to mankind’s ‘real’, ‘natural’, and ‘true’ sexuality. Their notions of what it meant to be sexually bound were thus inherently linked to what the sex radicals viewed as an illogical and irrational approach to sex that they believed failed to recognise or worked to restrain mankind’s natural and ‘true’ sexual nature. Building from this, journal authors emphasised the importance of considering sex in a way they considered honest and rational. A variety of contributors claimed that a frank and truthful recognition of the natural ‘facts’ or ‘laws’ of sex would serve to help create a world in which people’s sexual lives were guided not by inhibiting social structures but by their ‘true’ sexual nature; in short, they asserted that a rational approach would emancipate sex from the restraints and restrictions of irrationality, and allow it to be ‘free’.

Drawing from their particular construction of sexuality, many sex radicals directly linked ideas of sexual bondage to customs and attitudes they saw as working contrary to the logical and ‘natural’ truths of human sexuality and desire. Authors therefore often discussed sexual bondage in terms of being illogical and irrational, and were particularly critical of what they saw as the false superstitions and taboos surrounding sex. For example in *The Adult* Dora Kerr discussed what she saw as the ‘barbarity’ of contemporary sexual customs, and directly linked this to the ‘clinging superstitions’ that she believed were imposed on people from a young age.[617]

[617] Dora F. Kerr, ‘The Conversion of Mrs Grundy’ *The Adult* 2:4 (May, 1898), 97.

Reflecting this view, *Freewoman* authors also linked sexual bondage to what they saw as 'superstitions' surrounding sex in this way. Julian Warde, for instance, lamented the fact that sex had been 'associated with original sin and other discredited dogmas of past superstitions instead of being frankly discussed and intelligently understood', while Fred Collins called for the 'overthrow of superstition, because a superstitious people can never be free, enlightened, or happy.'[618] Further demonstrating this, a *Lucifer* editorial in 1895 praised radical contributors who sought to 'lift our common humanity out of the bogs and fogs of mediaeval superstitions'. [619] Furthermore, a *Lucifer* correspondent discussed the 'false teaching', ignorance and superstition they saw as characteristic of social and religious attitudes towards sex.[620]A common theme in sex radical discussions, then, was the idea that sexual bondage was a state in which superstitions and taboos had obscured the 'facts' of sex, and had thus served to wrongfully restrict and control mankind's natural sexuality.

This shared commitment to the idea that society's attitudes towards sex were based on superstition reflects radicals' broader belief in the irrationality of contemporary sexual customs. In *The Adult,* for example, Chas. A. Jones described the 'irrational, ludicrous … cruel tyranny' of the controls placed upon people's natural sexuality by marriage customs and the difficulties of obtaining a divorce. [621] Similarly Robert Braithwaite expressed disbelief that 'generations of semi-civilised human

[618] Julian Warde, 'Modernism in Morality: The Ethics of Sexual Relationships', *The Freewoman* 2:31 (June 20, 1912), 87; Fred Collins, 'Atheists', *The Freewoman* 2:31 (June 20, 1912), 91.
[619] 'For "Our New Humanity", *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 12:10 (July 26, 1895).
[620] Sophie M. Rivers, *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 2:9 (March 2, 1898), 71.
[621] Chas. A. Jones, 'The Question of Children: A Symposium – A Childish Question', *The Adult* 2:9 (October, 1898), 265.

beings … believed and acted on so palpable an absurdity' as marriage laws.[622] Reflecting this E. C. Walker was also explicitly critical of the 'suspicion, aversion, fear, disgust and horror' he associated with the superstitions and taboos surrounding sex; according to Walker 'such an attitude toward sex, the fundamental fact in the perpetuation of Man is utterly irrational and cannot fail to be disastrous in every direction'.[623] Radical authors therefore asserted that this irrational approach to sex signified both a failure to recognise the natural 'truths' of sex, and a general lack of intellectual development. Demonstrating this, one author argued that the controlling superstitions and taboos surrounding sex 'has no basis in nature; it is unreasonable, it is babyish, it is ridiculous'.[624] Instead, this writer called for people to leave the superstitions surrounding sex behind 'with the other swaddling clothes of intellectual infancy', and to step out of the 'cradle of orthodoxy'.[625]

As such, radical authors constructed a notion of sexual freedom around ideas about rationality, enlightenment and logic, and asserted that freedom would be the outcome of a view of sex guided by reason and a grasp of the 'facts' of human sexuality. In part this approach manifested itself in a reliance on the general rhetoric of rationality, truth and logic. *Adult* contributor Sagittarius, for example, argued that the 'orthodox dread of "licence" and "impurity"' he saw as typical of sexual bondage would be 'answered by the … silent logic of fact' in a system of sexual freedom, while Dora Kerr praised free lovers for their 'earnest desire to live up to the new light' despite the difficulties of throwing off 'the clinging superstitions among which we

[622] Robert Braithwaite, 'The Last Citadel of Authority', *The Adult* 1:4 (November, 1897), 54.
[623] E. C. Walker, 'Again the Inquisition Moves', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 1:34 (August 25, 1897), 269.
[624] E. C. Walker, 'Some Mistakes of Our Friends', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 1:21 (May 26, 1897), 165.
[625] Ibid.

were brought up.[626] R. A. Gordon, a British free lover, had work reprinted in *Lucifer* in which he argued that 'the only certain remedy for the prurience and ribaldry born of fatal obfuscation, suppression and evasion of facts, is the passionless statement of truths in plain terms'.[627] Mirroring this rhetorical tactic, Chas. A. Jones argued that free love was 'more rational, more productive of liberty, and therefore of happiness' than marriage.[628] Furthermore, in an article titled 'The Logic of Free Love', free love advocate Gerald Moore argued that the 'affirmation that freedom is the only rational solution of the problem of sexual relationships is founded on universal experience'.[629] As we see from these examples discussions of rationality were often not specifically defined, and instead demonstrate a general commitment to using the rhetoric of reason and logic. But radicals' calls for a rational approach to sex often went further than a reliance on the general rhetoric of rationality; they also emphasised the specific importance of considering sex 'scientifically'. Approaching sex scientifically, they believed, would provide a logical and rational framework through which it would be possible to identify the 'truth' about sex. Radicals maintained that an enlightened scientific understanding of sexuality that recognised it's 'facts' would therefore free it from irrational superstitions and taboos. Dora Kerr, for example, argued that campaigns for sexual freedom represented an attempt to frame 'collective ideals of social life on science and love, instead of superstitious religion and the barbarity which always accompanies superstitious religion'.[630] Other

[626] Sagittarius, 'Sexual Freedom in Relation to Women and Economics', *The Adult* 1:2 (September, 1897), 28;. Kerr, 'The Conversion of Mrs Grundy', 97.
[627] R.A. Gordon, 'What Repression Does', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 2:2 (January 12, 1898), 427.
[628] Jones, 'The Question of Children', 265.
[629] Gerald Moore, 'The Logic of Free Love' *The Adult* 2:8 (September, 1898), 240.
[630] Kerr, 'The Conversion of Mrs Grundy', 97.

