

SEX RADICALS IN AMERICA'S HEARTLAND: REDEFINING
GENDER AND SEXUALITY, 1880-1910

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by Andrea M. Weingartner

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INTRODUCTION

We claim the right as citizens of a free republic, to make and consummate our own marriage contracts without the help or interference of a priest, a magistrate or other officer of state, and we claim the right to dissolve these contracts by mutual consent—we claim the right to correct our mistakes in this regard without being obliged to commit a technical or real crime and then be obliged to sue or be sued in a divorce court in order to get the contract dissolved. In short, we maintain that the interference of church and state in the sex-relations of men and women is a monstrous usurpation of authority, and that instead of promoting morality, purity, and happiness to the race, this interference is one of the most prolific sources of immorality, vice, crime and unhappiness to the parties immediately concerned.

—Moses Harman, 1 January 1886.¹

FROM 1880 TO 1910, men and women across America's heartland engaged in discussions of free love and sex reform through reading and corresponding in radical periodicals. Heralding from the nineteenth-century tradition of freethinking, they formed a critique of marriage which stated that the institution functioned to crush out love and entrap husbands and wives. Sex radicalism rejected state and religious control of marriage and came to encompass a wide range of issues, from chastising brutal husbands for spousal abuse to promoting women's free choice in reproduction as the means of improving the race through the science of eugenics. Forming a correspondence network across the country, sex radicals were able to promote discussion, evolve their opinions, and defend their ideas and actions in a world that was hostile to their existence.

This study examines the rise of sex radicalism in Kansas and the larger network emanating from it that spanned across the country as men and women sought to redefine the ways in which they thought about gender and sexuality. Sex radicals based their ideas of free love on the tradition of American freethought, especially the principle of individual sovereignty, and were rooted in the class struggle that marked the economic inequalities of the gilded age. They saw free love as the key to fulfilling freethought's

¹ Moses Harman, "Our Demands," *Lucifer*, 1 January 1886.

promise of total autonomy, resolving class differences, and releasing its adherents from oppressive sexual and marital customs. As they worked out the larger questions of marriage, love, and sexuality, they also contemplated the roles that men and women would have in their ideal society.

This study will follow the development of *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer*, a freethought and free love paper edited by Moses Harman, and its correspondents. Harman helped to found the fledgling paper in 1880 and directed its development until the publication ceased at the time of his death in 1910. His commitment to freeing women from “sex slavery” gave greater voice to free love, and his paper became devoted to the emancipation of women from the bonds of matrimony. Harman and his correspondents constructed lively debates on the nature of marriage, love, sex, and contraception, relating personal stories and opinions that can be used as a window into their lives. Readers and contributors discovered that their ideas were shared by many across the country, and they used the paper to form a supportive network to agitate for social change. The battle to bring about free love ideals, however, proved to be difficult. Sex radicals remained a minority, and the larger community came to view them as a danger to sexual morality and social stability.

The terms “free love” and “sex radical” have connoted a variety of ideas to different people and times, yet held a specific meaning for the men and women who read and wrote to sex reform papers. To their contemporaries, “free love” represented sexual promiscuity, unrestrained passion, and even prostitution. However, those who subscribed to the philosophy of free love refuted its equation with “free lust,” instead explaining that the term meant that they were free to form romantic and sexual relationships without the

influence of any outside forces, including the church, state, and even public opinion. They believed that there could be no love except that which was freely given and saw legal marriage as an obstruction to its continued existence, believing marriage bound two people together indefinitely despite their fluctuating feelings towards each other over time. Many men and women who promoted sex reform proudly adopted the title of “free lover” regardless of negative opinions held by mainstream society. Yet, their use of the term was often complicated by the fact that even though they endorsed the idea of free love, most were legally married and did not live out the full extent of their ideals. To broaden the understanding of and identify those associated with the free love movement, the term “sex radical” is used here to describe all those who contributed to the discussion of sexual subjects and proposed some kind of change to the current system, whether it was to advocate for women’s sexual equality and reproductive choice or to argue for the abolishment of legal marriage. While some men and women would not have identified themselves as “free lovers,” the term “sex radical” aptly describes their participation in the movement for sex reform.

This study joins a growing literature on the free love movement. Several historians have chosen to focus on individual free lovers and their struggles, engaging in a more biographical approach. Hal Sears writes about the story of Moses Harman in *The Sex Radicals*, discussing his rise to prominence in the Kansas community by publishing free love tracts. Martin Henry Blatt studies the life of Ezra Heywood in *Free Love and Anarchism*, showing how Heywood’s Boston-based journal *The Word* became a prominent advocate for sex reform. In *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825-1860*, John C. Spurlock traces several antebellum free love

leaders, such as Robert Owen, John Humphrey Noyes, and Thomas Groves. He also examines the development of utopian communities, pointing to Modern Times, Berlin Heights, and Oneida as a few examples. While these studies cover the careers of the individual free lovers and the dissemination of their ideology, they pay little attention to the subject of gender.²

Other historians have considered the ways in which the free love movement served to empower women. A broad but short overview is available in *Intimate Matters*, by John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman, and in Linda Gordon’s *The Moral Property of Women*. Both works argue that the late nineteenth-century sex radical movement was more widespread than antebellum utopian sex reform movements and that it challenged restrictions placed on women concerning sexual expression. As John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman have described, free lovers envisioned a society in which women could attain equality with men, especially in sexual matters.³ Most women working in what historians now identify as the first wave feminist movement concentrated their efforts in temperance and prohibition, woman suffrage, banning prostitution, and assisting “fallen women” as the means to gain power in the family and public spheres.⁴ Yet free love differed from the mainstream women’s rights movement in that its reformers promoted

² Hal D. Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Lawrence, KS: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977); 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).

³ John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: a History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

⁴ Janet Zollinger Giele, *Two Paths to Women’s Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995); Michael Lewis Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender Politics in Gilded Age Kansas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965); Paula Baker, *The Moral Frameworks of Public Life: Gender, Politics, and the State in Rural New York, 1870-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

the complete abolition of legal marriage. More specifically, Linda Gordon details how free lovers recognized women's sexuality outside of procreation and sought to give women control over their fertility.⁵ In *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality*, Joanne Passet focuses specifically on women involved in the movement. She argues that individual women used free love to empower themselves and that many female readers of sex radical literature actively participated in an open conversation about women's rights.⁶

While our understanding of the free love movement has been enhanced by all of these works, studies of the free love movement and feminism in the late nineteenth century are still lacking a complete gendered analysis. Studying "gender" often connotes studying women, rendering men "invisible." Whereas femininity is marked and studied, masculinity is "unmarked" and men are left genderless. Because of their supposed invisibility, argues gender theorist Todd Reeser, men should also be subjects of study.⁷ The free love movement has been analyzed for its contributions to women's history, that is, how it affected women's lives and served to give agency to individual women at a time period when women were taking on more public roles and asserting more authority in the family and marriage bonds. Many scholars have thus far shown how free love represented radical feminism and a redefinition of womanhood.

What has yet to be fully explored is what the free love movement can tell us about the history of men in the late nineteenth century. The manifestation of feminism inevitably affected concepts of masculinity and ultimately led to the reconstruction of

⁵ Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), which is an updated version of *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America* (New York: Grossman, 1976).

⁶ Joanne E. Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

⁷ Todd W. Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction* (Chichester, UK; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

manhood for those who accepted new roles for women. Historians, however, have thus far failed to contemplate what benefits free love specifically had to offer men and how it affected their conceptions of manhood. This is especially puzzling given that many of the individuals involved in the free love movement were men. Most of its key leaders were men, such as Moses Harman, editor of *Lucifer*, and Bostonian Ezra Heywood, editor of *The Word*, and a majority of *Lucifer's* regular correspondents and contributors were also men. What would free love and the emancipation of women mean for them? How did the men involved in the discussions of *Lucifer* understand their roles and identities as men? As sociologist Michal Kimmel asserts, masculinity is constructed in fields of power—men's power over women and men's power over other men.⁸ If free love was a purely feminist movement, then it would have entailed taking power away from men and redistributing that power to women.

Furthermore, historians have yet to consider why so many men would be involved in and committed to a movement that, at first glance, seemed to benefit women and further removed power from them at a time when men were also experiencing a loss of power in the economic, political, and cultural arenas. Many scholars point to the late nineteenth century as a time in which manhood and the idea of masculinity was in flux. Factors such as the loss of independence due to deteriorating economic conditions, industrialization, a growing awareness of the “feminization” of culture, and an increase of women in the public sphere all challenged men's authority in their own lives and in their cultural existence. Historians Gail Bederman and E. Anthony Rotundo contend that in response to this “crisis” in masculinity, middle class men looked to reinforce manhood

⁸ Michael Kimmel, “Invisible Masculinity,” in *The History of Men: Essays in the History of American and British Masculinities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 3-15.

with more traditional and even “primitive” characteristics, such as physical fitness, athletics, an infatuation with militarism, and a rejection of “feminized” behaviors popularized by the mid nineteenth-century bourgeoisie. Rural men who lacked access to many resources, Joanne Passet argues, looked to marriage as one place they could exert their authority and therefore subjected their wives to both physical and mental abuse. The goal for late nineteenth-century men, as these studies have argued, was to recapture the power and authority men feared they were losing. In fact, these studies would seem to suggest that men would be loathe to partake in any kind of feminist movement at all.⁹ How, then, do we explain men’s involvement and leadership in the free love movement?

One scholar has noticed the fact that some men played a large role in the women’s movement during this time but explains their motives in terms of altruism. These “pro-feminist” men, Michael Kimmel argues, were also responding to the crisis in masculinity, but they chose to embrace the argument for women’s social and political equality. Kimmel claims their motives stemmed from a “democratic impulse” that caused them to believe the only moral course of action was to grant women full equality with men. Men’s participation came from a belief in science and progress in a modern world and that men were impoverished by women’s oppression. Kimmel contends that support for issues that empowered women would “benefit men who could then relate to strong, whole people capable of complementary relations.” Women’s sexual freedom, he

⁹ See Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977); T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Michael Kimmel, *The History of Men: Essays on the History of American and British Masculinities*; E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Joanne E. Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women’s Equality*.

maintains, would lead to the possibilities of “sexual relations among equals.”¹⁰

Kimmel’s explanation, however, is not wholly satisfying because he does not state what effect this had on manhood or concepts of masculinity.

The historiography on the free love movement beckons the further exploration of why men, at a time when their very manhood seemed to be at stake, would be willing to abdicate their power and authority for the sake of woman’s equality. Certainly some cared about women’s difficulties in marriage and acted out of genuine concern for their female companions and relatives. Yet the fact that there were large numbers of men writing to *Lucifer* and acting to emancipate women from “sex slavery” poses more questions about their motivations and prompts further inquiry into their ideas about manhood. What direct benefits did free love bring to men? How did it serve to reshape men’s understandings of gender and their roles in association with women? *Lucifer’s* stated purpose was to free women, but a closer look at the paper and what its correspondents said about freeing women reveals what they thought free love and the abolition of marriage would do for men and manhood as well.

This study argues that free love was more than a movement for women’s rights; it also served to empower men at a time when they were experiencing a crisis in their own male identities. Through the promotion of women’s emancipation from “sex slavery” and the abolishment of marriage, sex radical men sought to throw off church and state oppression, defend against gilded-age capitalism, and recreate a form of individualism that they believed had been lost since the early nineteenth century. In making these arguments, I address several key aspects of the movement that have not received

¹⁰ Kimmel, “Men’s Responses to Feminism at the Turn of the Century” and “From ‘Conscience and Common Sense’ to ‘Feminism for Men’: Pro-Feminist Men’s Responses of Support for Women’s Equality,” in *The History of Men: Essays in the History of American and British Masculinities*.

adequate attention, including men and masculinity, class dynamics, freethought, eugenics, and the region of the Midwestern United States. Only a thorough investigation of all these factors together can bring a complete gendered analysis of the free love movement and the men and women who were involved in it.

Class analysis, which is closely linked with gender, is a key factor that is lacking in the historiography of free love. Only a few historians have assessed class implications in the promotion or restriction of free love. In *Imperiled Innocents*, Nicola Beisel argues that reformers such as Anthony Comstock sought to repress free discussions of sexuality because of their concern that immoral values would be passed to middle class children, thus corrupting the whole caste. The suppression of free love and its publications was thus a way to protect middle and upper class gentility. Joanne Passet makes a passing reference to class when she notes that many women who subscribed to sex radical periodicals were farm women and that many free lovers belonged to the oppressed rural class, but she does not make a connection to men's gender identities.¹¹ In their assessment of the free love movement, both of these studies fail to connect class conflict with ideas about "manliness."

To define "manhood," as Gail Bederman asserts, is to look at how men claim certain types of power based on their cultural identities and the way in which society classifies men according to its politics, ideas, and daily practices. "Manliness" referred to men's character and self control, all attributes that nineteenth-century society desired in a man, while the term "manly" was used to describe admirable men. "Masculinity," on the other hand, referred to any attribute of man, good or bad, and was defined in opposition

¹¹ Nicola Beisel, *Imperiled Innocents: Anthony Comstock and Family Reproduction in Victorian America* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997); Passet, 143-144.

to femininity. According to Bederman, manliness and the concept of manhood was in crisis in the late nineteenth century, as men experienced a loss of independence and power in the social, economic, and cultural realms.¹² It was these economically oppressed men who were drawn to the free love movement and its promise of individual autonomy and “self government.” Free love, as understood by *Lucifer’s* correspondents, could alleviate some of that oppression and return authority to individuals who believed it had been lost. This study furthers the connection between class position and sex reform by looking at the ways in which free love provided an outlet for men’s personal freedom and control over one’s destiny.

This study further argues that the movement for freethought served as an important foundation for free love that functioned to shape sex radicals’ ideas regarding manhood and class conflict, which ultimately resulted in their inquiry into eugenics as a possible solution to perceived social problems. Freethinking has long been a European and American intellectual tradition, and the late nineteenth century was the “Golden Age of Freethought.”¹³ “Freethought” is defined as “unorthodox attitudes or beliefs” and a “freethinker” as one who “forms opinions on the basis of reason independently of authority; especially: one who doubts or denies religious dogma.”¹⁴ In modern history, freethought specifically refers to the questioning of Christianity and the assertion that reason and science be used as the basis of understanding human life instead of a belief in

¹² Bederman, 7-19.

¹³ Historians Fred Whitehead and Verle Muhrer define the “Golden Age of Freethought” to be the time period of 1865-1914 in *Freethought on the American Frontier* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1992), 23.

¹⁴ Whitehead and Muhrer, 16.

supernatural powers.¹⁵ Freethought also challenged the power held by religious organizations (the church) over the dissemination of ideas and influence upon governments. Its influence has been explored by historian Hal D. Sears, who credits Harman's involvement with freethinkers to his commitment of free speech, but does not fully examine the role in which freethinking played in converting men of the oppressed classes to sex radicalism.¹⁶ Likewise, scholars have not fully explored the correlation between sex radicalism and eugenics. Most studies of eugenics focus on "negative eugenics," examining the ways in which Progressive reformers sought to limit the reproductive rates of those they identified as "unfit," including individuals with hereditary defects, social deviants, immigrants, and African-Americans.¹⁷

Freethought influenced sex radicals due to the fact that it promoted scientific thinking and addressed the inequities inherent in class conflict experienced by men of rural Kansas and the Midwest. In 1859, Charles Darwin published his theories of evolution in *On the Origin of Species*, creating much controversy between the religious and scientific communities. Darwinism had a significant impact on freethought in that its anti-religious ideology had finally been buttressed with what seemed to be scientific

¹⁵ For a description of the rise of science and the questioning of Christianity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance periods, see J.B. Bury, *A History of Freedom of Thought* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952).

¹⁶ See Sears, *The Sex Radicals*.

¹⁷ Simone M. Caron, *Who Chooses? American Reproductive History Since 1830* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008); Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Donald K. Pickens, *Eugenics and the Progressives* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968); William H. Tucker, *The Science and Politics of Racial Research* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Mark H. Haller, *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1963); Diane B. Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity 1865 to the Present* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995).

evidence.¹⁸ The debate over Darwinism only served to convince many freethinkers that the church vehemently opposed any discussion of rationalism or attempts to further scientific research.¹⁹ In the 1880s, freethinking allowed Kansas sex radicals to form arguments against the authority of the church, which they believed was influencing the direction of the state. Free love and the rejection of legal marriage provided one way in which freethinkers could reject perceived oppression from the church and state. Growing economic inequalities also pushed freethinkers to agitate for social justice.²⁰ As they embraced free love, they came to believe that freedom of reproductive choice would better humanity and eliminate class conflict.

Freethinkers' adherence to sex radicalism eventually led them to explore the theories of eugenics in the twentieth century. They were in agreement with contemporary science which assumed that mental and moral traits were determined by heredity and that current social ills such as poverty and crime were a result of defects in heredity.²¹ Unlike middle class reformers who were concerned with "race suicide" and wanted to prevent the reproduction of the poor and promote that of the middle class, some sex radicals came to believe that freedom of choice for everyone would further the human race overall. They utilized their concepts of freethought and free love as the basis for understanding how eugenics could be applied as a science. By rejecting the oppressive marriage conditions and restrictions on sexuality imposed by state laws and religious customs, sex radicals believed free love would enable women to be better mothers, giving birth to a

¹⁸ Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 124-148; Sidney Warren, *American Freethought, 1860-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 45-70.

¹⁹ Sears, 40.

²⁰ Warren, 117-118.

²¹ Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity 1865 to the Present*.

better race of men who would then be able to throw off class oppression, resist capitalism, and become independent individuals.

While most historians of free love focus on the East Coast and its major urban cities, they have not considered the significance of what Kansas and the rural Midwest can add to our understanding of sex radicalism, especially in its relationship to freethought and class conflict. Historians Fred Whitehead and Verle Muhrer observe that the majority of historians focus on notable journals and universities of the East and use these sources as representatives of the whole nation. They contend, however, that the rural Midwest produced its own culture that was “both unusual and common in the territory.”²² As historian Page Smith shows, free lovers were “sprinkled liberally throughout the farming communities of the Middle West,” and there was an “identifiably distinct grass-roots strain in the movement.” Smith points to Kansas and Iowa as prominent places where free love blossomed in addition to the East Coast.²³

Kansas provides a rich resource with which to examine how free love intersected and interacted with the themes of class, gender, and sexuality. As a representative state of America’s heartland, gilded-age Kansas contained all the necessary ingredients to grow sex radicalism. When Christian forces mounted to promote religiously-inspired laws, more men were drawn into the secular ideas of freethought, especially as women’s organizations backed efforts to outlaw liquor. The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union was particularly strong in Kansas and threatened not only to take away men’s power to drink but also to wrest political control from its traditional male base.²⁴

²² Whitehead and Muhrer, 16.

²³ Page Smith, *The Rise of Industrial America* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984), 267.

²⁴ See Nancy G. Garner, “‘A Prayerful Public Protest’: The Significance of Gender in the Kansas Woman’s Crusade of 1874,” *Kansas History* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1997/1998), 214-229; Janet Zollinger Giele, *Two*

Itinerant freethought lecturers began traveling to spread the message, finding support for their cause in rural Kansas.²⁵ Men further were drawn to sex radicalism due to deteriorating economic conditions faced by farmers in the Great Plains in the 1880s and 1890s. Kansas was one of the states hit hardest by drought, falling crop prices, and the loss of economic independence for men who had once been successful. Kansas men readily identified with the growing class conflict, naming the corrupt and unequal nature of capitalism as the source of their oppression.²⁶

It was out of a small town called Valley Falls that freethinkers conceived of what would be the longest running free love periodical in American history. Several men founded the *Valley Falls Liberal* to decry the growing religious influences in their state, and it quickly gained enough readers to expand out into the larger Midwest. The publication was edited by Moses Harman, a recent Kansas migrant with a background in radical abolition, freethought, and a penchant for independent thinking. Under Harman's leadership, the paper addressed topics such as prohibition and opposition to religion, but quickly expanded to include a critique of economic and social inequalities readers observed in gilded-age America. When Harman gained sole proprietorship, he renamed it *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* in honor of the freethought goal of seeking truth and furthering knowledge on all subjects. By the mid-1880s, *Lucifer* began to embrace free

Paths to Women's Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism; Alison M. Parker, *Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and Pro-Censorship Activism, 1873-1933* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Michael Lewis Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender Politics in Gilded Age Kansas*.

²⁵ Independent scholar Susan Jacoby states that the most influential speaker of the freethought movement in the "Golden Age" was Robert G. Ingersoll (1833-1899), who traveled and spoke on subjects such as agnosticism, secularism, and Darwinism. Ingersoll lived most of his life in Illinois, then moved to New York City in 1885. He was regarded as the most traveled freethought lecturer, bringing the message to isolated communities in the West, including Kansas. See Jacoby, 149-185.

²⁶ See O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1969); John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt* (1931; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961); Page Smith, *The Rise of Industrial America: A People's History of the Post-Reconstruction Era*.

love, responding to readers' concerns that the forces of church and state were intruding into this very private sector of their lives. After years of advocating free love and the emancipation of women from "sex slavery" (the abolition of legal marriage), Harman steered the paper in the direction of eugenics, focusing more on how to better humanity through motherhood. In its final years, *Lucifer* became the *American Journal of Eugenics*, laboring to ensure the birth of free and independent men.²⁷

While this study cannot ignore the persona of Moses Harman, it also identifies *Lucifer's* correspondents and illuminates the conversations they had regarding the paper's topics. Initially, the majority of its readers were located in the state of Kansas, but as Harman sent his junior editor, E.C. Walker, traveling throughout the Midwest the publication gained a wider recognition. By the 1890s, *Lucifer* claimed subscribers from all across America and even a few in Europe, primarily in Britain and France. Though at its height the paper reportedly sent out over fifteen hundred subscriptions, *Lucifer* likely had a readership of several thousand.²⁸ In analyzing her own research, Joanne Passet admitted that it is difficult for historians to determine how many men and women read sex radical periodicals because they frequently shared issues.²⁹ As much as possible, this study identifies *Lucifer's* contributors and attempts to put their lives into a larger context. While this is possible for frequent correspondents, other readers may have only contributed once in the paper's history. Passet points out that for many of the sex radicals, the scant letters written to the editor are the historian's only sources for these

²⁷ For the evolution of *Lucifer* and Harman's editorship, see the *Valley Falls Liberal* (1880-1881), the *Kansas Liberal* (1881-1883), *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* (1883-1907), and the *American Journal of Eugenics* (1907-1910).

²⁸ Sears, 99. This figure is reported for the year 1890.

²⁹ Passet, 52.

individuals, as few left diaries or other correspondence.³⁰ Regardless of how much they wrote, the sex radical men and women constructed debates and worked to shape their own understandings of free love. They extrapolated how those ideas could be applied to remedy the various social, economic, and political problems encountered in their daily lives. This study enlivens that conversation in order that we might gain a true perspective of how men participated in the movement, what their participation meant in terms of their gendered identities as men, and how those ideas applied to wider conceptions of sexuality during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Chapter 1 traces the roots of the freethought movement in Kansas in reaction to religious incursions into the state and worsening economic conditions for its rural inhabitants. The growing support for freethought had a gendered component to it; men battled against women of the WCTU and the larger forces of capitalism, both of which threatened their independence. As the men struggled to maintain personal autonomy, their ideas in *Lucifer* transitioned into free love, which promised to make them masters of their own affairs.

Chapters 2 and 3 examine how free love and the emancipation of women served to shape manhood and men's identities. Chapter 2 argues that men who participated in the movement reconstructed power over women by positioning themselves as rescuers and protectors of women, abolitionists who would free women from "sex slavery." It further argues that free love was a way in which men could declare their independence from church and state authority, thereby allowing them to pursue the ideals of nineteenth-

³⁰ Passet, 53. In a research statement, Passet asserts that she is confident that most of the letters written to the editor are genuine. Out of almost 3500 letters sampled for 14 different publications, she was able to locate census data for approximately fifteen percent of the correspondents and thus expresses confidence in the letters' authenticity. See Passet, 173-174, for a detailed description of her statistical analysis.

century individualism. Chapter 3 examines how female sex radicals were drawn into this male-centered movement and contends that women embraced free love for its potential to tame men's abusive sexual practices and bring about a more loving and considerate manhood.

Chapters 4 and 5 look outside the sex radicals to the larger community, most of whom saw free love as a danger to long-held marital and sexual customs. As explained in Chapter 4, the free love marriage of *Lucifer's* junior editor E.C. Walker to Moses Harman's sixteen-year-old daughter Lillian provoked communal outrage, as local citizens decried the illegal sexual arrangement and chastised the free lovers for their unrespectable representations of manhood and womanhood. Chapter 5 follows the community's further pursuit of Moses Harman, whom they believed posed a special danger, not only to moral and social order but also to sexual purity. Worried that Harman would further corrupt local children and wanting to punish him for his role in the free love marriage, townspeople called on the state to arrest him for publishing "obscene" literature.

Chapter 6 follows the logic of freethought and sex radicalism as *Lucifer* began to explore the ideas of eugenics into the twentieth century. Believing that women enslaved in legal marriage would only give birth to "slave children," the free lovers promoted eugenics as a solution to class conflict. Once women were free to make decisions concerning motherhood, they would naturally give birth to children who would grow up to be independently thinking men. This transition, however, only served to reinscribe male hegemony on the free love movement, as it limited the role of women to mothers while promoting wider sexual freedoms and economic opportunities for men.

CHAPTER 1

THE “KANSAS LIBERALS”: FREETHOUGHT ON THE HIGH PLAINS

Kansas was known to me twenty years ago as the rallying place of the hosts of freedom, and I am again to witness the gathering of those intellectual forces of which we never dreamed in slavery days. We want a platform where religionists and nonreligionists can meet, where women as well as men can express themselves. If we have truth we need not fear error.

--William Denton, September 7, 1879¹

IN THE SPRING OF 1882, a short, but feisty woman named Annie Diggs assumed the editorship of a fledgling reform paper called the *Kansas Liberal*. Diggs had “eyes that sparkled” and was loved by those in her community. She was passionate about the causes of freethought, the plight of rural farmers, and women’s rights. Diggs, a former Washington, D.C. journalist, was not content to remain a homemaker in her town of Lawrence. Instead, the reform spirit present in Kansas inspired her and she became a leading figure in the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), which lobbied to enforce new state prohibition laws and promote woman suffrage; the Populist movement, which argued for fairer economic conditions regarding rural farmers; and the Kansas Liberal Union (KLU), an organization that promoted freethought and worked to oppose religious incursions into the state.² As secretary of the KLU, Diggs served as one of the two editors for the *Liberal*. Her term as editor, however, was to be short-lived.

When Diggs became a vehement supporter of the female issue of temperance, she clashed with other freethinkers. Temperance and the state’s newly passed prohibition

¹ William Denton, “Spiritualism, Heaven and Hell,” *Cloud County Blade*, 20 September 1879. Reprinted from a speech given by Denton at the Bismarck Grove campmeeting on Sunday, September 7, 1879.

² Michael Lewis Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender Politics in Gilded Age Kansas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 89, 180-82

laws divided the Kansas freethinkers on gendered lines. Among those who supported prohibition, most were female suffragists.³ Conversely, freethinking men opposed the enforcement of prohibition laws, citing the violation of personal choice. The columns of the *Kansas Liberal* were filled with comments from male contributors who insisted that “compulsory legislation” could never be successful and would only inhibit individual rights, while female contributors such as Elmina Slenker argued that men, because of their inherent “weaknesses” and “tendencies to error,” were incapable of self-restraint when it came to liquor and the domestic threats it posed for women.⁴ Diggs continued to support the temperance laws even through her co-editor, Moses Harman, spoke out against them.

As a female editor, Diggs also found herself personally attacked by some male readers. Alfred Taylor, the former president of the Kansas Liberal League, sent her a letter in which he wrote that he originally read the *Liberal* with “a great deal of satisfaction.” He had supposed the selections, writings, and arrangements “were the work of the superior talent of a man.” However, he had since learned that they were partially credited to a woman and now “they do not seem quite so good as we first thought them.” Taylor reasoned that, based on scientific evidence, the female brain was lighter than the male’s, and because women consumed less than men to support a smaller frame, “consequently your brain is not so powerful.” In his opinion, the management of a reform paper required “first class talent,” which he believed Diggs lacked due to her gender. Taylor expressed doubt that she could take on the enormous task of editing a

³ Hal Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Lawrence, KS: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), 47.

⁴ W.S. Bell, “Individuality,” *Kansas Liberal*, 30 March 1883; Elmina Slenker, “The Drunkard’s Wife,” *Kansas Liberal*, 30 March 1883.

freethought paper whose goals were to battle church and state oppression, adding that in her efforts “your inferior sex will have a pretty hard struggle.”⁵

One female reader came to Diggs’ defense. “Aunt Susan” chastised Taylor for attempting to intimidate Diggs, stating that like many other male liberals he had a hard time relinquishing old superstitions regarding the capabilities of women. She lamented that there would be “for a long time to come many more male Liberals” like Taylor, and women would do their best to prove them wrong. Aunt Susan maintained that man “must expect to content himself with one-half of the benefits of life, and that half adjusted with a precision which femininity helps arrange.”⁶ Yet, in her letter, Aunt Susan failed to see that it was the gendered issue of temperance that seemed to bring the negative attention to Diggs. Just a few weeks prior to his letter to Diggs, Taylor had written to editor Moses Harman praising his work and talent in organizing a freethought reform paper.⁷

Annie Diggs would not get to prove herself as an editor for the *Kansas Liberal*; in just a few short months the paper was returned to the sole proprietorship of Moses Harman. Her support and his opposition to temperance compounded with the newly passed Kansas state prohibition laws only increased as the two editors tried to collaborate on the reform paper. Harman wrote that eventually it became impossible for the two to work together, and in August 1882, only five months after Diggs joined the endeavor, she was forced out of the editor’s seat.⁸ Harman resumed his position as the solitary editor and steered the paper in the tide against prohibition. Under his direction, the *Kansas Liberal* would now stand for “self-government,” and, in a declaration of the paper’s

⁵ Alfred Taylor, “An Open Letter to Mrs. Annie L. Diggs,” *Kansas Liberal*, 18 May 1882.

⁶ Aunt Susan, “Letter to the Editor,” *Kansas Liberal*, 1 June 1882.

⁷ Alfred Taylor, “Letter to the Editor,” *Kansas Liberal*, 20 April 1882.

⁸ Moses Harman, “Lucifer’s Coming of Age,” *Lucifer*, 31 August 1901.

fundamentals, he wrote that “one citizen cannot rightfully prevent another from choosing his own food, drink or medicine; neither can government, state or national, rightfully deprive the citizen of this power of choice.”⁹

The brief editorship of Annie Diggs illustrated that the freethought movement contained a decidedly gendered tone. Freethought in Kansas and larger Midwest was about more than an attempt to attack Christianity; rather, it presented freethinking men with an opportunity to vent the economic and political frustrations they experienced as they tried to live out the ideals of individualism in the late nineteenth century. Many freethinkers were men who, as struggling farmers or working class laborers, already faced depressing economic conditions in a rapidly industrializing society. Furthermore, the late nineteenth century witnessed the rise of female influence in the public sphere through religious movements, including temperance and suffrage, both of which contested male authority. As men were faced with these challenges, they questioned their manhood and very identities as men.¹⁰ Freethought presented disempowered men with the opportunity to reassert their individualism by means of rejecting church and state inference, denouncing capitalism, and insisting on the right to self-government in all aspects of life.

Based on their ideas of personal liberty, the Kansas freethinkers soon began to develop ideas on free love and sex reform. Men participating in the freethought discussion could do little to change their economic status, as they felt more encumbered

⁹ Moses Harman, “Temperance and Government,” *Kansas Liberal*, 22 September 1882.

¹⁰ For a discussion on the crisis in manhood, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Michael Kimmel, *The History of Men: Essays on the History of American and British Masculinities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005); E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

by capitalist influences in gilded-age America, and they expressed a sense of powerlessness as moral reformers encouraged the passage of religious laws. However, several contributors to the *Kansas Liberal* and its successor, *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer*, started to investigate “free love” as a way to declare self-government in their personal affairs. In advocating free love, men rejected church and state incursions into their lives by way of marriage laws, asserting that it was their right alone to form or dissolve sexual relationships. By the mid-1880s, readers engaged in the discussion of sex and marriage reform in *Lucifer*, becoming sex radicals who believed free love would provide a means to affirm their autonomy in a world in which it was rapidly disappearing. Sex radicalism took on a gendered form of discussion, linking independence in sexual relationships to manly individualism and religious and state interference to feminine weakness. Thus, what began as a movement for freethought transitioned into a movement for free love within a few short years.

* * *

In the late summer of 1879, Kansas freethinkers, or “Liberals” as they called themselves, prepared for a large campmeeting in reaction to mounting religious forces in the state. The event was held during the second week of September in Bismarck Grove, which became a “communal city” of wagons, tents, and people. Lectures and special sessions ran from ten in the morning until midnight.¹¹ Speakers attacked religious incursions into the state, arguing instead for a secular government. G.W. Brown called for all Liberals to organize against the “antagonistic bonds” in order for church and state

¹¹ Sears, 49.

to be completely separated.¹² Furthermore, G.H. Walser protested against the fact that “church people” had already organized and ran the government without regard to modern scientific knowledge or facts.¹³ Other lecturers attacked Christianity in general, such as Professor William Denton, a state geologist from Massachusetts, who voiced the opinion that while “our art, our science, our mechanics are of the present age; our religion contains a large proportion of what rightfully belongs to the prehistoric age, when men were cannibals.”¹⁴ The six day event was widely attended by Kansans and other Midwesterners. Local newspapers reported numbers ranging from three thousand up to nearly twelve thousand people at the height of the campmeeting.¹⁵ One attendee recalled that it was the “largest Freethought Convention ever seen in the state,” observing that “thousands” were there.¹⁶

In holding their campmeeting, Kansas freethinkers were reacting against the movement for prohibition and religious incursions into the state. Previously in August 1878, a National Temperance campmeeting was held at Bismarck Grove, promising to be the biggest that the West had ever seen. Though temperance was the topic, it was closely tied to Kansas politics. Gubernatorial candidates served as prominent speakers, including Republican John P. St. John who later won the election based on his temperance platform. In August 1879, another temperance meeting was held, this time attracting between 75,000 to 100,000 people who celebrated a state legislative proposal to outlaw alcohol and rallied for victory at the polls. The following week, the Inter-State Sunday

¹² James C. Malin, *A Concern about Humanity: Notes on Reform, 1872-1912, at the National and Kansas Levels of Thought* (Lawrence, Kansas: By the Author, 1964), 67.

¹³ Malin, 68.

¹⁴ William Denton, “The Pocasset Tragedy,” *Cloud County Blade*, 20 September 1879.

¹⁵ Malin, 70.

¹⁶ Moses Harman, “A Call From Between Prison Bars to the Liberals of Kansas,” *Lucifer*, 12 August 1892.

School Assembly hosted a ten day meeting which included religious lectures, courses of study, and concerts.¹⁷

Kansas politics in the 1870s and 1880s encouraged the growth of a rural freethought movement because of the way in which it was closely tied to religion. Firmly rooted in its political parties was the idea that the state was theologically sanctioned, that government was derived by God rather than by man. This was most evident in the newly formed Prohibition Party, which declared a theological origin of government and sanction of legislation.¹⁸ By the election of 1878, temperance and a push for state-wide prohibition had become the main topic of debate. All three candidates for the office of governor were temperance men, including John St. John, who was elected president of the Kansas Temperance Union at the state convention that year. In 1879, the legislature passed a constitutional amendment for prohibition.¹⁹

Behind the movement for prohibition and closer ties between church and state was the National Reform Association (NRA). Formed during the Civil War, the NRA was conceived by people who feared the complete separation of church and state. Its chief purpose was to secure an amendment to the Constitution stating that the nation was Christian, and it also attempted to legislate morality. Toughening Sunday laws and outlawing liquor were just a few of the items on its agenda. The NRA held periodic gatherings and had local chapters across the country, including one in Kansas.²⁰ It maintained a presence in Kansas politics, as two of its vice presidents included former

¹⁷ Jim L. Lewis, "Beautiful Bismarck," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (Autumn 1969), 225-256.

¹⁸ Malin, 77, 2.

¹⁹ Malin, 22-24.

²⁰ Sidney Warren, *American Freethought, 1860-1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943), 176-179; Malin, 66; Sears, 50.

governors.²¹ In 1883, the NRA held a two day convention in Valley Falls, Kansas to promote formally Christianizing the state.²²

Working fervently for the movement of temperance was the Kansas branch of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Inspired by accounts of women organizing against saloons in Ohio, Protestant women in eastern Kansas formed their own chapter of the national WCTU in 1874 and ran a "Women's Crusade" to shut down saloons. Using their moral authority and command of the religious sphere, the women believed that they could improve men's performances as husbands and fathers by extending their influence into the public sphere to change men's private lives. They targeted liquor and the saloon as the source of men's selfishness, greed, and dishonesty. The women argued that civic morality could only be met if an equal balance of power existed between men and women in the public sphere. Prohibitionists therefore crossed the lines between public and private, inserting religious values into political debates and promoting larger roles for women in governmental affairs. This feminizing of Kansas politics resulted in the passage of the state prohibition amendment in 1880.²³

On a national level, the freethought movement gained momentum after the Civil War in response to and in reaction against the expansion of religious institutions.²⁴ The National Liberal League (NLL) was formed in 1876, and the movement gained support

²¹ Among its vice presidents were former territorial governor of Kansas John W. Geary and James M. Harvey, governor of Kansas 1869-1873 and US Senator of KS 1874-1877, Malin, 77.