Adult authors had similar views: Orford Northcote, for example, stated that sexual bondage had been perpetuated by the difficulty faced by the 'scientific investigator of sex questions' when trying to gather data on both the physical and psychological effects of sex.[631] Similarly, in *Lucifer* Elmina D. Slenker praised works that approached the subject of 'free love, free sexing and free motherhood….in the full light of reason and science'.[632] Mirroring this, E.S.P. Haynes argued in the *Freewoman* that a 'superstitious tabu [sic]' surrounding sex had been preserved by 'the tendency of many religious people to exclude scientific analysis', as well as the incapability of 'uncivilised persons' to think out sexual problems scientifically.[633]

A scientific approach to sex appealed to radicals calls for freedom in a number of ways. Firstly, resonating with radicals' calls for a 'rational' approach to sex, at this time science was understood as being an inherently rational and objective mode of enquiry that existed apart from social and cultural concerns. As Kirsten Leng has argued, science therefore promised an 'objective, empirical investigation and analysis of the material world' and was thus believed to 'deal in reality and the "true nature" of things.[634] As such approaching sex 'scientifically' would have given authority to radicals' attempts to ground their discussions of sex in rationality and logic – in the 'truth' of human nature - rather than in superstition and myth. In addition to this, science represented a way to discover what 'natural' sexuality looked like and a framework through which radical authors could argue that

[631] Orford Northcote, 'Some Sex Problems Considered', *The Adult* 1:1 (June, 1897), 9.
[632] Elmina D. Slenker, 'The Old and New Ideal', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 1:1 (January 6, 1897).
[633] E.S.P. Haynes, 'Pruriency and Sex Discussions', *The Freewoman* 1:9 (January 18, 1912), 291.
[634] Kirsten Leng, 'Sex, Science, and Fin-De-Siècle Feminism: Johanna Elberskirchen Interprets The Laws of Life' *Journal of Women's History* 25:3 (Fall, 2013), 44. See also Susan Sleeth Mosedale, 'Science Corrupted: Victorian Biologists Consider "The Woman Question"', *Journal of the History of Biology* 11:1 (Spring, 1978), 1.

sexuality was an innate and 'natural' part of mankind's nature.[635] Therefore by considering and treating sex 'scientifically' – that is as a natural and instinctual part of mankind's nature - these radicals believed it could be freed from the social and cultural constraints placed upon it. Not only can this approach be seen in their explicit discussions of sexual science in, for example, their attempts to construct a sexuality as outlined in the opening chapter; evidence for this understanding can also be found in the shared use of a broad range of biological, anthropological, ethnological, physiological, psychological, and sexological ideas in their diverse (and often conflicting) calls for free love illustrated throughout this thesis. This investment in approaching sex 'scientifically' was therefore notably pervasive and, as previous chapters have shown, played an important part in many of the key sex radical debates occurring in the journals.

We can therefore see that despite the broad and varied nature of the free love debates occurring in these journals, radicals framed their understandings of freedom and 'unfreedom' using shared ideas about rationality and irrationality. Sexuality, they asserted, exerted a natural, clean, and instinctual force that had been bound and oppressed by irrational and superstitious ideas and customs surrounding sexual behaviour. Radicals argued that a rational or 'scientific' understanding of sex, which recognised that it was a 'natural' force that existed external to culture, would help to free it from the unnatural impositions placed upon it by customs, superstitions, and taboo. Rationality and a rational recognition of the 'truth' or 'facts' of human sexuality was therefore key to radicals' shared notion of freedom. As Dora Kerr argued

[635] Ibid.

succinctly in the final edition of *The Adult,* 'The task of the earnest men of the future will be a careful study of the facts of sex. They will aim at guiding the sex forces in accordance with the laws of nature, instead of attempting to suppress these forces'.[636]

'Freedom merely means the absence of external restraint':[637] Sexual Bondage and Personal Liberty

For many radical authors sexual bondage represented a lack of personal liberty, or the hindrance of a person's right to govern their own lives. They therefore outlined the links between sexual 'unfreedom' and what they perceived as the invasive and oppressive influence of 'external restraints'. These 'external' forces took a number of different forms; firstly radicals discussed the outside interference of church and state on people's intimate lives. [638] A range of sex radical publications expressed discontent with the need for official intervention in private affairs and the authority and control that marriage customs, in particular, represented. As one anonymous contributor to *The Adult* asserted, 'the marriage laws and customs are the last citadel and bulwark of authority, both from the religious and the economic standpoints'.[639] *Lucifer* editor Moses Harman's article 'Why I Oppose Marriage' demonstrated the power that marriage customs were seen to give these authorities. Harman asserted that he opposed sanctioned unions due to the belief that they were

[636] Dora Kerr, 'The Custom of Marriage', *The Adult* 3:3 (February, 1899), 63.
[637] George Bedborough, Editorial, *The Adult* 2:1 (February, 1898), 3.
[638] Resonating with the topic of this section, a number of radicals were involved in such groups as the Personal Rights Association. This small aspect of radical debate is beyond the scope of this thesis, and will thus not be discussed in great depth here. For an insight into radicals' debates with the PRA see Oswald Dawson, *Personal Rights and Sexual Wrongs* (London: W. Reeves, 1897).
[639] Sagittarius, 'Sexual Freedom', 26.

‘the ‘Bastile’, the last refuge and fortress, or stronghold, in, by and through which Ecclesiasticism hopes to perpetuate its power over mankind’, perpetuating too the power of the ‘despotic and invasive ‘state’.[640] Sex radical authors also thought that personal liberty was being restricted by other, less tangible forces; in particular contributors emphasised the invasive and inhibiting role of social customs, conventions, and popular ideas of respectability. For example in his work on the *Blight of Respectability* British sex radical Geoffrey Mortimer criticised those who he believed ‘slavishly conform to the barbaric customs and codes’ of what he called the ‘that wretched clan’ of society.[641] Notions of sexual bondage were thus linked by a range of authors to the different ‘external restraints’ that they believed worked to interfere with people’s lives and restrict their personal liberty.

It is clear that an important part of radicals’ discussion of bondage was linked to the idea that a person’s liberty - especially in regards to sex – was being restricted by the influence of outside forces. In particular they emphasised what they saw as the injurious interference of church and state. For example a range of radical authors argued that the regulatory social and legal institution of marriage actively inhibited a person’s right to govern their own sexual lives. They asserted that it represented a device specifically and strategically designed to regulate and control sexual behaviour, motivated by the church and state’s desire to preserve their moral and political authority. A range of radical publications demonstrate the suspicion with which these bodies of power were viewed, as well as the links authors drew between

[640]Moses Harman, ‘Why I Oppose Marriage’, *The Adult* 1:6 (January, 1898), 171.
[641] Geoffrey Mortimer, *The Blight of Respectability: An Anatomy of the Disease and a Theory of Curative Treatment* (London: The University Press, 1897), p. 47.

church and state and the notion of sexual bondage. One *Lucifer* correspondent , for instance, argued that marriage was enforced by church and state made laws and as such did not represent 'a goal towards which humanity should strive', but instead was a 'danger which it should avoid'.[642] An 1897 *Lucifer* editorial similarly argued that only those who could throw off the 'priestly yoke' would be able to live a 'true life'.[643] Reflecting this American free love view, prominent *Adult* contributor Orford Northcote argued that formal marriage customs, particularly those sanctioned by the church, had served to 'heavily load mankind with chains'.[644] Some *Freewoman* authors also had similar views of the restrictive nature of religious and legal marriage laws; free love advocate Guy Aldred, for instance, asserted that sexual freedom would help put an end to the 'lie of the priest' and the 'filth of the divorce court'.[645] In part, then, radicals' calls for sexual freedom were formed as a protest against the idea that people's personal lives should be controlled by 'external constraints' enforced by church and state through the institution of marriage. Indeed an early edition of *The Adult* directly challenged 'the theory that a man and a woman need the intervention of lawyer or priest in determining the conditions on which they may unite, temporarily or permanently'.[646]

Other accounts focussed on less direct forms of sexual bondage. In particular, radicals discussed the invasive and limiting role of social customs, conventions, and notions of respectability. In this narrative, personal freedom was not only being

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[642] Caroline De Maupassant, 'Father, Mother and Child', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 1:5 (February 10, 1897), 48.
[643] Moses Harman, 'Birth, Death, and Funerals', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 1:3 (January 27, 1897), 28.
[644] Orford Northcote, *Ruled by the Tomb: A Discussion of Free Thought and Free Love* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1898), p. 5.
[645] Guy Aldred, 'The Freewoman', *The Freewoman* 1:9 (January 18, 1912), 179.
[646] George Bedborough, Editorial, *The Adult* 1:2 (September, 1897), 18.