²² Sears, 50.

²³ Nancy G. Garner, "'A Prayerful Public Protest': The Significance of Gender in the Kansas Woman's Crusade of 1874," *Kansas History* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1997/1998); Janet Zollinger Giele, *Two Paths to Women's Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995); Alison M. Parker, *Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and Pro-Censorship Activism, 1873-1933* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Kenneth S. Davis, *Kansas: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976), 144.

²⁴ Susan Jacoby, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 151-153.

from those who claimed freethought was necessary to advance scientific discovery.²⁵ Its platform included measures against the exemption of church property from taxation, the use of the Bible in schools, official proclamations of religious festivals, Sabbath observance laws, all laws meant to enforce Christian morality, and any attempt to privilege Christianity or any other religion in national and state constitutions.²⁶ Freethinkers began using the term “Liberal” to identify one who questioned the supernatural aspects of Christianity. Liberals, however, differed in their particular spiritual beliefs, ranging from materialists to spiritualists, and theists to atheists or agnostics.²⁷ Their one uniting factor was a rejection of orthodox Christianity and its influence on secular government. “Liberal” also came to mean a belief in the radical separation of church and state.²⁸ One prominent Kansas freethinker explained that the “word Liberal comes from the Latin word *liber*, signifying *free*. Hence the Liberal is one who is free from the bondage of Creeds.”²⁹

Facing threats to the secular government in Kansas from groups such as the NRA and WCTU, Kansas Liberals organized their Bismarck Grove campmeeting as a national meeting of the NLL. The goal was to publicize their concerns and recruit local citizens into the freethought movement. The campmeeting initiated the formation of the Kansas Liberal League; its platforms included issues such as the rejection of Christian dogma, religious freedom, a secular state, equality of men and women, and free speech.³⁰ The

²⁵ Malin, 66; Sears, 40.

²⁶ Malin, 66.

²⁷ Moses Harman, “Report of the Camp Meeting,” *Lucifer*, 14 September 1883.

²⁸ Sears, 36.

²⁹ Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 28 December 1883.

³⁰ Malin, 70-72.

campmeeting also inspired the founding of thirty to forty local Liberal Leagues³¹ along with numerous freethought journals.³² Subsequently, the state of Kansas came to be known nationally as a “laboratory of social experiment.”³³ Out of the many leagues formed, one in a small town called Valley Falls would rise to prominence.

At the time of the Bismarck Grove campmeeting, there were several Liberals residing in Valley Falls. Founded in 1869, the town was situated in eastern Kansas at the crossroads of two major Kansas railroads. It quickly became a center of agriculture, industry, and business and attracted pioneers from many eastern and southern states.³⁴ By 1880, Valley Falls reached a population of 1,030.³⁵ Residents of eastern Kansas noticed that there were a sizeable number of freethinkers in the region.³⁶ As a town in this area, Valley Falls was an example; a freethought organization originated in 1868. Local resident S.R. Shepherd invited several citizens to his office “for the purpose of forming a Liberal society, whose object should be to combat old theology, contribute to mutual improvement, etc,” called the “Philomathic [Philometric] Society.”³⁷ The group was reorganized in 1878 as the “Free Religious Society” with local farmer and

³¹ Samuel Porter Putnam, *400 Years of Freethought* (New York: Truth Seeker Company, 1894), 550, claims that thirty to forty leagues were formed in Kansas between 1879-1883. James Malin, 76, cites a letter from lecturer O.A. Phelps to the *Cloud County Blade* in which he claimed to have organized forty local leagues during his travels through the state in the spring and summer of 1880.

³² Malin, 76-77. Freethought journals established include the *National Monitor* of Wichita, the *Liberal Advocate* of Topeka, the *Western Reformer* of Salina, the *Cloud County Blade* of Concordia, and the *Valley Falls Liberal* of Valley Falls, all being short-lived except for the *Blade* and the *Valley Falls Liberal*.

³³ Fred Whitehead and Verle Muhrer, *Freethought on the American Frontier* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1992), 23.

³⁴ R.E. Van Meter, “Valley Falls: Its Location, Development and Prospects,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 8 April 1886.

³⁵ A. G. Patrick, editorial note, *Oskaloosa Independent*, 14 May 1881.

³⁶ Whitehead and Muhrer, 23.

³⁷ A.J. Searl, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 31 July 1885. Moses Harman described S.R. Shepherd as a “pioneer abolitionist, newspaper man, freethinker of the agnostic type, also a social reformer on all lines;” M Harman, “Lucifer’s Coming of Age,” *Lucifer*, 31 August 1901.

businessman Noah H. Harman as its president.³⁸ According to member A.J. Searl, it flourished for a short period of time but then fell apart. It was only after the excitement of the freethought campmeeting at Bismarck Grove that Valley Falls Liberals made another attempt at organizing. In November 1879, Searl and others obtained enough names to apply for a charter from the NLL for the Valley Falls Liberal League (VFLL).³⁹ Noah Harman was elected President with Joshua Vandruff, A.J. Searl, and Susan Reicheter as officers, all “old citizens, and well known Liberals.” Within a few months, there were around fifty members who held monthly meetings at the local hall.⁴⁰

The VFLL soon engaged in a heated contest with local Christians. The catalyst was a series of lectures given by freethinker Professor O.A. Phelps of Kansas City in February 1880. He spoke against Christian dogma and the proposed religious amendment to the Constitution.⁴¹ Afterwards, the *Valley Falls New Era*, a leading town newspaper, published religious debates between “Sylvester,” an anonymous local Christian, and “Rustic,” a member of the VFLL named Moses Harman.⁴² Eventually, the editor of the *New Era* declined to continue with the debates due to complaints from his

³⁸ Malin, 104. Noah Harman was the cousin of Moses Harman.

³⁹ A.J. Searl, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 31 July 1885.

⁴⁰ Rustic, “Reply to ‘Sylvester’ Number III, Concluded,” *Valley Falls New Era*, Supplement, 12 June 1880. As stated below, “Rustic” was the pseudonym of Moses Harman.

⁴¹ Editor, “Additional Local Matters,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 31 January 1880

⁴² Moses Harman, “Lucifer’s Coming of Age,” *Lucifer*, 31 August 1901. Of the pseudonym “Rustic,” Harman said it “was taken partly in reference to my lack of experience as a writer for the press.” As for the identity of “Sylvester,” Harman said it “was not hard to find” but it was also “merely conjecture as to who wrote the series of letters over his signature that appeared” in the *New Era*. There was evidence that “they were written, or at least mainly inspired, by the ‘Congregational’ minister of the city, a man of very considerable learning and skill in debate, named Wilson, and who had often participated in the debates of the ‘Philomatic Society.’” Points of contention between Sylvester and Rustic included the questions of whether or not figures from the Bible represented moral examples, how freethought could advance scientific discovery, whether or not freethought was inspired by the devil, and the merits of maintaining a secular government. See Sylvester, “From Peter’s Creek,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 17 April 1880; Rustic, “A Word to Sylvester,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 24 April 1880; Sylvester, “A Word to ‘Rustic,’” *Valley Falls New Era*, 1 May 1880; Rustic, “Word to Sylvester,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 8 May 1880; Sylvester, “Reply to ‘Rustic,’” *Valley Falls New Era*, 22 May 1880; Rustic, “Reply to ‘Sylvester’ Number III,” *Valley Falls New Era*, Supplement, 5 June 1880; Rustic, “Reply to ‘Sylvester’ Number III, Concluded,” *Valley Falls New Era*, Supplement, 12 June 1880.

Christian patrons.⁴³ Not wanting the discussion to die, the VFLL voted to start a new journalistic endeavor, launching the *Valley Falls Liberal (VFL)* in August 1880.⁴⁴ That the VFLL sought to create its own newspaper based on a continued debate was not unusual for Kansas. In his study of Kansas newspapers, historian Kenneth S. Davis found that a paper was often the propaganda of a cause or political party. The press in Kansas was unique; it played an active role in history, worked to influence the public, and was “intensely partisan, violently controversial, and ruthlessly competitive.”⁴⁵

The *VFL* was a direct response to political and gendered issues in Kansas. Freethinking men witnessed the power of the church to influence the state when prohibition laws were passed. They feared further incursion into the state by the church and were alarmed at the growing forces of the WCTU women, who also threatened to capture political power directly through a growing suffrage movement in the state of Kansas. Consequently, their reform paper would promote the “total separation of Church and State” and advocate the repeal of any law inspired by religion in attempt to combat the women’s growing influence. At the same time, readers also represented the Midwest’s small farmers and working classes; rural men were increasingly concerned with economic instability and the loss of their status as independent heads of the household in an industrial order. To men who feared they were being swallowed by the

⁴³ Moses Harman, “Lucifer’s Coming of Age,” *Lucifer*, 31 August 1901. Harman, however, recognized the editor G.D. Ingersoll’s fairness in allowing the VFLL to publish its side of the opinion, stating “Mr. Ingersoll has always had the manliness to recognize our right, as citizens of a free republic, to have our say on all questions affecting human interests. From first to last he has kindly furnished us every facility in his power to bring out our paper in the best manner possible.” Harman & Walker, “The Valley Falls New Era,” *Lucifer*, 11 January 1884.

⁴⁴ Moses Harman, “Lucifer’s Coming of Age,” *Lucifer*, 31 August 1901. The *VFL* was to be a monthly, 4 page paper.

⁴⁵ Davis, 131.

capitalist machine, the *VFL* would “champion the rights of the poor and laboring men” and promote individual sovereignty for all men.⁴⁶

In the paper’s first year, school teacher and fruit farmer Moses Harman was elected as editor to the *VFL*.⁴⁷ Harman was a recent migrant to Kansas, having left Missouri in 1879 with his two young children after the death of his wife in 1877. He had previously rejected organized religion while in Missouri after the Methodist church condoned slavery in the 1850s and further moved towards agnosticism after associating with Universalists. He came to believe that organized religion impeded free thinking and likened church doctrine to slavery. During the Civil War, Harman was ostracized from his Southern Missouri community for his radical views on abolition and freethought, and by the 1870s he believed he would find a more accepting home in Kansas, what he saw as the “historic battle ground between Freedom and Despotism.”⁴⁸ Moses Harman likely chose the town of Valley Falls as his new home upon hearing positive reports from his cousin Noah Harman, a long time resident, able farmer, and competent businessman.⁴⁹

In its first year, the *VFL* expanded its influence across Kansas. Though there were no profits to be made publishing a freethought journal, as half of the cheaply printed editions were given away, the *VFL* found many “liberal friends” for miles around and

⁴⁶ “Prospectus,” *Valley Falls Liberal*, August 1880; “Our Platform,” *Valley Falls Liberal*, January 1881.

⁴⁷ Editorial note, *Valley Falls Liberal*, November 1880; Malin, 104. Also elected as editor was A.J. Searl, Secretary of the VFL and “one of the best known and most active, clear-headed and logical of the Valley Falls Freethinkers.” He also served as the Secretary and, later, the President of the Kansas State Liberal League. However, Searl soon resigned to pursue a course of study at Kansas State University, leaving Harman as sole editor. See Moses Harman, “Lucifer’s Coming of Age,” *Lucifer*, 31 August 1901 and Moses Harman, “The Amenities of Debate,” *Lucifer*, 26 March 1886.

⁴⁸ George Harman, “Moses Harman,” *The Farmer’s Vindicator*, 11 February 1910. Harman’s wife, Susan Shook, had died in childbirth, leaving Harman to raise their remaining two children, George and Lillian. Harman moved to Kansas in 1879. Sears, 30. Hal Sears notes that Harman gained such notoriety for his anti-slavery position during the Civil War that townspeople had voted to run him out of Crawford County. John Steele McCormick, *History and Genealogy of Forest Hill, Crawford County, Missouri* (Leasburg, Missouri: By the Author, 1970), 91-94. Moses Harman and Edwin C. Walker, “Retrospect,” *Lucifer*, 3 April 1885.

⁴⁹ Malin, 103.

even acquired subscribers in other states.⁵⁰ Enough subscribers were procured in the first year to continue the publication which was renamed the *Kansas Liberal (KL)* to reflect its growing geographic influence.⁵¹ Subsequently, the KLL hosted another campmeeting in 1881 in which the organization transformed into the Kansas Liberal Union (KLU).⁵² The *KL* and the KLU soon united in their efforts. C.B. Hoffman, President of the KLU, spoke with *KL* editor Moses Harman and suggested he offer the *KL* as the “medium of communication” for the new organization.⁵³ Harman agreed, and the *KL* became the organ of the KLU. He would continue in his position as chief editor of the paper, but the office was moved to Lawrence where the business of the KLU was conducted. Annie L. Diggs, Secretary of the KLU, would serve as the managing editor. Harman’s work on the paper was considerably lessened, as he remained in Valley Falls, while Diggs, living in Lawrence, played a larger role in publishing the paper.⁵⁴

Annie Diggs was no stranger to social activism. After working as a journalist in Washington, D.C., she moved to Lawrence after securing a position at the local music store. She soon married A.S. Diggs, a postal clerk, and had three children. Annie Diggs, however, was not content to be a homemaker. Her association with the Unitarian Church led her to connect with other freethinkers, and Diggs served as one of the founding

⁵⁰ Moses Harman to William Denton, 16 March 1881, Denton Family Papers, folder “Harman, Moses, 1830-1910,” Joseph A. Labadie Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University Library, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor; Moses Harman, editorial note, *Valley Falls Liberal*, January 1881.

⁵¹ Moses Harman, “The Prospective,” *Valley Falls Liberal*, July 1881.

⁵² Editors, “An Appeal for the Unity of Effort Among Liberals,” *Kansas Liberal*, 20 April 1882. The members believed this name to be “more expressive of the character of said organization” due to the fact that it was composed of every phase of Liberal thought, including Materialists, Spiritualists, Free Religionists, Universalists, Unitarians, and Socialists. G.C. Castleman, “Attention Liberals!” *Kansas Liberal*, 13 April 1882.

⁵³ Moses Harman, “Important Announcement,” *Kansas Liberal*, January 1882.

⁵⁴ Moses Harman, “Announcement,” *Kansas Liberal*, 4 May 1882; Moses Harman, “Lucifer’s Coming of Age,” *Lucifer*, 31 August 1901. For Diggs’s increased role, see the *Kansas Liberal* from April-July of 1882.

members of the KLU in 1881. At the same time, she also engaged in the efforts for temperance and woman suffrage. Her first crusade was in 1877 against liquor usage by male students at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, and shortly thereafter she joined the WCTU in its campaign for the state prohibition amendment and woman suffrage.

Though she had become well known as a freethinker, Diggs was tolerated by the Christian organization despite her non-belief. The women welcomed her because of her devotion to these two issues. She respected the WCTU's empowerment of women through their suffrage campaigns and formed close friendships with its female members. In regards to her personality and values, Diggs was said to be a woman of much charm and grace, embodying the "outward manifestations of middle class respectability."⁵⁵

The *KL* seemed to benefit from its new association with the KLU. Readers approved and continued to write to the editors in support of the paper. B.W. Cook of Fontana, Kansas wrote that "I hope to receive it each week, as I find many things in it that I consider of great value."⁵⁶ From LaCygne, Kansas, D.W. Cozard told the editors that the *KL* "fills a long-felt want."⁵⁷ Both readers pledged to do their best to obtain other subscribers in their communities. Moses Harman noted that the new affiliation did serve to bring in "a very considerable increase to the subscription lists together with some important donations."⁵⁸ It looked as if the freethought paper, once an experiment, would

⁵⁵ O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1969), 78-80. John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt* (1931; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 165; Goldberg, 84-89, 180-182; Annie Diggs, "Woman Under the Rule of the Law, the Government and the Church," *Kansas Liberal*, 20 April 1882.

⁵⁶ B.W. Cook, "Letter to the Editor," *Kansas Liberal*, 1 June 1882.

⁵⁷ D.W. Cozard, "Letter to the Editor," *Kansas Liberal*, 1 June 1882.

⁵⁸ Moses Harman, "Lucifer's Coming of Age," *Lucifer*, 31 August 1901.

now be assured of continued survival and avoid the short-lived nature of so many other opinion newspapers in late nineteenth-century Kansas.⁵⁹

However, the union between the KLU and the *KL*, and more specifically Moses Harman and Annie Diggs, would not hold as gendered clashes emerged over the issue of prohibition. While the amendment passed in 1880, its enforcement was severely lacking.⁶⁰ Prohibition became closely tied with the campaign for women's suffrage when the WCTU, concerned for the safety of women and children, lobbied to enforce the law. Temperance women could now call upon the power of the courts to legally shut down saloons and take action against law enforcement officials who refused to acknowledge the new law. Furthermore, the Kansas WCTU supported and promoted suffrage efforts, viewing the franchise as the primary means to better prohibition enforcement. In its opinion, men were badly in need of moral instruction and took every opportunity to sin. This was why male-controlled businesses and politics were so corrupt. The WCTU was successful in helping women gain municipal suffrage in 1887, and the women believed that they could use the vote to pressure officeholders to uphold prohibition laws. Their tactics were more effective in small towns where local women could organize a small group of leading male citizens to aid in their efforts.⁶¹ Moses Harman observed one such group in Valley Falls, what he called a "Law and Order League" whose resolution was for this purpose.⁶² As Harman and others discussed the subject in the *KL*, it was clear

⁵⁹ For the short-lived nature of many opinion newspapers in Kansas history, see Kenneth S. Davis, *Kansas: A Bicentennial History*.

⁶⁰ Davis, 144-146.

⁶¹ Goldberg, 78-88.

⁶² Moses Harman, "Efforts to Enforce Prohibition," *Kansas Liberal*, March 1882. Harman did not indicate that the WCTU organized this group, but most likely temperance women were behind its formation.

that opinions on prohibition were split by gender, with men in opposition and several women in favor.

One of the lone voices in the *KL* supporting a prohibition law was Elmina Slenker. Born to Quaker parents, her father was a preacher who became a “doubting Thomas,” influencing her interest in freethought. Slenker supported such reforms as free soil, temperance, and equal rights, and she wrote for a Boston freethought journal called the *Investigator*.⁶³ Though living in western Virginia, Slenker became acquainted with the *VFL* and its successor the *KL*, serving as a regular contributor. She heartily agreed with the *KL*'s platform of religious freedom; however, Slenker represented the female perspective on prohibition. Concerning liquor, it was her opinion that men were “born full of tendencies to error, wrong and evil” and thus were incapable of making good decisions on their own; they would always succumb to the temptations of the drink. Because of this inherent weakness and its domestic implications, Slenker asserted that men should not have the right to access alcohol. Therefore, she argued, the state should take the choice of drink away from men to protect not only them but their families as well.⁶⁴ Slenker's support of prohibition, however, was the minority opinion voiced in the *KL*.⁶⁵

Men, who formed the majority of the paper's readers, argued that prohibition laws went against the principle that valued their personal sovereignty. While female contributors were quick to support a measure they believed would protect women and children, the men of the *KL* saw the law as a threat to their ability to make decisions.

⁶³ W.C. Cope, “Elmina Drake Slenker,” *To-Morrow*, reprinted in *Lucifer*, 6 June 1907.

⁶⁴ Elmina Slenker, “Letter to the Editor,” *Kansas Liberal*, 30 March 1883.

⁶⁵ Moses Harman, “Elmina's Rejoinder,” *Kansas Liberal*, 30 March 1883. Harman notes that even though those in favor of prohibition constituted a minority, they should still be given a space in the *KL*, as the paper was founded on the platform of free speech.

Even though most men of the *KL* practiced personal temperance, they wanted the choice to be available for all. Contributor W.S. Bell wrote that Liberals “admit that intemperance is a gigantic evil, but we recognize in despotism a greater evil.” Bell stated “the individual has a right to do just as he pleases as long as he does not interfere with the equal rights of others.”⁶⁶ Protecting male autonomy was the first priority of the Kansas Liberals. Moses Harman argued that “one citizen cannot rightfully prevent another from choosing his own food, drink or medicine; neither can government, state or national, rightfully deprive the citizen of this power of choice.” He maintained that when a government tried to enforce such laws, it took away the right of self-government.⁶⁷ Though he chose not to drink, Harman saw the prohibition crusaders as a threat to personal freedom, the men who made their livings in the liquor trade business, and men who chose on their own to drink.⁶⁸

Annie Diggs set herself apart from the men of the *KL* for her views on temperance. Furthermore, Diggs was collaborating with the WCTU to enforce prohibition and also gain suffrage for women. In her own words, Diggs admitted to forming close friendships with religious women of the WCTU, some of them reverends’ wives. She even defended the church, the very institution that the *KL* frequently attacked, for its positive attitude towards women, claiming the crusade for the ballot was made possible by the church and its ability to develop “self-reliance and individuality among women.” Diggs stated that under church education, women were awakened to the interests of politics and had become fit for “an intelligent exercise of the duties and

⁶⁶ W.S. Bell, “Individuality,” *Kansas Liberal*, 30 March 1883.

⁶⁷ Moses Harman, “Temperance and Government,” *Kansas Liberal*, 22 September 1882.

⁶⁸ Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 11 January 1884.

privileges of citizenship.”⁶⁹ Yet, what she wrote in the pages of the *KL* was contrary to the opinion of other freethinkers who were suspicious of the church’s intentions and believed that it oppressed rather than uplifted women.⁷⁰

Annie Diggs’ involvement in both the temperance movement and the WCTU clashed with the reform goals of her co-editor. Moses Harman vehemently opposed the enforcement of prohibition laws, and he likely conflicted with Diggs on the issue of woman suffrage. As a freethinker, he maintained a platform of equal civil rights for men and women and promoted women’s suffrage in the *KL*.⁷¹ However, Harman expressed doubt that much good would come from the female vote. Women, he contended, were heavily influenced by the church and succumbed to the “power of the clergy,” especially women of the WCTU whom he saw as the pawns of the religious element. Their entrance into politics, he argued, would only serve to enhance the power of the church, tying it more closely to the state. Harman viewed women of the WCTU as most dangerous for the way they were amassing political power in Kansas. In one particular instance, religious women in Valley Falls organized to nominate conservative councilmen, what Harman referred to as the “woman’s ticket.”⁷² Diggs, on the other hand, openly admitted to not only joining the WCTU but also befriending its female members. By her own words, she praised the church for the way in which it encouraged

⁶⁹ Annie Diggs, “Woman Under the Rule of the Law, the Government and the Church,” *Kansas Liberal*, 20 April 1882.

⁷⁰ For church oppression, see: Rustic, “Reply to ‘Sylvester’ Number III,” *Valley Falls New Era*, Supplement, 5 June 1880; “Free Thought and Progress,” *Valley Falls New Era*, November 1880; Moses Harman, “The Principles and Objects of the *Kansas Liberal*,” *Kansas Liberal*, September 1881; Moses Harman, “Our Object,” *Kansas Liberal*, 1 December 1882. For opinions stating the church oppressed women, see J.H., “Paul on Women’s Rights,” *Kansas Liberal*, 27 April 1882.

⁷¹ Moses Harman, “What We Demand for Woman,” *Kansas Liberal*, October 1881. In 1883, Harman encouraged readers to circulate a petition for woman suffrage to send to the Kansas State Senate and House of Representatives. “Woman Suffrage,” *Kansas Liberal*, 12 January 1883.

⁷² Moses Harman, “Local Aspects of the Fight,” *Lucifer*, 5 April 1889.

women to become political.⁷³ Harman, therefore, likely saw Diggs as a direct threat to the goals of the type of freethought he envisioned for the *KL*. His stance on woman suffrage and the WCTU could be directly tied to his position on prohibition, that both threatened male autonomy and a man's right to self-government.⁷⁴

The prohibition controversy eventually caused a rift between the editors of the *Kansas Liberal*. As Harman began to express his opinion more frequently in the pages of the *KL*, he and Diggs conflicted so much so that it became impossible for them to work together. The paper continued to serve as the organ for the KLU until the annual campmeeting in August 1882 when it was decided to end the association. The *KL* was returned to the sole proprietorship of Moses Harman, who brought the office back to Valley Falls.⁷⁵ After the separation, Harman distanced himself from the KLU and continued his attacks on organized religion. The paper would now serve to represent the freethinkers who opposed the enforcement of prohibition laws.⁷⁶ Its "two great questions" would be devoted to self-government, the idea that men should retain power of choice in all personal matters, and "equal rights," or the fight against capitalists and the few men who monopolized wealth.⁷⁷

For the continued success of the *KL*, Moses Harman realized that it would take more than campmeetings to reach rural inhabitants, and he felt that the time had come to seek a new business partner who could travel in the interests of the paper. After assuming sole proprietorship of the paper, Harman's time was limited. Living on a small

⁷³ Annie Diggs, "Woman Under the Rule of the Law, the Government and the Church," *Kansas Liberal*, 20 April 1882.

⁷⁴ For Harman's position against enforced temperance and platform on self-government, see Moses Harman, "Temperance and Government," *Kansas Liberal*, 22 September 1882.

⁷⁵ Moses Harman, "Lucifer's Coming of Age," *Lucifer*, 31 August 1901.

⁷⁶ Sears, 47.

⁷⁷ Moses Harman, "The Two Great Questions," *Kansas Liberal*, 18 October 1882.

fruit farm outside of town, he was only able to work on editing at night after finishing up farm chores. He had since remarried a Spiritualist freethinker named Isabel Hiser, and his wife and children helped with some of the work of the paper by setting type and wrapping papers to mail. What was needed for the continued success of the paper was someone to travel and effectively market it. In late 1882, Harman accepted the invitation from E.C. Walker to become a canvasser and editorial correspondent.⁷⁸

E.C. Walker was a rather prominent Liberal from Iowa. Similarly to Moses Harman, he was raised on a farm and served as a school teacher for twenty-five years until his interest in freethought spurred him to pursue radical journalism. In the late 1870s, his articles appeared in the free-religious paper *Index* and in a New York freethought paper called the *Truth Seeker*.⁷⁹ He had been a regular contributor to the *KL* for several years and served on the executive committees of both the Iowa Liberal League and the NLL.⁸⁰ Previously to joining the *KL*, Walker had already proven successful as a freethought lecturer and organizer for campmeetings in both Iowa and Kansas.⁸¹ As a traveling lecturer whose writing was already familiar to *KL* subscribers, he made an excellent choice for the paper's junior editor.

After accepting his new position, E.C. Walker spent many months from 1883 to 1885 traveling throughout the Midwest to promote Liberalism, sell freethought literature,

⁷⁸ Moses Harman, "Lucifer's Coming of Age," *Lucifer*, 31 August 1901. Harman married Isabel Lee Hiser of Valley Falls on July 18, 1880. See Marriage Records, Jefferson County, 1856-1924, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. For Hiser's Spiritualist background, see Moses Harman to Elizabeth Denton, 30 April 1889, Denton Family Papers, Joseph A. Labadie Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University Library, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

⁷⁹ E.C. Walker to Joseph Labadie, 3 March 1889, Joseph A. Labadie Papers, Joseph A. Labadie Collection, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University Library, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor; Sears, 53-54.

⁸⁰ Moses Harman, "E.C. Walker," *Kansas Liberal*, 1 December 1882.

⁸¹ Moses Harman, "Lucifer's Coming of Age," *Lucifer*, 31 August 1901, and E.C. Walker, "Kansas Liberal League," *Lucifer*, Supplement, 21 March 1884.

and obtain new subscribers for the paper. Harman stated that Walker had “proved himself a very efficient and successful canvasser.”⁸² He was most helpful in gaining new readership for the paper through his Midwestern campaign. In 1885, Walker estimated that he had added “hundreds of new subscribers” during his tours.⁸³ Though no exact figure exists for the number of subscribers during this time, Harman reported in July 1884 that there were sixty-five subscribers in the town of Valley Falls and “several hundred more scattered over Kansas and the rest of the states and territories.”⁸⁴

As the *Kansas Liberal* expanded its readership, Moses Harman decided to change the name of the paper in 1883. Some of the patrons had expressed a preference for a name that was not local in character, and Harman wanted to drop the word “Liberal” because there were already many papers with this in their titles. Searching for something unique, he combined the Latin words *lux* and *ferre* to form “light-bearer” and added the prefix of the name of the morning star, “Lucifer,” to create *Lucifer, the Light-bearer*.⁸⁵ Harman rejected any association with the Christian devil, stating that the term existed as a positive force long before its meaning was distorted by Christian theology.⁸⁶ He sought

⁸² Moses Harman, “Lucifer’s Coming of Age,” *Lucifer*, 31 August 1901. Walker’s primary travels were through Kansas, but he also visited Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Minnesota. For details of his canvassing tours, see E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Kansas Liberal*, 12 January 1883; E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Kansas Liberal*, 9 February 1883; E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Kansas Liberal*, 30 March 1883; E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Kansas Liberal*, 13 April 1883; E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Kansas Liberal*, 25 May 1883; E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Lucifer*, 24 August 1883; E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Lucifer*, 16 November 1883; E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Lucifer*, 30 November 1883; E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Lucifer*, 28 December 1883; E.C. Walker, “To the Liberal Public,” *Lucifer*, 11 January 1884; E.C. Walker, “Journeys of the Junior,” *Lucifer*, 7 March 1884; E.C. Walker, “Journeys of the Junior,” *Lucifer*, Supplement, 21 March 1884; E.C. Walker, “Journeys of the Junior,” *Lucifer*, 13 June 1884; E.C. Walker, “Field Notes,” *Lucifer*, 27 February 1885; E.C. Walker, “Field Notes,” *Lucifer*, 3 April 1885; E.C. Walker, “Field Notes,” *Lucifer*, 10 April 1885; Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 19 June 1885; Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 26 June 1885; Moses Harman, “Walker at Burlington,” *Lucifer*, 13 November 1885; Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 11 December 1885.

⁸³ E.C. Walker, “Past and Future,” *Lucifer*, 18 December 1885.

⁸⁴ Moses Harman, “Those Cowardly Liberals,” *Lucifer*, 11 July 1884.

⁸⁵ Editors, “Change of Name,” *Lucifer*, 24 August 1883.

⁸⁶ Editors, “Our Name Again,” *Lucifer*, 21 November 1884.

to invoke the term's scientific meaning and explained that "Lucifer" was originally intended to mean "educator," as the freethought paper sought to bring "mental Enlightenment."⁸⁷ Undoubtedly Harman knew that the new name would provoke controversy, especially among his religious opponents. Though he did not acknowledge it, this was another way for Harman to reject the Christian construction of the world and rebel against its influences.

Freethought readers generally approved of the new name, though there were some adverse reactions. J. Kinser wrote, "I like the new name and hope the paper will take a fresh and hopeful start on its way to independence."⁸⁸ Praise was also received from former Kansas Governor Charles Robinson, who stated that "chief merit of *Lucifer* is its independence of thought and expression."⁸⁹ Yet, some readers did not approve of the name. A subscriber from Lyons, Kansas refused to renew; he felt that the new name was in defiance to his Christian neighbors and did not want to create conflicts.⁹⁰ Another correspondent had suggested changing the name. Writing to the editor, "H.P." said that the name of the paper was no concern to him, but he thought that it might prejudice potential readers against the paper, thereby preventing the spread of Liberalism.⁹¹ Harman rightly predicted that some people would equate the new name with the Christian devil. A sample copy was returned to his office labeled "The Devil—Returned."⁹² Several readers did understand the scientific correlation, as J.A. Dobbins wrote "by no means discontinue the publication of LUCIFER, as I look upon it as the one star in the

⁸⁷ Editors, "Change of Name," *Lucifer*, 24 August 1883.

⁸⁸ J. Kinser, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 2 November 1883.

⁸⁹ Charles Robinson, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 2 November 1883.

⁹⁰ Moses Harman, "A Few Facts," *Lucifer*, 18 December 1885.

⁹¹ H.P., "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 11 September 1885.

⁹² Moses Harman, "Responses," *Lucifer*, 16 April 1886.

constellation of liberty.”⁹³ Harman chose to keep the name, and *Lucifer* proved to be one of the longest running radical papers of the nineteenth century.⁹⁴

Lucifer continued previous arguments about the separation of the church and state, but soon readers’ concerns shifted the debate to focus more on the problems of economic and social inequalities. In the gilded age, men in rural Kansas viewed the growing industrial order in terms of a class conflict. From its beginning, the *VFL* stated that it would champion the rights of the laboring man against monopolists and claimed to be the only paper in Jefferson County devoted to upholding the rights of man regardless of class distinctions.⁹⁵ This discussion theme carried over to the *KL*, one of whose objects remained “to champion the cause of the weak against the strong, the poor against the rich, the down-trodden Minority against the would-be Almighty Majority.”⁹⁶ Eventually, topics of economic and government reform became just as important if not more than the previous debates over religion. Undoubtedly, *Lucifer’s* male readers were troubled over the perceived loss of independence in their economic livelihood, and this topic started to take precedence over the threats presented by religious forces. In 1884, a contributor voiced the concerns of these men when he told the editor that “we consider the main issue of the present time is not attacking church and pulpit tramps as first questions, but to take a bold stand against all the robberies with and without laws, defending a suffering humanity. Let us knock down idle money kings and give help to honest labor.”⁹⁷

⁹³ J.A. Dobbins, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 12 October 1883.

⁹⁴ *Lucifer* was published from 1883 to 1907. Joanne E. Passet states that it had subscribers in thirty-six states and nine countries, see Joanne E. Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women’s Equality* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 15.

⁹⁵ *Valley Falls Liberal*, August 1880.

⁹⁶ Moses Harman, “New Series,” *Kansas Liberal*, 12 January 1883.

⁹⁷ Aug. Semmendeinger, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 13 June 1884.

The late nineteenth century was a time of visibly escalating economic inequalities and class conflict. Industrialization changed the nature of production and created distinct working and capitalist classes in America by mid-century. As a result of the developing industrial order, the upper classes established a new hierarchy of control. It was during this time that working men began to understand their problems in terms of class conflict.⁹⁸ Furthermore, the emerging market economy transformed the independent male-headed household into a dependent and “separate” sphere of the family.⁹⁹ Various laborers, including small farmers, wage workers, intellectuals, and reformers “who were the victims, or merely opponents, of capitalism,” found common cause.¹⁰⁰ In the urban cities, the working class was composed of permanent wage laborers, while in the West small farmers were dominated by a system agribusiness and railroad monopolies.¹⁰¹ The gilded age witnessed a “war between capital and labor,” a struggle to regain what had been lost since the Declaration of Independence. This loss, according to historian Page Smith, was the ideal that “all human beings had been born equal and were entitled to equal rights and opportunities.”¹⁰² Because freethinkers sought to uphold the principles of 1789, especially those concerning equality and individual liberty, they took special interest in the class conflicts of the late nineteenth century.

Men contributing to the Valley Falls freethought publication readily recognized economic inequalities and identified the problems of class conflict. Though America was

⁹⁸ Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

⁹⁹ LeeAnn Whites, *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 1.

¹⁰⁰ Page Smith, *The Rise of Industrial America: A People's History of the Post-Reconstruction Era* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984) 213

¹⁰¹ Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

¹⁰² Smith, xiii-xiv.

supposed to be the “land of equal right,” Moses Harman argued this was not the case. If all men were given the same opportunities, he reasoned, there were be few paupers. Instead, Harman observed that the country was being divided into two classes: the very rich and the very poor.¹⁰³ Reader George Foster pinpointed the system of competition, which “amassed gigantic fortunes for the *few* and caused poverty, crime and degradation for the *many*,” as the cause. Capitalists triumphed over labor, he argued, because they maneuvered to keep working men down.¹⁰⁴ There were several ways in which “the present system oppresses and robs the laborer,” according to correspondent A. Warren. Laborers suffered from a depression of wages, the profit-making goals of capitalists, and a “social system that demoralizes the conscience and intellect of the worker.”¹⁰⁵

The men blamed the capitalist class for labor oppression and unfair control of the state. E.C. Walker pointed out that workers were at the mercy of their employers and existed on “bare subsistence,” often finding themselves out of work during economic panics because the market was “glutted” with the products of their labor. Fair competition, which might allow the laborer to rise up out of poverty, was impossible, Walker contended, because of the monopolization of credit and land and the restrictions on commerce and domestic exchange.¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile, the “aristocratic few” lived at ease by buying and selling the labor of men, women, and even young children. Moses Harman equated this industrial system to the old “slave traffic” that he argued should concern all true humanitarians.¹⁰⁷ As historian Jeffrey Ostler has shown, many

¹⁰³ Moses Harman, “Our Nation’s Peril,” *Lucifer*, 7 March 1884.