kerbed by the explicit interventions of institutions like the church and state – people's private sexual lives were seen to be being controlled and constrained by popular ideas of sexual 'respectability' and 'morality' or, as one *Adult* writer labelled it, the 'orthodox dread of 'licence' and 'impurity''.[647] Social customs surrounding sex and marriage as well as common ideas about what constituted 'moral' sexual behaviour, radical authors argued, had served to force people into a state of sexual bondage. *Adult* author Sagittarius, for instance, spoke of the 'bondage of the prude' and the culture of 'self-suppression amidst conventionalism'.[648] Similarly Geoffrey Mortimer criticised those who he believed were 'vapouring and wasting [their] sweetness in the aridity of Little Muddleton Road' by conforming to social custom and the 'reigning opinions of the irrational mass'.[649] Mirroring these misgivings about the influence of customs and conventions prominent American free lover E. C. Walker described the stifling nature of sanctioned monogamous marriage as representing a form of 'Abject slavery to the gods of mock propriety'.[650] Other *Lucifer* authors shared this view. For example in a speech made to the *Lucifer* circle and reprinted in their journal, R. B. Kerr criticised those who 'yield obediency to…the conventionalism of artificial human society', and outlined the role of 'respectability' in perpetuating the power of the injurious 'social machine'.[651] Reflecting this view and suggesting the endurance of these ideas into sex radical texts of the twentieth century *Freewoman* editor Dora

[647] Sagittarius, 'Sexual Freedom', 28.
[648] Ibid.
[649] Mortimer, *The Blight of Respectability*, p. 47.
[650] E. C. Walker, *What the Young Need to Know: A Primer of Sexual Rationalism* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1897), p. 4.
[651] Moses Harman, 'Respectability Again', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 3:52 (January 6, 1900), 412.

Marsden similarly attacked 'the disorder of living according to the law, the immorality of being moral, and the monstrousness of the social code'.[652]

As these examples show, it was not only the legal and religious marriage customs that radical authors believed represented oppressive and invasive external forces. Radicals also asserted that the social expectation of marriage, ideas about sexual respectability that decreed that sexual activity was only legitimate within marriage, and the tabooing of sexual discussions in the public sphere worked to restrict sexual freedom. Central to radical understandings of sexual bondage, then, were criticisms of the influence of public opinion on people's personal and private lives. It is significant that early sex radical articles asserted that to facilitate sexual freedom 'The education of public opinion is infinitely more necessary than tinkering with the law'.[653] Indeed the opening edition of *The Adult* clearly implied the journals desire to act as 'A Crusade Against Custom'.[654] Radical ideas about sexual bondage can thus be understood to be characterised by a shared distrust of impositions made on individual sexual freedom, both through the formal and binding nature of marriage laws laid out by church and state, and through the more diffuse but nevertheless powerful influence of social customs, conventions, and values.

Slavery and Liberty

Building from this belief in the way that oppressive and invasive external forces served to restrict personal sexual liberty, a range of sex radicals characterised a lack of sexual freedom as analogous to a form of slavery. Drawing from abolitionist

[652] Dora Marsden, 'The New Morality – V', *The Freewoman* 1:9 (January 18, 1912), 162.
[653] George Bedborough, Editorial, *The Adult* 1:1 (September, 1897), 18.
[654] George Bedborough, 'What the Legitimation League Means', *The Adult* 1:1 (June, 1897), 2.

traditions on both sides of the Atlantic, radical authors often asserted that mankind has been 'enslaved' by the controls and restraints placed upon sexuality by social and legal customs. Radicals therefore emphasised that sexual freedom, in its various forms, was akin to an emancipation from this slavery. Characterising freedom in this way, and describing links between their calls for sexual reform and the abolition of slavery, was a powerful approach for a number of reasons. Not only did it allow sex radical authors to draw from a rich rhetorical and ideological anti-slavery tradition; it also allowed them to present sexual freedom as a basic human right.

Drawing from a rich American abolitionist tradition, numerous authors writing in both America and Britain framed their ideas about sexual freedom and 'unfreedom' through a juxtaposition of slavery and emancipation. Moses Harman, for example, directly and unambiguously linked his criticism of monogamous, sanctioned marriage to issues surrounding the Atlantic slave trade. For example in *The Adult* he argued that he opposed marriage for much the same reason that he opposed its 'twin relic of barbarism, African slavery' because he believed it to be the 'sum of all villainies'.[655] Further demonstrating his investment in the idea that marriage represented the 'oldest and perhaps most nearly universal of all forms of human slavery', Harman also contributed an article to his own paper in 1900 titled 'The New Abolition Movement' which drew clear links between attempts to abolish chattel slavery and calls for sexual reform.[656] Harman was not alone in connecting

[655]Harman, 'Why I Oppose Marriage', 170. Harman's commitment to anti-slavery appears to be directly linked to his own long-held abolitionist views; Harman was run out of Crawford County, Ohio, in the early 1860s for his unpopular and outspoken advocacy of anti-slavery campaigns. For information on Harman's role in abolitionist movements see Hal Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Lawrence, KS: Regents Press of Kansas), p. 30.
[656] Moses Harman, 'The New Abolition Movement', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 4:31 (August 11, 1900), 245-246.

marriage and slavery in this way; for example R. B. Kerr discussed slavery at length in the journal, while James F. Morton Jr discussed the 'thralldom of conventionalism and marital slavery' in his contributions.[657] Similarly Ina Champney called on women to 'cease this life of submissive slavery' and instead be an 'independent, rational individual' by rejecting marriage.[658] Kate Austin, writing in 1900, likewise wrote that free love was superior to marriage due to the 'superiority of liberty over slavery, in giving happiness to the individual and development to the race'.[659]

The association between a lack of sexual freedom and slavery used in the American sex radical context had its origins in a wide range of American antebellum reform movements. Demonstrating the links between the rhetorical and ideological traditions of sex radicalism and abolitionist movements, Joanne Passet has shown the importance of American antislavery newspapers as an early vehicle for feminist protest, and discusses the impact of Garrisonian abolitionism in enhancing women's awareness of the similarities between chattel slavery and the bonded conditions of wives.[660] John Humphrey Noyes, founder of the Oneida colony, had published material discussing the links between indissoluble marriage and slavery,[661] and notorious free lover Victoria Woodhull had argued that, 'Like an elephant led by a string' women in marriage were 'subordinated by just those who are most interested in holding them in slavery'.[662] Drawing from this rich and diverse rhetorical and

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[657] James F. Morton Jr, 'Wife and Prostitute', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 3:5 (February 4, 1899), 33.
[658] Ina Champney, 'To Our Mothers', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 3:32 (August 19, 1899), 250.
[659] Kate Austin, 'The Uplifting Process', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 4:15 (April 21, 1900), 115.
[660] Joanne Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 65. For information on William Lloyd Garrison and his abolitionist politics see Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery (*New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).
[661] Passet, *Sex* Radicals, p. 66.
[662] Victoria Woodhull*, Prophet of Women's Power* (1872).

ideological tradition of abolitionism, then, the free love advocates in this circle emphasised that the external forces that they believed imposed on individual sexualities had served to 'enslave' them.