¹⁰⁴ George S. Foster, “Letter to the Editor,” *Kansas Liberal*, 29 June 1882.

¹⁰⁵ A. Warren, “Co-operative Housekeeping, Concluded,” *Lucifer*, 30 November 1883.

¹⁰⁶ E.C. Walker, *Practical Co-Operation: A Series of Short Articles* (Valley Falls, Kansas: By the Author, 1885), 1-2.

¹⁰⁷ Moses Harman, “Are We Practical?” *Lucifer*, 13 February 1885.

Americans believed the new industrial order threatened to destroy the republic, as huge aggregations of capital corrupted democracy.¹⁰⁸ Harman claimed that the government “robs the toiling masses of several hundreds of millions every year in order to build up a moneyed aristocracy who now control every branch of industry in their own interest.”¹⁰⁹ While the American ideal was that there were basic rights, E.C. Walker argued that “class rules and usurpation” have thrown these to the wayside.¹¹⁰

Men who wrote in to *Lucifer* felt victimized by class oppression and readily identified specific sources. Leavenworth, Kansas resident H.H. Hutcheson cited the monopolization of money and its relation to the issuance of credit due to the fact that it was difficult for the average laborer to gain access to hard money or credit.¹¹¹ The earnings of small farmers and workers were further taxed by interest and rent, what reader Wm. Rowe deemed as “robbery.”¹¹² Land was also an issue. Correspondent Jeremiah Hacker, a farmer from New Jersey, estimated that a family needed only fifty acres to earn a living.¹¹³ However, many men experienced difficulty purchasing land due to speculation by big businessmen and corporations. *Lucifer’s* contributors decried this practice, claiming that speculators should not have the right to seize vast tracts of land, hold it until the market values increased, then sell it to make huge profits.¹¹⁴ Hacker referred to this as “land robbery,” claiming that all men should have a right to own land.

¹⁰⁸ Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880-1892* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 1.

¹⁰⁹ Moses Harman, “Uncle Sam’s Benevolence,” *Lucifer*, 5 September 1885.

¹¹⁰ E.C. Walker, “Falsehood and Intemperance,” *Lucifer*, 18 April 1884.

¹¹¹ H.H. Hutcheson, “The Horny Hands of Honest Toil,” *Lucifer*, 30 October 1885.

¹¹² Wm. Rowe, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 17 April 1885.

¹¹³ J. Hacker, “Land Robbery,” *Lucifer*, 25 January 1884.

¹¹⁴ E.C. Walker, “Crankism,” *Lucifer*, 30 May 1884.

He condemned the “monopolists and the government that aids them” in this “land theft” while millions starved and millions of acres remained vacant.¹¹⁵

The men writing about class problems in the Midwest had real reason for concern. Many migrants to the plains frontier believed that they would find prosperity and abundance with the means for success backed by the government. Yet, this was not the case. They discovered that the best lands had been granted to railroad companies by Congress while speculators gobbled up much of the rest.¹¹⁶ Land speculation was the greatest in Kansas.¹¹⁷ In addition to difficulties obtaining land, small farmers also had to take on debt in the form of mortgages in order to purchase needed supplies and equipment, often paying high interest rates during hard times.¹¹⁸ By the 1880s, most Midwestern farmers lived on mortgaged farms or were tenants.¹¹⁹

A variety of market forces prevented Kansas farmers from finding success in the late nineteenth century, pitting them against capitalist forces. They operated under a deflationary economy, as the period from 1870 to 1897 witnessed steadily declining prices. The grain trade often cheated farmers. Many farmers blamed low prices on the high cost of transportation set by railroad companies, which in the frontier Midwest often held a monopoly over an area if there were no competing lines. They believed that railroad companies discriminated against the small farmer, giving better rates to larger

¹¹⁵ J. Hacker, “Land Robbery,” *Lucifer*, 25 January 1884; J. Hacker, “Liberal Papers,” *Lucifer*, 13 February 1885.

¹¹⁶ Goldberg, 18. For more on propaganda campaigns initiated to attract migrants, see Michael Lewis Goldberg, *An Army of Women*, and John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party*.

¹¹⁷ Hicks, 24.

¹¹⁸ Goldberg, 24-25.

¹¹⁹ Ostler, 13.

producers.¹²⁰ Attempts to regulate railroad companies were thwarted; such was in Kansas through corrupt deals with the legislature. A Liberal identifying himself as “W.” provided one example, claiming that a candidate in the Kansas gubernatorial race received backing from a newspaper established by a railroad syndicate to protect “Gould interests.”¹²¹ Profitability of farming was further affected by prices set by the Chicago commodities market, which was often legally manipulated by traders for their own benefit. The farmers’ economy was thus connected to the capitalists, as shown by Michael Goldberg who describes the influence that the “captains of industry” held over both the national and international markets. Their goal, he argues, was to amass the largest personal fortune as possible with no regard for those below who might suffer, a goal that was in accordance with their beliefs in Social Darwinism that only the “fittest” would survive in a capitalist economy.¹²²

Class conflict was also exemplified in Kansas by attempts to enforce “Sunday laws.” The men of Valley Falls witnessed the efforts of local religious organizations to prohibit work on Sunday. A group called the “Sunday School Union” and representatives from churches in the Jefferson County area formed the Christian Association to protest the transacting of business on the Sabbath day and to call for the enforcement of work stoppages. Though the Kansas state “Sunday laws” allowed for works of “necessity and charity,” freethinkers believed it would only favor the wealthy and allow the rich to

¹²⁰ Hicks, 33-67; John M. Peterson, “The People’s Party of Kansas: Campaigning in 1898,” *Kansas History* 13, no. 4 (Winter 1990/1991), 235. For deflation, also see Goldberg, 6-24. Jeffrey Ostler also argues that the cost for shipping goods in western states such as Kansas were much higher than the east because of the low traffic volume, putting additional pressures on frontier farmers; see Ostler, *Prarie Populism*.

¹²¹ W., “Letter to the Editor,” *Kansas Liberal*, 11 May 1882. “W” was referring to railroad magnate Jay Gould, notorious for his corrupt dealings in the railroad industry.

¹²² Goldberg, 23-24. The “captains of industry” are described as the corporate elites, financiers, and politicians who profited from their activities in the market economy. Their theories of Social Darwinism stated that only the fittest in society would survive; thus, they saw their success as a product of natural selection and the detriment of the farmer or wage worker as a sign of their unfitness.

operate their businesses while denying “the poor man who works on Sunday to save his crop from probably destruction or who may think it necessary for him to work every day to keep himself and family from want.” In the opinion of the freethinkers, the Sunday laws represented not only another religious incursion into politics but also further attempts by the capitalist classes to suppress those below them. Powerful men who oversaw the law could choose when to enforce it and when to allow select citizens to work. Freethinkers believed that those in control would use their power arbitrarily and prohibit small farmers and wage laborers from working—the men who needed the income the most.¹²³

Added to farmers’ financial problems was a period of intense drought experienced by the plains states in the 1880s and 1890s. Up until this point, Kansas had experienced a few decades of abundant rainfall which contributed to increased settlement. This good fortune, however, was short lived, and it dramatically affected crop yields.¹²⁴ By the late 1880s, the drought, in combination with falling crop prices and increasing debt, led to economic distress.¹²⁵ The majority of Midwestern farmers “struggled through seasons of poor crops or low prices.”¹²⁶ With two thirds of the state in drought and available credit manipulated to the debtor’s disadvantage, farmers had a difficult time trying to provide for their families and keep their farms.¹²⁷

¹²³ Editors, “The Sunday Question Once More,” *Valley Falls Liberal*, January 1881.

¹²⁴ Hicks, 30. Before the period of rain, Kansas and other western frontier states had been known as the “Great American Desert.” During the period of abundant rainfall, it was widely believed by agriculturists and promoted by propagandists that cultivating the land using modern farming techniques would actually change the climate, creating more favorable conditions for rain. As the period of abundant rain began, this idea was thought to have become reality, and migration to the plains increased. Yet, by 1880, the rainy period had ended and the plains once again returned to a more arid state.

¹²⁵ Fred Whitehead, *The History of Radical Politics in America* (Chestertown, Maryland: The Literary House Press, Washington College, 1995), 25.

¹²⁶ Ostler, 23-24.

¹²⁷ Peterson, 235.

While some farmers left the western parts of plains states such as Kansas and Nebraska, many living in the central and eastern portions remained to tough it out. However, they were not without dissatisfaction. Historian John D. Hicks commented that these farmers “stayed and suffered, forming a discontented class ideally prepared for the doctrines of political and economic revolt, which agitators were quick to introduce.”¹²⁸ Some turned to farmers’ alliances and political parties as a means to a solution, while others reached out to more radical ideas such as those promoted by the freethought paper in Valley Falls.¹²⁹ Because a majority of *Lucifer’s* readers and correspondents resided in the Midwest, they had first hand knowledge of the economic and class oppression described in the paper and were ready to identify with it.

The men of *Lucifer* saw themselves as members of an oppressed class. In the early 1880s, editor Moses Harman noted that most of his patrons were farmers and fruit growers like himself.¹³⁰ As a traveling lecturer and canvasser for the paper, E.C. Walker commented on economic conditions as he journeyed through Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, Nebraska, Iowa, and Minnesota. Much of the territory he covered was prairie land in which he encountered small farmers receptive to his message. In eastern Kansas and western Missouri he observed pockets of coal deposits that gave rise to mining towns and wage laborers. On several occasions, he had the opportunity to speak at the local Knights of Labor Hall, gathering support from wage workers.¹³¹ Traveling through

¹²⁸ Hicks, 32-33.

¹²⁹ For a discussion of the farmers’ alliances and the People’s Party, see John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, and Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism*.

¹³⁰ Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 30 November 1883.

¹³¹ For full descriptions of his canvassing tours, see E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Kansas Liberal*, 12 January 1883; E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Kansas Liberal*, 9 February 1883; E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Kansas Liberal*, *Kansas Liberal*, 30 March 1883; E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Kansas Liberal*, 13 April 1883; E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Kansas Liberal*, 25 May 1883; E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Lucifer*, 24 August 1883; E.C. Walker, “Editorial

Kansas in 1885, Walker remarked that “never before have I heard so many complaints of hard times; never before have I found the people of any considerable portion of the West so pressed for ready means.” He blamed low agricultural prices for the suffering of farmers, and Moses Harman observed that large quantities of corn were being used as fuel in Kansas and Nebraska because it was cheaper than paying for rail transportation to take the product to market. The winter of 1885, the economic outlook was “severe,” with many “distressing accounts of want and suffering among the poor.”¹³² The economic problems of subscribers often translated into financial problems for the paper as they frequently fell behind on payment.¹³³

Men constantly wrote to the editor to describe their dire situations. Seventy-three year old Thomas Dodge of Ohio expressed regret that he was not able to attend a campmeeting held in 1883 because he was ill and “broken down with hard work.”¹³⁴ Hiram Harrington lamented that he was ostracized by his small Minnesota community for his Liberal views. Harrington disclosed that “I have been rather short for money this past year owing to the fact that I have been out of employment so much of the time” and gave

Wanderings,” *Lucifer*, 16 November 1883; E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Lucifer*, 30 November 1883; E.C. Walker, “Editorial Wanderings,” *Lucifer*, 28 December 1883; E.C. Walker, “To the Liberal Public,” *Lucifer*, 11 January 1884; E.C. Walker, “Journeyings of the Junior,” *Lucifer*, 7 March 1884; E.C. Walker, “Journeyings of the Junior,” *Lucifer*, Supplement, 21 March 1884; E.C. Walker, “Journeyings of the Junior,” *Lucifer*, 13 June 1884; E.C. Walker, “Field Notes,” *Lucifer*, 27 February 1885; E.C. Walker, “Field Notes,” *Lucifer*, 3 April 1885; E.C. Walker, “Field Notes,” *Lucifer*, 10 April 1885; Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 19 June 1885; Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 26 June 1885; Moses Harman, “Walker at Burlington,” *Lucifer*, 13 November 1885; Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 11 December 1885. Of Walker’s speaking engagements at the Knights of Labor Hall in Burlington, Iowa, Moses Harman noted that Walker was able to garner a great deal of support from townspeople because the Knights were strong, showing the paper’s appeal to wage workers. Walker spent many months in the years 1882-1885 traveling in the interests of the paper (to get more subscribers and sell literature) and to spread ideas of Liberalism to the rural people he encountered.

¹³² E.C. Walker, *Practical Co-Operation: A Series of Short Articles* (Valley Falls, Kansas: By the Author, 1885), 16; Moses Harman, “The New Year and the Outlook,” *Lucifer*, 16 January 1885.

¹³³ Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Kansas Liberal*, 18 October 1882. Harman noted that the subscription list “is now nearly sufficient to pay all expenses if payments could come in promptly as they fall due.” In September 1881, Harman also noted that a severe drought in the Valley Falls area that summer caused financial problems for the *KL*, Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Kansas Liberal*, 1 September 1881.

¹³⁴ Thomas H. Dodge, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 16 November 1883.

the opinion that the townspeople “had rather see me starve than not.” Having met E.C. Walker on a canvassing tour, Harrington had wished he had money to purchase a few Liberal books, but said that he was “so poor and so cramped for money that I can do but little to help on the grand cause of Liberalism.”¹³⁵ For Dodge and Harrington, who could not travel to Kansas or openly speak about freethought in their communities, having the Valley Falls freethought paper was an important link in communication with other Liberals who were subject to the same kinds of oppressions with whom they could find common cause.

Men who supported *Lucifer's* economic message often expressed a desire to help, but struggled to find the means. D. Jenkins, of Hannibal, Missouri, praised the paper but regretted, “I would if I could gladly aid you in anything but money.”¹³⁶ NLL officer and former abolitionist Elizur Wright wrote that as a reader of the paper, “I feel sure I ought to help it, but my means are always behind my disposition and the deserts of working friends.”¹³⁷ Other men made sacrifices to a cause they believed would help their economic situation. Joseph Bucher of Michigan classified himself as a “poor man and in poor health,” receiving only a small pension for his service in the Union Army. He contributed a dollar to the paper with hopes for sending more in the future, though his economic prospects were grim.¹³⁸ In order to “voice the sentiment of Liberalism and advance the Labor cause, the true cause of humanity,” a wage worker from the mines of

¹³⁵ See Hiram A. Harrington, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 11 July 1884; Hiram A. Harrington, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 17 April 1885; Hiram A. Harrington, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 5 September 1885.

¹³⁶ D. Jenkins, “Letter to the Editor,” *Valley Falls Liberal*, July 1881.

¹³⁷ Elizur Wright, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 11 July 1884.

¹³⁸ Joseph Bucher, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 17 April 1885.

Scranton, Kansas also gave several dollars.¹³⁹ Their humble gifts showed the desperation men were feeling as a result of their economic plight.

The men of *Lucifer* expressed doubt that they could affect any change to their economic and political oppression. Contributor H.H. Hucheson observed that the political parties were dominated by the upper classes while reader J.M. Zinn remarked that “the masses of the nation have no voice that amounts to anything.” He argued that “the political machinery of this country is controlled by the tyrannical bosses” rather than the will of the people.¹⁴⁰ Readers like George Foster advocated workers unite against the industrial system, but that too seemed impossible.¹⁴¹ Many Kansans protested the arrest and executions of the Chicago anarchists in the Haymarket Affair, and *Lucifer* gave its full support to the laborers whom it felt were treated unjustly.¹⁴²

By the mid-1880s, *Lucifer*'s male readers felt that their autonomy as individuals was slipping away. They witnessed efforts by the church and religious forces such as the WCTU to curtail their ability to freely decide to drink or work on Sundays. As rural farmers, most were suffering under depressed economic conditions, beholden to the unfair lending practices of banks, the vicious shipping practices of the railroads, and unforgiving droughts. Even in their personal affairs, the men gauged that they were losing autonomy. If Midwestern readers saw themselves as oppressed economically and politically, they also believed that church and state were conspiring to invade their personal lives through the regulation of marriage. For men struggling to achieve the goal

¹³⁹ Jno. F. Young, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 24 July 1885.

¹⁴⁰ H.H. Hucheson, “The Horny Hands of Honest Toil,” *Lucifer*, 30 October 1885 and J.M. Zinn, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 30 May 1884.

¹⁴¹ George S. Foster, “Letter to the Editor,” *Kansas Liberal*, 29 June 1882.

¹⁴² Fred Whitehead, “The Kansas Response to the Haymarket Affair,” *Kansas History* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1986). For *Lucifer*'s support, see issues 14 May 1886 and 3 September 1886.

of “self-government,” an ideal that *Lucifer* praised, attacking marriage followed naturally from the criticism of the church and state because it, too, was regulated by these entities. Marriage and, consequently, sexual relationships were yet another area of men’s lives that could be affected by outside forces beyond their consent. Readers, led by editor Moses Harman, began to attack marriage laws as another factor in men’s oppression.

The subject of marriage reform was introduced early in the paper’s history, but it soon became the main focus of *Lucifer*. In the first issue of the *VFL* in 1880 Moses Harman criticized the institution of marriage, decrying the church and state’s interference and regulation. He claimed it was impossible to try to legislate love.¹⁴³ More articles appeared in greater frequency over the next few years which advocated a reform or total abolishment of the institution. Just as freethinkers believed that the state should not regulate alcohol through prohibition, they also maintained that the church and state should not interfere in the “conjugal arrangements of men and women.”¹⁴⁴ Personal autonomy, what *Lucifer* called “self-government,” was the foremost goal of freethought, yet men found themselves increasingly dependent under state rule and economic forces.¹⁴⁵ However, *Lucifer’s* contributors were hopeful that they could break the control the church and state had over their personal lives through a rejection of legal marriage. Harman declared that “our ideas in regard to Marriage and divorce are based upon the doctrine of the sovereignty of the individual,” that the regulation of marriage by the church and state likened men to children who needed parental consent.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Moses Harman, “Marriage,” *Valley Falls Liberal*, September 1880.

¹⁴⁴ Moses Harman, “Marriage,” *Lucifer*, 13 June 1884.

¹⁴⁵ Moses Harman, “Liberal Papers,” *Lucifer*, 13 February 1885.

¹⁴⁶ Moses Harman, “Free Marriage and Free Divorce,” *Kansas Liberal*, 2 March 1883.

In 1884 and 1885, more articles were devoted to the discussion of marriage reform, and by 1886 marriage and love came to dominate *Lucifer's* topics. This shift can be explained by several factors. Harman himself took an interest and personally steered the paper in this direction, seemingly tired of debating the merits of religion. Additionally, E.C. Walker helped influence the criticism on marriage with his nonconformist views of social institutions. Walker was an individual anarchist; he believed in private property, natural law, and opposed majority rule. He rejected authority and argued that institutions must be based upon other relationships that did not coerce.¹⁴⁷ Unlike the battle with religion or struggles against the rising capitalist system, marriage undoubtedly appeared as a venue where Harman and other freethinkers could likely initiate some kind of real change. While these men could do nothing to affect their status as poor farmers or downtrodden workers, they could make a stand to reject state interference in their sexual choices. Therefore, the editors of *Lucifer* began to promote “free love” as one of the new platforms of the paper.

“Free love” was an extension of *Lucifer's* freethought principles to the topics of marriage and sexual relationships. Love, as Harman explained, was spontaneous and could not be regulated by the law. Legal marriage crushed love when it compelled two people to remain together when love had ceased.¹⁴⁸ To E.C. Walker, free love, or a man’s ability to form and dissolve sexual relationships without church or state regulation, equaled liberty and the freedom of choice; it was about men’s individual sovereignty. “If man is his own master,” he argued, “then he is the master of no one else. If he is not his own master then he is the naturally destined slave of whoever has power to enslave

¹⁴⁷ Sears, 58-59.

¹⁴⁸ Moses Harman, “Our Demands,” *Lucifer*, 1 January 1886.

him.”¹⁴⁹ Harman agreed, maintaining that to involve the church or state in this personal choice was no more than a “monstrous usurpation of authority.” Instead, he stated that it should be a right of all citizens to freely contract and dissolve marriages as they saw fit without church and state interference.¹⁵⁰

The editors of *Lucifer* led the transition to free love and marriage reform, but the approval of its readers sanctioned the move agreeing that legal marriage represented limits to their personal autonomy and status as free, independent men. Contributor J.H. Cook likened legal marriage to a prison, claiming love itself was suffering. Love should be free from the constraints of man-made customs, laws and restrictions, he maintained.¹⁵¹ Likewise, Channing Severance stated that civil law was a “needless power” when it came to the “healthy and natural passion which exists between the sexes.”¹⁵² As they struggled to maintain manly independence in a world that increasingly made them economically and politically dependent, the subject of love was seen as a new conduit to the expression of personal freedom. H.H. Hutcheson represented this view when he stated that “we are free to love any one we please.”¹⁵³

However, as Harman and Walker directed *Lucifer* towards free love, they inevitably encountered resistance and lost some readership. For example, in the town of Valley Falls the number of subscribers dropped from sixty-five in 1884 to fifty two years later when free love dominated *Lucifer's* topics.¹⁵⁴ Harman's former colleague Annie Diggs, who had since become an editorialist for the *Topeka Advocate*, lent no support to

¹⁴⁹ E.C. Walker, “The Social Problem,” *Lucifer*, 30 May 1884.

¹⁵⁰ Moses Harman, “Our Demands,” *Lucifer*, 1 January 1886.

¹⁵¹ J.H. Cook, “Caged Birds,” *Lucifer*, 16 July 1886.

¹⁵² C. Severance, “Letter to E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman,” *Lucifer*, 29 October 1886.

¹⁵³ H.H. Hutcheson, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 19 March 1886.

¹⁵⁴ Sears, 99.

the sex reform effort. A few weeks before she signed on as a full time editor, the *Advocate* referred to *Lucifer* as a “constant parade of obscenity” and indicated that it overstepped the boundaries of public morality.¹⁵⁵ To those who rejected a discussion of sexual matters, supporters had choice words. They saw free love as a natural extension of freethought, meaning that men should not only have a right to form their own opinions and ideas regarding religion and economics but also exercise the same freedom in their sexual affairs. Frequent contributor J.H. Cook pointed out that a few freethinkers acted as if social and sexual relations were unfit to investigate. It was therefore inconsistent that they repudiate church influence on one hand and blindly accepted orthodox laws, customs, and institutions related to marriage on the other.¹⁵⁶ Channing Severance furthered this opinion by stating that those who shunned a discussion of sex relations were only freethinkers “in the realms of old theology, but not on living, vital issues that concern the health and happiness of man, and the lives of future generations.”¹⁵⁷ E.C. Walker declared that free love was one of the ultimate goals of freethought, believing “the time is swiftly approaching when all Freethinkers will perceive that in so far as they deny liberty in the relation of the sexes they are false to their own grand creed, the gospel of Liberty and Responsibility.”¹⁵⁸

Though some readers disapproved and stopped taking *Lucifer*, others readily supported the transition and the subscription list grew. In 1884, Harman reported that “several hundred” took the paper. In 1886 the figure was estimated at about seven hundred, with less than ten percent coming from *Lucifer*’s home base of Jefferson

¹⁵⁵ *Topeka Advocate*, 6 March 1890, quoted in Sears, 148.

¹⁵⁶ J.H. Cook, “Social and Sexual Bigotry,” *Lucifer*, 18 April 1884.

¹⁵⁷ C. Severance, “Freethought vs. Obscenity,” *Lucifer*, 25 December 1885

¹⁵⁸ E.C. Walker, “The Social Problem,” *Lucifer*, 30 May 1884.

County, Kansas. By 1890, after several years of being devoted to the topics of free love and sex reform, *Lucifer* claimed over fifteen hundred subscribers.¹⁵⁹ Due to the fact that subscribers frequently shared issues with their friends, family, and neighbors, the actual readership of *Lucifer* was probably in the thousands. The paper reached out not only to Midwestern subscribers but also to those from all parts of the country and even overseas. One historian estimated that at its peak it had readers from thirty-six states and nine nations.¹⁶⁰ Readers from all across the country sent letters expressing support and contributed to the discussion on sex reform.¹⁶¹

The editors continued to feature regular articles concerning marriage and sexuality, topics that came to dominate the paper by 1886. The Liberals must have realized that there was not much they could do to remedy their economic problems nor could they curtail the power of women in the WCTU and their movement for temperance, and they had since lost faith in the corrupt political system. Instead, the shift to free love was representative of men trying to regain control over some aspect of their lives. Unable to retain power in political or economic affairs, men claimed authority over their sexual lives. As freethinkers, they rejected church and state regulation in the form of legal marriage and sought an alternative. For the readers of *Lucifer*, free love became a way they could assert an independent manhood which the social and economic forces of the gilded age seemed to be crushing out.

¹⁵⁹ Moses Harman, "Those Cowardly Liberals," *Lucifer*, 11 July 1884; Moses Harman, "Brief Comment," *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886; Sears, 99.

¹⁶⁰ Passet, 15, 52.

¹⁶¹ For example, letters from *Lucifer* in the October 1886 issue came from readers in Maine, Kansas, Colorado, New York, Iowa, Michigan, California, Vermont, Minnesota, Texas, Florida, Illinois, Massachusetts, Dakota Territory, Missouri, Connecticut, and Ontario.

The trend towards free love also represented a personal interest for both editors. Moses Harman had long criticized “institutional marriage,” and E.C. Walker, a divorced man himself, also rejected it. And 1886 marked a special time for both: Walker had developed a personal relationship with Harman’s daughter but did not want to initiate a legal marriage. Instead, the parties desired a free love union, what they called an “autonomistic marriage,” free of church and state interference. As Harman increased the proportion of space *Lucifer* devoted to free love, he was building up support for the upcoming marriage and his larger desire to institute sex reform. The next few years would mark a test of free love in practice and the editor’s right to publish articles of a sexual nature.

CHAPTER 2

FREE LOVE AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF MANHOOD

In our zeal for the elevation of woman, let us be just to man.
—J. Allen Evans, May 10, 1889¹

ON SEPTEMBER 19, 1886, E.C. Walker stood in front of his friends and family at the home of Moses Harman, ready to enter into a free love union, what they called an “autonomistic marriage,” with Harman’s daughter Lillian. Walker and his bride had been working together for several years, and as their friendship blossomed into romantic love, they desired to live together. As freethinkers, they rejected church and state authority in the marriage relation and thus refused to abide by the state requirements of obtaining a marriage license and utilizing a legal officer to solemnize their union. Instead, the couple decided to put their free love ideas into practice by forming an “autonomistic marriage” that was independent of church and state regulations. Moses Harman publicly announced the account of their ceremony and printed statements in defense of their actions in that week’s issue of *Lucifer*.²

At first, it appeared Walker had created an ideal marriage for Lillian in line with contemporary women’s rights ideas. In the late nineteenth century, women worked to gain more authority in marriage, access to divorce, and freedom from the tyranny of abusive husbands.³ Walker seemed to abide by these demands when he abdicated “all the so-called ‘marital rights’” and declared that Lillian was “free to repulse any and all

¹ J. Allen Evans, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 10 May 1889.

² E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman, “Past and Present,” *Lucifer*, 8 April 1887.

³ Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

advances of mine.” She would remain “sovereign of herself,” as he recognized her right to “control her own person,” retain her maiden name, keep any property inherited or earned by her, and he promised to care financially for any offspring their union might produce. By giving up his traditional rights as a husband, Walker declared that “Lillian is now made free.” He ended his vows with a pledge of his honor, that he would uphold his promises for the duration of their relationship.⁴

Through his declarations, it looked as if Walker had molded himself into the perfect companion for the emancipated woman. Lillian was made free, but seemingly at the cost of Walker’s authority as a husband. At a time when Midwestern men like E.C. Walker were facing challenges such as economic dependence, religious and state incursions into personal affairs, and efforts from women’s organizations to control their behavior, why would they have supported a movement that stripped away the power men received through marriage? While *Lucifer’s* contributors discussed free love, what they said about the emancipation of women had larger implications for the way they imagined a new kind of manhood. Free love necessitated a renegotiation of power between men and women, and the reconstruction of that power was key to understanding gender relations. Because gender is a system of power, larger inferences can be made about their ideals and beliefs about manliness through their discussion of empowering women. Thus, looking at what *Lucifer’s* sex radicals said about the emancipation of women and the abolishment of marriage suggests the roles they envisioned for men and a new construction of manhood.

⁴ Editors, “Autonomistic Marriage Practicalized,” *Lucifer*, 1 October 1886. See Appendix A for an account of the ceremony and marriage vows.

In the act of emancipating women, sex radical men created new sources of power for themselves, but often in conflicting ways. On one hand, the rhetoric of emancipating women positioned men as the rescuers of women. It reinforced man's role as a protector of woman by maintaining that it was his duty to be responsible for her care and safety as head of his household. On the other hand, sex radical men expressed a desire to be true individuals by freeing themselves from all the bindings of legal marriage. Through the practice of free love, men would not be required to retain any allegiance to one woman, and, though men pledged financial responsibilities, the raising of children would fall exclusively to women. Although these two sources of empowerment for men were contradictory and were not recognized as such, both arguments can be located in the discussions among sex radical men in *Lucifer*. This chapter will argue that free love, rather than reducing men's power, reconstructed manhood by offering them a renewed sense of authority as they took on the role of protectors of women, opposed church and state-sanctioned legal marriage, and assumed a new position of freedom in their sexual lives and in relationships with women.

By advocating equality for women in marital and sexual partnerships, the men of *Lucifer* positioned themselves as the rescuers and protectors of women. They compared their reform to the earlier anti-slavery movement by utilizing the rhetoric of abolitionism. Men wrote about "emancipating" women from legal marriage, what they referred to as "sex slavery" because of the way in which married women lacked sexual autonomy. In speaking of their desires to free women from marriage, they continually compared themselves to antebellum abolitionists who labored against African slavery. Just as Africans had been victims of the system of slavery, so were women victims of the system

of legal marriage. In creating a comparison with abolition, sex radical men were taking on the traditional male role of the protector. Free love for men, as this chapter argues, was essentially about creating a new authority for men as rescuers and protectors of women. Men were not becoming feminized or losing power over women because of their endorsements of women's equality; rather they were taking on traditional masculine roles of protecting women from marital abuse and rescuing them from bad husbands. Their use of an abolitionist analogy further presented the idea that women could not free themselves, that they were victims who needed the help and protection of men like *Lucifer's* editors Moses Harman and E.C. Walker.

Free love also offered an opportunity for men to regain personal independence and was an expression of nineteenth-century individualism. Through the promotion of "autonomistic" marriage, sex radical men attempted to throw off perceived oppression by the church and state, reassigning that authority to themselves. In the new order of capitalist America, the men of *Lucifer* experienced economic hardships. Many were small farmers while others were from the urban working class, and both groups faced rising pressure from the church as religious leaders looked to influence state and federal laws.⁵ As freethinkers opposed to religiously inspired laws and members of the working classes subjected to oppressive economic conditions, they felt increasingly powerless to control the direction of their own lives. This sense of helplessness conflicted with the core American value of individualism which stated that the individual had the ability to make his own way and could control his own destiny. Free love and its rejection of state and church-sanctioned marriage was therefore a way to reinvigorate manhood with an

⁵ For a more detailed descriptions of the problems experienced by the readers and correspondents of *Lucifer* and its predecessors, see Chapter 1, "The 'Kansas Liberals:' Freethought on the High Plains."

expression of independence. Sex radical men could take control of their sexual relationships and insist on self-government in all personal affairs. While they might be economically less powerful than other men, at least they would still hold power in the affairs of the heart.

Men could thus assume new positions of independence in their sexual and romantic lives by practicing free love. While the expressed goal of free love was to free women, consequently freeing women also freed men. No longer were they tied to one woman or even monogamy. Free love promised to give men the ability to pick and choose their sexual partners, remaining with them only as long as they desired. Furthermore, the men and women of *Lucifer* envisioned fathers to have a more limited responsibility for the care of children than husbands under institutional marriage. Children were assumed to be the responsibility of mothers, and fathers could assist in childrearing only if they chose to do so. If a man and a woman separated the sex radicals believed the children should remain with their mother, an idea that was contrary to legal practices during the nineteenth century.

The men of *Lucifer* were sincere in their desire to emancipate women, but they saw the movement for free love through a gendered lens. They lamented the fact that women were abused in marriage, even likening women's position in marriage to a prostitute or female slave. Male sex radicals sympathized with battered wives who suffered both physical and mental consequences in legal marriage. They envisioned that in free love women would have sexual autonomy and freedom of choice regarding romantic partners, but structurally men could not see much change. Women were

described as weaker and in need of male protection and rescue, and child care and domestic duties were still assumed to be women's responsibility.

Though male sex radicals spoke out in favor of female emancipation, what they were actually doing was reconstructing their own power and authority over women at a time when that authority was being threatened. The pressing question of what free love meant for men and what they gained through its endorsement can be seen by examining and interpreting the discussion of woman's emancipation. In their analogy to abolition, they assumed the powerful position of the white abolitionist freeing the black slave. Just as white abolitionists wanted freedom for slaves but could not imagine true racial equality, sex radical men wanted to help free women from the tyrannies of marriage but did not envision that women would assume the same economic and domestic positions as men. To the sex radicals, women were still women, and that meant the extra burden of domestic responsibilities, especially in the rearing of children. More importantly, free love became an attainable expression of individualism. While men could not become autonomous in relation to the economy or state, they could assert independence in their romantic affairs. In 1886, then, E.C. Walker became the model of manhood for the free lovers as he entered an autonomistic arrangement with Lillian Harman. Through the practice of free love, he would serve as Lillian's protector and reject church and state oppression by emancipating himself from domesticity and the controls that marriage gave women over men.

* * *

As men imagined what their roles would be under the banner of free love, they identified with commonalities which included a history in abolition. *Lucifer's*

contributors heralded from an anti-slavery background, beginning with the paper's editor. Moses Harman was an ardent abolitionist while living in southern Missouri in the 1850s, despite the region's large pro-slavery majority. His personal views were not kept secret; rather, he vocalized his dissent in a prominent way, earning notoriety for his anti-slavery position. At one point, Harman became so noisome to the pro-slavery faction that community members met and voted to run him out of town, and on several occasions he narrowly escaped mob violence.⁶ During the Civil War, he tried twice to enlist in the Union Army, but was rejected because of a childhood injury that had left him partially disabled.⁷ Eventually, Harman made the decision to leave Missouri in 1879, taking with him his two young children. The timing of his decision can be attributed to the death of his wife earlier in 1877, but he was also attracted to Kansas for its role in the anti-slavery movement and its reputation as a state with the commitment to freedom.⁸ Anti-slavery convictions remained with him for the rest of his life. Harman continued his love of justice and belief in self-ownership as he edited *Lucifer*, easily translating his ideas about the ownership of black slaves to the position of women in marriage.

Many readers of *Lucifer* also identified with the anti-slavery movement and had similar backgrounds in abolition. Writing in to the paper, they were proud to reveal their past associations with this once controversial reform movement. Regular correspondent Thaddeus B. Wakeman, a prominent attorney from New York who later became a Populist, had a history in the anti-slavery movement. In a letter to junior editor E.C.

⁶ George Harman, "Moses Harman," *The Farmer's Vindicator*, 11 February 1910; John Steele McCormick, *History and Genealogy of Forest Hill, Crawford County, Missouri* (Leasburg, MO: By the Author, 1970).

⁷ William Lemore West, "The Moses Harman Story," *The Kansas Historical Quarterly* 37 (1971), 41.

⁸ Moses Harman and Edwin C. Walker, "Retrospect," *Lucifer*, 3 April 1885.

Walker, he proudly asserted that he once donated money “to make Kansas a free state.”⁹ Another New York contributor, Adin Ballou, though a clergyman, identified with *Lucifer’s* goal to free women. The eighty year old was a radical abolitionist who associated with the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society during the Civil War.¹⁰ Likewise, in memorializing frequent correspondent Seward Mitchell, E.C. Walker described him as being one of the “Old Guard” abolitionists.¹¹

In the 1880s, a significant number of *Lucifer’s* readers were of the anti-slavery generation. Around the time of Walker’s free love ceremony, several contributors ventured to give their ages: outspoken free lover J.H. Cook was sixty-eight, New Jersey correspondent Jeremiah Hacker was eighty-six, free lover Francis Barry was sixty, and Warren Chase, an itinerant free love lecturer from Wisconsin, was seventy-four.¹² In fact, *Lucifer* attracted readers in their seventies and eighties, many of whom could be identified as “veteran reformers.”¹³ Though they may not have mentioned direct involvement with abolitionism, they were of adult age during the great contests over slavery in the 1840s and 1850s and were familiar with the rhetoric of anti-slavery. Their feelings about slavery likely carried into the postbellum period when free lovers openly discussed emancipating women from the slavery of marriage.

Geographic location was yet another tie to the antebellum period of abolition, as a majority of *Lucifer’s* contributors resided in areas where anti-slavery sentiments would

⁹ T.B. Wakeman, “Letter to Mr. Walker,” *Lucifer*, 22 November 1886.

¹⁰ Hal D. Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Lawrence, KS: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), 15, 154.

¹¹ E.C. Walker, “Seward Mitchell,” *Lucifer*, 4 November 1887.

¹² J.H. Cook, “To Lovers of Truth, and Justice Humanity,” *Lucifer*, 14 January 1887; J. Hacker, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 4 March 1887; Barry was born in 1827, Joanne E. Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women’s Equality* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 78; Warren Chase, “Letter to Sister Lois,” *Foundation Principles*, printed in *Lucifer*, 7 August 1885.

¹³ Passet, 57.

have run high. Throughout the early years, the editor periodically published a list of subscribers that included their name and location. In 1883, 95% of subscribers were listed from the Midwest, while in 1884 77% were from the Midwest with another 7% located in Northeastern states.¹⁴ After 1884, when Harman stopped printing lists of new subscribers, readers' locations can be discerned from published letters, most of which identified the letter writer's city and state. In October 1886, a month in which many readers' letters were published in response to the Walker-Harman autonomic marriage, over 60% of the letters were from readers in the Midwest, while another 21% were from the Northeast.¹⁵ Conversely, very few readers resided in former Confederate States. In 1883, they number only two out of 176 total new subscribers, and only 11% of new subscribers in 1884 were from former Confederate States. Out of the 46 letters published in October 1886, a mere 6 were from former Confederate States.¹⁶

The backgrounds of *Lucifer's* readers therefore would have made it easy for them to compare married women to enslaved Africans. Those who had been abolitionists demonstrated a commitment to personal freedom, while older readers and residents of former anti-slavery states would have been able to readily make the association and accept the task of a new kind of abolition—that of freeing women from “sex slavery.” The rhetoric of sex slavery and a desire to “emancipate” women from marriage created an analogy that these readers would understand, a view that caused them to think about marriage in terms of a bondage that needed to be broken and wives as persons who

¹⁴ See “New Subscribers” in issues of *Lucifer*, August-December 1883 and 1884.

¹⁵ See *Lucifer*, 1 October, 8 October, 15 October, 22 October, and 29 October. The total number of letters in which a reader location was identified was 46: 28 from the Midwest, 21 from the Northeast, 6 from the South, and 10 from the West.

¹⁶ See “New Subscribers” in issues of *Lucifer*, August-December 1883 and 1884; *Lucifer*, 1 October, 8 October, 15 October, 22 October, and 29 October.

needed to be freed. By comparing marriage to slavery, contributors were able to criticize the institution at a time when marriage was a source of empowerment for most middle class Americans.¹⁷

The language of abolition enabled *Lucifer* readers to think of wives as chattel slaves who needed to be freed; just as African slaves were property of their masters, so were wives owned by their husbands. This comparison became more obvious as *Lucifer's* men commented about the status of women in marriage. Itinerant lecturer Warren Chase declared that “the women are as much slaves as ever any colored people were in Alabama, and the roots of that slavery are still in our marriage laws in all our States.”¹⁸ Freethought lecturer and farmer Jeremiah Hacker described the wife as a “sexual slave of her ‘lord and master.’” In his travels as an itinerant, he met a man whose previous two wives had died because they were “not strong enough to perform the duties of wife-hood” that the man demanded. Between the two, they had nineteen children and countless abortions. In Hacker’s opinion, these women were nothing more than sexual slaves whose deaths were caused by the institution of marriage.¹⁹ As C.L. James, a reformatory author from Wisconsin, voiced, the “ownership” husbands claimed over wives ultimately led to their degradation.²⁰ Moses Harman summed up *Lucifer's* position on marriage laws by claiming that they were as “infamous as those which put the person

¹⁷ For a discussion of women’s increased power in marriage, see Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*; Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 151-174; Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1981).

¹⁸ Warren Chase, “The War of the Gauges,” *Lucifer*, 6 July 1888.

¹⁹ J. Hacker, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 26 August 1887; J. Hacker, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 29 August 1890. Occupational data listed from Ancestry.com, Source Citation: Year: 1880; Census Place: Berlin, Camden, New Jersey; Roll: 775; Family History Film: 1254775; Page: 615D; Enumeration District: 66; Image: 0072. Original data: Tenth Census of the United States, 1880 (NARA microfilm publication T9, 1,454 rolls), Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²⁰ C.L. James, “Ownership in Marriage,” *Lucifer*, 15 January 1886.

of the black woman under the control of her master.”²¹ If a woman were to leave her husband she became like a fugitive, a “runaway wife” who would lose any claim to her children or property.²² While slavery had technically been abolished, Harman claimed that “real slavery” remained in the form of legal marriage, which he believed was “scarcely less compulsory than before the Emancipation proclamation.”²³

One of *Lucifer's* expressed goals was to enlighten women so that they would set themselves free from marriage. The paper's contributors expressed the hope that women would take the initiative. Long-time free love advocate Francis Barry wrote that “woman must save herself.”²⁴ Female readers such as Laura Cummings voiced the same opinion when she wrote that women must learn that “woman must save woman.”²⁵ Harman's editorials conveyed the opinion that a free and open discussion of sexuality would lead more women to question marriage and rebel against it. He envisioned that women would instead choose to practice free love. In 1889, he stated that “woman must be a rebel and must be sustained in her rebellion by her sister woman.”²⁶ *Lucifer's* arguments against marriage were aimed at female readers of whom the editors and correspondents hoped would take the free love message and work to free themselves from the oppression of marriage.

However, contrary to this main message, *Lucifer's* editors constructed a gendered argument to explain why woman was unable to free herself without help from men.

Woman's helplessness was often attributed to what they perceived to be her innate

²¹ Moses Harman, “Another Disgusted Reader,” *Lucifer*, 28 September 1883.

²² Moses Harman, “Erratum,” *Lucifer*, 21 August 1885.

²³ Moses Harman, “Comment,” *Lucifer*, 8 March 1889.

²⁴ Francis Barry, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 12 April 1889.

²⁵ Laura Cummings, “Legal or Moral,” *Lucifer*, 18 January 1889.

²⁶ Moses Harman, “Comment,” *Lucifer*, 8 February 1889.

nature. Unlike men, contributors conveyed the idea that women were weak and dependent. E.C. Walker claimed that women were more “conservative” than men and were unwilling to accept new ideas.²⁷ Moses Harman concurred with this assessment of woman’s nature. He viewed women as having been ingrained with the characteristics of obedience, submission, and self-sacrifice.²⁸ In his eyes, women were not on the same level as men, who could express independence of will. Instead, women were more akin to slaves who were conditioned to be subservient to their masters. He compared the way in which slaves defended their masters to wives who defended marriage. Most women would choose to stay in the bondage of marriage rather than work to emancipate themselves by practicing free love. He remembered this had been the case for African slaves in the antebellum period, who, in some cases, resisted emancipation and preferred to remain where they were.²⁹

Readers easily made the connection between women’s passivity and religious influences. As freethinkers, they saw the church as one of the oppressive forces preventing them from having control over their own sexuality and women as the pawns of church leaders who could persuade them of what was “moral.” Because women were dominated by religious influences, Pennsylvania reader Annie E. Higby doubted that they would take action to change their situation.³⁰ The women who did take up reforms through religious organizations such as the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union were also unlikely to question their position in marriage. Frequent contributor Lucinda Chandler had firsthand knowledge. She held Christian beliefs, but was a radical socialist

²⁷ E.C. Walker, *Variety vs. Monogamy; An Address Before the Ladies’ Liberal League, of Philadelphia* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1897), 1.

²⁸ Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 17 January 1890.

²⁹ Moses Harman, *Institutional Marriage* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1901), 7-9.

³⁰ Annie E. Higby, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 6 May 1887.

reformer, willing to consider the merits of free love. When speaking about marriage and divorce at the Chicago Moral Education Society, she observed that the women in attendance were “far from prepared to decide what’s to be done.” In Chandler’s opinion, the women felt “paralyzed at the situation.”³¹

Therefore, men would need to be the ones to rescue women from sexual slavery. When writing about the duties of the “social reformer,” radical abolitionist Adin Ballou said “he stands for sex equality, demands for woman the right of self possession,” and condemns the actions of a brutal husband.³² Based on his article, Ballou essentially imagined social reformers to be men and, conversely, men worthy of being reformers to be beholden to the free love principle of women’s emancipation. Moses Harman made a similar argument, stating that it was up to reformers to “awaken woman.”³³ If women would not choose to free themselves from abusive husbands, the task would fall to free lovers. As Harman and others debated the emancipation of women, it became clear that *Lucifer’s* men would have to step up and take on the role of the protector in order to rescue women from sex slavery.

Rather than lessening men’s power, the emancipation of women became more about constructing a new authority for men as *Lucifer’s* editors and male correspondents used the language of abolition and imagined themselves to be akin to antebellum abolitionists working to end slavery for women. Based on the conversations in *Lucifer*, the sex radicals, both male and female, expressed doubt that women would recognize the bindings placed on them by legal marriage and voluntarily choose to reject it in favor of

³¹ Lucinda B. Chandler, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 7 June 1889. Description of Chandler as a Christian socialist see Sears, 133.

³² A.L. Ballou, “Lucifer Defended,” *Lucifer*, 8 June 1888.

³³ Moses Harman, “Notes and Comments,” *Lucifer*, 31 May 1889.

free love. Women could be free from the tyrannies of legal marriage only with the help of men, who in turn could prove their manhood by emancipating women and reinforce their authority over women as a protector. So much did he believe that he was working to emancipate women, the term “free lover,” Moses Harman contended, would one day be as honored as the terms “abolitionist” or “free soiler.”³⁴ He clearly spelled out actions men needed to take in order to bring about this goal. Like William Lloyd Garrison and the radical abolitionists, free lovers demanded the destruction of marriage laws which denied women self-ownership and enslaved them.³⁵ Harman asserted the “only way to protect woman from the ‘abuse of marital rights’ (husbands’ rights) is to abolish those rights altogether.”³⁶ He also encouraged male readers to educate women and arouse them to their “essential degradation” in the marriage bond.³⁷ Ballou agreed, stating that educating the next generation was an important mission of the social reformer.³⁸

The *Lucifer* paper itself was the tool that men used to advance their goals of protecting women, and it would also serve to exemplify a new kind of manhood. With its two male editors and expressed purpose of emancipating women from sex slavery, *Lucifer* took on traditional male characteristics as it worked to save women, many of whom were resistant to free love reforms, from a lifetime of marital unhappiness and misery. The paper first began in 1880 as a forum for readers to protest against religious incursions into the state and lament economic oppression, containing only a few articles attacking legal marriage. But by the late 1880s, the editor admitted that *Lucifer* had become, foremost, a “freelove paper.” Its purpose was to make “an earnest protest

³⁴ Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 16 May 1884.

³⁵ Moses Harman, “Are We Abolitionists?” *Lucifer*, 18 February 1887.

³⁶ Moses Harman, “Is It ‘Useless’?” *Lucifer*, 18 March 1887.

³⁷ Moses Harman, “The Next Revolution,” *Lucifer*, 20 December 1889.

³⁸ A.L. Ballou, “Lucifer Defended,” *Lucifer*, 8 June 1888.

against slaveries of all kinds, and especially against the slavery of woman as wife and mother.”³⁹

Readers came to view the editor of *Lucifer*, Moses Harman, as the leader of the new abolitionist movement, and they lauded him for his work in trying to rescue women. It was at Harman’s sole discretion that the paper shifted topics around 1886 to focus more exclusively on a goal to “emancipate woman from sex slavery” and overturn marriage laws.⁴⁰ Harman presumed to represent free lovers who challenged marriage laws, commonly using the pronoun “we” when speaking of the way in which his daughter and co-editor defied Kansas statutes.⁴¹ Many who wrote in to *Lucifer* imagined Harman as a new type of abolitionist who was fighting to end women’s sex slavery based on his own personal background, his work as the editor, and his bold propositions to destroy legal marriage. Readers sanctioned Harman’s new leadership role, likening him to great abolitionists of the antebellum period. Contributor Sada Bailey Fowler stated that “M. Harman is the Wm. L. Garrison of the age,” while Frank Harman, nephew to Moses, even argued that the editor was “fighting for a greater reform than Garrison.”⁴² One correspondent compared *Lucifer* to Garrison’s anti-slavery paper the *Liberator*, furthering the connection between Harman and the venerated abolitionist.⁴³

Lucifer’s female readership, especially, picked up on the abolitionist rhetoric and imagined Harman to be the embodiment of woman’s great protector. Through their words, it is clear that many came to idolize him and believed that Harman’s efforts to

³⁹ Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 16 January 1891.

⁴⁰ Moses Harman, “Protection II,” *Lucifer*, 9 March 1888.

⁴¹ See Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 8 October 1886; Moses Harman, “Legality vs. Justice,” *Lucifer*, 15 October 1886 for examples.

⁴² Sada Bailey Fowler, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 7 March 1890; Frank S. Harman, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 15 April 1887.

⁴³ Jay Chaapel, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 8 November 1889.

bring about free love and end legal marriage would rescue them from abusive marriages. As Colorado reader Mrs. A.E. Wright explained, many women were “longing for *freedom* in many ways, but do not know what to do or how to help themselves.” They knew that something was terribly wrong about the marriage system and that they were its victims, but were resigned to “silently submit to it till death relieves them.” Mrs. Wright praised Harman and other “dear brothers” who risked persecution in order to agitate for reform in the pages of *Lucifer*.⁴⁴ Another reader, Mrs. E.H. Jones, called Harman “woman’s emancipator and friend,” stating “woman needs his help.”⁴⁵ Charlotte Luce, a farmer’s wife and midwife from Iowa, even wrote to the Kansas judge to petition for clemency after Harman and Walker were arrested in 1887 for publishing obscene literature. In her letter, she referred to the two men as “defenders of women” and expressed the sentiment that she did not believe they should be punished for their “efforts to free women from sexual slavery.”⁴⁶

When E.C. Walker was arrested for violating the marriage laws of Kansas, he became an example for men and helped to solidify the connection between free lovers and radical abolitionists. In the eyes of the state, his “autonomistic” union did not represent a legal marriage because it was not officiated by a legal authority nor was a marriage license obtained.⁴⁷ Walker and his bride faced charges for defying the marriage laws of Kansas. Their conviction, however, did not deter the free lovers; rather it encouraged *Lucifer’s* readers to continue the comparison between free love and anti-

⁴⁴ Mrs. A.E. Wright, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 12 July 1889.

⁴⁵ Mrs. E.H. Jones, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 11 July 1890.

⁴⁶ Charlotte C. Luce, “Letter to Judge C.G. Foster, Topeka Kansas,” *Lucifer*, 1 November 1889. For her background information, see Charlotte Luce, “Crimes Against Womanhood: The Markland Letter Duplicated and Vindicated,” *Lucifer*, 1 November 1889; Charlotte Luce, “Wails of Agony from Sex Slaves,” *Lucifer*, 31 January 1890. A detailed discussion of Walker’s arrest is in Chapter 4 and Harman’s in Chapter 5.

⁴⁷ F.H Roberts, “Decisions of the Supreme Court,” *Oskaloosa Independent*, 12 March 1887.

slavery, and they saw Walker as a brave abolitionist. Remarking on the couple's imprisonment, freethinker Thaddeus Wakeman declared that Kansas had become a "Slave State."⁴⁸ One reader compared Walker to John Brown, while another likened him to William Lloyd Garrison for his "moral courage" to break marriage laws just as anti-slavery citizens had done before the war.⁴⁹ Former abolitionist and radical free lover Seward Mitchell also described Walker using anti-slavery terminology. He wrote that Walker's imprisonment was needed to "open the eyes of the slaves" and that his suffering was for great principles because he dared to be a "true man."⁵⁰

Moses Harman undoubtedly took advantage of Walker's arrest as an opportunity to expand the comparison between the emancipation of women and the abolition of slavery. He claimed that his daughter would not fall victim to the marital abuse experienced by women who were legally married. He praised E.C. Walker for allowing Lillian to retain her maiden name, saying that in this action Walker rejected Lillian as his slave.⁵¹ Not only was Walker functioning to protect women, he was also taking radical action similar to antebellum abolitionists who often resorted to breaking the law to achieve their goals. To vindicate and maintain the sex radical principles of free love, Harman asserted that it would be "necessary to disobey and even defy statute law, as abolitionists disobeyed and defied statute law."⁵² Walker was in the same position as old abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison due to the fact that he was imprisoned for violating the marriage laws and threatened with mob action for his unconventional

⁴⁸ Thaddeus B. Wakeman, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 22 November 1886.

⁴⁹ G.C. Jones, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 24 December 1886; W. Perkins, "Prudence and Discretion," *Lucifer*, 14 January 1887.

⁵⁰ Seward Mitchell, "Letter to Brother Walker," *Lucifer*, 26 November 1886. About Mitchell's background, see E.C. Walker, "Seward Mitchell," *Lucifer*, 4 November 1887.

⁵¹ Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886.

⁵² Moses Harman, "Legality vs. Justice," *Lucifer*, 15 October 1886.

relationship with Lillian. Even the *Lucifer* office was in danger of destruction because townspeople were upset at the couple's defiance.⁵³

Male readers did not hesitate to utilize the abolitionist analogy when describing their own efforts to free women. Self-proclaimed free lover J.H. Cook stated that he was an "educator and agitator" on the question of women's sovereignty. He revealed that he had been fighting against the "social tyrannies" of marital rape and other abuses for over forty years. When writing about his personal efforts, Cook said that he stood "in the same relation to these higher slaveries that Garrison did to Chattel Slavery" and refused to back down from his position.⁵⁴ Francis Barry, too, proved his commitment to emancipating women whom he described as "the victims of marriage." He wrote that for the past forty years, just as Garrisonians demanded an end to African slavery he had been denouncing marriage as "the vilest of abominations" and demanding its "immediate and unconditional abolition."⁵⁵

While they may have been radical in their desires to abolish marriage, *Lucifer's* male editors constructed traditional male roles for free lovers; instead of describing themselves as losing patriarchal power by advocating women's sexual autonomy, they upheld male power in their roles as rescuers and protectors of women. Free love would provide women with more sexual autonomy, but only because men were benevolent enough to grant it to them. Men could reclaim honor and integrity through the practice of free love and in their roles as protectors of women. An honorable man, one who had attained a higher form of manhood, would shelter his woman from violence and abuse the

⁵³ Moses Harman, "Are We Abolitionists?" *Lucifer*, 18 February 1887.

⁵⁴ J.H. Cook, "Social and Sexual Slavery," *Lucifer*, 18 April 1884; J.H. Cook, "That 'Free Love Chip'," *Lucifer*, 19 September 1884.

⁵⁵ Francis Barry, "Barry to Hacker," *Lucifer*, 22 July 1892; Francis Barry, "The Marriage Question," *Lucifer*, 12 February 1886.

best way he knew how, which, according to the sex radicals, was through free love, and male free lovers would be the community which would judge this new form of honorable manhood.⁵⁶ Men would still retain power over women by allowing them choice.

Furthermore, women would look up to free lovers as men who could rescue them from the flawed system of legal marriage and protect them from potential marital abuses that occurred inside of marriage. Men such as Moses Harman and E.C. Walker were shining examples of how advocating free love could remake manhood through the protection of women. Their actions served to improve women's conditions in relationships with men, with the *Lucifer* editors as examples. Readers observed that Walker granted freedom to Lillian and Moses Harman promoted free love through his work in *Lucifer*. California correspondent Dagmar Mariager lauded the editors as "the rescuers of women," writing that they defended "all women in their right to personal safety from the unprovoked assaults of their so-called protectors."⁵⁷ One New Hampshire reader praised Harman and Walker for their efforts to emancipate women, calling them "faithful men and true."⁵⁸

Lucifer's male contributors provided examples of how men could achieve this form of honorable manhood in relation to their treatment of women. Men could protest against marital rape, as did Dr. Markland who wrote to *Lucifer* to expose the horrors of a husband's selfish actions. Moses Harman called his letter a "manly protest" that should

⁵⁶ For a description of honorable conduct and community-supported codes of honor, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). Though Wyatt-Brown's focus is the antebellum South, the codes of honor which he describes can be seen through the discussion of men's behavior in the *Lucifer* network.

⁵⁷ Mrs. D. Mariager, "A Woman's Plea for Justice: Another Open Letter to Judge Foster," *Lucifer*, 19 July 1889.

⁵⁸ Lydia E. Blackstone, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer* 14 October 1887.

be held in “undying remembrance.”⁵⁹ Men who were already legally married could reject sexual control over their wives. William Thorpe, a blacksmith from rural New York, wrote to *Lucifer* to explain how he tried to exemplify this new manhood. Thorpe declared, “I do not look upon my wife as a slave, or an object of lust.” Instead, he allowed his wife Harriet to make decisions on sexual matters. Thorpe ended his letter by encouraging all married men to follow his example.⁶⁰ Another reader modeled new tactics for men; in addition to reforming the relationships with their own female partners, men could reach out into their communities to advocate free love to save other women. Carl Glefser explained to the editor that he handed out sample copies of the *Lucifer* paper and sex radical materials to married women in his Colorado community, hoping to enlist them in the paper’s cause. He also sent in the names of four married women who he convinced to become *Lucifer* subscribers.⁶¹ Jeremiah Hacker also followed this model, traveling as a lecturer and promoting free love. In describing his efforts, he stated that just as he would be obligated to save a drowning woman, so did he feel it was his duty to help married women.⁶² The best example was Francis Barry, who, as a true practitioner of free love, rejected legal marriage altogether. The former resident of the free love community Berlin Heights, Ohio declared that any man who continued to uphold marriage, in his opinion, was not a real man but a “liar and hypocrite.”⁶³ Through their

⁵⁹ Moses Harman, “The Age Needs Plainness,” *Lucifer*, 22 June 1888.

⁶⁰ Harriet and William Thorpe, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 7 February 1890. Because Harriet signed the letter with her husband, it is clear that she approved of his behavior towards her. Occupational data from Ancestry.com, Source Citation: Year: 1880; Census Place: Milton, Saratoga, New York; Roll: 928; Family History Film: 1254928; Page: 278B; Enumeration District: 78; Image: 0558. Original data: Tenth Census of the United States, 1880 (NARA microfilm publication T9, 1,454 rolls), Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁶¹ Carl Glefser, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 27 September 1889.

⁶² Jeremiah Hacker, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 8 April 1892.

⁶³ Francis Barry, “Barry to Hacker,” *Lucifer*, 22 July 1892; Francis Barry, “The Marriage Question,” *Lucifer*, 12 February 1886.

actions, these readers of *Lucifer* showed how following the ideas of *Lucifer* served to make them into better men.

Related to questions of power, the value of individualism was also central to manhood. When considering what qualities a true man possessed, the idea that he was independent and had ultimate control over the decisions of his life was at the forefront of what it meant to be a man in the nineteenth century. Society viewed a man who was dependent on others and did not have control of his life as a lesser man, a feminine man who was not manly. Historically, dependence has been the mark of the female gender or a child, while independence and control has been a defining characteristic of what it means to be an adult male head of the household.⁶⁴ Men living in the 1880s inherited a tradition of American individualism which dated back to earlier in the century with the rise of the market economy, the expansion of universal manhood suffrage, and the growth of the middle class. Men were expected to become “self-made,” working competitively to create a sense of identity in the market and political systems. The traditional male virtue of independence, as seen in the early republic, meant autonomy in personal relations as well as freedom from reliance on political and social authorities.⁶⁵

However, by the late nineteenth century, men’s identities as individuals were in jeopardy, especially for *Lucifer’s* readers who recognized specific obstacles to their independence. The early editions of the *Valley Falls Liberal* and *Kansas Liberal* decried the influence of the church over secular life, as religious leaders successfully passed a

⁶⁴ See Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) for a discussion on the importance of man’s role as head of the household.

⁶⁵ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); Eric Foner, “Radical Individualism in America: Revolution to the Civil War,” *Literature of Liberty* 1 (July-Sept 1978), 5-31.

prohibition law in the state of Kansas. The church, claimed Wyoming reader J.F. Crawford, had always sought to control her subjects. He lamented that there were “but few men who realize how much she controls their actions and thoughts, yet they imagine themselves freemen.”⁶⁶ Readers were quick to see the state’s incursion into their personal lives. The WCTU was fervently working to enforce prohibition laws, and there was a movement to pass “Sunday laws” that would prevent men, some desperately needing the income, from working. Contributors also noted the economic oppressions they, as either small farmers or wage laborers, faced, which included increased debt, the rising cost of land, and loss of economic independence as America became dominated by large corporations with a workforce of wage earners.⁶⁷ These men undoubtedly felt that their autonomy and very identity as men were in jeopardy as they found themselves less able to maintain control over their political and economic lives.

The men of *Lucifer* specifically targeted marriage laws as one source of oppression for manhood because of the way in which the state dictated how a marriage could be entered, what rights each spouse had within that marriage, and the conditions under which the marriage might be terminated, if termination was even allowed. Men had lost their individualism within marriage, according to the sex radicals, because the state took away their ability to freely conduct their sexual relationships. In their eyes, the state did not regard men as independent individuals, but rather viewed them as dependents who required permission and guidance in governing their personal affairs. Moses Harman argued that marriage laws supported a “paternal government” that treated its citizens as “simply wards or minor children.” Because they could not be trusted to

⁶⁶ J.F. Crawford, “Woman Under the Rule of the Church,” *Kansas Liberal*, 20 April 1882.

⁶⁷ Readers especially complained about the “land robbery” perpetrated by the railroad companies, which was aided by politicians, and capitalists, who robbed their workers of decent wages.

marry or divorce themselves, he concluded that “we are not freemen.” Harman told readers that this represented a usurpation of state power.⁶⁸ Likewise, E.C. Walker blamed the state and its current marriage laws for enslaving men and taking away their free power of choice, asserting that the “caitiff souls do not know that they are in bonds.”⁶⁹

Free love promised to bring to manhood an assertion of individualism and a reclamation of lost authority in that it rejected all influences the church and state held over men’s sexual and romantic lives. While one historian suggests that the sense of powerlessness led men to become more abusive to their wives, this study has found that sex radical men turned to free love and the emancipation of women as the way to reassert personal autonomy.⁷⁰ The long-held value of individualism found expression in the free love movement where self-made men desired to stand apart from institutions such as the state, church, corporations, and, in some cases, even the family.⁷¹ Free lovers opposed incursions into their personal lives by these outside institutions. Moses Harman invoked the tradition of individualism inspired by the Early Republic when he wrote that the “fathers of ‘76” would never have approved of such restrictive marriage laws. Just as the founders had rebelled against the old laws of monarchical and theocratic governments to establish manly independence, so should free lovers reject current marriage laws and declare independence in their sexual lives.⁷²

⁶⁸ Moses Harman, “Free Marriage and Free Divorce,” *Kansas Liberal*, 2 March 1883.

⁶⁹ E.C. Walker, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 21 March 1884.

⁷⁰ Passet, 143-144.

⁷¹ John C. Spurlock, “A Masculine View of Women’s Freedom: Free Love in the Nineteenth Century,” *International Social Science Review* 69, no. 3/4 (1994), 34-44.

⁷² Moses Harman, “Free Marriage and Free Divorce,” *Kansas Liberal*, 2 March 1883.

Sex radical men could express independence and individualism specifically by rejecting legal marriage, which represented church and state authority over them. *Lucifer's* men proposed that they form their own sex unions, even asserting that this was a fundamental right. Moses Harman drew on the founding principles of individualism to make this point. He argued that as citizens of a free republic, men should claim the right to form their own marriage contracts and dissolve these contracts by mutual consent.⁷³ Asserting their manhood was about recapturing power that they believed was usurped by the state. In order to be their own masters, Walker maintained, men must practice “self-government” in all personal affairs, especially regarding “sex liberty.”⁷⁴ The state should not be able to hold any power over men’s romantic and sexual relationships. As asserted by correspondent J.H. Cook, it was his “right” to be free in governing his love affairs, not the church or state.⁷⁵

In the pages of *Lucifer*, some men even ventured to suggest that they were enslaved by legal marriage because it denied them the personal freedom that marked an independent manhood. One anonymous reader claimed that in ninety-nine out of one hundred marriages “one or the other of the parties to a marriage is a slave.”⁷⁶ In making this statement, the reader acknowledged that it was not always the woman who was victimized by marriage. State mandated and religious marriages were a forced binding of a man to one woman, but just as women expressed a desire to escape brutal husbands, so did men express a desire to leave a woman if she became disagreeable to him. A man may be trapped in marriage to a woman he no longer loved. Moses Harman argued that

⁷³ Moses Harman, “Our Demands,” *Lucifer*, 1 January 1886.

⁷⁴ E.C. Walker, “The Social Problem,” *Lucifer*, 30 May 1884.

⁷⁵ J.H. Cook, “Monogamy and Polygamy,” *Lucifer*, 17 July 1885.

⁷⁶ J.W.C., “The Marriage Bond,” *Lucifer*, 5 August 1887.

this was due to the ceremonial promise to “love and honor” until death, which could become impossible to fulfill.⁷⁷ Free lover and regular correspondent H.H. Hutcheson stated that a couple should not be compelled to live together in this situation. Marriage laws, in his view, were controlling and prevented men from exercising freedom over their own decisions.⁷⁸ Free lover J.H. Cook agreed; legal marriage restricted love and individuality, which served to suppress and destroy not just women but men too.⁷⁹

Reader J. Allen Evans provided direct evidence that men were often the ones enslaved in marriage. The radical individualist and free lover from Colorado wrote that “slavery is not altogether the condition of the woman.” Evans argued that he knew “many slaves of the opposite sex.” To back up his claim, he told readers of his own personal experience being trapped in marriage. Evans described himself as a “victim” to his wife who was a “tyrant in petticoats” and “ruled supreme all with whom she was intimately associated.” Through his description of her, he obviously felt helpless, at one point, to assert control over his wife, her actions, and, consequently, his own life. His experience in marriage showed that men, too, could be victimized and abused in marriage. His story intended to emphasize to readers that while many articles in *Lucifer* described women as slaves, men were subjected to the same laws that trapped women in marriage. Men, perhaps more than women, needed to be able to express independence and freedom in their lives. Evans reminded readers that in their zeal to emancipate woman, “let us be just to man.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Moses Harman, “Statement of Principles in Regard to Marriage,” *Lucifer*, 17 September 1886.

⁷⁸ H.H. Hutcheson, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 3 October 1884.

⁷⁹ J.H. Cook, “Marriage Versus Individuality,” *Lucifer*, 3 February 1888.

⁸⁰ J. Allen Evans, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 10 May 1889.

For *Lucifer's* men, free love promised to release them from constrictive marriages and make their personal feelings of love and sexual desire all that was necessary to form relationships. Because of the promise required of the husband to be true to his wife, Moses Harman viewed marriage laws to be “like swearing an honorable man to tell the truth.” As long as love ruled, he declared, no laws should be required.⁸¹ Couples who loved each other, wrote Warren Chase, had no need for the interference of the law.⁸² Marriage, to E.C. Walker, represented an invasion of individuality and control over one’s life, something that a man could not afford to give up. Rather, a man needed to be able to express independence in all his personal affairs. Walker asserted that free love was the only way to free men, stating “that we can have ‘too much freedom’ I unhesitatingly deny.”⁸³

Free love would also make men completely individual because it specified that manhood was separate from the care of offspring. If marriage and the legal bond it created were abolished, a man would not be compelled to financially support his wife or their children. *Lucifer's* men expressed the sentiment that love, rather than legal obligations, would encourage them to support their children. Moses Harman stated that “no natural father will neglect to help provide for his conjugal partner or for his and her offspring.”⁸⁴ Reader S.C. Thayer believed that if a couple chose to separate, they could agree “like business men” on the care and support of the children.⁸⁵ Yet, in their discussion about child care, many male free lovers made statements that indicated that they would be released from the raising and care of children, tasks they believed would

⁸¹ Moses Harman, “Ethics of Government,” *Lucifer*, 7 August 1885.

⁸² Warren Chase, “Letter to the Editor,” *Foundation Principles* printed in *Lucifer*, 7 August 1885.

⁸³ E.C. Walker, “Love and the Law,” *Lucifer*, 8 January 1886.

⁸⁴ Moses Harman, “Comment,” *Lucifer*, 19 October 1888.

⁸⁵ S.C. Thayer, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 10 December 1886.

and should fall to women. As Harman wrote, a woman's maternal functions were "her own" and that "she alone is responsible" for exercising that function. In his opinion, it was not necessary for society to compel a man to pledge security for any potential offspring before he could become a father.⁸⁶ Likewise, J.H. Cook argued that love, rather than the responsibility for children, should be the only factor that held a man and woman together.⁸⁷ What these men were essentially arguing was that in cases of separation women should retain custody of children and be responsible for their rearing, contrary to common legal customs in the nineteenth century which assigned custody to fathers. Childcare was not men's task in the eyes of the free lovers, though most men articulated that they should provide financial assistance for their children. By delegating the task of raising children to women, sex radical men were making the statement that child care was not part of manhood but rather was seen as a subcomponent of womanhood.

The practice of free love would allow men to become true individuals who were not tied to one woman, and some men expressed the desire to have multiple partners, what free lovers referred to as "variety." Because free love would abolish the permanency of marriage and allow men to leave relationships if they so desired, it opened up the possibility for them to engage in serial monogamy and even have multiple partners at the same time. E.C. Walker explained that it was up to the individual and "his own taste" to decide how many partners to have. In his pamphlet *Variety vs. Monogamy*, he stated that legal marriage and monogamy were one and the same, conveying the idea that life-long monogamy with one partner could be just as oppressive as legal marriage. For man to be truly happy, he must follow his heart; it could mean a lifetime partnership, but

⁸⁶ Moses Harman, "Comment," *Lucifer*, 21 September 1888.

⁸⁷ J.H. Cook, "Marriage Versus Individuality," *Lucifer*, 3 February 1888.

this was rare, Walker claimed. In his opinion, it was more likely that a man would have multiple partners, either one at a time or several simultaneously. Variety was, in his view, the pathway to true freedom and happiness.⁸⁸

In *Lucifer*, men discussed and endorsed the possibility of attaining this freedom. This was the case for J.H. Cook who admitted to readers that he had had several lovers over the course of his life. His reason for endorsing a serial style monogamy was his opinion that “the functions of the upper brain were not confined to time or numbers [of partners], spontaneity and liberty are not necessarily limited to one.” Women’s rights advocate Lois Waisbrooker disagreed with him, saying it was “a man’s view of it.” The practice of having multiple partners over one’s life was a bit of a controversy between male and female sex radicals. The men, however, were more likely to vocalize their opinions and convey a desire for multiple partners. They debated in the pages of *Lucifer*, the men convinced that variety was the best possible expression of their sexuality.⁸⁹

In 1886, E.C. Walker became the example of how free love would help men recover their manhood through an expression of individualism and autonomy. In his decision to form a sexual union with Lillian Harman, he rejected church and state interference. He knew of the Kansas marriage laws requiring a license and officiant but refused to comply, choosing instead to marry himself. As Walker explained, these institutions had become “old garments, to be dropped when we grow into larger-statured manhood.”⁹⁰ Because he viewed the state as a usurper of his own power, he believed he was under no obligation to obey the marriage laws, as he would have been sacrificing

⁸⁸ E.C. Walker, *Variety vs. Monogamy; An Address Before the Ladies’ Liberal League, of Philadelphia*.

⁸⁹ J.H. Cook, “A Woman’s View of It,” *Lucifer*, 10 April 1885. Dr. Juliet Severance was one of the few women who agreed with the men’s position on variety.

⁹⁰ E.C. Walker, “To the Editor of the Sickle,” *Lucifer*, 8 October 1886.

“self-respect,” meaning his manhood, if he had legally married.⁹¹ Walker also rejected permanently tying himself to one woman. Before meeting Lillian Harman, he had been married to another woman and had two children with her. They had mutually agreed upon divorce, and he left her to care for the children with his financial support. Although he was able to obtain a legal divorce in that situation, he likely wanted the freedom that a free love union would provide to him should he decide to split from Lillian in the future. Walker’s desires to truly be an independent man in relation to women served him well. Several years after his autonomistic marriage to Lillian, they agreed to separate, and Lillian retained custody of their child Virna. By 1900, Walker was living in New York City, free of his past two wives and undoubtedly looking for another chance at love.⁹²

To readers of *Lucifer* in 1886, E.C. Walker presented a model of how men could use the principles of free love to attain the goal of self-government. Readers applauded Walker’s actions as a sign of manly independence. Seward Mitchell commended the way in which Walker and Lillian Harman married themselves, saying it was the affirmation of their principles.⁹³ Dr. W.G. Markland also approved, affirming that it should be up to individuals to manage their love affairs, not the state.⁹⁴ Texas reader A. Warren said he was grateful for the reform work Walker was doing, believing it would have a greater effect on society in the future.⁹⁵

Many men wrote to the *Lucifer* editors expressing hope that they, too, could achieve the type of manhood that Walker’s free love union promised. They welcomed the opportunity to have a wife who required no promises or oaths from her future

⁹¹ E.C. Walker, “Kansas Liberty and Justice: To Jail and There,” *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886.