Like their American counterparts, *Adult* contributors characterised a lack of sexual freedom and the intervention of external forces into private affairs as a form slavery – indeed an early journal subtitle announced it was formed as a 'Crusade Against Sex-Enslavement'.[663] This reliance on the motif of slavery was not unusual as many contemporary social reformers used emancipatory ideas in their work; Richard Huzzey and Antoinette Burton, for example, have discussed the importance of the rhetoric of slavery to a range of feminist reformers in late Victorian and early Edwardian Britain.[664] They argue that these feminist campaigners were operating within the geopolitical context of an expansive and expanding empire, which facilitated their use of a vocabulary 'steeped in racial metaphors and civilising tropes'.[665] Therefore, like a wide range of contemporary reformers who were exploiting metaphors of slavery for a variety of political purposes, the sex radicals in this circle used notions of slavery to characterise notions of sexual bondage and critique social institutions.[666] *Adult* author Orford Northcote, for instance, criticised

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[663] *The Adult* 1:2 (September, 1897).
[664] Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p. 78; Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012), p. 81.
[665] Burton, *Burdens of History*, p. 2.
[666] Antoinette Burton has argued that although scholarship on feminist anti-slavery rhetoric has largely been limited to the context of transatlantic anti-slavery campaigns, the use of ideas about slavery and abolition should be understood to have persisted into the late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women's movements. She states that the use of this rhetoric is a 'heretofore neglected phenomenon' that requires further historical consideration. See Antoinette Burton, '"States of Injury": Josephine Butler on Slavery, Citizenship and the Boer War' in Ian Fletcher, Philippa Levine and Laura Nym Mayhall (eds), *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 19.

the man who 'sacrifices his freedom …[and] becomes a slave' by agreeing to marry.[667] Mirroring this, John Badcock Jr compared a married person to a worker bee whose 'growth is stunted and its sexual organs are abolished, in order to make it the most perfect slave'. [668] The 'blind obedience and restricted lives' of such enslaved creatures, he claimed, 'are no more to be held up for our admiration than are the toils of the half-starved human wretches that have worked the mines for us'.[669] Likewise, Dora Kerr referred to marriage as 'the original, purely slavish bond'.[670] *Freewoman* authors also exploited the rhetoric of slavery in their work. Teresa Billington-Greig, for example, discussed the activities of women who 'desire emancipation from the old sex-servitude',[671] while H. Cecil Palmer discussed the dichotomy between the masculine 'master class' and the feminine 'slave class'.[672]

As these *Freewoman* quotes suggest, while used to refer to sexual bondage in general this rhetoric of oppression, powerlessness, and slavery was commonly applied specifically to women within marriage. This reliance on the motif of slavery was not new as many reformers used emancipatory ideas in their work; over a century earlier Mary Wollstonecraft in her 'Vindication of the Rights of Women' (1792) had drawn parallels between British women and the Eastern Harem.[673] John Stuart Mill had also exploited the connection between the position of women and

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[667] Orford Northcote, 'Prostitution', *The Adult* 1:3 (October, 1897), 37.
[668] John Badcock Jr., 'Go to the Butterfly, Thou Slave', *The Adult* 1:2 (September, 1897), 20.
[669] Ibid.
[670] Kerr, 'The Custom of Marriage', 62.
[671] Teresa Billington-Greig, 'Woman and Government', *The Freewoman* 1:5 (December 21, 1911), 85.
[672] H. Cecil Palmer, 'The Philosophy of the Woman's Question', *The Freewoman* 1:7 (January 4, 1912), 124.
[673] For an in depth look at Wollstonecraft's treatment of the issue of slavery see Moira Ferguson, *Colonialism and Gender Relations from Mary Wollstonecraft to Jamaica Kincaid: East Caribbean Connections* (Columbia University Press, 1993).

slaves in *The Subjection of Women* (1869).[674] The analogy of marriage with slavery, popular with feminist reformers who also had ties with abolitionism, allowed these radicals to relate their campaigns for sexual freedom to those concerned with the white slave trade associated with prostitution, as well as African-American slavery.[675] For instance in an article in *The Adult,* echoing his work in American free love paper *Lucifer,* anarchist free lover Moses Harman stated that he opposed marriage 'because marriage opposes Justice. Marriage is unjust to woman – depriving her of her right of ownership and control of her person, of her children, her name, her time, and her labour'.[676] *Adult* editor George Bedborough also challenged the injustices of marriage for women in his opening editorial, in which he stated that the idea of women existing as the 'property' of her husband was offensive to both the woman and the man involved, as it was 'incompatible with any right definition of… self-respect'.[677] Reflecting discussions in American free love papers, R. A. Gordon also discussed the slavery of women in *The Adult*, declaring that 'Men, for twenty

[674] Jeff Nunokawa has discussed Mill's use of the rhetoric of slavery in *The Afterlife of Property: Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 10-11.
[675]Joanna Bourke, 'Sexual Violence, Marital Guidance, and Victorian Bodies: An Aesthesiology', *Victorian Studies* 50:3 (Spring, 2008), 423. Ideas about links between feminist movements and campaigns for the abolition of slavery have been discussed by a number of historians. See, for example, Elizabeth J. Clapp and Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Women, Dissent, and Anti-Slavery in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 3; Karen Offen, 'How (and Why) the Analogy of Marriage with Slavery Provided the Springboard for Women's Rights Demands in France, 1640 – 1848' in Kish Sklar and Brewer Steward (eds.), *Women's Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation* (New Haven:Yale University Press, 2007), p. 57; Philippa Levine, 'Sexuality and Empire' in Catherine Hall and Sonya A. Rose (eds.), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 132; Philippa Levine, *Gender and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 144; Diane Robinson-Dunn, *The Harem, Slavery and British Imperial Culture: Anglo-Muslim Relations in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), esp. chapter 4; Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley and Los Angeles University of California Press, 1997).
[676] Harman, 'Why I Oppose Marriage', 170.
[677] Bedborough, 'What the Legitimation League Means', 4.

centuries and longer, have oppressed and enslaved women…completely'.[678] The respectability of orthodox society, according to Gordon, was based on this idea of wifely slavery; he stated his belief that women had been so completely enslaved by men for so long that they 'clung to the institution of sex slavery in the same way as the black slaves did when we tried to free them'.[679] Furthermore, *Lucifer* authors argued that the 'indissoluble tie' represented slavery for women 'because law, religion, and public sentiment all combine under this tie to hold her'.[680] They stated that 'there is no other human slavery that knows such depths of degradation as a wife chained to man she neither loves nor respects; no other slavery so disastrous in its consequence on the race or to individual respect, growth, and development'.[681] Sexual bondage, which (as outlined in chapter 2) radicals asserted weighed most heavily on women, was therefore clearly linked to slavery in the radical view.

As these examples show, the notion that people had become 'enslaved' by the hostile interventions of external forces into their private lives lay at the heart of the sex radical's understanding of sexual bondage. Thus while they were undoubtedly informed by different contexts and traditions, a diverse set of radicals were committed to the idea that a lack of sexual freedom was clearly comparable to a form of slavery. This comparison presented them with a powerful rhetorical and ideological tool, as it allowed authors to present the existing sexual customs of the day as barbaric and unjust. As Antoinette Burton has shown, ideas about slavery represented 'one of the most evocative signs of social and political injustice' of the

[678] R.A. Gordon M.D., 'Sexual Topics', *The Adult,* 2:2 (1897), 37.
[679] Ibid, 35.
[680] 'Mrs Stanton's Last Plea for Women', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 6:47 (December 4, 1902), 369.
[681] Ibid.

era.[682] As such, by associating the social and legal regulation of sex to a form of slavery, radicals were able to argue that contemporary sexual customs were incompatible with justice and civil liberty.