⁹² Sears, 268.

⁹³ Seward Mitchell, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 31 December 1886.

⁹⁴ W.G. Markland, “Letter to Harman and Walker,” *Lucifer*, 24 December 1886.

⁹⁵ A. Warren, “To the Friends of Freedom Everywhere,” *Lucifer*, 10 December 1886.

husband or any assurance that he would remain with her if the union became disagreeable to him. Gabriel Wacht of Boston told the editor that it was his intention to follow Walker's example "should I find a suitable party to the contract."⁹⁶ Readers also expressed a desire to find women who were willing to enter such a relation with no security. As Chicago reader Julius Mark wrote, "I wish I could find *another* Lillian to enter what is in my opinion the ideal union of man and woman."⁹⁷ His letter indicated some doubt that many women would enter this type of union and give such a large margin of freedom to their husbands. These readers clearly idolized Walker for putting his free love principles into practice, ensuring freedom and independence for himself and the ability to get out of the relationship honorably if he so desired.

Looking through the pages of *Lucifer*, it is clear that free love and women's emancipation offered men a chance for new, yet often conflicting expressions of manhood. It presented them an opportunity to re-establish authority over women in the role of rescuer, but also to fulfill the promise of individualism, as idealized by men earlier in the century. By working to emancipate women from "sex slavery," men could find a new way to protect women. They could reclaim the power they were losing over women by positioning themselves as the rescuers of women, just as antebellum abolitionists saved black slaves from cruel masters. At the same time, free love promised to liberate men who were also trapped in the bonds of marriage with women. By rejecting legal marriage, men would be free to end unions when they desired, form as many sexual relationships as they wanted, and even assign the responsibility of raising offspring to

⁹⁶ Gabriel Z. Wacht, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 3 December 1886.

⁹⁷ Julius Mark, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 12 November 1886.

women. Free love thus promised a new form of independence for men at a time when their autonomy in the economic and political arenas was waning.

Given these benefits of free love, it is now obvious why E.C. Walker made his particular vows to Lillian. He made no promises to stay with her, declaring himself to be “sovereign.” He acknowledged his responsibility for the care of offspring, but would not have to take custody of the child should they separate. The duty of raising their child, itself a large burden, would fall to Lillian, as it did when they separated and Walker moved to New York in the late 1890s. Furthermore, Walker was celebrated by acting as Lillian’s protector, rescuing her from sex slavery that she would have found in a legal marriage. In his vows, he declared that “Lillian is now made free,” but what he also and perhaps more importantly meant was that he was made free. Walker was the shining example for other men looking for freedom in their sexual lives and a way to address their own declining position in the larger economic and social order of the emerging modern industrial world.

Free love also served to discipline the harshness of masculinity and promised to make men into better partners. In their condemnation of legal marriage, sex radicals decried the way in which husbands wielded absolute power over their wives, citing marital rape and unwanted children as examples of spousal abuses against which no laws existed. By practicing free love, women could tame men’s sexual practices and require they live up to honorable standards regarding their treatment of wives. In addition to reforming manhood, free love had the potential to liberate women from the bonds of legal marriage and offer them sexual autonomy and reproductive control, abilities that many who wrote to *Lucifer* believed they lacked.

CHAPTER 3

DISCIPLINING MANHOOD: THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN

[Marriage] is a power that has done more to make monsters of men, more to breed monsters, more to destroy the health of woman, and to create prostitution in and out of marriage, that can be reckoned.

—Lucinda B. Chandler, February 10, 1888.¹

IN THE SPRING OF 1886, Dr. W.G. Markland received a letter from a woman seeking his advice on how to help her friend “F.” As she explained, “F” had given birth and was “severely torn by the use of instruments in incompetent hands.” Several physicians had operated on her with some success until “F’s” husband “forced himself into her bed and the stitches were torn from her healing flesh, leaving her in worse condition than ever.” The doctor’s correspondent seemed exasperated, unsure what to do to help her friend, and obviously frustrated and horrified at the husband’s actions.

In his article for *Lucifer*, Dr. Markland used this story as an example of how women suffered under current marriage laws. Laws should protect individuals, he argued; but in his opinion, marriage laws did not serve to protect women. Instead wives were vulnerable to their husbands’ unwanted advances—what Markland labeled as rape, which he defined as “coition with a woman by force.” Single women were protected by laws against rape, but married women were not when the attacker was her husband. Referring to the story he posed controversial questions: “Did this man rape his wife? Would it have been rape had he not been married to her?” According to his perspective, Markland strongly believed that “F” was raped by her husband, that it was an unwanted

¹ Lucinda B. Chandler, “What is Marriage?” *Lucifer*, 10 February 1888.

sexual act, and that the law would do nothing to prosecute the husband for “F’s” injuries because it recognized that the person of the wife was wholly under control of her husband.

In addition to allowing the abuse of women, Markland’s letter showed how legal marriage turned men into monsters. It permitted men to possess absolute control over their wives’ bodies, and he likened husbands to the despotic czar of Russia. In fact, if a woman died because of forced intercourse with her husband there was no law that would prosecute him. The law recognized a man’s unconditional right to his wife’s body. This was a most “fearful power,” and Markland shuddered to think that the safety of society depended upon a legal right “which none but the coarse, selfish, ignorant, [and] brutal” would exercise. His story illustrated that men were using and abusing their power over women because the law did not recognize rape between married persons. Legal marriage did nothing to protect women and could therefore allow man to become a “brute.”²

The Markland letter resonated with female readers of *Lucifer* who acknowledged that married men’s sexual practices needed to be disciplined due to the fact that the power they gained through marriage caused them to represent the worst of male excesses. Women attested to the story told by Dr. Markland, writing about their own personal stories in response. They readily disclosed tales of marital abuse either in their own lives or in those of other women they knew, citing rape, unwanted children, poor health, violence, and even suicide as problems wives faced. Male readers acknowledged women’s position in marriage, echoing their stories of marital abuse. Women lamented that under the current system they felt helpless to improve their position. Meanwhile,

² W.G. Markland, “Another ‘Awful Letter’,” *Lucifer*, 18 June 1886. See Appendix B for full text of the letter.

their characterization of married men likened them to mere brutes. Based on their testimonies, it became clear to readers of *Lucifer* that manhood was deteriorating; female contributors to the paper continually referred to the Markland letter to make this point.³

Women who wrote to *Lucifer* blamed legal marriage and the fact that there were no laws to protect wives from brutal husbands, and they were convinced that free love would provide a better alternative. Contemporary female social reformers also acknowledged the problem of spousal abuse, but instead of suggesting free love as an alternative, they proposed to enforce standards of temperance, ban prostitution, give women the vote, and include women in the public sphere as a type of “social housekeeping.”⁴ The women who contributed to *Lucifer*, however, were outside the normative social spheres; they were “sex radicals” who believed that an open discussion of the sex question and ending legal marriage would improve women’s conditions. While historians have explored the free love movement and sex radicalism for its promise to offer women equality with men and sexual autonomy, this study has revealed that the concept of free love was also used to discipline masculine sexuality.⁵ Using free love as

³ For examples of how contributors used the Markland letter see: M.C. Gurney, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 16 April 1886; Charlotte C. Luce, “Letter to Judge C.G. Foster, Topeka Kansas,” *Lucifer*, 1 November 1889; Mrs. E.A. Abbey, “Man’s Inhumanity to Women,” *Lucifer*, 6 December 1889; Flora Wardall-Fox, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 24 August 1888; Lucinda B. Chandler, “What is Marriage?” *Lucifer*, 10 February 1888; Dora Forster, *Sex Radicalism as Seen by an Emancipated Woman of the New Time* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1905).

⁴ Janet Zollinger Giele, *Two Paths to Women’s Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995); Michael Lewis Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender Politics in Gilded Age Kansas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965); Paula Baker, *The Moral Frameworks of Public Life: Gender, Politics, and the State in Rural New York, 1870-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). Several sex radical women, including Elmina Slenker, did support issues such as temperance, but they saw those movements as ancillary to free love; see Chapter 1.

⁵ For works on women’s empowerment through free love, see: Joanne Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women’s Equality* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); John

a platform for reform, the women of *Lucifer* called for a higher standard of sexual morality from men with the expectation that practicing free love would require men to respect the sexual autonomy of their partners. Marital rape would become non-existent, and women would exercise control over their reproduction. As the women discussed marital discord and men's behavior, they developed a discourse that defined "morality" and manliness based on the better treatment of women. Men agreed that free love would provide better treatment towards women, arguing that the emancipation of women would function to temper man's worst excesses. Free love would thus serve to discipline men's sexual practices because their female partners would not be legally tied to them but would be free to leave at will.

* * *

In the late 1880s and early 1890s, *Lucifer's* female contributors expressed grave concerns about the position of women in marriage. They attacked marriage as the source of wives' abuse and misery, blaming the power legal marriage gave married men for their suffering. It was legal marriage and the fact that there were no laws to protect married women, sex radicals claimed, that allowed men to brutalize their wives. Marriage corrupted manhood, allowing them to be unchaste and sexually demanding of their wives. Male readers and contributors acknowledged women's concerns, agreeing that marriage positioned them in a subordinate position which allowed husbands to take advantage. A discussion emerged in *Lucifer* which highlighted the problems of women and the debasement of men. For women in particular, *Lucifer* provided a space to voice these concerns which otherwise might have been socially proscribed.

D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Hal D. Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1977).

Women wrote to *Lucifer* to illustrate problems they encountered in marriage, providing numerous stories, letters, and articles which told of male aggression and brutal husbands. Their words provided a powerful argument against marriage because of the personal nature of their testimonies. Regular correspondent Mattie Hursen, of Clinton, Iowa, testified that she had been in “sex slavery for seventeen long years” which had left her “broken in health, with brain nearly paralyzed from forced cohabitation sanctioned by law.” To save her life, Hursen risked leaving her husband and facing the world alone and penniless.⁶ Correspondent Rachel Campbell experienced a similar marriage. A short biography of her life described her husband as having “large sexual demands;” he became physically violent if she refused. Her family members advised against divorce, fearing she would be publicly disgraced. Campbell, however, left her husband, preferring to support herself through hard work at a cotton mill instead of enduring continued sexual abuse. She later published a fictional story titled *The Prodigal Daughter* detailing women’s abuse in marriage. It was printed in *Lucifer* in 1885, and afterwards the tale was widely referred to by *Lucifer* readers to lament women’s position in marriage.⁷

Personal stories conveyed the fact that women were often trapped in marriage, powerless to defend against the men who were supposed to be their protectors. A woman identified only as “Virginia” described herself as being “helpless” and likened her married life to being bound by shackles. So controlling was her husband that she had to read and write to *Lucifer* in secret.⁸ Sadie Magoon, an occasional letter writer from Los

⁶ Mattie E. Hursen, “Letter to Judge Foster,” *Lucifer*, 1 November 1889. Note: Also referred to in *Lucifer* as Mattie E. Hurson.

⁷ See Mary Florence Johnson, “Pioneer Chips: From the Private Correspondence of Rachel Campbell,” *Our New Humanity*, December 1895, 32-37; Rachel Campbell, “Sex Ethics No. 1,” *Lucifer*, 24 June 1892 and Rachel Campbell, *The Prodigal Daughter*, printed in *Lucifer*, 12 June 1885.

⁸ Virginia, “Letter to Lillian,” *Lucifer*, 29 October 1886.

Angeles, told readers a story detailing how one wife suffered at the hands of her husband. The man was considered to be “good” by his acquaintances, yet compelled his wife “to be his sexual slave at the cost of her life.” The wife’s health suffered, and even as she was confined to bed with illness “this human brute satisfied his passions.” Finally, the woman’s nurses sat with her around the clock to protect against her husband’s frequent violations which left her, according to Magoon’s sources, “raw as beef steak.” Though Magoon herself seemed happily married to William P. Magoon, also a frequent contributor and proponent of *Lucifer’s* free love platform, she sympathized with the wife’s plight.⁹

Most horrific to sex radicals was the existence of rape within marriage and the fact that it was legal. The brutal details of marital rape were foremost recognized and described by health care providers who witnessed its ill effect on their patients. In 1886, Dr. Markland’s story of a woman injured through forced intercourse was the first to be printed in *Lucifer*, and others soon followed, most prominently from female health care providers.¹⁰ Midwife Charlotte Luce, who practiced from her farm in Iowa, told *Lucifer’s* readers that even during parturition women were susceptible to their husbands’ sexual abuses. One laboring wife revealed to Luce that her husband insisted his sexual wants be gratified before he would call the doctor, while at another woman’s home she

⁹ Sadie Athena Magoon, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 14 February 1890.

¹⁰ See W.G. Markland, “Another ‘Awful Letter’,” *Lucifer*, 18 June 1886, which appears in Appendix B. Cases such as that described by Markland were common, Dr. Richard O’Neill stated in a letter to the editor in 1890. O’Neill witnessed many instances of abuse as a practicing physician in New York City’s tenement districts. He gave an example of “Mrs. M” who “died of injuries caused by the brutal sexual connection of her husband, a few days after an operation had been performed for perineal laceration.” Though Dr. O’Neill described her husband as a “big drunken beast” who was “morally guilty of her murder,” the man was not found legally guilty of any crime. Based on his experience as a physician, O’Neill concluded that “thousands” of women were killed every year from “sexual excesses forced on them” while others suffered from venereal disease and often insanity. See Richard V. O’Neill, “A Physician’s Testimony,” *Lucifer*, 14 February 1890, which appears in Appendix D.

had to administer an opiate to the “drunken” husband to keep him away from the travailing woman so she could be delivered.¹¹ Water-cure physician Dr. Juliet Severance of Wisconsin reported knowledge of similar abuses of wives, whom she described as “poor victims of this accursed system of slavery.” She regularly treated women in rural Iowa and Wisconsin due to the lack of qualified physicians specializing in obstetrics and gynecology. Severance’s experiences led her to develop a sharp critique of marriage. She claimed that the abuses wives suffered “would make the outrages once committed upon southern slaves pale before them.”¹² Likewise, in her twenty years traveling as a lecturer and a healer, Mrs. F.A. Logan told readers that she encountered numerous wives who were “subject to masculine dictation, usurpation and tyranny through the darksome hours which nature designed for restful sleep and recuperation.”¹³

Lucifer’s correspondents linked woman’s ill health and the violence against her person to her entrapment in legal marriage. Readers relayed personal stories and opinions based on what they heard from other women. Frequent contributor Mattie Hursen told readers of a letter she received from a friend, who explained that her health was suffering due to her husband’s demands. “I am so nervous,” the friend wrote, “and I must submit my person to him, for to deny him makes him worse.”¹⁴ Mrs. M.C. Gurney reported that she knew of a woman who, after only ten days of marriage, was “unable to stand upon her feet from sexual excesses.” The poor wife “lived in perpetual misery for nearly four years,” bedridden, until her husband suddenly died; afterwards, she speedily

¹¹ Charlotte C. Luce, “Letter to Judge C.G. Foster, Topeka Kansas,” *Lucifer*, 1 November 1889.

¹² Juliet Severance, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 22 January 1886. For biographical data, see Passet, 124-125.

¹³ Mrs. F.A. Logan, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 22 October 1886.

¹⁴ Mattie Hursen, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 13 March 1891.

recovered her health, secretly glad that he had passed lest she die from his abuse.¹⁵ In her practice as a healer, Mrs. F.A. Logan claimed to have heard “sad tales of women,” stating that the present system of marriage was to blame for their “sick head-aches and nervous prostration.” Based on her professional experience, she estimated that marriage had “crushed out of mortal existence tens of thousand of women.”¹⁶ California correspondent Luna Hutchinson pointed to daily newspaper stories of wife-beatings and conjugal murders as proof of the hardships women faced in marriage.¹⁷ Most sex radicals agreed with farmer’s wife Jennie M. Harper who wrote that countless women went prematurely to their graves on account of the abuse they faced in marriage.¹⁸

Wives frequently expressed the concern that they had no control over their reproduction and often resorted to abortion to avoid unwanted children. Elmina Slenker claimed that “thousands” of women every year attempted abortions; as proof, she pointed to the “vast quantities of pills, powders and potions taken by desperate and despairing wives already overburdened with maternal cares and duties.”¹⁹ Further evidence came from readers’ admissions, either from their own personal experience or knowledge of a friend’s. A Missouri reader, an anonymous woman identified only as “Mrs. M.H.,” confessed that her second child “was hardly a year old when to my horror I found another immortal soul gestating beneath my throbbing heart.” She tried “with every device I

¹⁵ M.C. Gurney, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 16 April 1886.

¹⁶ Mrs. F.A. Logan, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 22 October 1886.

¹⁷ Luna Hutchinson, “A Woman’s View of ‘Irene,’” *Lucifer*, 8 March 1889.

¹⁸ Mrs. J.M. Harper, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 16 November 1883. Occupation data from Ancestry.com, Source Citation: Year: 1880; Census Place: Pine Island, Goodhue, Minnesota; Roll: 621; Family History Film: 1254621; Page: 428B; Enumeration District: 169; Image: 0412. Original data: Tenth Census of the United States, 1880 (NARA microfilm publication T9, 1,454 rolls), Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁹ Aunt Elmina, “A Crime of Mothers,” *Lucifer*, 8 September 1893.

knew or could imagine to rid myself of this new burden,” but was unsuccessful.²⁰ In Chicago, a desperate woman came to reader H.E.M. and pleaded with her to tell her how she could “unburden herself of undesired maternity,” declaring, “I can’t be burdened with it and my husband is so mean to me now he knows I can’t leave him.”²¹ Mrs. E.A. Abbey, of St. Joseph, Missouri, gained the confidence of a neighbor who admitted, “I am in constant dread of being impregnated again, for my husband will deny himself nothing, neither will he let me rest my wearied mind or body.” Unfortunately, the woman died several months later from an attempted abortion.²²

A few women even contemplated suicide to escape bad marriages. One trapped wife wrote to Mattie Hursen, who had been a battered wife herself, because she was uncertain of what to do in her situation. Forced to submit to a husband she described as “worse than a brute,” the wife stated, “I *hate him*, and he has driven me to it.” When composing her letter to Hursen in 1891, she admitted that she was tempted to take her own life or murder her husband in order to end the suffering.²³ Pseudonymous contributor Zoa Topsis wrote about a St. Louis woman who was the “only recognized outlet for the lust of a lecherous husband.” The woman confided, “Often have I taken a razor in my hand, and deliberately raised it to my throat, in the act of placing myself beyond the horrid necessity of submitting my body to the embraces of a man whom I have long since ceased even to respect.” The abused wife told Topsis that she knew of no other way to resist the humiliation and degradation of her marriage.²⁴

²⁰ Mrs. M.H., “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 18 January 1889.

²¹ H.E.M., “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 26 May 1893.

²² Mrs. E.A. Abbey, “Man’s Inhumanity to Women,” *Lucifer*, 6 December 1889.

²³ Mattie Hursen, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 13 March 1891. Hursen remarked in 1887 that because her letters appeared so frequently in *Lucifer* that she received “so many letters” from readers asking her views on sex questions, see Mattie E. Hurson, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 25 March 1887.

²⁴ Zoa Topsis, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 3 December 1886.

The cries coming from *Lucifer's* women for relief came at a time when women in general were gaining more power and autonomy. Historical evidence shows that by the late nineteenth century, women's roles in the family and society were changing. Families became less patriarchal following industrialization, and women were able to exert more control in marriage as a moral authority.²⁵ Historians point to overall decreasing fertility rates throughout the nineteenth century as evidence of this power shift. While contraceptive practices may have contributed to this drop, they argue that the primary factor was women's control over male sexuality through a "domestic feminism" that allowed women to seize power within the family.²⁶ Many female reformers promoted "voluntary motherhood," a tool for women to strengthen their positions by deciding whether they would engage in sexual activities that could lead to pregnancy.²⁷ Additionally, divorce became more easily accessible to women as a result of the women's rights movement. Divorce rates dramatically increased after the Civil War when it became more widely available and as more courts were willing to grant wives an end to abusive marriages.²⁸

Not only were women gaining power within the family and marriage, they also garnered public authority. By mid-century, female moral reform organizations promoted women's public interests. Women campaigned to outlaw liquor and prostitution, thereby curbing men's behaviors and attacking the sexual double standard. The Woman's

²⁵ Linda Gordon, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America*; Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 151-174; Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1981).

²⁶ Daniel Scott Smith, "Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America," *Feminist Studies* 1, no. 3/4 (1973): 40-57.

²⁷ Gordon, 55-71.

²⁸ Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

Christian Temperance Union served as the largest women's organization; its crusade for "home protection" turned into a larger campaign to grant women political power through womanhood suffrage.²⁹ As more women entered the public sphere to address issues related to home and family, they gained some successes in procuring the vote. Several states including Kansas granted women either limited or full suffrage by the end of the century. Many women were able to take advantage of new legal rights and expanding social roles because of the growing influence of the women's rights movement.³⁰

Despite these gains, for women writing to *Lucifer* the sense of entrapment was real, and they certainly believed that legal marriage put them at a disadvantage. Perhaps this could be attributed to the fact that most female readers of *Lucifer* were from rural backgrounds. As regular contributor Elmina Slenker claimed, "many a woman way off in the country on a farm is the abject slave of her husband." These wives could not leave their husbands, and they could no longer turn to their parents who relinquished responsibility for them after marriage. Farm women, according to Slenker, were "feeble and broken in health" due to nature of their work, and, she questioned, with "two or three babes to care for," how could they leave their husbands and make their own livings?³¹ With no formal skills and little education, there was a slim chance for them to become economically self-sufficient. They were, literally, trapped in marriage.

Another argument wives made was that they believed their children would be taken away from them if they tried to divorce their husbands. This was the case for Ohio

²⁹ Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*.

³⁰ The state of Kansas granted women municipal suffrage. See Michael Lewis Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender Politics in Gilded Age Kansas*; Janet Zollinger Giele, *Two Paths to Women's Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism*.

³¹ Elmina Drake Slenker, "A Few Words of Comment," *Lucifer*, 28 February 1890.

wife Eliza Harman (of no relation to Moses Harman). She was frequently subjected to her husband's "anger and suspicion," which she claimed was "so mortifying and degrading that were it not for the sake of my son, a boy of seventeen, I would take the law in my own hands and declare myself free." At the time of her letter, however, she was still waiting for the chance to break away.³² Similarly, Iowa wife "C.S.A." stated that her husband was strongly opposed to free love or "anything whatever that suggests the emancipation of woman from sex slavery." She wrote, "Had I no children—and I have four who need my care and from whom I would by no means be separated—I might look at the matter in a different light." The wife did express hope that she would be able to free herself sometime in the future.³³ Dr. Juliet Severance fared better; after her husband abandoned her, she filed for divorce. He tried to take their children, claiming she was an unfit mother, but the judge awarded her custody.³⁴ Perhaps it was because the father abandoned the family, or possibly it was due to the fact that she was gainfully employed as a physician that she was able to keep her children. Regardless, other wives did not feel they would be as lucky.

One letter in particular illustrated why abused wives who wrote to *Lucifer* could not leave bad marriages. Mrs. Miriam Channells, a tailor's wife from Ohio, confided that she was "married at eighteen and have been a slave since." She began her marriage with genuine love for her husband, but over the years her affection and confidence in him vanished. Channells admitted that she "lived a life of legal prostitution," meaning that she submitted sexually to him though she did not desire it because she was economically dependent on him. Over the course of her marriage, she had four children, the first born

³² Eliza D. Harman, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 17 October 1890.

³³ C.S.A., "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 29 October 1898.

³⁴ Passet, 125.

when she was just sixteen years old and the last born when she was thirty-one. The subjugated wife explained that she would have left her disagreeable husband but she feared that she would not be given custody of her children if she divorced. At the time of her letter in 1892, she was sixty-three years old and still trapped in marriage. Her children were now adults, and though she would not have to worry about retaining custody if she petitioned for divorce, it is likely that she had no place else to go.³⁵

Women's discussions in *Lucifer* went beyond an outcry against wife abuse to target husbands as the perpetrators of domestic violence. It was not merely marriage that created women's suffering; it was the men who abused the women who were responsible. As readers debated the issue, they constructed a rhetoric that stated that the institution of marriage created bad husbands. Legal marriage caused men to turn into brutes because it gave them access to absolute power, which readers believed to be a corrupting force. Again, women freely wrote to the editor to provide specific evidence. Their letters indicated a belief that man, at heart, was good natured, but legal marriage and the power it gave him over his wife's body transformed him into a compassionless beast once he wielded its power. His absolute authority over his wife proved, as female contributors claimed, that the institution itself was to blame.

³⁵ Mrs. Miriam Channells, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 22 July 1892. For additional data on her family, see U.S. Census records: "United States Census, 1880," index and images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/M8MG-JBP> : accessed 23 Feb 2013), Miriam Channel in household of D. C. Channel, Lockland, Hamilton, Ohio, United States; citing sheet 531B, family 1, NARA microfilm publication T9-1023; "United States Census, 1880," index and images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/M8MG-JBG> : accessed 23 Feb 2013), D. C. Channel, Lockland, Hamilton, Ohio, United States; citing sheet 531B, family 0, NARA microfilm publication T9-1023; "United States Census, 1870," index and images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/M6V2-KFC> : accessed 23 Feb 2013), Mary Channel in household of Dudley Channel, Ohio, United States; citing p. 71, family 514, NARA microfilm publication M593, FHL microfilm 552707; "Massachusetts, Marriages, 1841-1915," index and images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/NWYY-K5W> : accessed 23 Feb 2013), Dudley Channell in entry for Herbert Channell and Adelaide Luhrs, 1867. Several discrepancies exist between her letter and census records: her last name is listed as Channells or Channel, and though she claimed to be married at age 18 her first child was born when she was 16, in 1845, according to records which list her as Miriam Channel.

Personal stories in *Lucifer* provided vast details of how marriage corrupted men. Free love pamphleteer and *Lucifer* correspondent Rachel Campbell acknowledged that before marriage, men could be “grand and noble,” serving as excellent friends and lovers. When they became husbands, however, their demeanor changed perceptively. No longer was a man amiable and considerate; he could now be more demanding and abusive. Campbell had firsthand experience with the ruinous effects marriage had on manhood. At the age of sixteen, she married a man she described as being “very pleasant and cordial” during their courtship. Afterwards, however, he expected “service” from her, believing it was her duty to grant sexual favors to him. If she refused, he became physically violent, often leaving bruises on her body in the shape of his hands. Campbell alleged his mistreatment caused two stillborn births and the death of a young, sickly baby. He became “so disagreeable as a husband” that she was forced to leave him even though divorce brought her social disgrace.³⁶

Other women also expressed the idea that marriage turned men into brutes. Social purity reformer Lucinda B. Chandler was well aware of the problems women faced in marriage. As a founding member of the Moral Education Association of Boston in 1873, she was concerned about women’s experiences in the home. Chandler became a regular contributor to *Lucifer* in the late 1880s, agreeing with the paper’s position on marriage. Responding to the Markland letter in 1888, she stated that marriage made “monsters of men” and husbands became nothing more than “dehumanized males.”³⁷ More female

³⁶ Rachel Campbell, “Sex Ethics No. 1,” *Lucifer*, 24 June 1892; Mary Florence Johnson, “Pioneer Chips: From the Private Correspondence of Rachel Campbell,” *Our New Humanity*, December 1895, 32-37.

³⁷ Lucinda B. Chandler, “What is Marriage?” *Lucifer*, 10 February 1888. For more on Chandler’s work with the Moral Education Association of Boston, see the Moral Education Association of Boston Records. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

correspondents echoed this sentiment. Regular correspondent M.C. Gurney, a physician's wife from a small Kansas town, no doubt heard about the distress of rural women. She estimated that thousands experienced anguish in marriage, forever bound to men they had ceased to respect or love. These men, she claimed, had "perverted" nature in the sexual relations, leading her to conclude that "male man is lower to-day than the brute."³⁸ Jennie M. Harper, a farmer's wife from Minnesota, doubted men's ability to understand how to make congruous marriages. She blamed men's "undeveloped stage of progression," claiming that the problems they caused in marriages would produce an overall "demoralizing effect on humanity."³⁹ Because of the way in which men oppressed women, Harper believed it brought shame and misery to men.⁴⁰ As one anonymous woman calling herself "Justitia" declared, marriage created a "besotted and ruined manhood."⁴¹

Lucifer's male correspondents recognized women's concerns over abuse in marriage and readily agreed that marriage made men immoral. Reformatory author and regular contributor C.L. James stated that marriage "makes men libertines." As long as marriage existed, the Wisconsin resident claimed, men should be expected to become more lascivious.⁴² J.H. Cook, another regular contributor of Columbus, Kansas, had a more cynical view of marriage. He compared it to a prison and stated that men used their

³⁸ M.C. Gurney, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 2 November 1883.

³⁹ J.M. Harper, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 16 November 1883. Occupational data from Ancestry.com, Source Citation: Year: 1880; Census Place: Pine Island, Goodhue, Minnesota; Roll: 621; Family History Film: 1254621; Page: 428B; Enumeration District: 169; Image: 0412. Original data: Tenth Census of the United States, 1880 (NARA microfilm publication T9, 1,454 rolls), Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁰ J.M. Harper, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 25 January 1884.

⁴¹ Justitia, "Thoughts for the Thoughtful," *Lucifer*, 22 November 1886.

⁴² C.L. James, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 1 June 1888.

power in marriage to usurp power and gratify lust at the expense of women's happiness.⁴³ Long-time free lover and activist Francis Barry concluded that "marriage turns men into devils" and that even though some men were not yet married, their manhood was in jeopardy as well. The very existence of legal marriage tainted the possibility that manhood could be saved. Barry reasoned that even an unmarried man "has his manhood eliminated by its diabolical influence."⁴⁴ As evidence of the ways in which husbands could become brutes, Dr. Richard V. O'Neill wrote to *Lucifer* to detail a few of the horrors he witnessed as a physician living in New York City's tenement district. The "brutal outrage" detailed by Dr. Markland, O'Neill stated, was not unique. He encountered similar cases in which women were physically made sick by unwanted intercourse. Wives were suffering from neurasthenia, exhaustion, and even venereal ulcers due to their husbands' "brutal lust." One patient of his even died of injuries caused by a "brutal sexual connection." The doctor concluded that "there seems to be no limit to the brutality and bestiality of many men."⁴⁵

Men's abusive treatment of wives and sexual misconduct was widely recognized outside the free love movement in the nineteenth century. Female moral reform societies organized to oppose the sexual double standard and tried to stop men from visiting prostitutes.⁴⁶ The social purity movement also tackled the problems of prostitution and the double sexual standard of conduct, but expanded their critique to include marital sexual practices. Reformers worked towards sex education and giving women more control over their sexuality. Most endorsed "voluntary motherhood," which entailed

⁴³ J.H. Cook, "Caged Birds," *Lucifer*, 16 July 1886.

⁴⁴ Francis Barry, "Occasional Notes—No. 10," *Lucifer*, 22 January 1892.

⁴⁵ Richard V. O'Neill, "A Physician's Testimony," *Lucifer*, 14 February 1890. About his economic situation, see R. V. O'Neill, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 7 March 1890.

⁴⁶ Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*.

leaving choice of sex and reproduction to wives, as a solution to the risks women faced in marriage.⁴⁷ Likewise, the WCTU recognized marital abuse, at first focusing on banning alcohol, which they claimed contributed to men's bad behavior, as a solution to domestic violence. The WCTU soon joined the social purity movement in its attempts to outlaw prostitution, working together to call on the states to raise the age of consent to protect young women from male predators. Women in both movements also argued for suffrage, believing that political equality would help to protect women and raise their status in marriage.⁴⁸ While these female reformers, like the sex radicals, recognized that women suffered in marriage from abusive husbands, they were not willing to suggest that marriage be abolished in order to discipline men's sexual practices. On the contrary, most social purists, temperance workers, and suffragists would not consider legitimizing the existence of sexual relationships outside of marriage. They imagined that men's sexual practices could be reformed within marriage through stricter laws against domestic violence, increased access to divorce, higher age-of-consent laws, and bans on alcohol and prostitution.

Both sex radical men and women, on the other hand, believed that the solution to men's immoral behaviors resided in free love and the abolition of legal marriage. Looking at *Lucifer*, readers would have believed that domestic violence was caused directly by the existence of legal marriage. Editor Moses Harman chose specific letters and articles written by women to serve *Lucifer's* purpose of condemning legal marriage and bad husbands in order to promote free love. He needed to suggest that free love presented the solution for domestic violence that the competing model of reform, the

⁴⁷ Gordon, 55-75; D'Emilio and Freedman, 150-152; David J. Pivar, *Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality and Social Control, 1868-1900* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1973).

⁴⁸ Goldberg, 74-77; D'Emilio and Freedman, 152-155.

women's rights movement, lacked.⁴⁹ Harman stated that only the practice of his "gospel of sex-deliverance," which entailed striking down legal marriage, would bring the possibility of tempering man's nature.⁵⁰ Co-editor E.C. Walker agreed, stating that men could not hope to curb abusive sexual practices towards their wives unless legal marriage was overturned. Until this occurred, men should ignore laws regarding marriage and practice free love. He stated that "no man ever developed into a nobler manhood who always obeyed the law and did nothing more."⁵¹ Walker himself was an example of this when he broke the law to form an autonomistic union with Lillian Harman.

The women of *Lucifer* were attracted to free love because of its promise to emancipate women from brutal husbands. If women were no longer legally bound to men, they would not be required to stay with unlovable or abusive husbands. Frequent contributor Mrs. M.C. Gurney acknowledged that young couples in love may have a change of heart over time and, if legally married, be trapped in a loveless marriage. Therefore, she felt it was unjust to require a man and a woman to make the life-long commitment of legal marriage.⁵² *Lucifer's* female contributors supported the free love ideal of forming a union based on "mutual contract" in which a couple would promise to stay together only so long as both desired. The union, they maintained, would be based purely on reciprocal love and mutual desire, and there was no need to involve the courts or judicial system. However, several women, including Mattie Hursen and freethought lecturer Mrs. H.S. Lake, voiced the opinion that the union must be publicly announced in

⁴⁹ Women who subscribed to free love as a solution to domestic violence were convinced that gaining suffrage or banning alcohol and prostitution would not solve women's private problems in marriage, but saw that a larger reform, that of abolishing marriage altogether, was necessary.

⁵⁰ Moses Harman, "The Social Evolution," *Lucifer*, 10 July 1885.

⁵¹ E.C. Walker, "Love and the Law," *Lucifer*, 8 January 1886.

⁵² M.C. Gurney, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 9 April 1886.

order for the women to receive fair treatment and the men to uphold honorable agreements. Love and a public statement from a man would then be all a woman would need. If a woman wanted to end her relationship because it proved unsatisfactory, she could easily dissolve the contract and be free.⁵³

Female male correspondents of *Lucifer* were convinced that free love was the best alternative to legal marriage because of the way it would discipline men's sexual practices and end the abuse of women. If women were free to leave bad husbands, men would have to treat their partners with respect in order to maintain their relationships. Frequent correspondent Sara Crist Campbell observed that men must be taught that women's sexual nature was not the same as theirs, that men and women should thoroughly understand each other before forming any union. A farmer's wife from Illinois, she believed that free love promised a better position for women. Campbell argued that forgoing legal marriage and forming a partnership based on mutual desire would put men "more on their good behavior in every particular, than the old way."⁵⁴ Dr. Juliet Severance had a similar opinion, pointing out that in free love a woman was no longer owned by her husband. She would remain with him "so long as he could call out her affection by his noble character and tender consideration." Essentially, free love

⁵³ For women's discussions of love contracts, see: Mrs. M.C. Gurney, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 5 March 1886; Mrs. H.S. Lake, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 14 January 1887; Mattie E. Hurson, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 11 February 1887; Sada Bailey Fowler, "Sister Bailey to Sister Lake," *Lucifer*, 11 February 1887; Mrs. H.S. Lake, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 4 March 1887; Elmina Drake Slenker, "Response to Edgeworth," *Lucifer*, 1 April 1887; Mrs. P.W. Farmer, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 31 August 1888; Juliet H. Severance, *A Discussion of the Social Question* (Milwaukee: National Advance Print, 1891).

⁵⁴ Sara Crist Campbell, "The Other Side," *Lucifer*, 3 July 1891; Sara Crist Campbell, "Letter in the Lucifer Club Column," *Lucifer*, 9 January 1891.

would put him on “good behavior.”⁵⁵ Dr. Severance was a witness to one such relationship, and she reported that there was no spousal abuse present.⁵⁶

By practicing free love, women could help discipline men’s sexual practices and improve manhood overall because their continued relationships would depend upon men’s respectable behavior. An anonymous female reader from Kirwin, Kansas identifying herself only as “Hannah” asserted that good men “would not be so scarce if women would require of all men the highest type of manhood.”⁵⁷ As Kansas correspondent Lillie D. White reasoned, an emancipated woman would not choose to have any kind of relationship with a forceful and domineering man. Whereas marriage, or “legal bondage,” allowed men to treat their wives poorly, free love would relieve women of this “distress.” White, who served as temporary editor of *Lucifer* in 1893, believed that free love would temper man’s nature and bring about more harmonious relationships.⁵⁸ Long-time women’s rights activist Lois Waisbrooker agreed that free love would end the abusive treatment of women because they would not be legally bound to men. Men would thus have to treat women with love and respect in order to continue their relationships.⁵⁹ Waisbrooker herself had been the victim of an unhappy marriage when, in 1856, she was forced by family pressure to marry a man she did not love. After discovering the gender equality of Spiritualism, Waisbrooker left her husband and became an itinerant lecturer, endorsing free love as a way to promote women’s

⁵⁵ Juliet Severance, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 22 January 1886.