Counter to this understanding of the slavery and bondage of marriage, radicals shared a vision of sexual freedom that was inherently linked to ideas of emancipation and personal liberty. Clearly reflecting this view, *Adult* author Gerald Moore argued that 'The abolition of marriage is simply the abolition of slavery. Under a condition of liberty individuals would be free to engage in any ceremony they pleased'.[683] George Bedborough discussed freedom in a similar way; in one of his final contributions to *The Adult* before his arrest, for example, he stated that 'Freedom merely means the absence of external restraint'.[684] This closely reflected a definition of 'freedom' he set out in earlier editorials:

> 'the term freedom…which members of the Legitimation League subscribe, implies simply the absence of external restraint and compulsion. It means that marriage, or its equivalent, is regarded as a personal matter, requiring no legal supervision or control. It implies individual sovereignty in individual concerns'.[685]

Reflecting the links between radical notions of freedom and personal liberty, Lillian Harman also expressed similar views in the journal. In an 1898 article, for example, she contrasted the 'old dependence and slavery' of sanctioned marriage with the 'new responsibility and liberty' of free love unions.[686]

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[682] Burton, 'States of Injury', 20.
[683] Moore, 'The Logic of Free Love', 241.
[684] Bedborough, 'What the Legitimation League Means', 2.
[685] George Bedborough, 'The Legitimation League', *The Adult* 2:4 (May, 1898), 119.
[686] Lillian Harman, 'The New Martyrdom', *The Adult* 1:6 (January, 1898), 156.

Freedom, in the radicals' view, was therefore closely linked to a person's right to govern their own sexual life free from outside interventions; one *Lucifer* correspondent, for instance, subscribed to a notion of freedom that meant 'not only immunity from all legal interference, but...far more important, emancipation from superstition and the resulting customs and (false) love ideals'.[687] Outlining the dichotomy between the 'slavery' of the existing sexual system and the 'liberty' of free love meant that radicals were able to couch their calls for sexual reform in the powerful rhetoric of emancipation. Free sexual expression, they claimed, was a characteristic of a progressive, just, and civilised world; as Moses Harman argued, the abolishment of oppressive marriage laws and a turn to a system of freedom would rid humanity of 'heaviest load [it] has now to carry in its toilsome march from the lowlands of barbarism to the highlands of true civilisation'. [688]

Recognising the Individual

Radicals shared beliefs about what constituted sexual freedom, then, were often formed against a notion of bondage that was characterised by collective social, legal, and religious restrictions on a person's liberty. But they also linked their notion of freedom to a different kind of individual freedom. Drawing from their assertion, outlined throughout this thesis, that mankind's sexuality was highly diverse, complex, and individual, radicals emphasised that freedom was linked to sexual autonomy and self-determination; in short, they believed that individuals should be allowed to dictate and govern their sexual lives in accordance with their own highly individual

[687] Flora Fox, *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 1:5 (February 10, 1897), 47.
[688] Harman, 'Why I Oppose Marriage', 171.

sexual needs and desires. As such their notion of freedom was notably individualistic, and linked to what radical authors saw as the importance of self-determination and 'the paramount right of the individual to self-realisation in all non-invasive directions'.[689]

Reflecting their belief in the diverse and dynamic sexuality of mankind as outlined in chapter 2, a range of authors emphasised the importance of creating a system that would allow for a wide variety of types of sexual expression. A *Lucifer* article from 1898, for example, explicitly illustrated the links between freedom and the recognition of the complexity and diversity of human sexuality. T. B. Wakeman asserted,

> 'my friends, the only true way out, the true remedy for immorality, is … through love and knowledge, that is science, liberty, and humanity. It is only by these and through these that any true and permanent remedies may come. This will bring us a broad, inclusive morality which will give a greater flexibility of adjustment to individual needs, tastes and conditions, and a far greater aid to public welfare and social progress that we have ever dreamed to be possible under the old exclusive, crushing, brutal morality of slavery'.[690]

Echoing Wakeman's contentions about the importance of 'individual needs, tastes and conditions', *Adult* writers clearly articulated their beliefs about the links between freedom and individual self-expression. John Badcock Jr., for example, was highly critical of social laws and customs that had restricted individual liberties; he argued,

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[689] George Bedborough, Editorial, *The Adult* 1:1 (June, 1897), 1.
[690] T. B. Wakeman, 'Some Problems of Social Freedom', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 2:43 (October 29, 1898), 347.

for example, that 'to give liberty to live is honourable; but to put restraint upon life is dishonourable'.[691] The impact of the 'social organism' on individual freedom, he claimed, had served to turn its 'various living parts…into abortions'.[692] Badcock Jr asserted that sexual self-restraint was 'absolutely pernicious – from the standpoint of the individual' and compared the 'blind obedience and restricted lives of the ants and bees' unfavourably to the 'pleasure and the glory' of butterflies who, 'Forming no part of a social organism… have all their lives for themselves'.[693] For this author freedom (understood as the individual's right to govern their own sexual life in accordance with their particular tastes and inclinations) typified a 'sweeter existence' where individuals 'with senses developed…go for beauty, gambolling all day in the sunshine'.[694]

This emphasis on the links between freedom and the importance of individual self-expression was also a particularly prominent theme in *The Freewoman.* For instance Dora Marsden argued that the sexual bondage of conventional marriage was characteristic of an 'Old Morality' which created oppressed, unexceptional, and reliant 'Bondwomen'. 'Bondwomen' appeared to be formed and maintained by the conditions of conventional contemporary marriage; these women, locked into social and cultural roles, were seen to lack the 'individual and personal vision of life in any sphere' required to achieve Marsden's ideal higher, spiritual, individualistic state of 'Freewoman'.[695] 'Bondwomen', Marsden claimed, were women who were 'not

[691] Badcock Jr., 'Go to the Butterfly, Thou Slave', 19.
[692] Ibid, 20.
[693] Ibid.
[694] Ibid.
[695] Dora Marsden, 'Commentary on 'Bondwomen', *The Freewoman* 1:2 (Nov. 30, 1911), 21.

separate entities…not individuals'.[696] Drawing from this view, 'freedom' was closely linked to individuality, and to self-expression and self-determination. Marsden criticised, for example, those who argued that 'woman is an individual, and that because she is an individual she must be set free'.[697] Instead she stated that it would be 'nearer the truth to say that if she is an individual she IS free, and will act like those who are free'.[698] Comments in the *Freewoman* therefore reflect the idea found in *The Adult* and *Lucifer* that freedom represented the individual's right to govern and dictate the terms of their own life in accordance with their own feelings, needs, and desires. Marsden's opening editorial, for example, asserted that individual freedom 'will consist in appraising their own worth, in setting up their own standards and living to them...for none can judge of another soul's value. The individual has to record its own.[699] Women's freedom was therefore, in this view, seen to be an 'individual revolution'.[700] Contributions from all of these journals can thus show us how an individual's right to self-expression and self-determination was a key facet of this group's notion of freedom.

The Old vs. the New

Radicals also framed their understandings of freedom and bondage in other ways; in particular, they discussed notions of freedom and 'unfreedom' in terms of 'new' and 'old', or progress and regression. A diverse range of sex radical authors emphasised that sexual bondage, in its varied forms, should be understood as old-

[696] Dora Marsden, 'Bondwomen', *The Freewoman* 1:1 (November 23, 1911), 1.
[697] Ibid.
[698] Ibid.
[699] Ibid.
[700] Marsden, 'Commentary', 21.

fashioned and outdated. A lack of freedom, they claimed, was characteristic of an old and decaying world order and was thus unfit for the modern world. This notion of bondage was contrasted with a particular view of freedom as modern, progressive, and innovative. Radicals thus worked with an understanding of freedom that presented freedom as a key facet of a modernity, and thus allowed them to argue that free sexual expression was characteristic of a progressive, civilised world.

A range of authors throughout the journals characterised sexual bondage as old, outdated, and decaying. Early reports of Legitimation League meetings, for example, reveal that when a speaker objected to free love he was informed that his 'ethical standard… [was] getting out of date'.[701] Reflecting this, Orford Northcote characterised what he saw as the stifling and restrictive nature of monogamy (particularly in marriage) as 'the old monogamic fortress'. He argued that 'the breaches in its battered walls show that the time will come, when, if it stands at all, its ruins will only serve to indicate to the curious the sexual customs of the past'.[702] Dora Marsden made similar comments when discussing her ideas about the 'New Morality'. She stated that 'In proposing a new sex-morality we have to remember that we are not uprooting the old morality. There is no necessity. Of its own decay the old morality has fallen in a heap of ruins. It is for us of this age a question of removing the debris'.[703] This characterisation of sexual bondage as outdated was, then, a pervasive one; Dora Kerr also criticised those against free love whose 'thoughts still

[701] The response was given to an anonymous speaker (only referred to in reports as 'No.1') who heckled Legitimation League founder Oswald Dawson during a speech in 1897. It was given after No. 1 reportedly stated that 'the pride of an honourable man's life was to believe in the absolute fidelity and integrity of wife', which was met with laughter. The exchange is reported in Oswald Dawson, *The Outcome of Legitimation: A Lecture* (London: The Legitimation League, 1897), pp. 13-16.
[702] Orford Northcote, 'Prostitution', *The Adult* 1:3 (October, 1897), 35.
[703] Dora Marsden, 'The New Morality – III', *The Freewoman 1:* 7 (January 4, 1912), 121.

run in grooves forged 50 years ago; whose bodies are about to step into the garments of the twentieth century, but whose minds are left behind in the early nineteenth century'.[704] Similarly, C.H Norman spoke of the 'cramping restrictions' of 'dead centuries'.[705]

Counter to these assertions that sexual bondage was characteristic of a repressive and outdated past, ideas about sexual freedom were closely linked to notions of progress, development, innovation, and modernity. The links between radical notions of freedom and ideas about modernity and progress are manifested in a number of ways, including in radicals' use of evolutionary narratives explored throughout this thesis. It is also seen in their more general discussions of such topics as 'the spirit of innovation'[706] and 'the impulse towards progress'.[707] British-Canadian radical Dora Forster, who contributed to both *The Adult* and *Lucifer*, discussed 'the new and rational' system of free love in her work on the 'emancipated woman of the new time'.[708] Similarly, *Adult* editor George Bedborough discussed the desirability of replacing 'old theories' with 'new facts' in early contributions to his journal.[709] Reflecting this, E. C. Walker contrasted the 'decay and death' of sexual bondage with the 'progression, generation, regeneration' he saw as characteristic of sexual freedom.[710] *Lucifer* had similar views, and authors spoke of free lovers taking 'new

[704] Kerr, 'The Conversion of Mrs Grundy', 97.
[705] C. H. Norman, 'The Administration of Justice in the Divorce Court', *The Freewoman* 1:17 (March 14, 1912), 326.
[706] Northcote, *Ruled by the Tomb,* p. 1.
[707] Dora Marsden, 'The New Morality – I' *The Freewoman* 1:4 (December 14, 1912), 61.
[708] Dora Forster, *Sex Radicalism: as seen by an Emancipated Woman of the New Time* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1905), p. 28.
[709] George Bedborough, Editorial, *The Adult* 1:2 (September, 1897), 18.
[710] Walker, *What the Young Need to Know,* p. 11.

roads' and joining a 'progressive army' by calling for unsanctioned sexual relationships.[711]

Radicals' attempts to characterise sexual freedom and bondage as 'new' or 'old' resonates with broader contemporary discussions about social and sexual development. Indeed Heike Bauer has argued that understandings and imaginings of historical time were key to fin-de-siècle discourses of sex that looked to chart and measure social development through considerations of sexual conduct.[712] This concern with time, which Bauer calls the 'temporal dimension' of contemporary socio-sexual discourses, was based on ideas about civilisation and degeneration which sought to historicise sexual behaviours; in essence there was a desire to chart how the current condition, through processes of historical change and development, had come to be.[713] Drawing from this, some contemporary thinkers directly engaged with ideas about 'old' and 'new' sexual customs in their work and created specific models of change over time. Edward Carpenter, for example, gloried the pre-modern world; he believed that ancient man had lived a 'hardy nature-life', and criticised the process of 'civilisation' for corrupting man and forsaking 'the sacredness of sex'.[714] Therefore as we can see from Carpenter's work, some contemporary reformers

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[711] Aunt Elmina, 'The Woman Who Does', *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* 2:22 (June 5, 1898), 174.
[712] Heike Bauer, 'Measurements of Civilisation: Non-Western Female Sexuality and the Fin-de-Siècle Social Body' in Peter Cryle and Christopher E. Forth, *Sexuality at the Fin de Siècle: The Makings of a "Central Problem"* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), p. 93. Although more specifically concerned race and homosexuality, Valerie Rohy has explored how discussions and debates about sexuality are structured through ideas about time. See Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality* (Albany, N.Y: SUNY Press, 2009).
[713] Bauer, 'Measurement of Civilisation', p. 93.
[714] Edward Carpenter, *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure, and Other Essays* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1891), p. 26. For a discussion of Carpenter's ideas about ancient past and the injurious effects of civilisation see Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (London and New York: Verso Books), pp. 144-161.

grounded their discussions and evaluations of sexual behaviour using specific models of historical change.

The sex radicals contributing to these journals did not, however, use such specific models of historical change in their work. Although their ideas about 'new' and 'old' sexual customs clearly reflect a concern with historical time they did not for the most part glorify a particular time in the past, or identify a particular mode of historical development that moved towards sexual freedom. Instead most radicals, particularly those contributing to *The Adult,* grounded their beliefs about sexual freedom in more general discussions about old and decayed nature of sexual bondage and new, progressive nature of freedom. They relied, then, on a rather straightforward narrative of progress that served a dual purpose; not only did this general reliance on notions of progress, innovation and development serve to fundamentally undermine existing sexual customs, it also presented radicals as agents of progress in a period obsessed with change and a transition to modernity.[715]

Conclusions

The exploration of radical journals undertaken throughout this thesis has highlighted the central importance of notions of bondage and freedom to sex radical debate. Ideas about freedom and bondage are present in every aspect of their

[715] Leigh Anderson and Janet Looney have discussed the pervasiveness of the rhetoric of progress. They argue that the language of progress 'immediately indicts the existing arrangement' by insinuating that the 'base-line as failed in some way'. See Leigh C. Anderson and Janet W. Looney, *Making Progress: Essays in Progress and Public Policy* (Lexington Books, 2003), p. 20. For an overview of late nineteenth-century ideas about the importance of progress and change see Peter J. Bowler, *The Invention of Progress: The Victorians and the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 1-2.

discussions, and lay at the heart both their critique of existing institutions and their calls for sexual reform. This chapter has undertaken an in-depth examination of what it meant for radicals to be ‘bound’ or ‘free’; it is through analysis of these key ideas, I have argued, that we can gain a better understanding of what brought such a diverse range of sex reformers – often with notably different views and agendas – together.