⁵⁶ Juliet H. Severance, *A Discussion of the Social Question* (Milwaukee: National Advance Print, 1891), 17.

⁵⁷ Hannah, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 10 April 1891.

⁵⁸ L., “Free Love,” *Lucifer*, 3 April 1891. White edited *Lucifer* for a period of 6 months in 1893 while Moses Harman was in prison, see Sears, 148.

⁵⁹ Lois Waisbrooker, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 30 August 1889.

happiness.⁶⁰ If men would be respectful of their partners, she argued, their relationships would create “mutual desire.”⁶¹

Lucifer's men supported the idea that free love would discipline male sexual behavior. Their words of assurance to women indicated that they believed free love, rather than other competing models of female reform such as temperance or suffrage, would lead to better treatment of women because it was the nature of legal marriage that created brutal husbands. By eradicating legal marriage, which they alleged was the source of abuse, women would fair better. One pseudonymous reader claimed that autonomistic unions would make men better husbands because most men “have a regard for their reputation as men of honor,” indicating that they would treat their partners better than men in conventional marriages.⁶² Men would have to depend on their “good conduct” to retain the confidence of their female companions, stated reader Henri Armand.⁶³ Freethinker J.F. Crawford, a former Valley Falls resident who moved to Wyoming, believed that a man who regarded woman as his equal would have more love for her and enjoy a better relationship. If a man acknowledged a woman’s equality, she would have greater devotion to her partner. Crawford argued that just as man elevates womankind, he elevates himself.⁶⁴ Using his life as an example, one reader who identified himself only as a “Freelover” allowed his wife a divorce because “she believed her happiness depended upon a dissolution of the ties that bound us.” Though he was

⁶⁰ Passet, 114-115.

⁶¹ Lois Waisbrooker, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 30 August 1889.

⁶² Arminius, “Is It a Guarantee,” *Lucifer*, 18 February 1887.

⁶³ Henri B. Armand, “Social Radicalism,” *Lucifer*, 24 July 1885.

⁶⁴ J. F. Crawford, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 30 November 1883.

deeply saddened by her departure, he felt it was the only way to preserve her happiness and right to a mutually desirable relationship.⁶⁵

Free love would also offer women protection from unwanted children. Two of its fundamental principles were that the woman should decide whether or not to become a mother and that men should respect the sexual requests of their female partners.⁶⁶

Frequent contributor Sara Crist Campbell maintained that “every woman should bear the number of children she wants, and no more.” It was woman’s right, she declared, to make decisions concerning maternity.⁶⁷ Likewise, Lillian Harman wrote that “a woman should be free to choose the best conditions available when she wishes to become a mother.”⁶⁸ Female readers who supported *Lucifer’s* free love platform identified with this vision. Reader Elizabeth H. Russell from Cleveland understood women’s freedom to decide when and how many children to have as being one of the core principles of free love.⁶⁹

Though free love offered women emancipation from sexual abuse, *Lucifer* readers debated whether contraception and the possibility of coition when procreation was not desired benefited women. Several prominent contributors argued against the idea of artificial contraception or “preventatives.” Christian dress reformer Celia B. Whitehead thought women would be taken advantage of by men because they would have no “excuse” for refusing. If a man knew his wife could not get pregnant because they were using contraceptives, her position as a sex slave could be continued. Abstinence, except

⁶⁵ J. Allen Evans, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 10 May 1889.

⁶⁶ Moses Harman, “Usury vs. Lucifer,” *Lucifer*, 2 April 1886.

⁶⁷ Sara Crist Campbell, “Developed Reason, The Real or Only Second Coming of Christ,” *Lucifer*, 20 March 1891.

⁶⁸ Lillian Harman, “Freedom of Choice, the Foundation Principle,” *Lucifer*, 24 February 1897.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth H. Russell, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 17 March 1897.

when children were desired, is what Whitehead proposed.⁷⁰ At first, regular contributor Elmina Slenker disagreed with Whitehead, stating contraception would be preferable in situations where husbands refused to be continent despite the risks of maternity, or in situations where husbands sought prostitutes to satisfy their lusts. Every woman, she argued, should have access to “contracepts” to protect her health.⁷¹ Through the course of debate, however, Slenker changed her mind, stating “Mrs. Whitehead is right.” Abstinence, or continence as she called it, was the “only safe and harmless mode of prevention.” She became convinced that contraceptives were a “license to lust,” encouraged sexual intemperance, and prevented couples from finding happiness in other forms.⁷² The “‘sexual subjection’ of woman” would be impossible if sexual intercourse was reserved for procreation.⁷³

As a sex radical, Elmina Slenker did place value in men and women’s sexual expressions and offered non-coital solutions to the problem of unwanted pregnancies. She did not deny that women had similar sexual desires to men, but acknowledged that many of these women did not want motherhood. Instead of intercourse, Slenker wanted men and women to cultivate their love and passion into “sweeter and higher channels” of expression, what would be “friendly living contact, and an intimate, close companionship of [the] sexes.”⁷⁴ This was the “Diana method,” known to many sex radicals in the nineteenth century as a form of sexual expression. Slenker described Diana as the “nude contact between husband and wife” in which sexual pleasure would be attained without

⁷⁰ Celia B. Whitehead, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 27 March 1885 and Celia B. Whitehead, “Mrs. Whitehead to Elmina,” *Lucifer*, 25 June 1886.

⁷¹ Elmina Slenker, “Borning Better Babies,” *Lucifer*, 29 May 1886; Elmina Drake Slenker, “Contraceptics,” *Lucifer*, 23 July 1886.

⁷² Elmina Drake Slenker, “Mrs. Whitehead, Diana and Elmina,” *Lucifer*, 3 August 1888; Elmina Drake Slenker, “Elmina’s Response to Francis,” *Lucifer*, 7 June 1889.

⁷³ Elmina Drake Slenker, “Response to Edgeworth,” *Lucifer*, 1 April 1887.

⁷⁴ Elmina Drake Slenker, “Visionary Nonsense (!),” *Lucifer*, 7 September 1888.

coition.⁷⁵ It was the safest solution in which hours of “pleasant sensations” could be enjoyed without the fear of pregnancy, ruined health, or the necessity of abortion.⁷⁶ Some female readers responded favorably to the Diana method and wrote to *Lucifer* to endorse the method.⁷⁷

Other women, however, wrote to *Lucifer* to endorse the use of contraceptives. Several letter writers admitted that women wanted knowledge of birth control methods because they, like their husbands, desired sexual relations but did not want to have more children. Alma S. pointed to the fact that “many women give themselves freely up to sexual enjoyment, notwithstanding the terrible consequences that so frequently follow.” Anna Perkins, on the other hand, stated that some women suppressed their sexual desire because they feared pregnancy. Both readers voiced the opinion that if contraceptives were available, women should have access to them. Science, after all, had discovered “means of protection,” so woman should use it to her benefit. Sexual desire, maintained Perkins, should be cultivated rather than restrained.⁷⁸ Contributor Amy Linnett indicated that in addition to engaging in sex relations without fear of pregnancy, a woman could also use contraceptives “in order to please herself,” not just her partner. As evidence, Linnett pointed to a female acquaintance who recently asked her for the name of a firm dealing in contraceptives.⁷⁹ Readers often requested contraceptive information from Moses Harman; as editor of a sex reform paper they most likely assumed he would have access. Emil L. of Kansas wrote to ask if he knew “any good way to control conception” or

⁷⁵ Elmina Drake Slenker, “Dianaism,” *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886.

⁷⁶ Elmina Drake Slenker, “Comments on Chavannes’ Article,” *Lucifer*, 14 January 1887.

⁷⁷ See for example, Sara Crist Campbell, “A Woman’s View of ‘Diana’ Continence,” *Lucifer*, 2 January 1891.

⁷⁸ Alma S., “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 14 September 1888; Anna Perkins, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 12 October 1888.

⁷⁹ Amy Linnett, “Continence and Contraceptives,” *Lucifer*, 5 May 1897. The acquaintance, of course, wanted the information “for a friend.” Linnett did not indicate whether she knew of such a firm or not.

someone who could give this information, while Nebraska reader G.A., a man with a wife and three children, asked for knowledge of “a sure prevention for conception.”⁸⁰ Harman realized that there was a great desire for knowledge such as this, but obscenity laws made it difficult to publish detailed information without legal risk.

However, Harman printed correspondence which discussed the matter in vague terms to give readers information on contraceptive techniques. One popular tactic was known as the “Oneida method,” or male continence in which male ejaculation was avoided during intercourse. Dora Forster, author of a series of articles titled “Sex Radicalism,” claimed that this method had been “adopted with success by many” and pointed readers to the book *Karezza*, written by Dr. Alice Stockham, for more information.⁸¹ Correspondent Albert Chavannes provided an example of the successful use of the method. A farmer and long time contributor from Tennessee, he approved of male continence as a compromise between the Diana method endorsed by Elmina Slenker and “full indulgence.” Instead of denying sexual passion, he reasoned that male continence could provide a legitimate means to attain further happiness.⁸² Despite their debates over contraceptives, sex radicals agreed that free love provided the means to discipline men’s sexual practices because of the way in which it allowed women choice and control.

⁸⁰ Emil L, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 10 March 1897 and G.A., “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 10 December 1898.

⁸¹ Dora Forster, *Sex Radicalism as Seen by an Emancipated Woman of the New Time* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1905), 41. This pamphlet originally appeared in serial form in *Lucifer* in 1904 and was later printed as a pamphlet due to its popularity. See also Alice B. Stockham, *Karezza: Ethics of Marriage* (Chicago: A.B. Stockham & co., 1896).

⁸² Albert Chavannes, “Asceticism vs. Indulgence: An Answer to Elmina,” *Lucifer*, 10 December 1886; Occupational date from FamilySearch.org, "United States Census, 1880," index and images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/MD72-QQ2> : accessed 16 Jan 2013), Albert Chavannes, District 2, Knox, Tennessee, United States; citing sheet 199D, family 0, NARA microfilm publication T9-1265.

Free love not only disciplined men's sexual practices; it also served to foster a discussion about manhood itself. The very nature of manliness depended upon men's good behavior; what *Lucifer's* female correspondents said about free love indicated that being "manly" was about respecting women's sexual autonomy and personhood. "Manly qualities," according to Julia C. Franklin, included strength in body and mind, and, she asserted, a man must be "as chaste and pure as he wants woman to be."⁸³ For Lucinda Chandler, the "dignity of manhood" depended upon the emancipation of woman from the legal binds of marriage.⁸⁴ In her view, kind and considerate husbands who rejected the power of wifely possession were the "men who possess manhood."⁸⁵ Morality, according to Lillian Harman, was judged by a man's actions and respectful treatment of others. A man who was "truthful, honest, courteous, and just is by common consent called a moral man."⁸⁶ Kansas reader Hannah called for all women to require superior ideals from men and be satisfied by nothing less. Then good men, she claimed, "would not be so scarce if women would require of all men the highest type of manhood."⁸⁷

As evidence that free love could temper the harshness of masculinity and turn men into respectful partners, the sex radicals frequently used themselves as examples. However, most writers for *Lucifer* were advocates of free love rather than actual practitioners; the majority of *Lucifer's* adherents professed support for the abolition of marriage but were legally married themselves. However, as *Lucifer's* prominent female contributor Elmina Slenker argued, one could be a "free lover" and still be legally

⁸³ Julia C. Franklin, "Woman as an Uplifter," *Lucifer*, 20 December 1889.

⁸⁴ Lucinda B. Chandler, "Is Self-Protection a Human Right," *Dr. Foote's Health Monthly*, printed in *Lucifer*, 7 September 1888.

⁸⁵ Lucinda B. Chandler, "What is Marriage?" *Lucifer*, 10 February 1888.

⁸⁶ Lillian Harman, *Marriage and Morality* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1900), 10-11.

⁸⁷ Hannah, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 10 April 1891.

married. In her explanation of free love, she wrote that free lovers who were “monogamists” could live together in “lawful relations” (legal marriage) but believe love itself was free and that the woman would make decisions about bearing children.⁸⁸ As sex radicals wrote about their marital and sexual experiences, their stories revealed that they tried to incorporate some elements of free love into their legal marriages, including respecting women’s sexual autonomy, allowing wives free choice, and opting to divorce their partners if they agreed they were no longer in love.

Elmina Slenker explained to readers how her unconventional marriage served her needs. Despite her Quaker birth, she quickly became interested in freethought and sex reform as a young woman. She published numerous freethought and sex reform books while also conducting a mail order service for radical literature from her home in Snowville, Virginia. Additionally, Slenker engaged in private correspondence concerning sexual science, functioning as one of *Lucifer’s* most able contributors in the 1880s and 1890s.⁸⁹ When Slenker decided to marry, she did not use a justice of the peace or member of the clergy. She and her husband married themselves in the presence of witnesses, a form of ceremony that was legally recognized by the state of Virginia. Her marriage certificate simply stated: “This is to certify for the accomplishment of marriage intentions this 8th day of June, 1856, Isaac Slenker and Elizabeth P. Drake, do mutually promise to take each other for husband and wife, hoping to be faithful and loving companions till the end of life.” She was proud that the vows contained no mention of her obeying her husband, as they “promised nothing at all save simply to take

⁸⁸ Elmina Slenker, “Free-Love,” *Lucifer*, 29 July 1887.

⁸⁹ “One ‘Whom Love of God Hath Blessed’,” *Winstead (Kansas) Press*, printed in the *Kansas Liberal*, October 1881 and E.C. Walker, “Mrs. Slenker’s Works and Worthiness,” *Lucifer*, 20 May 1887.

each other as husband and wife.”⁹⁰ Slenker lived happily in marriage for over thirty years until dissatisfaction emerged between her and her husband. In the spirit of free love, they separated, and she stated that she had never been happier with her life.⁹¹

Other women wrote in to *Lucifer* to support the idea of free love while at the same time were legally married. Mrs. M.C. Gurney, a housewife in her mid-forties, supplied countless letters to *Lucifer* in the 1880s, agreeing with Harman and Walker that men and women should be able to dissolve their own relationships in the manner of free love. In 1886, she debated with opponents of free love, favoring free love reforms of marriage. Yet, Gurney herself was married to a Kansas physician.⁹² Likewise, Dr. Juliet Severance, of Iowa and later Wisconsin, was a regular contributor to *Lucifer*, a reform author, and involved in the women’s rights movement. The water-cure physician most likely came to critique marriage after her first husband abandoned her and her children. She authored numerous pamphlets, some published by Moses Harman, on the subject of marriage, free love, and the “social” question. Though she supported the principles of free love, she legally married her second husband Anson B. Severance in 1869.⁹³

⁹⁰ Elmina Drake Slenker, “Marriage,” *Lucifer*, 29 October 1886.

⁹¹ Elmina Drake Slenker, “Response to Francis and Warren,” *Lucifer*, 2 August 1889 and Elmina Drake Slenker, “An Explanation,” *Lucifer*, 30 August 1889. Charges were made that Slenker’s husband decided to leave after she became committed to abstinence, but she refuted this, saying that it was his own “restless, wandering, dissatisfied nature,” that he had become unhappy in their small town. Slenker further believed that her arrest for mailing obscene literature and subsequent trial was a good excuse for him to leave.

⁹² For debates, see: Mrs. M.C. Gurney, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 5 March 1886; M.C. Gurney, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 16 April 1886; M.C. Gurney, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 15 October 1886. For marital status: Ancestry.com, Source Citation: Year: 1880; Census Place: Palmer, Washington, Kansas; Roll: 399; Family History Film: 1254399; Page: 559A; Enumeration District: 325; Original data: Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, (NARA microfilm publication T9, 1,454 rolls), Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁹³ For biographical information, see Passet, 121-131. Views on marriage: Juliet Severance, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 24 December 1886; Juliet H. Severance, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 17 February 1888; Juliet H. Severance, *A Lecture on Religious, Political and Social Freedom* (Milwaukee: Godfrey & Crandall Printers, 1881), Labadie Pamphlet Collection, University of Michigan ; Juliet H. Severance, *A Discussion of the Social Question*; Juliet H. Severance, *Marriage* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1901).

Very few women admitted to being true practitioners of free love due to the social and possibly legal consequences they might face by doing so, but one woman was bold enough to write about her story. In a letter to the editor, Mrs. L.M.R. Pool from Swanton, Ohio declared that her belief in free love had grown stronger every day for the past thirty years, despite negative opinions others formed about her. Her adherence to the practice also had a damaging financial impact on her life because she was “deprived of a pension honestly mine.” Mrs. Pool explained that someone wrote to the authorities in Washington that “I was doing a partnership business with a man that did not own me, body and soul, and that I was an outspoken Freeloover.” A special examiner arrived to investigate the charges that she was living with a man to whom she was not legally married, and Mrs. Pool “had the audacity to inform his highness that I was a Freeloover.” After waiting for her pension for twelve years, the claim was rejected, according to her, “on account of my Freeloove proclivities, and nothing else.” She needed the money badly, but regardless of the negative impact her practice of free love had, Mrs. Pool boldly stated that she did not need it bad enough to back down from her beliefs.⁹⁴

As evidenced by the sex radicals themselves, most of the *Lucifer* band were supporters of free love who were married rather than actual practitioners who lived with partners outside of marriage. The question that emerges is why so many men and women would write to the paper in support of abolishing marriage when they themselves were married. Perhaps, as in Gurney’s case, they came to support free love after having already been married. Or, as was for Juliet Severance, they legally married like-minded partners who shared their views on sexuality and women’s autonomy.⁹⁵ Another

⁹⁴ Mrs. L.M.R. Pool, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 4 February 1887.

⁹⁵ Passet, 126-127.

possibility is that some may have wanted to enter free love unions but were unwilling to face the social ostracism or legal entanglements that extra-marital sexual relationships would bring. Most writers for *Lucifer* never explained their particular situations; they continued to write to the paper in support of free love.

Free love promised to temper masculinity and produce harmonious unions, but readers needed a clear example beyond the advocates' descriptions of their marriages. In each case of legal marriage, love and consideration for the female partner characterized the relationships. The men's promises of affection and respect prevented them from brutalizing or otherwise taking advantage of the male privilege and power that legal marriage accorded to them. In Slenker's situation, she was able to end her relationship when she no longer desired to be with her partner. Yet, as one reader pointed out, many sex radicals who professed to follow the principles of free love still chose to enter into legal marriage.⁹⁶ They were free lovers only in theory, not actual practitioners of the views they professed. From the perspective of *Lucifer's* editors, it must have seemed prudent to demonstrate that a free love union could work, that woman would be guaranteed freedom from marital abuse and that man would act honorably toward her without the security of the law. What the sex radicals needed was a high profile, contemporary practitioner of free love who would show that their ideas could work in the modern age. After the publicity of the Markland letter in the summer of 1886 and *Lucifer's* increased interest in disciplining manhood through women's emancipation, the time was right to put their principles into practice.

Lillian Harman became the model for sex radical women when she entered into an autonomistic, free love union with E.C. Walker in September 1886, showing how free

⁹⁶ A.J. Searl, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 12 March 1886.

love could both liberate women and discipline men's sexual practices. She first met Walker when he came to work with her father on the *Kansas Liberal* in 1882. At the time, she was helping to set type, and over the next few years became more involved in the business of publishing *Lucifer*.⁹⁷ Walker soon befriended her, and "gradually that friendship deepened into love." In early spring of 1886 they formed a business partnership selling radical literature, and later in the fall they decided to form a "social partnership." As head of his household, Moses Harman consented to his sixteen-year-old daughter's marriage to his thirty-seven-year-old co-editor, undoubtedly proud that his daughter subscribed to *Lucifer's* free love ideas. As a father, Harman would have only allowed the union if he was assured of Walker's honorable intentions towards his daughter, especially given the age difference. Harman must have believed that free love would offer better protection for his daughter than legal marriage. With her father's consent, Walker and Lillian could thus enter a love union free of church or state intrusion, as Lillian's father was "the only person on this planet whom she was under any obligation to consult." On Sunday, September 19, 1886 friends and family gathered at the Harman home to witness the free love ceremony of Lillian Harman and E.C. Walker.⁹⁸

Their marriage and its emancipation of Lillian Harman as a wife promised to temper her partner's sexual practices and overall manhood. In his vows to Lillian, Walker recognized her individuality, promising that she would remain "sovereign of herself" and that in their free love union, unlike legal marriage, "Lillian is now made free." Walker announced that she would retain the right to control her body and would

⁹⁷ Moses Harman, "The Outlook," *Lucifer*, 24 April 1885.

⁹⁸ E.C. Walker, "Kansas Liberty and Justice: To Jail and There," *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886. Sears gives E.C. Walker's date of birth as 1849, 53.

be “free to repulse any and all advances of mine.” Marital rape, a common abuse by brutal husbands, would not exist in this relationship. Because he would not be legally married to Lillian, Walker was not entitled to any sexual privileges. Additionally, Lillian retained the right to her property and would keep her maiden name rather than take his. In all aspects of their new union, which they referred to as a “co-partnership,” Lillian shared equality with her new husband. Lastly, Walker pledged to honor her and provide financial support to any offspring they might have. Lillian stated that she entered into the union “of my own free will and choice.” The promises to obey her husband and not part until death were not used; instead, she asserted that she would not make any promises that might become impossible for her to keep. If she and Walker fell out of love in the future, their vows allowed for a peaceful dissolution of their union. Her conscience, she noted, would be her guide, and she would keep her maiden name, as she believed it was her “duty” as an emancipated women to do so.⁹⁹

Lillian Harman certainly believed that by entering a free love union with E.C. Walker that she was acting to discipline manhood. Legal marriage, she concluded, was immoral because it did not require the husband to be respectful of his wife’s personal rights. Morality, she argued, stemmed from the intentions and quality of the actor, his respect for a woman’s personal rights, and a policy of “non-invasion.” A moral man was one who was “truthful, honest, courteous, and just.” Believing she would not get these qualities from a man she legally married, Lillian opted to enter into a free love relationship with E.C. Walker.¹⁰⁰ Because she was not legally tied to him, Lillian was free to leave at any time. This would force Walker to uphold his promises to her and

⁹⁹ “Autonomistic Marriage Practicalized,” *Lucifer*, 1 October 1886. See Appendix A for a full text of the vows.

¹⁰⁰ Lillian Harman, 10-14.

treat her respectably and honorably, thereby disciplining his manhood and sexual practices.

After reading accounts of the autonomistic union, women wrote to *Lucifer* to express their approval of Lillian's actions, seeing her as the model for womanhood in free love. Frequent contributor Sada Bailey Fowler stated that Lillian had made "one of the noblest declarations that a true woman can make," believing that readers would look upon her as "one of the inspired women of our time."¹⁰¹ Likewise, Ann Steward, a reader from rural Missouri, lauded Lillian for her "moral courage" in living up to the principles which she professed, while Iowa reader Annetta Nye declared Lillian to be "brave in what you believed to be right."¹⁰² To readers who supported free love, the marriage represented a new possible future for women. As Colorado reader Eulah Stillwell expressed, the manner in which the couple married was "the only proper way" she could imagine.¹⁰³ One woman called the union an example of "moral reform" while another thought that the free love contract "will in time supplant the present system of marriage."¹⁰⁴

Conversely, *Lucifer's* female correspondents praised Walker's actions and held him up as a superior example of manhood. Mrs. M.C. Gurney extolled his statement of beliefs and vows to Lillian, calling them "beautiful and grand." She wrote that "if he can live such advanced ideas" by making Lillian free and holding himself "sacredly to all his obligations towards her, he most assuredly deserves to be revered by coming generations

¹⁰¹ Sada Bailey Fowler, "An Open Letter to Lillian Harman," *Lucifer*, 8 October 1886.

¹⁰² Ann E. Steward, "Letter to Lillian," *Lucifer*, 12 November 1886 and Annetta Nye, "Letter to Mrs. Lillian Harman," *Lucifer*, 1 October 1886.

¹⁰³ Eulah C. Stillwell, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 25 March 1887.

¹⁰⁴ Dagmar Mariager, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 15 October 1886 and Mrs. F.A. Logan, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 22 October 1886.

as the veritable hero which he is.”¹⁰⁵ Another reader, only identified as “Virginia,” said she knew Walker to be “brave, honest, and true.” She approved of the autonomistic union and believed him to be the “very embodiment of chivalry.”¹⁰⁶

By the 1890s, *Lucifer* had clearly established a platform of free love that promised to bring emancipation to women. Wives’ accounts and stories told by readers constructed a dialogue of spousal abuse, rape, unwanted children, the unfortunate consequences of abortion, and the feelings of helplessness. Legal marriage, they claimed, was responsible for women’s suffering at the hands of husbands who had ceased to become decent human beings. Instead, the power bestowed on men through legal marriage turned them into monsters. In the eyes of *Lucifer’s* women, married men were mere brutes. Female readers and contributors were attracted to free love and the abolition of legal marriage because of the way in which it promised to free women from the bonds of marriage and discipline men’s sexual practices. If unions were formed solely on the basis of love, women would be free to end relationships if they decided it was in their best interest. Because women would have freedom of choice, men would be required to treat their female partners with love and respect if they hoped to maintain those relationships. Free love also proclaimed sexual autonomy for women, as it would be women who would chose when and if to bear children. Though most women who supported *Lucifer’s* free love platform were not actual practitioners, several wrote about the equality of their own marriages.

In 1886, Lillian Harman became the ultimate example for free lovers and emancipated women across the country when she entered into an autonomistic marriage

¹⁰⁵ M.C. Gurney, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 15 October 1886.

¹⁰⁶ Virginia, “Letter to Lillian,” *Lucifer*, 29 October 1886.

with E.C. Walker. Not all of Kansas celebrated the free love union, however. In the couple's hometown of Valley Falls, Walker and Lillian received ample criticism for their refutation of marital customs and sexual practices. The citizens were shocked and outraged when the theories of *Lucifer*, once confined only to print, were manifested in their community. Feeling that the free lovers had violated cherished values and purposefully defied the law, the townspeople sought to punish them.

CHAPTER 4

WITHOUT LICENSE TO WED: THE “AUTONOMISTIC MARRIAGE” AND SEXUAL RESPECTABILITY

Most people approve of the wise and wholesome marriage laws of this state. In fact, no one here, outside of the *Lucifer* office, has any disposition to violate them. There is no accounting for the foolhardy notions of some folks.
--T.W. Gardiner, 24 September 1886.¹

ON MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 1886 newly married free lovers E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman busily prepared to leave, but their honeymoon would be spent in jail rather than the planned destination of Kansas City. That morning they stopped in at the *Lucifer* office to finish up some last minute business. Only a few minutes later, the town constable arrived with a warrant for their arrest. The warrant was based on a complaint filed by William F. Hiser, Lillian’s step-brother, in which he testified that “E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman did then and there unlawfully, feloniously, live together as man and wife without being or having been married; contrary to the form of the statute in such case made and provided, and against the peace and dignity of the State of Kansas.” The constable took them to the office of the justice of the peace where they had to confront the prosecuting attorney. A continuance was granted until the following week and bond was set at one thousand dollars. Failing to obtain the bond money, the authorities then remanded the couple to the county jail at Oskaloosa, though Lillian was allowed to return home under guard as the jail was deemed “unfit for a woman to occupy.”²

¹ T.W. Gardiner, “Local News,” *Valley Falls Register*, 24 September 1886.

² E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman, “Friends of Liberty, Attention!” *Lucifer*, 17 September 1886. This issue was dated September 17 but was completed and mailed out on September 20, the day after the ceremony. See also “Autonomistic Marriage,” *Valley Falls Register*, 24 September 1886.

The arrest of E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman symbolized the local townspeople's rejection of free love. Free love and the freethinkers' denunciation of Christianity in the small town of Valley Falls were barely tolerated in the form of *Lucifer*. The free love marriage of two of its parties was the last straw for the community and the catalyst for real attempts to suppress the paper and its editors. The free lovers knew their ideas antagonized those around them, yet were perhaps unaware just how irksome they had become to the community at large. Moses Harman admitted that there had been rumors both before and after the ceremony that "a storm of some sort was brewing," but he did not imagine that action would be taken so quickly.³ To the rest of Valley Falls, the free love marriage represented a blatant disregard of their social customs regarding marriage and a purposeful defiance of the law. Local papers reported that the marriage was conducted "without and regardless of law or license or the usual ceremonies" and that the free love couple "defied, willingly and purposely violated the plain provisions of the law."⁴

Clearly this event marked an overstepping of the boundaries of respectability concerning marriage, sexuality, and even gender. For several years, the free lovers had written about reforming or altogether abolishing marriage. They also imagined new ideas regarding sexuality and the way in which men and women could relate to each other in sexual relationships. Yet, for the most part they existed rather peaceably with the citizens of Valley Falls excepting an occasional religious clash concerning their anti-Christian sentiments. The autonomistic marriage was intended to realize their new ideas on sexual reform, but the free lovers did not anticipate the harsh reaction from the community that

³ Moses Harman, "Arrested!" *Lucifer*, 17 September 1886.

⁴ T.W. Gardiner, "Autonomistic Marriage," *Valley Falls Register*, 24 September 1886.

they received in turn. No longer were *Lucifer's* unconventional ideas merely expressed in the form of the printed word; now these ideas were being acted out in the midst of the small Kansas town and in blatant disregard of the law.

Community members had strict ideas as to what constituted a legitimate sexual relationship (namely legal marriage) and how men and women were to conduct themselves in this respect. Concerned citizens were outraged that traditional marriage customs were trampled upon by the free love couple and that the parties involved in the ceremony violated cherished gender roles. At the forefront, blame was placed on Moses Harman for failing to uphold his role as a father and protect his young daughter, allowing disorder to come to his household. E.C. Walker was attacked for his violation of the sacred role of the husband. Local rumors alleged that he abandoned his first wife and their children and was now seeking to enter an adulterous relationship with a vulnerable young girl. As for Lillian Harman, the community was unsure whether she was a pawn in her father's diabolic schemes or if she willingly overstepped the boundaries of respectable femininity to become Walker's concubine.

This chapter will argue that the Kansas community drew on state power to punish the free lovers for transgressing the boundaries of respectability concerning gender and sexuality, forcefully rejecting their attempts to bring free love reforms into reality and punishing the free lovers for their open defiance of the law. The autonomistic marriage served as the main catalyst for the prosecution. Local opinions deemed the union immoral, and citizens moved quickly to chastise what they considered to be inappropriate behavior. Although they contemplated vigilante justice in the form of mob violence, leading citizens decided on a legal course of action. Under Kansas statutes regulating

marriage, E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman were arrested because they failed to obtain a marriage license or utilize a legal officiant. Though E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman pursued their case to the Kansas State Supreme Court, community definitions of marriage and notions of respectable sexual conduct held out in the end.

* * *

At its first appearance, Valley Falls, Kansas, seemed to be a typical frontier town. It was a center of agriculture and industry, and had attracted many pioneers since its founding in 1869. By 1886, a local newspaper claimed that it was one of the best places to live in Kansas with “its pleasant places, its genial society, its flourishing mercantile and industrial institutions, and the refining influence of its schools and churches.”⁵ And like many other frontier towns in the Midwest, Valley Falls was home to several freethinkers. This in of itself was not enough to set the town apart. However, the fact that a growing freethought publication named *Lucifer* existed did highlight the eccentric element that resided there. Once its editors began to advocate free love, the townspeople became more antagonized by its presence. But, it was the free love, or “autonomistic,” marriage of one of *Lucifer*’s editors to the other’s young daughter and the defiance of the law that the marriage entailed that was the scandal which ultimately led to direct action against *Lucifer*. No longer willing to sit idly by, community members joined together in chastising the free lovers for their refutation of marital customs, legal statutes, and transgressions of sexuality and gender.

Citizens of Valley Falls had reasons to be concerned about the free love union because marriage was not merely a private arrangement that could be adapted and

⁵ R.E. Van Meter, “Valley Falls: Its Location, Development and Prospects,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 8 April 1886.

changed by individuals; rather it was a public institution that held meanings beyond romantic expressions of love. Marriage worked to create public order, affirm one's standing in the community, organize community life, and facilitate the state's intervention in private life. The public was necessarily drawn into what would otherwise be a private agreement between two lovers; a marriage needed to be recognized and affirmed by the state and community to hold legal standing, and marriage bonds were honored by public force. The state set laws and governed the regulation of marriage, dictating what actions, rights, and obligations a husband and wife had to each other. Another important function of marital regulations was to define what kinds of sexual relations and which families would be recognized as legitimate.⁶ The community, therefore, had an interest in overseeing the marriages of its members to ensure social cohesion, regulate the organization of families, and enforce gender and sexual practices.

In the late nineteenth century, challenges to marriage produced deep-seated anxieties concerning a community's ability to order both family and society. Americans were alarmed by the increase in divorce because of the way in which it broke up the traditional family and, more importantly, allowed the possibility that men and women would have more than one sexual partner in their lifetimes. Divorce, in the opinion of the general public and political conservatives, would lead to a world in which husbands no longer controlled their wives, household dependents, and property, which for the past two centuries had been the primary means of ordering society. The possibility of divorce also conjured up fears of free love and polygamy, as recent communities of Oneidans and Mormons had challenged traditional marital and sexual arrangements. During this time, Americans had reasons to be concerned about the fragility of marriage; divorce rates

⁶ Nancy Cott, *Public Vows* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 1-4.

increased dramatically in the post-Civil War period, from two per one thousand marriages in 1870 to four per one thousand by 1900.⁷ Additionally, the dissolution of marriage, which previously could only be granted by the state legislatures, was now available through the court system. Several states even passed omnibus clauses, allowing divorce for any reason.⁸ Kansas was not one of these states, but its statutes did provide a wide range of legitimate reasons for granting a divorce, including abandonment for one year, adultery, impotency, habitual drunkenness, and the conditions of “extreme cruelty” and “gross neglect of duty,” both of which could have been interpreted in a variety of ways.⁹ In 1887, a survey by the Department of the Interior estimated that there was one divorce for every fifteen marriages in the state of Kansas.¹⁰

Americans became more concerned about the stability of marriage and were less willing to tolerate informal matrimony. In the era of the Early Republic, couples frequently engaged in “irregular” or common law marriages, which emphasized the private nature of contracts and relied on self-regulation of marital arrangements. Communities and judicial authorities had largely accepted such arrangements based on the notion that individual responsibility was preferable to state intrusion into private life. However, by the 1870s, Evangelical Protestants, educators, legislators, and social scientists witnessing the threats to Christian marriage feared the breakdown of social order if marriage was not regulated and set to one standard. With divorce and irregular practices on the rise by groups seeking to alter the traditional understanding of marriage,

⁷ Cott, 107.

⁸ Elaine Tyler May, *Great Expectations: Marriage and Divorce in Post-Victorian America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 4.

⁹ C.F.W. Dassler, “Section 639,” *Compiled Laws of Kansas, 1879: Being a Compilation of all the Laws of a General Nature, Based upon the General Statutes of 1868* (St. Louis: W.G. Gilbert, 1879), 690.

¹⁰ Daniel W. Wilder, *The Annals of Kansas: 1886-1925* (Topeka, KS: Kansas State Historical Society, 1954), 46.

reformers moved to legislate marriage. New state laws were enacted that formalized the marriage ceremony, as most states required a license and a registered officiant to recognize it as a legal relationship.¹¹ For example, the 1868 General Statutes of Kansas specified that the marriage contract could be entered into by either a civil or religious ceremony and that the parties must obtain a license and have the ceremony performed by a judge, justice of the peace, or licensed preacher of the gospel.¹² Reformers across the country were satisfied with these types of state regulations, believing that they would provide the best mechanism for the policing of domestic relations and steadying the instability of the marriage institution.¹³ The Kansas free lovers rejected the desire to standardize marital practices through state regulation, instead opting to rely on previous irregular celebrations of marriage. However, in the late nineteenth-century atmosphere of marriage reform, the way in which free lovers attempted to alter marriage was not seen as merely a private matter; rather it threatened to derail social expectations and sexual practices for a whole community.

Local newspapers represented the public opinion concerning the autonomistic union and the free lovers' attempts to redefine marriage in their own terms. Valley Falls had two weekly papers, the *New Era*, edited by R.E. Van Meter, and the *Register*, edited by T.W. Gardiner. Papers from nearby towns also commented, including the *Oskaloosa Independent*, edited by F.H. Roberts, and the *Winchester Argus*, edited by A.W. Robinson, though reports of the affair could be found in many other eastern Kansas localities such as Topeka, Kansas City, Meriden, and Troy. Moses Harman recognized

¹¹ Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and Family in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 69-84; Cott, 107-109.

¹² Dassler, 537-538. Sections 1, 4, and 10.

¹³ Grossberg, 87-88.

that the average county newspaper was a good indicator of public sentiment.¹⁴ Based on articles appearing in each of these local newspapers shortly after the autonomistic marriage, it is clear that public opinion was against the free lovers. E.C. Walker specifically pointed to the *New Era*, the *Oskaloosa Independent*, the *Winchester Argus*, and the *Valley Falls Register* as papers that he claimed were “bitter against us.”¹⁵ Because the citizens of the community would have primarily received local news through these papers, the negative portrayal of *Lucifer* and the free love marriage would have worked to shape the opinions of individual citizens. As stated by the *Argus*, many community members undoubtedly agreed with its conclusion that *Lucifer* was a “fearfully demoralizing sheet” and that free love was an unrespectable creed that needed to be suppressed.¹⁶

The overall opinion was that the free lovers openly violated communal expectations, traditional definitions of marriage, and legal statutes. R.E. Van Meter of the *New Era* reported on the ceremony and stated that it was done “all in accordance with the vicious doctrine so vigorously advocated by *Lucifer* of late.” The literal adoption of the free love creed was disturbing to the editor. He maintained that “the deed was so brazen, flagrant and exasperating that public indignation knew no bounds.”¹⁷ Other reports classified E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman as “cranks” and insisted that their behavior was “ridiculous as well as scandalous.”¹⁸ Many believed that their views on marriage were downright uncivilized and that autonomistic marriage did not, in fact,

¹⁴ Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 11 February 1887.

¹⁵ E.C. Walker, “Kansas Liberty and Justice: To Jail and There,” *Lucifer*, 8 October 1886.

¹⁶ A.W. Robinson, Editorial note, *Winchester Argus*, 23 September 1886.

¹⁷ R.E. Van Meter, “A Disgraceful Affair—The Junior Editor of ‘Lucifer’ in Hoc,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 23 September 1886.

¹⁸ *Topeka Commonwealth*, quoted in Moses Harman, “Notes,” *Lucifer*, 15 October 1886 and F.H. Roberts, “Local Department,” *Oskaloosa Independent*, 16 October 1886.

represent a legitimate or respectable union. A writer for the *Troy Chief* compared the autonomistic marriage to the practices of a herd of animals, explaining that any two animals go together as they please and then changed partners to suit their convenience.¹⁹ R.A. Van Winkle, a patron and contributor to *Lucifer* from Arrington, Kansas, agreed with this representation. He wrote a scathing letter in which he claimed that the ceremony defied the sanctity of marriage and the necessity of marriage laws. Through published articles, *Lucifer's* free love correspondents paraded their “beastly and disgusting diatribes against marriage laws” and in doing so they “libel humanity and our civilizations and proclaim themselves beasts.” In Van Winkle’s opinion, anyone who entertained the “beastly sentiments” advocated by *Lucifer* “should be classed hereafter with beasts.”²⁰

Though E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman were labeled as “cranks” and their behavior was described as “ridiculous,” they were not merely harmless eccentrics but represented a direct threat to social order and sexual customs in the way they purposefully flouted the law; their alterations of the sacred institution of marriage could have wider ramifications for the community if left unpunished. The *Topeka Capital* admonished the couple for defying the law, stating that they should have had a little more regard as to “what their fellow citizens generally believe to be for the public common good in these respects.”²¹ Public opinion was therefore strongly opposed to recognizing the union, and the general view was that the autonomistic ceremony purposefully defied the law. Foremost, the General Statutes for the State of Kansas considered marriage a

¹⁹ “New Light on the Subject,” *Troy Chief*, printed in the *Valley Falls Register*, 29 October 1886.

²⁰ R.A. Van Winkle, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 4 February 1887. Harman listed him as an “old contributor and patron,” but clearly based on his letter he did not support the free love platforms of *Lucifer*.

²¹ “Marriage and Divorce,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, 17 October 1886.

civil contract that required specific legal obligations.²² The main argument was that the free love ceremony did not represent a legal marriage because it was not officiated by a legal authority nor was a marriage license obtained.²³

The community was also greatly disturbed by the statements made by the couple that they could separate voluntarily if either of them wished to end the relationship. This could be attributed to the fears of rampant divorce and unstable family units associated with multiple sexual partners, as divorce rates in Kansas climbed.²⁴ Citizens did not like the idea that men and women could form or end sexual unions so easily; they viewed marriage as a permanent contract that could not be rescinded in an informal way, and insisted that any offspring produced by the union must be taken into consideration. The *Kansas City Times* stated that the marriage relation was “binding and sacred in all civilized countries,” and that “religion and law alike impose the obligation of perman[an]cy” when a man and women decide to marry.²⁵ The relationship of husband and wife, maintained the *Topeka Daily Capital*, “shall not be sundered without the consent of the other people in the community or state, as made manifest in their laws.” The *Topeka Daily Capital* even ventured to suggest that the couple would not have been prosecuted if they had omitted any discussion of separation.²⁶ However, they did include clauses to end the union and chose to ignore laws regulating matrimony; therefore, the community did not recognize the free love marriage as being legal in the eyes of the state.

Not only was the autonomistic marriage illegal, but the general opinion of community members held that it was unrespectable and immoral. The *Times* summed up

²² See Dassler, *Compiled Laws of Kansas*.

²³ “Decisions of the Supreme Court,” *Oskaloosa Independent*, 12 March 1887.

²⁴ Cott, 107; Wilder, 46.

²⁵ “The Harman Case,” *Kansas City Times*, printed in the *Valley Falls Register*, 28 January 1887.

²⁶ “Marriage and Divorce,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, 17 October 1886.

the overall sentiment against the free lovers when it stated that they could “hardly expect to be given a permit to conduct themselves in a way that not only defies settled law but outrages the moral sense of ninety-ninths of the people who live in the prosperous commonwealth of Kansas.”²⁷ Editor Van Meter reported that many people expressed outrage at the “immoral and exasperating conducts” of the editors.²⁸ The *Report of Meriden, Kansas*, even claimed that *Lucifer* and its free love principles represented “undefiled, lowdown prostitution” for the way in which the free lovers appeared to give Lillian over to a man who had a reputation as an adulterer.²⁹

Since the autonomistic ceremony was deemed unlawful and indecent, the charge was made that it resulted in an “illegal cohabitation.”³⁰ The free love couple was arrested the following day for living together as man and wife without being married.³¹ Clearly the townspeople and even former supporters of *Lucifer* were morally outraged at the sexual relationship that followed this pretention of marriage. They placed blame on the three parties involved: Moses Harman, as a bad father; E.C. Walker, as an adulterer and sexual predator; and Lillian Harman, as the misguided child bride who risked her sexual purity. All three were accused of violating customary gender roles and failing to follow proper marital practices.

The foremost attacks fell on Moses Harman, the father of Lillian and the presumed overseer of the illegal ceremony. The scandalous events proved that his household was in disarray. In the nineteenth century, the household functioned as the

²⁷ “The Harman Case,” *Kansas City Times*, printed in the *Valley Falls Register*, 28 January 1887.

²⁸ R.E. Van Meter, “Some Plain Words,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 7 October 1886.

²⁹ Editorial, *Report*, printed in “Fruits of Christianity,” *Lucifer*, 10 December 1886.

³⁰ R.E. Van Meter, “A Disgraceful Affair—The Junior Editor of ‘Lucifer’ in Hoc,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 23 September 1886.

³¹ R.E. Van Meter, “The Free Lovers Flanked,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 30 September 1886.

core organizational structure of gender and class relations, and any disruptions to its order could have larger ramifications to the cohesion of society.³² As head of the household, it was Harman's responsibility to protect his young daughter from sexual corruption and keep his household orderly by following the law. However, he had failed in both duties. Van Meter reported that Harman "unblushingly admits that he was in full accord and sympathy with the unlawful and disgraceful 'compact' of his own daughter and the man Walker."³³ The community felt that he neglected his fatherly duty to protect his daughter's moral purity. Outraged citizens called Harman a "crack-brained chap" and declared that only a "brutish father" would approve of such a corrupt sexual arrangement.³⁴ One man approached him and said, "Mr. Harman, you have done very wrong" and wondered, "Why don't you get an officer and have your girl married right?"³⁵ Another man gave him the same advice, claiming that the townspeople would never leave him alone if he did not obtain a license and have his daughter legally married.³⁶ The *Meriden Report* suggested that Harman was treating his daughter like a prostitute by turning her over to Walker, whom it claimed was also a "brute." The *Report* stated that due to his irresponsible actions, Harman himself should be sent to prison.³⁷ A former friend and visitor to the *Lucifer* office, identifying himself only as "X," was so upset over the debacle that he wrote a scathing letter to Harman in which he stated "our friendship has forever ceased."³⁸ It was the communal sentiment that Harman, as the

³² LeeAnn Whites, *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 6.

³³ R.E. Van Meter, "Some Plain Words," *Valley Falls New Era*, 7 October 1886.

³⁴ F.H. Roberts, "Free Love: An Illegal 'Contract' Leads to a Jail Cell," *Oskaloosa Independent*, 25 September 1886.

³⁵ Moses Harman, "Bail," *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886.

³⁶ Moses Harman, Editorial, *Lucifer*, 10 December 1886.

³⁷ Editorial, *Report*, printed in "Fruits of Christianity," *Lucifer*, 10 December 1886.

³⁸ X, "Letter to M. Harman," *Lucifer*, 27 December 1886.

father of Lillian and key promoter of free love doctrines in *Lucifer*, had instigated and allowed this abomination to take place. He ultimately neglected his duty as Lillian's father to set her on the correct moral path. To the community, Harman had failed as both a father and a head of the household.

Personal attacks were also directed at E.C. Walker, whom local reports represented as an adulterer and example of the vilest manhood. Most offensive to community members was the rumor that he had seemingly abandoned a first wife and several children. The *Winchester Argus* reported that he was married and had "several little Walkers," while one reader from his former Iowa community likewise made claim that Walker "had already a wife."³⁹ Public opinion agreed that Walker was a wife abandoner and neglectful father who cared nothing for the family he left behind. Because he was now engaged in a new relationship with Lillian Harman, charges were further made that he was an adulterer. R.E. Van Meter, who served as the local writer for the Associated Press, sent out a dispatch claiming that Walker was arrested on a charge of adultery.⁴⁰ Though this was not the actual crime with which he was charged, the fact that it was reported as such represented the townspeople's perspective of the situation.

At the time of the union, Walker was in fact divorced. He married his first wife, Laura V. Morton, in 1873, and they had two children. In 1880, before moving to Kansas and assuming the position of junior editor of *Lucifer*, he was listed in the federal census as living in Iowa with a wife and two children.⁴¹ By 1882, Walker was in Valley Falls

³⁹A. W. Robinson, Editorial note, *Winchester Argus*, 23 September 1886; B.B. Hart, "Letter to the Editor," *New Thought*, printed in *Lucifer*, 3 December 1886.

⁴⁰Moses Harman, "Adultery," *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886.

⁴¹Census data from FamilySearch.org, "Iowa, County Marriages, 1838-1934," index, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/XJNQ-PH9> : accessed 03 Nov 2012), Edwin C. Walker and Laura V. Morton, 1873. Source Citation: Year: 1880; Census Place: Florence, Benton, Iowa; Roll: 326; Family History Film: 1254326; Page: 161A; Enumeration District: 027; Image: 0732. Original data: Tenth Census

without his wife or family. The *Topeka Daily Capital* reported that he had obtained a divorce several years prior to his marriage to Lillian.⁴² Moses Harman attempted to defend Walker's honor, stating that Mrs. Walker, now living in southern Kansas, desired the divorce and requested care of their children. The *Topeka Daily Capital* also reported on his favorable treatment of his ex-wife, noting that Walker obtained a land claim and turned the title over to her.⁴³

Though Walker was not married when he entered into the autonomistic union with Lillian Harman, the community still held a negative opinion of him. Most reports concerning Walker from local papers such as the *New Era* and the *Oskaloosa Independent* had only hateful words to describe him. To many community members, it still appeared that he had abandoned his previous wife and children, as most envisioned marriage to be a life-long commitment. The *Oskaloosa Independent* correctly stated that Walker was legally divorced but harshly admonished him for having deserted his family.⁴⁴ Certainly the community feared that this bad behavior could and probably would be repeated. This was due to the clause in the autonomistic ceremony which stated he could separate from Lillian if he so desired. By calling for his arrest, they most likely believed they could halt his use and subsequent abandonment of innocent women and children.

of the United States, 1880. (NARA microfilm publication T9, 1,454 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁴² "Still in Jail," *Topeka Daily Capital*, 18 November 1886, printed in the *Valley Falls Register*, 26 November 1886.

⁴³ Moses Harman, "Adultery," *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886; Moses Harman, "The Pivotal Issue," *Lucifer*, 4 February 1887; "Still in Jail," *Topeka Daily Capital*, 18 November 1886, printed in the *Valley Falls Register*, 26 November 1886.

⁴⁴ F.H. Roberts, "Free Love: An Illegal 'Contract' Leads to a Jail Cell," *Oskaloosa Independent*, 25 September 1886.

Not only could Walker desert his new bride and any children their union might produce, the community also viewed him as a sexual predator who sought to take advantage of Lillian's young age. When reporting on the marriage, local papers were quick to point out the vast age difference between the two. In addition to being described as already having a wife or divorced, Walker was depicted as "a man near 40 years of age" and "about 38 years old." Lillian, in contrast, was portrayed as the "16-year old daughter of Harman."⁴⁵ By pointing out the age differences and representing Lillian as a child, the press attempted to paint a picture of Walker as a mature, yet calculating individual who might be looking to take advantage of a vulnerable young girl who lacked the protection that should have been provided by her father. One reader voiced this opinion when he said that Walker might "mislead the loving affections of a sixteen year old miss."⁴⁶

The age difference of the free love couple mattered in 1886, a time in which age of consent laws were being hotly debated. In the colonial and early republic eras, a younger age at marriage was normal and accepted, as cheap and available land made establishing an independent household more feasible. However, throughout the nineteenth century, the age of marriage for both men and women began to rise as the population and land prices both increased and as the growing middle class deferred the age of matrimony.⁴⁷ By the late nineteenth century, social purity reformers were

⁴⁵ F.H. Roberts, "Free Love: An Illegal 'Contract' Leads to a Jail Cell," *Oskaloosa Independent*, 25 September 1886; A.W. Robinson, Editorial note, *Winchester Argus*, 23 September 1886.

⁴⁶ B.B. Hart, "Letter to the Editor," *New Thought*, printed in *Lucifer*, 3 December 1886.

⁴⁷ J. David Hacker, Libra Hilde, and James Holland Jones, "The Effect of the Civil War on Southern Marriage Patterns," *Journal of Southern History* 76, no. 1 (February 2010), 39-70. In the colonial and early republic eras, the average age of marriage was 20 for white women and 26 for white men, while in 1890 it was 23.8 for white women and 27.8 for white men. For middle class influences, see David J. Pivar, *Purity Crusade, Sexual Morality and Social Control, 1868-1900* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1973), 104.

agitating for a higher age of consent, concerned that young, white adolescent girls would fall victim to male lust and exploitation, especially in new urban environments where prostitution and abortion existed in a shady underworld. Across the country these middle class reformers, aided by women of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, started a campaign in 1885 to raise the age of consent from 10 or 12, the average in most states. Age of consent laws, which legislated the age at which one could legally consent to sexual relations, were a means to protect young girls by prosecuting men for statutory rape. They also served to reform men's deviant sexual practices, reassert social control, and categorize illicit sexual behavior as a crime. The WCTU in particular was active in this campaign; horrified that some state laws listed 10 as the age of consent, the women utilized their skills from the temperance crusade to lobby legislatures and circulated a petition demanding that "the age at which a girl can legally consent to her own ruin be raised to at least eighteen years." Between 1886 and 1895, the social purity campaign succeeded in raising the age of consent from 10 in some states to 14-18 in 29 states.⁴⁸

The state of Kansas quickly fell in line with the new desires to raise the age of consent, which was 10 in 1885 when the movement began. The low age called reformers into action. The Kansas State Temperance Union (KSTU), the local state organization of the WCTU, worked furiously with the state suffrage association, the Kansas Equal Suffrage Association (KESA), which had just completed a successful campaign to win municipal suffrage for women. The women's organizations lobbied the state legislature and won the greatest victory for the social purity crusade when Kansas became the first

⁴⁸ Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 2-19; John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 153; Pivar, 139.

state to raise the age of consent, or the “age of protection” as they called it, to 18 in 1887, one month after winning municipal suffrage for women. The women were alarmed in 1889 when a bill was passed by the state senate to lower the age back down to 12, but the president of the KSTU, Fanny H. Rastall, called out to local unions for an immediate response. Women by the thousands signed petitions and sent them to the legislature where the bill never left the committee and the law was preserved.⁴⁹ Social purity reformers were especially proud of the fact that Kansas, along with the state of Wyoming, had both enacted women’s suffrage and had the highest age of consent.⁵⁰

The autonomistic marriage between E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman occurred right in the midst of the age of consent controversy. Concerned citizens would have been aware of the campaigns and petitions put forth by the KSTU and the KESA. Local newspapers were keen to point out the age difference, describing Walker as a mature adult while positioning Lillian as an innocent young girl. Undoubtedly, community members were alarmed at the union, which was not even a legal marriage but, to many, a sexual relationship in which a calculating male predator took advantage of a young girl. His vows, published freely in *Lucifer*, spoke to his deviance. By Walker’s own accord, he asserted that he could leave Lillian and any offspring their union produced if he became dissatisfied. Townspeople no doubt read this and believed he would morally ruin Lillian and move on to another female victim. Had the autonomistic ceremony and sexual union occurred only a few months later, Walker could have been arrested for statutory rape, regardless of Lillian’s consent. E.C. Walker, in many respects, had therefore transgressed the gender boundary of respectable masculinity. Not only was he a

⁴⁹ Odem, 30-31; Robert Smith Bader, *Prohibition in Kansas: A History* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 97-98.

⁵⁰ Pivar, 143.

wife deserter, an adulterer, and a bad father, but, because of his sexual union with a minor, he was also a corrupting influence on an innocent young girl.

Public opinion was very harsh against E.C. Walker, a man the community considered to be immoral and disreputable. Former *Lucifer* patron R.A. Van Winkle asserted that due to the free love marriage, most community members had a “contemptable [sic] opinion of him.”⁵¹ Editor R.E. Van Meter reported that a former friend called Walker a “scoundrel” and declared “he ought to be in the penitentiary.” The man’s attitude, observed Van Meter, was that of one who “believed from the bottom of his heart that the laws of decency and good morals had been most cruelly outraged, and that speedy and commensurate punishment would meet with his most hearty approval.” The *New Era*’s editor also claimed that others he supposed would stand by *Lucifer* under any circumstances had now expressed themselves “as immeasurably disgusted with the immoral and exasperating conduct of the editors of that paper, as exemplified by the Walker-Harman liaison.”⁵² Walker had become a “special object of hatred and denunciation” in the town. After violating the state’s marriage laws, the community saw its opportunity to exact vengeance against him.⁵³

Upon his arrest, community members expressed satisfaction that justice might be served. One correspondent to the *Valley Falls Register* referred to him as a “justly imprisoned crank” who would hopefully learn that Kansas, while allowing free speech, would “not permit her most sacred laws boldly violated and trampled under foot.”⁵⁴ The abuse towards Walker did not end after his arrest. Claims were made that he desired

⁵¹ R.A. Van Winkle, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 4 February 1887.

⁵² R.E. Van Meter, “Some Plain Words,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 7 October 1886.

⁵³ Moses Harman, “The Facts,” *Lucifer*, 22 October 1886.

⁵⁴ Kohl Rabi, “Blue Mound,” *Valley Falls Register*, 15 October 1886.

“cheap notoriety” and was taking advantage of the donations sent by *Lucifer’s* readers, described as his “deluded followers,” while other rumors circulated that he continuously quarreled with the sheriff and struck the jailor in the face during one dispute.⁵⁵ Based on local accounts of Walker’s character and actions, the community sought to chastise him for his bad behavior and corrupting influences.

As far as Lillian Harman was concerned, the community was unsure whether she was a victim of free love or a proud representative of unrespectable femininity. The initial sentiment was that as a young girl, she must be a victim of her father’s fanatical beliefs and Walker’s predation. Both her youthful age and female gender seemed to suggest that she was corrupted by her male elders. The *Valley Falls Register* described her as a “young girl, not yet 17” who “doubtless has been misled in the matter.”⁵⁶ Another report stated that she was “gritty, though misguided.”⁵⁷ Other opinions suggested that the community take sympathy on the young girl. After all, she was “only a girl and raised under the advice of a brute.”⁵⁸ A former *Lucifer* patron argued that as a child, she should be pitied as a victim of her father and Walker’s scheme.⁵⁹ In these perspectives, Lillian Harman was young and innocent and could not help that her female purity had been put in jeopardy. These sentiments fell in line with the general view of purity reformers who insisted that young girls were passive and dependent in any illicit sexual encounter and should be considered victims.

⁵⁵ “The Walker-Harman Case,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, 22 October 1886; Martha Meadows, “Odds and Ends from Oskaloosa,” *Valley Falls Register*, 29 October 1886; F.H. Roberts, Editorial note, *Oskaloosa Independent*, 9 October 1886.

⁵⁶ T.W. Gardiner, “Autonomistic Marriage,” *Valley Falls Register*, 24 September 1886.

⁵⁷ F.H. Roberts, Editorial Note, *Oskaloosa Independent*, 11 December 1886.

⁵⁸ Editorial, *Report*, printed in “Fruits of Christianity,” *Lucifer*, 10 December 1886.

⁵⁹ R.A. Van Winkle, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 4 February 1887.

This opinion also suggested that the community should focus its actions against the real instigators of the crime, namely Moses Harman and E.C. Walker, who were instrumental in corrupting Lillian. Local opponents of free love believed the autonomistic marriage was arranged by her father and that it ruined her female purity by associating her with an adulterer. A prominent community member, Chief Justice Horton of the Kansas State Supreme Court, argued that if there was neither public record made nor a legal officiant present then “the woman is placed at the mercy of the man who may deny the ‘consensual relation,’ and repudiate her.” Furthermore, he reasoned that if “the man objects to having his marriage public, and a record of it made, he tacitly admits that he intends to cheat her whom he has privately promised to make his wife.”⁶⁰ Thus, some members of the community feared that Lillian, as a victim, was being corrupted from outside influences over which she had no control.

There was an alternative perspective, however, that placed equal blame on Lillian and condemned her for consciously acting as an unrespectable example of femininity. Some community members were willing to assign her full blame for the illicit sexual union and insisted that she was not merely a passive victim but an independent actor in the whole free love affair. The *Kansas City Times* asserted that she knew what the marriage laws entailed and that she deliberately violated those laws because “she had contrary views of her own.” Because she intentionally made the decision by her own means, the *Times* believed that she should be punished as harshly as Walker.⁶¹ Reports of her actions after the arrest seemed to confirm her active role in the marriage. F.H. Roberts, editor of the *Oskaloosa Independent*, observed that although her father lamented

⁶⁰ “Decisions of the Supreme Court,” *Oskaloosa Independent*, 12 March 1887.

⁶¹ “The Harman Case,” *Kansas City Times*, printed in the *Valley Falls Register*, 28 January 1887.

his daughter being taken to jail, she insisted upon it.⁶² When he tried to pay her bond money to free her from jail, she would not allow it, preferring to remain behind bars with Walker.⁶³

As a willing party to an illegal and immoral sexual arrangement, Lillian thus flouted respectable femininity. F.H. Roberts described her as conducting herself in “a way that not only openly defies settled law but outrages the moral sense” of the community.⁶⁴ After seeing a defiant look on Lillian’s face, one man allegedly exclaimed to E.C. Walker that he would like to tar and feather her.⁶⁵ Another outraged citizen of a nearby town wrote to *Lucifer* to express her indignation at Lillian’s behavior. Mrs. F.B. Stout of St. George, Kansas claimed that Lillian had committed a disgraceful act and had “rob[b]ed herself of her good name if she ever had one.” No decent girl, according to the letter writer, would have done such a “dirty” deed. Instead of lashing out at authorities for the arrest, Lillian should “thank the people of kan[sas] for not allowing her to live such a disgrasifull [sic] Life,” as it was in the community’s interest to keep morality in check.⁶⁶ In these opinions, Lillian was not merely a misguided child, but a willing party to her own corruption and an immoral sexual arrangement. Thus, she should be treated as an adult in criminal proceedings.

In addition to the fact that the free lovers represented unrespectable manhood and womanhood, there was also a great concern that they were bringing an overall bad reputation to the town of Valley Falls itself. Because of the existence of *Lucifer* and the

⁶² F.H. Roberts, “Free Love: An Illegal ‘Contract’ Leads to a Jail Cell,” *Oskaloosa Independent*, 25 September 1886.

⁶³ F.H. Roberts, Editorial note, *Oskaloosa Independent*, 11 December 1886.

⁶⁴ F.H. Roberts, “The Harman Case,” *Oskaloosa Independent*, 29 January 1887. Article contains an excerpt from the *Kansas City Times*.

⁶⁵ E.C. Walker, “Kansas Liberty and Justice: To Jail and There,” *Lucifer*, 8 October 1886. Walker did not indicate the man’s name.

⁶⁶ Mrs. F.B. Stout, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 15 April 1887.

recent free love marriage, the town was quickly earning a reputation of being “queer” and “awful.”⁶⁷ The editor of a newspaper from nearby Troy, Kansas claimed that the town was rife with murders, mobs, vice, and scoundrels, noting that its society of infidels and free lovers had “scandalized the whole community.” He specifically pointed to *Lucifer* and the free love marriage as one major source of immorality.⁶⁸ Editorialist Martha M., of Oskaloosa, remarked that she was astonished that “this nest of filth at your town has not long since been buried.”⁶⁹ For the townspeople, this negative image of Valley Falls was unacceptable. They regarded themselves as moral, law-abiding citizens and were quick to set themselves and their town apart from the *Lucifer* group, who formed a minority. Out of 1200 residents, *Lucifer* claimed only about fifty local subscribers.⁷⁰ T.W. Gardiner, editor of the *Register*, defended the majority of community members in his paper, stating that they approved of the “wise and wholesome marriage laws of this state.” No one, except for those associated with *Lucifer*, had any disposition to violate them. The autonomistic marriage, in his perspective, was merely one of the “foolhardy notions” of the free lovers. The Walker-Harman union, in his opinion, was “an unfortunate affair, but that Valley Falls as a community should be held responsible for the possible disgrace by the uncharitable insinuations of neighboring newspapers—See the *Winchester Argus*—is plainly unjust.”⁷¹

It was therefore up to the townspeople to restore order and morality to their community. As Gardiner stated, Valley Falls “generally applies a wholesome remedy to

⁶⁷ A.W. Robinson, Editorial note, *Winchester Argus*, 23 September 1886; T.W. Gardiner, Editorial note, *Valley Falls Register*, 24 September 1886.

⁶⁸ Sol. Miller, *Weekly Kansas Chief*, quoted in Moses Harman, “Notes,” *Lucifer*, 15 October 1886.

⁶⁹ Martha M., “Oskaloosa Odds and Ends,” *Valley Falls Register*, 12 November 1886.

⁷⁰ Hal D. Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Lawrence, KS: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), 99.

⁷¹ T.W. Gardiner, “Local News,” *Valley Falls Register*, 24 September 1886; T.W. Gardiner, Editorial note, *Valley Falls Register*, 24 September 1886.

all the wrong doing here and is able to take care of her interests.” He believed that the prosecution of E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman was necessary to redeem the town’s good name and avoid disgrace.⁷² Prominent community members took the lead in punishing the free lovers. According to Moses Harman, Dr. A.M. Cowan, a physician and churchman, along with C.C. Lord, an old citizen and prominent merchant, headed the efforts to suppress the free lovers.⁷³ Harman also named the Baptists of Valley Falls as taking part in the persecution.⁷⁴ Editors of the local newspapers contributed to the encouragement of prosecution. A.W. Robinson of the *Winchester Argus* was kin to Dr. Cowan, and R.E. Van Meter of the *New Era* was a “representative Christian” who figured prominently in town politics; both editors used their positions to attack the free lovers.⁷⁵ Rumors of the autonomistic ceremony circulated before it took place, and after the ceremony it was clear that the townspeople had formed a vigilante committee meant to deal with the free lovers and chastise them for their immoral behavior.

Before the official arrest of the free love couple, it appeared that certain community members of a self-appointed vigilante committee plotted mob violence in order to punish the free lovers for their transgressions. Lillian’s step-brother, William Hiser, told family members that there had been talk of “mobs.”⁷⁶ After the ceremony became public knowledge, mob violence was freely and openly threatened. Threats of lynching, claimed Moses Harman, were also made. The free lovers took this seriously, not only as violence directed at them or a possible lynching of the free love couple but

⁷² T.W. Gardiner, Editorial note, *Valley Falls Register*, 24 September 1886.

⁷³ Moses Harman, “Half Sheet,” *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886.

⁷⁴ Moses Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 1 October 1886.

⁷⁵ Moses Harman, “Should be Suppressed,” *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886 and Moses Harman, Editorial, *Lucifer*, 29 October 1886.

⁷⁶ E.C. Walker, “Kansas Liberty and Justice: To Jail and There,” *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886.

also as a more general threat that the townspeople might attack the *Lucifer* office and destroy its materials. To make matters worse for those involved, the local papers encouraged these “passions and prejudices” against the *Lucifer* group.⁷⁷ The *Oskaloosa Independent* insisted that *Lucifer* was “altogether a disgrace to the Falls.” The editor insinuated mob violence when he added that the “common and emphatic expression is that the decent people up there ought to dump the outfit into the Delaware [River] and drive the gang who run it out of town.”⁷⁸ The *Winchester Argus* also rallied citizens asserting that “in any other town almost, public sentiment would be so strong against the outfit, the *Lucifer* would suddenly cease publication and the Walker-Harman crowd would evacuate the city.” The *Argus* advocated that *Lucifer* “should be suppressed.”⁷⁹ That community members and newspaper editors were even contemplating using vigilante justice against the couple and possibly the *Lucifer* press signified the immense disdain they had for the autonomistic marriage and its free love ideals. No longer were community members willing to sit back and let the free lovers trample over sexual morality and the sacred marriage laws of Kansas. Something must be done to punish them and stop their bad behavior before it cast an immoral shadow over the whole town.

Although vigilante methods were tempting, citizens ultimately settled on a legal course of action against E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman as the best means to reprimand them for their transgressions, calling on state power to correct their disreputable behavior. They likely thought it best to punish the lawbreakers by following the law themselves, thus setting an example of how criminal behavior would not be tolerated in their town.

⁷⁷ See Moses Harman, “Half Sheet,” *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886; Moses Harman, “Bail,” *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886; E.C. Walker, “Kansas Liberty and Justice: To Jail and There,” *Lucifer*, 8 October 1886; Moses Harman, “To the Citizens of Valley Falls,” *Valley Falls Register*, 8 October 1886.

⁷⁸ F.H. Roberts, “Free Love,” *Oskaloosa Independent*, 25 September 1886.

⁷⁹ A.W. Robinson, Editorial note, *Winchester Argus*, 23 September 1886.

The morning after attending the ceremony, Lillian's step-brother William Hiser went to the office of the local justice of the peace and filed a complaint that the couple unlawfully lived together as man and wife without having been married. An arrest warrant was drawn up and the couple taken into custody.⁸⁰ At first, it may seem odd that Lillian was betrayed by her own kin. Moses Harman claimed that Hiser filed the complaint in order to prevent mob violence and allow the legal system rather than vigilantes to handle the case.⁸¹ Yet, Hiser, too, must have been concerned about his family's reputation, his sister, and the violations of sexual norms and marital customs that had taken place. The *New Era* described him as an "honest, law-abiding citizen" who felt "duty bound as such to help in the protection of society and his own home circle invaded by these social anarchists."⁸² As head of the household, Moses Harman had failed to establish sexual order; in fact, he was encouraging sexual disorder and immorality. Hiser might have believed that if his step-father was not going to discipline his household, he would have to act as the head and bring order to the household. Having Walker and Lillian arrested and legally charged was the best way to see that they were punished for their crimes against the state and immoral sexual conduct, but in a legal way that avoided violence.

Others who had been friends to the *Lucifer* group quickly turned their back on Walker and the Harmans as a show of disapproval. One woman was "shocked" by the way in which their actions created a scandal in the eyes of the respectable people of the town, while another man broke off all contact fearing to be associated with such

⁸⁰ See E.C. Walker, "Kansas Liberty and Justice: To Jail and There," *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886, E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman, "Friends of Liberty, Attention!" *Lucifer*, 17 September 1886, R.E. Van Meter, "A Disgraceful Affair—The Junior Editor of 'Lucifer' in Hoc," *Valley Falls New Era*, 23 September 1886.

⁸¹ Moses Harman, "Half Sheet," *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886.

⁸² R.E. Van Meter, "The 'Tolerable' Intolerant," *Valley Falls New Era*, 13 January 1887.

unrespectable people.⁸³ The paper also lost some local subscribers; while it boasted about 65 in 1884, shortly after the free love marriage the number dropped to 50.⁸⁴ Though E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman were offered bail while waiting for their trial, they could find no one willing to go out on bond for them. Several local freethinkers declined because they feared social ostracism and even personal violence if they were to be associated with the free lovers, while others refused because they vehemently disagreed with the free love marriage.⁸⁵ According to the *New Era*, former supporters also refused to help procure bail because they were disgusted with the immoral conduct of the editors, and Van Meter believed that they would “labor zealously” with other citizens to ensure a conviction.⁸⁶

Townpeople finally got their chance to see the free lovers punished for their defiance of marriage customs and sexual moral standards when the legal system swung into action. At the preliminary examination on September 27, 1886, the court room was crowded with spectators exhibiting great interest in the case.⁸⁷ The *New Era* remarked that the prosecution was “ably conducted by W.F. Gilluly and L.A. Myers, who, of course showed the fallacy of [defense attorney] Mr. Overmyer’s argument.” After the judge announced his decision to bind the couple over to the district court, the large audience reportedly received this decision with “rapturous applause.” R.E. Van Meter remarked that this was sufficient evidence to show that public opinion was not swayed by the “heretical and vicious doctrine” argued by the defense.⁸⁸ Public opinion was

⁸³ Moses Harman, “Respectability,” *Lucifer*, 1 October 1886.

⁸⁴ Sears, 99. Sears notes, however, that the free love marriage and ensuing trial did serve to boost the national constituency, from about 700 in 1886 to 1500 in 1890.

⁸⁵ Moses Harman, “Bail,” *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886.

⁸⁶ R.E. Van Meter, “Some Plain Words,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 7 October 1886.

⁸⁷ T.W. Gardiner, “Bound Over,” *Valley Falls Register*, 1 October 1886.

⁸⁸ R.E. Van Meter, “The Free Lovers Flanked,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 30 September 1886.

decidedly against the free lovers, and Moses Harman believed that it influenced the decision of the court. The arguments of the prosecution, he claimed, were directed to the prejudices of the audience rather than the judgment of the magistrate.⁸⁹ Regardless of whether or not Harman thought they received a fair hearing, the fact was that this had become a community affair in which public opinion and even prejudices did matter. The townspeople were upset that a man and a woman could proclaim themselves to be married without completing any legal requirements and then proceed to initiate a sexual arrangement that they said could be severed at any time.

The district court trial of E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman on October 14, 1886 exposed the harsh prejudices and moral condemnations against them. The couple stood before Judge Crozier in the Oskaloosa courtroom. Their attorneys, David Overmyer and G.C. Clemens, had tried to secure a change of venue. They argued that the couple could not get a fair and impartial trial by jury in their county, reading extracts from five local newspapers as evidence of the public sentiment against them, two or three of which openly advocated mob violence. The attorneys, however, failed in their effort when the judge denied their request. Moses Harman was the first witness and testified that the couple did not obtain a license nor utilize a legal officiant, though he maintained that they did not violate any law of Kansas. In his recounting of the trial, he did not explain why he thought no laws had been violated, but based on the attorneys' arguments he likely believed the marriage could be legal in the common law tradition. William Hiser was the next witness, and he testified to the proceedings of the autonomistic ceremony. At the dictation of the prosecuting attorney, Mr. Gilluly, he told the court that on the day before

⁸⁹ Moses Harman, Editorial, *Lucifer*, 1 October 1886.

the event he heard Moses Harman declare that “this marriage will take place regardless of law—in defiance of law.”⁹⁰

Community members were most interested in whether a sexual relationship had been established. This was the key to proving that the couple had illegally cohabitated as man and wife without having been married. William Hiser testified that the parties did, in fact, occupy the same room that evening and came out of it together the following morning. This fact was evidently enough to convince the judge and jury that an illegal, and consequently immoral, sexual relationship was established as a result of the autonomistic ceremony. The judge instructed the jury to return a verdict of “guilty” if, from the evidence presented, they found that the parties had lived together as man and wife without first having obtained a license and being married by a legal officer, to which they did. The judge’s ruling included an almost contradictory statement that if either of the parties married again without obtaining a divorce they would be held liable for bigamy but, at the same time, maintained that a license and officer was necessary in Kansas to make a legal marriage.⁹¹ The court was wary to proclaim the marriage legal, but in light of the fact that a sexual union had been established, the court was also hesitant to say that the parties were not married. At their sentencing on October 19, Walker was sentenced to two and a half months and Lillian one and one half months in the county jail, neither being released until the court costs were paid.⁹²

Community members were undoubtedly pleased to see the free lovers punished. The sentence was not as severe as many had hoped, conceded R.E. Van Meter, but even

⁹⁰ Moses Harman, “Legality vs. Justice,” *Lucifer*, 15 October 1886.