This chapter has shown that radicals shared a number of assumptions about the nature of bondage and freedom. Firstly, drawing from their understanding of mankind’s ‘true’ sexual nature, radicals envisioned freedom as inherently linked to a rational grasp of the ‘truth’ of human sexuality. Bondage was therefore closely tied to ideas about irrationality, and writers specifically criticised taboos and superstitions that they believed had obscured or ignored the rational ‘facts’ of sex. Further to this, analysis has revealed that radical authors envisaged sexual bondage as a lack of personal liberty. They asserted that ‘external’ restraints placed on individuals by church and state, as well as by social customs, had taken away people’s autonomy and the right to govern their own person. Many radical authors drew direct links between this lack of liberty and slavery, and therefore couched their calls for sexual freedom in the rhetoric of emancipation. But this individual autonomy took a number of forms. Not only was it was related to a person’s right to self-ownership; radicals also asserted that ‘freedom’ meant a person’s right to individuality and self-expression. Closely reflecting their beliefs about the diversity and dynamism of sexuality, radicals emphasised that freedom was a highly individual affair. Furthermore, authors across the journals discussed bondage and freedom in terms of ‘old’ and ‘new’. In doing so they created a narrative of progress away from

regressive and decaying bondage, towards a modern, enlightened and progressive system of sexual freedom. It is therefore through notions of bondage and freedom that radicals came together; while their debates were contentious, it was through these shared understandings of what it meant to be ‘bound’ or ‘free’ that radicals contributing to all of these journals coalesced.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the way that sex radicals debated ‘free love’ in their contributions to radical journals. Their ideas about ‘free’ love, I have shown, were grounded in their understandings of ‘natural’ sexuality, and in their belief that mankind had a powerful, pure, and natural sexual instinct. This instinct, they claimed, was not something that needed to be controlled or oppressed; instead, as outlined in chapter 1, they asserted that it was an important and positive force that required free expression. This understanding of sexuality meant radical authors’ ideas about sexual freedom were also shaped and formed against a particular critique of existing social institutions. As chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated, sex radicals believed that the social and legal restrictions placed on ‘natural’ sexuality by both marriage customs and the contemporary taboo surrounding the discussion of sexual topics had led to what they characterised as a state of sexual ‘bondage’. In these chapters we saw the different ways in which radicals articulated their conviction that society was governed by a set of dominant structures, legal codes and moral frameworks that worked against ‘natural’ human sexuality. In their world, society was controlled and oppressed by a diverse set of social and legal customs. It was against this particular view of the ‘bondage’ of sex that authors framed their ideas of ‘freedom’; many contributors to the journals asserted that sexual ‘freedom’ was a state in which the bonds placed upon sex would be lifted, so as to allow the ‘natural’ sexual instincts free and uninhibited expression. This freedom of expression, they claimed, would restore a ‘natural’ order between the sexes and thus help to combat a variety of

social ills; as an analysis of their views throughout this thesis has shown, they claimed sexual freedom was a potential cure for a host of social problems including prostitution and the proliferation of sexual vice, the spread of venereal disease, and the degeneration of the race.

Despite their common belief in the importance of creating a sexual system that was not antagonistic to the free expression of 'natural' sexual urges, radicals clashed over many of the practicalities of sexual freedom. As discussed in chapters 4 and 5, authors particularly disagreed over how 'freedom' was to be lived day to day, what constituted the most advanced and evolved sexual system, and who was capable of living a sexually 'free' life. However, despite these contentious debates, radical authors throughout these journals shared a commitment to making sex 'free'. Furthermore, they characterised their notions of 'freedom' and 'bondage' in similar ways. As outlined in chapter 6, they shared a view of freedom as rational, emancipating, and modern, versus the irrational, subjugating, and degenerate nature of bondage. By bringing together themes running through this project this chapter showed that radicals, despite their many differences, cohered through shared ideas of what it actually meant to be 'bound' or 'free'.

By examining the way radicals formed their ideas about sexuality and exploring how these ideas helped to shape their calls for sexual reform, this thesis represents the first in-depth scholarly consideration of 'free love' in Britain at this time. It moves away from existing historical research that places the sex radicals on the margins of contemporary debates and instead highlights the complex construction of sex radical thought. In doing so it breaks new ground, and illustrates

the important ways in which a consideration of sex radicalism can help us to better understand *fin de siècle* debates about sex.

Many of the ideas and debates in the journals were directly underpinned by radicals' engagement with science. In part this involved a borrowing and appropriation of the rhetoric of science and an emphasis on the importance of rationality and logic. For example, as discussed in the final chapter, radicals characterised sexual freedom as linked to a rational and scientific understanding of sex that recognised the 'truth' of human sexuality. However, it also manifested itself in a number of more specific ways. Firstly, scientific ideas (and particularly theories associated with the late nineteenth century interest in sex that became central to a variety of work in the human sciences, including anthropology, ethnology, evolutionary biology, eugenic science, psychiatry and sexology) framed radicals' particular construction of a 'natural' and vital sexuality that they believed existed external to society and culture. As such, scientific ideas can be seen to lie at the very heart of radicals' critique of social institutions formed against beliefs about the 'bondage' of 'natural' sexuality. Furthermore, theories and methodologies drawn from a diverse range of scientific theories framed their debates about how 'freedom' could and should be lived. While their debates about potential alternatives to marriage, for example, were supported using interpretations of theories drawn from anthropology, ethnology, and evolutionary biology, their discussions of the viability of female sexual freedom drew from both evolutionary and eugenic science. Therefore while these authors were generally not scientists or doctors, science nevertheless played a crucial role in the formulation and articulation of their radical ideas about sex.

The ‘science of sex’ has been studied by historians of the period before. As previously discussed, works by such historians as Crozier and Seidman have tended to focus on the interventions of ‘medical men’ into debates about sex, and attempts to legitimate ‘sexology’ as a medical field.[716] However, my examination of radical debates about sexual freedom and an analysis of how they used science to construct their views tells us a new and different story about attempts to think about sex ‘scientifically’ at this time. It has shown that clear connections existed between the works of radical authors and the research of more well-known sexologists such as Havelock Ellis, Iwan Bloch and Richard von Krafft-Ebing. Authors in both groups, my research has illustrated, relied upon similar sources and methodologies in order to study man’s ‘natural’ sexuality, and to discuss what constituted ‘normal’ sexual behaviour. My thesis has therefore demonstrated that contemporary sexology did not exist in isolation, and was not the niche concern of a small group of medical professionals. Instead, I have illustrated that a diverse range of radical authors – for all of their differences – can also be considered to have been active participants in the field as it emerged.

Such connections, explored in this thesis, therefore add a new dimension to recent attempts to reframe contemporary sexual science.[717] Firstly the links that my

[716] Ivan Crozier, ‘Nineteenth-Century British Psychiatric Writing about Homosexuality before Havelock Ellis: The Missing Link’, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 63:1 (January 2008), 66n; Steven Seidman, ‘Theoretical Perspectives’ in Steven Seidman, Nancy Fischer, and Chet Meeks (eds.), *Handbook of the New Sexuality Studies* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), p. 4.
[717] Kirsten Leng, for example, discusses the way that sexual science involved the contestations of ‘diverse interlocutors’. Leng, ‘Sex, Science, and Fin-De-Siècle Feminism: Johanna Elberskirchen Interprets the Laws of Life’, *Journal of Women's History* 25:3 (Fall, 2013), 44. See also Kate Fisher and Jana Funke, ‘British Sexual Science beyond the Medical Cross-Disciplinary, Cross-Historical, and Cross-Cultural Translations’ in Heike Bauer, *Sexology in Translation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), pp. 95 - 114.; Heike Bauer, *English Literary Sexology: Translations of Inversion, 1860-1930* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 8.

research has drawn between radical debates and more well-known sexological inquiry demonstrates that the project of sexual science was not a domain restricted to medical men; rather, I have shown that at this time it is a field better characterised as a broad, diverse, and politically and socially interested intellectual circle of which radicals contributing to these journals should also be considered a part. Furthermore, my work demonstrates the methodological diversity that underpinned attempts to think about sex 'scientifically'; moving away from research that has focused on highly medicalized understandings of sex, it shows that attempts to study sex and sexuality through science drew from a diverse range of theories and methodologies drawn from a wide range of scientific disciplines. This thesis has therefore shown that by obscuring the interventions of figures such as sex radicals into scientific debates about sex, existing research has often overlooked the diversity that lay at the heart of contemporary sexual science. I therefore argue that by blurring the lines between 'radical' and 'established' sexual science we can better understand the construction and articulation of scientific ideas about sex at this time. In addition, it also highlights the importance of reform to the sexological project. This focus of sexological work has been recognized in the case of homosexuality where, for example, Magnus Hirschfeld's support for a change in the German law regarding homosexuality is well known.[718] However, it has been less central to our understanding of the wider critique of sexual attitudes, morality, customs and practices that drew sexological

[718] See, for instance, Elena Mancini, *Magnus Hirschfeld and the Quest for Sexual Freedom: a History of the First International Sexual Freedom Movement* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

thinking together with that of the sex radicals and contributed directly to the purpose and shape of sexology itself.

In addition to exploring radicals' use of a diverse range of scientific ideas and methodologies, this thesis has also examined the ways in which radical authors engaged with a range of topical social debates. My analysis of radical journals has shown, for example, that they were involved in discussions about a wide range of prominent issues including marriage, the rights of women, racial health, prostitution, and education. To date scholars have tended to focus on radicals' interventions into a specific arena; that is the critique of marriage and the position of women within it. However, by charting radicals' considerations of a broad range of social issues this thesis has drawn attention to the diversity of radical discussion and the interrelationship between various points of debate. While evidently closely concerned with questions about marriage, I have shown that this group were in fact involved in a rethinking of many of the most vibrant and topical debates of the day. As such my research moves away from a reductive view of sex radicalism that has often tied it closely to marriage, and instead reveals the diverse interests and influences that shaped contemporary sex radical thought.

An examination of these interventions into a broad range of contemporary debates has allowed me to demonstrate the links between the sex radicals and other reform movements. A consideration of their calls for sexual knowledge outlined in chapter 3, for example, allows for clear connections to be drawn between radical authors and those involved with the social purity movement. I have shown that despite their different views and agenda, radical authors and social purists had a

shared desire to ‘purify’ society, and relied on a number of similar ideas and theories to support their calls for access to sexual knowledge. Similarly, calls for free motherhood discussed in chapter 5 illustrate ties between feminist radicals and broader calls for female bodily autonomy; like a broad range of contemporary feminist reformers, radicals sought to exploit the idea of ‘woman as mother’ in order to achieve their aims. My research has therefore shown that these radicals were not isolated; instead they are better understood as actively taking in part in a broad set of intellectual debates about issues related to sex, relationships, gender, and the body. As such, this thesis has shown the importance of bringing radicals in from the margins of historical accounts in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of such debates.

While the primary focus of this study has been *The Adult,* the inclusion of other sex radical journals in my study has highlighted the links between a number of groups discussing ‘free love’ in this period. Firstly, an analysis of British free love journals has revealed the close ties between radical groups on both sides of the Atlantic. These ties took a number of forms. Not only can they be seen in the practical work done to promote and supply each other’s works; as the examination of *Lucifer* alongside the *Adult* in previous chapters have shown, it is also possible to trace rhetorical and ideological similarities in their publications. Though many existing histories have restricted their view to an examination of, for example, one group or one country, my thesis has therefore shown that sex radical movements were not separate or distinctive entities. Instead, by drawing from radical material based in both Britain and America, I have highlighted the exchanges and

connections that drew them together. Reflecting Lucy Delap's discussion of the transatlantic dialogues that shaped contemporary avant-garde feminist thought, my research has shown that 'free love' in Britain can only be properly understood if we consider the way it existed alongside and in conversation with international sex radical movements.[719] Furthermore, the inclusion of material from early twentieth-century journal *The Freewoman* has demonstrated the persistence of sex radical ideas over time. Existing historical work, which has tended to focus on sex radical debate occurring in the mid to late nineteenth century, has overlooked the enduring nature of sex radical ideas; my research, however, reveals the continuities, changes and antagonisms between movements for sexual reform both before and after the turn of the twentieth century.

My thesis has therefore shown that previous studies that have focussed on sex radical views at only one time or in one place have left us with a limited view of contemporary sex radicalism. In order to present a more nuanced view of sex radical views, my research has discussed and made use of the connections between radical movements both at home and abroad, and before and after the turn of the twentieth century. It has therefore added something new to our understanding of contemporary sex radical thought; it demonstrates that ideas about 'free love' were not a simple product of a specific place or time, but rather were formed by diverse communities of authors, readers, and correspondents contributing to a range of sex radical journals.

Future Directions

[719] Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde: Transatlantic Encounters if the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

There are a number of potential ways in which this research could be developed in the future. Firstly, analysis could be expanded to consider other contemporary journals. Sex radical authors contributed to a number of publications outside of their own circles; George Bedborough wrote articles for feminist journal *Shafts* in the late nineteenth century, for instance, while others wrote for periodicals such as *The Westminster Review, The University Magazine and Free Review, Justice, The New Age, Mother Earth,* and *Our New Humanity.*[720] Though a consideration of these contributions has been largely beyond the scope of my analysis, it would be interesting to see how debates about 'free love' were being played out in other arenas. Any research of this kind would undoubtedly serve to deepen our understanding of the connections, dialogues, and exchanges that shaped contemporary sex radical thought.

In addition, it would be interesting to expand the geographical boundaries of research into contemporary sex radicalism. While my research has begun to explore the relationship between American and British sex radicalism for the first time, it has not been able to explore sex radical movements elsewhere in the world. Historians like Michiko Suzuki, Maxine Molyneux, and Martha A. Ackelsberg, for example, have discussed 'free love' debates in Japan, Argentina, and Spain;[721] indeed the radicals themselves spoke of far afield colleagues in such places France, Egypt, Australia,

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[720] See, for example, George Bedborough, *Shafts* (April, 1897), 125; Lillian Harman, 'To the subscribers of the American Journal of Eugenics', *Mother Earth* 6:2 (April, 1911), 55-56; Orford Northcote, 'A Study in Stirpiculture', *The University Magazine and Free Review* 6 (October, 1897 – March, 1898), 637- 641.

[721] Michiko Suzuki, *Becoming Modern Women: Love and Female Identity in Prewar Japanese Literature and Culture* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2010); Maxine Molyneux, 'No God, No Boss, No Husband: Anarchist Feminism in Nineteenth-Century Argentina', *Latin American Perspectives* 13:1 (Winter, 1986), 119-145; Martha A. Ackelsberg *Free Women of Spain: Anarchism and the Struggle for the Emancipation of Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

South Africa, India, and Russia.[722] Much like expanding research into new journals, widening the geographical boundaries of analysis into 'free love' could only help to give us more of an insight into the way that sex radical views were formed as part of international dialogues and communities.

The chronological boundaries of research could also be expanded in order to gain a broader insight into the construction of sex radical thought. It would be interesting, for example, to consider the influence of earlier sex radical thought on *fin de siècle* sex radicals. For instance Anna Clark has suggested that figures like Richard Carlile, James Hinton, and the Owenites of the early nineteenth century acted as 'forerunners' to later sex radical movements.[723] As such it might be useful to explore the links between radical sex reformers like those in the Legitimation League and earlier generations of radical thinkers. Furthermore, an exploration of the persistence of sex radical ideas further into the twentieth century could be intriguing. While this study set 1913 (when *The New Freewoman* collapsed) as its boundary, it would be helpful to explore how radical ideas were continued or adapted or left behind following the First World War.

This thesis has accomplished an important task, and is the first to offer an in-depth consideration of the way 'free love' was constructed in Britain at this time. It has explored the ideas and theories that underpinned radical thought, and the intellectual debates, contexts, and exchanges that helped to shape their ideas about

[722] See George Bedborough, 'The Legitimation League', *The Adult* 2:4 (May, 1898), 118-121.
[723] Anna Clark, *Desire: A History of European Sexuality* (Routledge: New York, 2008), p. 151. See also Anna Clark, 'James Hinton and Victorian Individuality: Polygamy and the Sacrifice of the Self', *Victorian Studies* 54:1 (Autumn, 2011), 35-61.

the importance of radical sexual reform. Furthermore, as these intriguing suggestions about the future of research into sex radicalism show, it has begun to explore how discussions of sex often considered ‘radical’ or ‘fringe’ can help us to better understand contemporary debates about sex.

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