⁹¹ Moses Harman, “Legality vs. Justice,” *Lucifer*, 15 October 1886.

⁹² E.C. Walker, “Kansas Liberty and Justice: To Jail and There,” *Lucifer*, 22 October 1886.

“a single day’s imprisonment stigmatizes their conduct as effectually as a whole year.”⁹³

The public was satisfied that the couple had been punished and hoped that they had been taught a lesson. A report from the *Topeka Daily Capital* stated that after the sentencing they had “almost entirely lost that brazen, defiant and cheerful disposition which characterized them.”⁹⁴ The prisoners were taken to jail where, Moses Harman observed, they were treated like “wild beasts on exhibition.”⁹⁵ The sheriff, however, did nothing to curtail the public spectacle, most likely believing this to also be part of the punishment for their transgressions.⁹⁶

The free lovers appealed their case to the Kansas State Supreme Court based on the tradition of common law marriage. Common law marriage had a long history in the United States, dating back to the colonial era where an “informal public” of family, kin, and neighbors exercised control over matrimony rather than any type of state apparatus. While the state set the framework for marriage, it was the community that policed its members and upheld notions of morality concerning sexuality and marriage. With communal approval, couples married themselves, and judges were disposed to accept informal marriage arrangements when accepted by the local community while courts were satisfied with the appearance of marriage despite lack of formal documents or ceremonies.⁹⁷ Into the nineteenth century, some states required licensing as the primary method of public surveillance, but many couples still resisted and judges ruled in favor of those living as husband and wife by considering the common law assumption that

⁹³ R.E. Van Meter, Editorial, *Valley Falls New Era*, printed in *Lucifer*, 29 October 1886.

⁹⁴ *Topeka Daily Capital*, 16 October 1886.

⁹⁵ Moses Harman, Editorial, *Lucifer*, 12 November 1886.

⁹⁶ Lillian Harman, “Letter to Papa,” *Lucifer*, 22 November 1886.

⁹⁷ Cott, 29-39.

marriage could be presumed from the acknowledgements, cohabitation, and reputation of the couple.⁹⁸

By the 1870s, however, there was growing criticism for the tolerance of informal matrimony and the increase in divorce, and many states witnessed reform movements intended to secure marital stability. Reformers pressured state legislatures to require ceremonies and to invalidate common law practices, which they considered antiquated and dangerous. Society, in their opinion, would be better served if laws were enacted to protect women and children through the bonds of matrimony. The state of Kansas, for example, rewrote its marriage laws to require a license and the use of a legal officer in 1867. Judges and the courts, meanwhile, retained the authority to grant marital status with proper proof of marriage, as they adapted the laws to individual circumstances. However, the overall trend in the late nineteenth century was to punish those who refused to comply with new marriage laws and uphold a single standard of marriage for the entire populace.⁹⁹

David Overmyer, the attorney for E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman, attempted to make a case for common law marriage when the defendants appeared in front of the Kansas State Supreme Court on January 7, 1887. In a brief published for the appellants, he argued that the marriage should be considered legal because all that was required was a verbal consent or agreement and subsequent cohabitation. Overmyer pointed to several cases from various states which upheld this idea: *Bissell v. Bissell*; *Van Tuyl v. Van Tuyl*; and *Hutchins v. Kimmel*. Though the statute required a license, the absence of a license was not a reason to nullify the marriage, as opined in the case *State v. Worthingham*.

⁹⁸ Grossberg, 77-79.

⁹⁹ Cott, 109; Dassler, 537; Grossberg, 83-97.

Neither was a religious or legal officer required, as was in the case of *Dyer v. Brannock*. As for the formation of a sexual union with the intention of marriage, Overmyer cited a Kansas case, *Smith v. Brown*, in which the court stated that evidence of continuous cohabitation as man and wife furnished enough evidence of a marriage by establishing that their motive was to be married. Overmyer argued that the defendants planned the marriage six months in advance of the ceremony, met at the bride's father's house to marry, made a marriage agreement, intended to cohabit as man and wife, and consummated their relationship, a point which Overmyer said in most states would make a marriage alone. He also pointed out the problematic ruling of the lower court that the parties did marry but not in accordance with the marriage statutes. This judgment, he claimed, transposed penalties for concubinage for the "irregular celebration of marriage."¹⁰⁰

The prosecution, in turn, published its own brief to be presented to the court explaining why the previous conviction of the free lovers should be upheld. W.F. Gilluly, the county attorney, and S.B. Bradford, the Attorney General, pointed to the law passed in 1867 and information in the state of Kansas' Chap. 61, Com. Laws of 1881 to show that a license must be legally obtained and the ceremony performed by a judge, justice of the peace, or licensed preacher of the gospel in order for a marriage to be valid. The civil government, they argued, had established regulations for the "due celebration of marriage" and that it had a duty and an interest in seeing all citizens conform to such regulations. Furthermore, the prosecution reasoned that Kansas did not recognize

¹⁰⁰ David Overmyer, *In the Supreme Court of the State of Kansas: Supplemental Brief for Appellants* (Valley Falls, Kansas: M. Harman & Sons, Printers, 1886). The cases he cited were: *Bissell v. Bissell* (65 Barb., 325); *Van Tuyl v. Van Tuyl* (57 Barb. 235); *Hutchins v. Kimmel* (31 Mich. 127); *State v. Worthingham* (23 Minn. 529 533); *Dyer v. Brannock* (66 Mo., 391); and *Smith v. Brown* (8th Kan. 615).

instances where a man and a woman lived as man and wife as a common law marriage because the state had changed its laws regulating marriage from the 1862 provision which listed it only as a civil contract to the 1867 laws requiring a license and a legal officer present at the ceremony. Because the legislature added these provisions, they argued, a marriage could not be legal unless entered as the new provisions specified.

One of the main points of the prosecution's argument was that the free lovers not only failed to fulfill the necessary requirements to make a legal marriage but that they had purposefully set out to defy the law. They were not living in a rural area which precluded access to legal means, nor were they ignorant of the statutes requiring a license and a legal officer to perform the ceremony. Gilluly and Bradford maintained that Walker and Harman possessed a "disposition to antagonize the law" and "willfully violated" it by "marrying themselves in defiance of the law." The attorneys emphasized the fact that their actions, together with those of Lillian's father, were "willful and deliberate," "in conflict with the laws of the State." The prosecution pointed out that the couple were owners of a newspaper which advocated such doctrines and that they "eagerly sought and improved this opportunity to show to their deluded followers that they dared, even in face of law, to practice what they had been preaching." The law, in the opinion of the prosecuting attorneys, should be regarded with respect; yet Walker and Harman exhibited none. Therefore, they argued, as mandated by section 12 of the Com. Laws of 1881, the couple should be punished for purposefully violating the law. Gilluly and Bradford declared that because proper regulations were not followed, Walker and Harman "were *not* married." They also commented on the clause in the ceremony which indicated the couple could separate themselves, stating that the "position, too, that the

parties may divorce themselves by contract, and that contract enforced by law, is hardly in accordance with Kansas law on this subject.” The prosecuting attorneys praised the state’s marriage law and declared that “there is still a flavor of morality about it which most respectable people relish.”¹⁰¹

Though E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman appealed their decision to the Kansas State Supreme Court, they found the same moral sentiments existed in the higher as in the lower court. The court, and probably many citizens as well, were hesitant to argue that the parties were not married because it had been established that a sexual relationship followed the ceremony. It was the illicit nature of this sexual relationship along with the couple’s flouting of the law that troubled the citizens of Valley Falls and why they sought legal action against the free lovers. They were not comfortable in allowing sex to happen outside of a marriage bond, and based on the judges’ opinion, neither was the state. The majority opinion was that society had an interest in the regulation of marriage. The purpose of statutory regulations, according to Justice J. Johnston, was “wise and salutary,” giving publicity to the contract which he considered “of deep concern to the public.” Furthermore, he reasoned that formal proceedings should be required because they would “discourage deception and seduction, prevent illicit intercourse under guise of matrimony, relieve from doubt the *status* of parties who live together as man and wife, and the record required to be made furnishes evidence of the *status* and legitimacy of their offspring.”¹⁰²

In their written opinions, the Supreme Court Justices addressed the community’s concerns about marriage and the desire to see the free lovers punished. Consent was

¹⁰¹ W.F. Gilluly and S.B. Bradford, *In the Supreme Court of the State of Kansas: Brief for Appellee* (Kansas Publishing House: Topeka, 1886).

¹⁰² *State v. Walker*, 13 P. 279 (Kan, 1887).

deemed sufficient to constitute a common law marriage; thus, E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman were married. But, the state also had full power to prescribe reasonable regulations required for marriage, and persons failing to conform to these requirements “may be punished, although the marriage itself be valid.” A record of marriage, asserted Justice C.J. Horton, was vital to society. This was done to ensure the rights of conjugal heirs, protect the woman from abandonment, and ensure that the man uphold his promises to his wife. Justice Horton argued that though Walker and Harman married, they did so without following the statute regulations requiring a probate judge or justice of the peace to solemnize the marriage and that a license must be obtained and returned to the office of the probate judge so that the marriage could be recorded and made public. Consequently, the justices ruled that the parties were married but were guilty of violating the marriage law because they failed to obtain a marriage license and a legal officiant. Horton ended his written opinion with the statement that if “Edwin Walker and Lillian Harman are suffering imprisonment, it is because they have willfully and obstinately refused to conform to the simple and inexpensive regulations of the state directing marriage.” By failing to follow the law, he reasoned, “they have exhibited neither good sense nor sound reason.”¹⁰³

In this case, the community was most concerned about the disciplining of sexuality. As directed by the courts, they were willing to accept the autonomistic ceremony in order to place sex safely inside of marriage. But they also believed that the parties must somehow be punished for their failure to comply with state laws and social

¹⁰³ *State v. Walker*, 13 P. 279 (Kan, 1887); F.H. Roberts, “Decisions of the Supreme Court,” *Oskaloosa Independent*, 12 March 1887.

customs. The justices upheld the district court's ruling of the jail sentences.¹⁰⁴ Walker and Harman would have to remain in jail until they paid the court costs.

Additionally, one Supreme Court Justice took the opportunity to weigh in on women's freedoms in marriage. While supporting *Lucifer's* goals for the emancipation of women, he also denied that such free love reforms were necessary, as claimed by Moses Harman and his correspondents. In his filed opinion, Chief Justice Horton declared that Lillian Harman could retain her maiden name if she so desired. His statements about women's rights in Kansas, however, contradicted *Lucifer's* claims that women were powerless and subject to abuse in marriage. According to Horton, "the constitution and statutes of Kansas are very liberal in recognizing the rights and privileges of women." Women retained control of their property, income, and persons, and had municipal suffrage. As to the question of whether women were abused in marriage, he maintained that the wife was not the servant or slave of the husband and that no statutes justified cruelty "or other inhuman or brutal conduct towards his wife." In Kansas, Horton said, "a woman, in nearly all matters, is accorded civil and political equality with man."¹⁰⁵

Harman saw Horton's statements as a "great victory," declaring that concessions such as these had never before been made by a high judiciary of any state.¹⁰⁶ However, what Harman perhaps did not realize was that this opinion contradicted the very argument of *Lucifer* that marriage was immoral because of the treatment of wives by

¹⁰⁴ R.E. Van Meter, "The Free Lovers: The Supreme Court Declares their Marriage is in Violation of Law," *Valley Falls New Era*, 17 March 1887.

¹⁰⁵ *State v. Walker*, 13 P. 279 (Kan, 1887). For the status of women's suffrage in the state of Kansas, see Michael Lewis Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender and Politics in Gilded Age Kansas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

¹⁰⁶ Editors, "At Last," *Lucifer*, 11 March 1887.

brutal husbands. If what Justice Horton wrote was indeed true, free love reforms as Harman advocated were unnecessary. The *Kansas City Times* reflected this view when it remarked that the subject of feminine freedom “has been pretty well exhausted.”¹⁰⁷ The fact that Harman and *Lucifer’s* correspondents still maintained that women needed emancipation and that free love reforms were necessary no doubt continued to agitate a community that did not share his perspective.

Based on opinions appearing in the local newspapers, it appeared that the community would have been satisfied that E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman were convicted and sentenced to several months in jail, yet another offender still remained unpunished. Moses Harman, the father of the misguided bride and proprietor of the dangerous free love paper still remained at large. In their scathing reports of the free love ceremony, several editors pointed to Harman as the main instigator of the events. Agitation against *Lucifer* did not stop once the couple was imprisoned; rather, the community was more determined than ever to silence the paper by targeting the person they considered the leader of the free lovers: Moses Harman.

¹⁰⁷ “The Harman Case,” *Kansas City Times*, reprinted in the *Valley Falls Register*, 28 January 1887.

CHAPTER 5

THE DANGERS OF SEXUAL KNOWLEDGE: OBSCENITY LAWS AND THE SUPPRESSION OF FREE LOVE

I have no use for a paper or a doctrine teaching Free Love, and the abolition of the marriage relation, and I would willingly spend my last breath and my last cent securing the conviction and imprisonment of the teachers and senders of such infamous creed.
--Mrs. E.M.E., 29 July 1887.¹

IN THE WINTER OF 1889, the good citizens of Valley Falls observed “school children” eagerly reading over a particularly pernicious copy of the *Lucifer* paper. The December 28, 1888 issue contained an article which included excerpts from circulars describing different methods of reproductive control in detail. The first recommendation, taken from a promotional pamphlet for the various uses of petroleum jelly, was to put four or five grains of salicylic acid in Vaseline and apply internally, with the idea that spermatozoa would not survive in an acidic environment. The second method, termed “Clough’s Circular,” stated that an electric connection between both ends of the spinal columns must be joined in order for conception to take place. Therefore, to prevent conception and prolong enjoyment, Mr. Clough recommended that sexual partners avoid kissing during intercourse. In an editorial comment, Moses Harman expressed skepticism that Vaseline would prevent conception, but reasoned that enough scientific evidence on magnetic theory had been rendered to show the plausibility of Clough’s hypothesis.

¹ Mrs. E.M.E., “Letter to Elmina Slenker,” quoted in Elmina Slenker, “Free-Love,” *Lucifer*, 29 July 1887.

By reprinting the instructions for both preventative methods in *Lucifer*, Harman had just given tantalizing and dangerous information about sex to the children of Valley Falls. Pregnancy and the fear of pregnancy had functioned as a social control over the sexuality of non-married young people, but with the knowledge of how to avoid conception there was nothing to prevent sexual indulgence. Parents, however, guarded what they allowed their children to learn about sexuality and evaded questions on the topic. So prized was the knowledge that the curious young people of Valley Falls apparently held a “feverish desire” to get a hold of it, according to Harman. No doubt they read *Lucifer* with intrigue, interested to know what their parents would not tell them. Aware that their children had been exposed to such immorality, the townspeople were outraged. Harman reported that “quite a commotion was raised” by the publication of the article as the paper circulated around town.²

The fact that young school children were reading about prolonging and indulging in sexual intercourse without repercussion must have further outraged a community that had most recently been upset by Harman’s rejection of Christian marriage and his promotion of free love, what many viewed as “free lust.” Not only had Harman taken his printed ideas and enacted them in the midst of the community when he helped stage his daughter’s “autonomistic” ceremony, now it seemed that he had the ability to affect other children as well. Knowledge, as he admitted, could be dangerous. Harman believed that he offered knowledge as a means of education, scientific advancement, and the bettering of humanity, while the residents of Valley Falls saw his efforts as morally corrupting and blatantly offensive. To the community, Moses Harman must have seemed like the

² Moses Harman, “Fiat Justitia,” *Lucifer*, 28 December 1888; Moses Harman, “Is Knowledge Dangerous? The ‘Fiat Justitia’ Article,” *Lucifer*, 15 February 1889.

biblical Satan, offering dangerous information to innocents and tempting them to sway from the correct moral path—one local newspaper editor maintained the *Lucifer* was, in fact, named after the Devil.³

Moses Harman was first targeted in 1886 after the autonomistic marriage of his daughter when community members believed he orchestrated the illegal ceremony in defiance of the law. Eager citizens, however, could not find a way to punish Moses Harman for the crime since the law only applied to the couple and not the father of the bride. Regardless, they did not consider the couple's imprisonment as the solution to ending the threat of free love. Townspeople identified Harman as the instigator and ring leader of the Kansas free lovers, believing that the threat would subside if he was silenced. In early 1887, several community members procured old copies of *Lucifer* in which they claimed Harman had published "obscene" material. After alerting authorities, Harman was arrested in February 1887 for violating federal postal regulations that barred the mailing of obscene literature.

Harman's arrest in 1887 was primarily motivated by his part in the autonomistic marriage, but also his continued role as the town's principle free love agitator prompted legal action against the editor. Despite his subsequent conviction for mailing "obscene literature," he resumed publishing sexually explicit material which townspeople considered a moral danger. Harman further proved this to be the case, as exemplified in the instance where school children obtained misleading contraceptive advice from *Lucifer* in 1888. Clearly, punishing Harman for the free love marriage was not enough. He would persist in purveying obscenities through his paper. Ultimately, it was at the

³ F.H. Roberts, "Free Love: An Illegal 'Contract' Leads to a Jail Cell," *Oskaloosa Independent*, 25 September 1886.

direction and resolve of community members and federal postal authorities, made aware of Harman's presence by concerned citizens, that he was reprimanded through legal prosecution which they hoped would forever silence *Lucifer*. Harman's imprisonment served as an indicator that he had overstepped the boundaries of respectable sexuality, and good citizens not only rejected free love but would not tolerate the spreading of sexual knowledge that had proven to be a corrupting influence on their children and the larger community.

* * *

Though Lillian Harman and E.C. Walker had been punished for the celebration of an illegal marriage ceremony, the conviction hardly satisfied the community because Moses Harman continued to publish *Lucifer* and advocate free love. Before the free love marriage, *Lucifer* was allowed to exist in relative peace in Valley Falls. In an article about the town written several months previous to the marriage, editor R.E. Van Meter of the *New Era* acknowledged *Lucifer* as one of the local papers, stating that it was a "champion of Liberalism" that circulated in various parts of the United States. His description lacked any negative comments about Harman or *Lucifer*.⁴ After the free love marriage, the perspective changed. No longer was it seen as a harmless publication; the paper now seemed to pose a larger danger to the community since its ideas had been acted out in the autonomistic marriage scandal. *Lucifer's* purpose, according to Van Meter, was to convert local people to its "vile and nauseating doctrine."⁵ The ideas in the paper could inspire dangerous and disturbing behaviors in those who subscribed to them. Van Meter provided evidence of this by printing a letter from one *Lucifer* correspondent

⁴ R.E. Van Meter, "Valley Falls: Its Location, Development and Prospects," *Valley Falls New Era*, 8 April 1886.

⁵ R.E. Van Meter, "Some Plain Words," *Valley Falls New Era*, 7 October 1886.

who mailed William Hiser a rope and instructed him to hang himself for his role in the arrest of the free love couple. This, claimed Van Meter, was proof of the damaging effects of the *Lucifer* paper.⁶

The foremost threat that *Lucifer* posed was the spreading of sexual immorality in the community. One Reverend from Illinois wrote to Harman, saying that the paper could only inspire sentiments that would “arose the lustful passions of the youth” and asked him not to send *Lucifer* to his area.⁷ Likewise, a citizen from nearby Meriden, Kansas feared that through the “degraded sheet, many a poor girl may be ruined.”⁸ The townspeople were convinced that *Lucifer* contained “the vilest sort of stuff” and filled its columns with advertisements for books and pamphlets “of the most obscene character,” tracts which its publishers knew were under the ban of the law.⁹ Certainly the community feared that if the paper could inspire one free love marriage which, they asserted, led to an illegal cohabitation and the formation of an illicit sexual arrangement, it could inspire more individuals to transgress the boundaries of respectable sexuality and shatter the innocence of childhood. E.C. Walker was direct proof that one who subscribed to free love could become a danger to society. He was cast as a male predator who abandoned his first wife and his children, then moved on to corrupt a young girl whom he would most likely abandon. The future of Valley Falls’ children, especially its vulnerable young girls, hung in the balance with *Lucifer* looming in the shadows of the community.

⁶ R.E. Van Meter, “The ‘Tolerable’ Intolerant,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 13 January 1887.

⁷ Rev. J.P. Kester, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 14 October 1887.

⁸ Editorial, *Report*, printed in *Lucifer*, 10 December 1886.

⁹ R.E. Van Meter, “‘Lucifer’ to be Squelched,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 3 March 1887.

The fear of sexual knowledge and its power to corrupt innocent youths was a growing concern in the late nineteenth century. Middle class ideas had recently come to view childhood as a distinct stage of development, and psychologists and sociologists insisted that children and youths required nurture and protection. Reformers were increasingly concerned as the visibility and commercialization of sex became readily available, especially in larger cities. Yet, sexual material also began filtering into rural areas, as evidenced by *Lucifer's* presence in Kansas and greater Midwest. Reformers warned that exposure to such illicit information could tempt children into moral ruin. Instead, the middle classes upheld values that stated children needed to be protected by remaining under the watchful eyes of their parents; the proper place of sex was in the home between married couples for procreation only.

However, as sexual materials continued to proliferate, middle class families worried that this vice would harm their children and upset the orderly transmission of their own social standing and cultural values. Any immoral behavior by their children could potentially lead to family disgrace and jeopardize their social standing. In response to these threats, reformers began their efforts to restrict the circulation of contraceptive devices, birth control information, and what they considered to be obscene literature and art. Particular attention was paid to any type of reading material of a sexual nature, as reformers feared that this knowledge would indefinitely corrupt their children and send them down a path towards immorality.¹⁰ Evidence that these concerns existed in Valley

¹⁰ Viviana A. Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Nicola Beisel, *Imperiled Innocents: Anthony Comstock and Family Reproduction in Victorian America* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997); Allison M. Parker, *Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and Pro-Censorship Activism, 1873-1933* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Anna Louise Bates, *Weeder in the Garden of the Lord: Anthony Comstock's Life and Career* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1995).

Falls was present in the controversy over children who read the article “Clough’s Circular.”¹¹

After the conviction of E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman for the free love marriage, the overall sentiment was to suppress *Lucifer* before it had a chance to further harm the good town of Valley Falls. The paper had come to earn a reputation as “the vilest and most damnable publication with which a community was ever cursed.”¹²

There were a whole host of reasons why the town now looked to suppress *Lucifer*. As the *Oskaloosa Independent* asserted, it “preaches free love, denounces Christianity, and is altogether a disgrace to the Falls.”¹³ Townspeople apparently considered vigilante violence; however, they must have decided it was an inappropriate choice. Instead, they settled on legal suppression as the best course of action. One attempt to silence the paper had been the arrest of E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman. But their imprisonment did not stop the publication; on the contrary, as Moses Harman correctly observed, its circulation increased due to the interest in the case.¹⁴ The community would therefore have to consider alternative actions to get rid of the hated publication.

The obvious target was the chief editor and proprietor of *Lucifer*, Moses Harman. As the father of Lillian and the overseer of the autonomistic marriage, he was viewed as the instigator of this scandalous event. Shortly after the ceremony, calls were made to punish the couple and Harman as well.¹⁵ His role in the marriage was not the only reason why citizens called for his arrest; it was merely the catalyst. The *New Era* stated that “the

¹¹ Moses Harman, “Is Knowledge Dangerous? The ‘Fiat Justitia’ Article,” *Lucifer*, 15 February 1889.

¹² R.E. Van Meter, “The ‘Tolerable’ Intolerant,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 13 January 1887.

¹³ F.H. Roberts, “Free Love: An Illegal ‘Contract’ Leads to a Jail Cell,” *Oskaloosa Independent*, 25 September 1886.

¹⁴ Moses Harman, “The Fight for Free Speech and Free Press,” *Lucifer*, 17 February 1888.

¹⁵ R.E. Van Meter, “Some Plain Words,” *Valley Falls New Era*, 7 October 1886.

name Harman is very suggestive of infidelity, free-love, illegal marriages, violated laws and fines and imprisonments for the same.”¹⁶ It was Harman’s role as the main proponent of free love that set the community against him. One paper declared that he was the “king bee” of the free love ring and that with his arrest the element would subside.¹⁷

Imprisonment of the editor seemed to be the town’s best solution. Many would have agreed with the editor of the *New Era* who claimed that Harman was too old and set in his ways to ever change.¹⁸ Even Harman himself admitted to this fact, writing that “we of the Lucifer band are no longer respectable.” The price of respectability was to give up free love and the open discussions of sexuality, and Harman refused to do this. He maintained that he would not conform to community standards for respectability’s sake.¹⁹ Because of his determination, community leaders had no choice but to have Harman arrested in attempt to end free love and crush *Lucifer*.²⁰ First, though, they would need to find evidence that he committed a crime since he could not be prosecuted for his role in the autonomistic marriage. The Comstock Act of 1873 seemed to provide a solution.

The Comstock Act was a result of the late nineteenth-century movement to discipline sexuality and remove all visible traces of immorality from public view. Middle class reformers in eastern urban cities focused on moral problems connected to working class immigrants, including drinking, sexual misconduct, and crime. The most appalling

¹⁶ A.W. Robinson, Editorial note, *Valley Falls New Era*, 3 October 1891.

¹⁷ Col. Groesbeck, Editorial, *Osawkee Times*, quoted in Moses Harman, “Brief Comment,” *Lucifer*, 22 October 1886.

¹⁸ A.W. Robinson, Editorial note, *Valley Falls New Era*, 3 October 1891.

¹⁹ Moses Harman, “Respectability,” *Lucifer*, 1 October 1886.

²⁰ Moses Harman, “Resume,” *Lucifer*, 23 March 1888.

feature of working class culture was public displays of sexuality represented in prostitution and pornography. Middle class sensibility and evangelical religiosity dictated that sex belonged in the home between married couples for the purpose of procreation. As commercialized sex increased in visibility on the streets of New York, so did attempts to suppress it.²¹ Conservative businessmen joined to form the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) to counter sexual immorality and protect the youth of the city.²² One of its members was Anthony Comstock whose zealous Christianity led him to become America's leading vice crusader in the nineteenth century. He strongly believed in a father-dominated household which required a woman's submission to her husband and assumption of motherhood. He saw illicit sexuality as threatening to this middle class evangelical standard and made it his life's goal to eradicate vice.²³

Instead of focusing on prostitution like most of his contemporaries, Comstock concentrated on eliminating "obscene" literature. He believed that there was "no active agent employed by Satan" that served to ruin the family more than "evil reading."²⁴ According to Comstock, obscene literature was responsible for vices such as prostitution and illicit sex. He claimed that through reading, good women started down the path to ill-fame and often told a story about a male friend who, after purchasing obscene literature, visited a brothel and contracted a venereal disease. Comstock also connected the use of contraceptives and abortion to immoral literature.²⁵ Although he had strong

²¹ Bates, 5-6; concerning evangelicalism, see Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles Over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 11, 299-300.

²² Horowitz, 299.

²³ Bates, 13-15

²⁴ Anthony Comstock, *Traps for the Young* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883. Reprinted with Introduction by Robert Bremner. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), 240.

²⁵ Comstock, 133; Bates, 53.

opinions as to what it was, Comstock never specifically defined what he meant by “obscene” literature. As Helen Horowitz has shown, evangelical reformers like Comstock did not differentiate between erotica (material intended to stimulate the reader) and educational material that was meant to inform the reader.²⁶ He considered any piece of literature that dealt with the topic of sexuality immoral.²⁷

Anthony Comstock believed it was his special mission to protect children by eradicating all forms of obscene literature. He was most concerned about the fate of America’s youths and guarding their innocence from temptations on the street. Comstock argued that obscene literature and images would incite young people to indulge in unhealthy practices, including masturbation, premarital sex, and prostitution. Even educational literature concerning human anatomy was dangerous because it provided children with knowledge of their sex organs.²⁸ Young people, excited by reading and informed by contraceptive practices, could engage in sinful sex without the fear of pregnancy.²⁹ Comstock called obscene literature “literary poison” and warned that it “not only brings moral death, but suffers the victim to live on a wretched existence in the world, corrupt, and a corrupter of those about him.”³⁰ Through his efforts to eliminate obscenity, Comstock imagined himself as a hero similar to moral champions from Bible stories, affectionately referring to himself as “Uncle Tony” when visiting with children.³¹

²⁶ Horowitz, 10-11.

²⁷ Bates, 61.

²⁸ Bates, 3-15.

²⁹ Beisel, 40-41.

³⁰ Comstock, 179.

³¹ Bates, 15.

To eradicate all traces of obscenity from America's print culture, Comstock looked to the authority of the state. Allying himself with powerful industrialists of the YMCA, Comstock was able to influence the passage of legislation to suppress the circulation of "obscene" literature in 1873.³² Appropriately named the Comstock Act, in sum it stated:

"That no obscene, lewd, or lascivious book, pamphlet, picture, paper, print or other publication of an indecent character, or any article or thing designed or intended for the prevention of contraception or the procuring of abortion...book, pamphlet, advertisement or notice of any kind giving information...by what means [contraception or abortion] may be obtained...shall be carried in the mail."

The act further declared that anyone who deposited any of these items into the mail would be guilty of a crime.³³ As to what the law meant by "obscene," the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a definition of obscenity based on a litmus test that deemed anything capable of impairing the moral development of children to be "obscene."³⁴ Comstock was appointed as the Special Agent of the United States Post Office with the power to enforce the new federal law. He helped to found the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice (NYSSV), a male-dominated vigilante organization devoted to the policing of obscenity.³⁵

With the new power to arrest violators of the federal law, Comstock targeted the usual purveyors of pornography but also expanded his efforts to include free lovers. Though free lovers viewed themselves as social reformers, anti-vice crusaders considered them dangerous promoters of promiscuity and were horrified at their free discussion of sexuality and violations of gender norms. Marriage was a form of sexual restraint and

³² Horowitz, 379-383

³³ Beisel, 39-40.

³⁴ Parker, 2.

³⁵ Bates, 8, 90, 99.

social control, and free lovers posed a direct threat in their attempts to reject the institution.³⁶ In his propaganda against obscene literature, Comstock attacked free love as a guise for pure “lust.” He considered it one of the “lowest and most debased forms of living” that “crushes self-respect, moral purity, and holy living.” No other form of literature was more offensive than free love tracts, which ruined young men and “maidens pure and chaste.” Free love, Comstock believed, would turn the home into a brothel. He denied that free lovers were social reformers, stating that science was only the “pretended foundation for their argument.” Free lovers were merely “men and women foul of speech, shameless in their lives, and corrupting in their influences.”³⁷ Part of Comstock’s work, then, would be hunting down these sex radicals and ensuring their convictions.

While most historians focus on his reform activities in New York City, Comstock did not limit his endeavor to the East Coast. In 1873, he traveled throughout the Midwest and organized the Western Society for the Suppression of Vice (WSSV), with headquarters in Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Chicago.³⁸ While working in the Midwest, Comstock met Robert W. McAfee, a man who had become interested in Comstock’s work and labored with him to organize the WSSV. It was through his anti-vice work that McAfee was appointed as the Midwestern Post Office Inspector.³⁹ As a postal inspector,

³⁶ Horowitz, 395.

³⁷ Comstock, 158-159.

³⁸ Heywood Broun and Margaret Leech, *Anthony Comstock: Roundsman of the Lord* (New York: The Literary Guild of America, 1927), 148-149.

³⁹ “From Woods McAfee Memorial,” undated, folder “Post Office Inspectors, 1872-1960+nd,” Ralph Ginzburg Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin. Though he had a long career with the WSSV and was instrumental in the conviction of many Midwestern sex radicals and purveyors of “obscene” literature, no files of his remain in existence. According to an undated letter written by his son to a researcher, these files were either “junked or burned,” see R.W. McAfee to Ralph Ginzburg, undated, folder “Post Office Inspectors, 1872-1960+nd,” Ralph Ginzburg Papers, Wisconsin

he was accorded the same powers to police the mails in the midwestern United States as Comstock himself exhibited in the eastern part of the country. McAfee had the “perfect liberty to proceed under [the Comstock] law” according to his own discretion. Like Comstock, McAfee believed he represented the highest morals values and thus worked to suppress free lovers in the Midwest.⁴⁰

It was not only Anthony Comstock and his colleagues who were concerned about policing the written word; censorship garnered approval from a wide range of Americans in the late nineteenth century. From wealthy businessmen and industrialists to middle class female reformers and white-collar professionals, the attempts to suppress obscenity through legal means gained support, largely for its promise to protect innocent youths from the potentially corrupting forces of sexuality. Censorship was especially popular among women’s religious groups and professional organizations, both of whom felt a special connection to the welfare of children. The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union in particular held an interest in safeguarding children and the home. Midwestern women of the WCTU were actively involved in political and social reforms and saw the new obscenity laws as yet another venue to enforce morality through government legislation. The women viewed “impure” reading material as a destructive force that could break down the moral dominance of the domestic sphere. The WCTU likely picked up on Comstock’s comparison of sexual literature to alcohol for the way in which it had the potential to loosen morals and excite lust. Members believed that the meanings hidden within the texts would directly influence immoral behavior in America’s youths.

Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin. Letter writer R.W. McAfee is the son of the postal inspector R.W. McAfee, of the same name.

⁴⁰ R. Frankenstein, *A Victim of Comstockism; being the history of the persecution of George E. Wilson by the agent of the Western Society for the Suppression of Vice* (Chicago: Wilson Publishing Company, 1893), 12, 15, 27.

Therefore, they wholeheartedly supported the passage of federal censorship laws and created the Department for the Suppression of Impure Literature within their organization in 1883 to further aid with efforts to eliminate obscenity.⁴¹

The citizens of Valley Falls were familiar with the Comstock Act, the regulations on the mailing of obscene literature it dictated, and the ability of the postal inspectors to prosecute any violators of these laws. Certainly *Lucifer* contained “obscene” material and it was also deposited in the mail by the publishers, thus violating the law on both accounts. However, no legal action had been taken against the publication or its editor before the free love marriage in 1886. It seemed that in Kansas, a territory far west of Comstock’s eastern focus, it was up to the community to draw the authorities’ attention to a potential law-breaker. After the free love marriage scandal upset Valley Falls, citizens reasoned that they would be able to draw upon the postal regulations to secure the arrest of Moses Harman. The initial accusations against Harman and *Lucifer*, therefore, came from the Valley Falls community, not from the postal inspectors. The editor said that he had good evidence that the Valley Falls informants included a leading clergyman, a prominent physician, a banker, and a hotel keeper.⁴² It was only after local citizens alerted the postal department to the possible dangers of the paper that federal officials took legal actions against Harman. He noted that following the initial notification, the inspectors and agents of the vice society took over and continued to pursue him throughout his career of publishing the paper.⁴³

Once the state and the postal inspection apparatus were aware of the existence of *Lucifer*, the prosecution and persecution of Moses Harman began. A deputy U.S.

⁴¹ Parker, 2-51; Horowitz, 399.

⁴² Moses Harman, “The Arrest,” *Lucifer*, 11 March 1887.

⁴³ Moses Harman, “Resume,” *Lucifer*, 23 March 1888.

Marshal arrived in Valley Falls in the late afternoon on February 23, 1887 with a warrant for the arrest of the editors and publishers of *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer*. Three members of the *Lucifer* staff were named, but Moses Harman and his son George were the only ones present in the office when the marshal arrived, as E.C. Walker was still being held in the county jail for failing to follow marriage laws. Harman and his son were charged with the crime of sending “obscene literature through the mails,” taken to Topeka, and released the following morning on a bond of five hundred dollars each.⁴⁴

Although the charges against him did not specify an exact article or issue of *Lucifer* for which he was arrested, Harman surmised what community members had identified as “obscene.” Undoubtedly the letter from Dr. W.G. Markland was one article that had been particularly offensive to the town’s moral sensibilities. Markland had used graphic language to describe the marital rape and injuries of an unfortunate wife and protest against these atrocities (see Appendix B). Harman chose not to alter the wording of the letter due to his belief in the free expression of all contributors “even though that expression may sound harsh and uncouth.” As he had explained to readers previously, censorship and the efforts of Anthony Comstock merely blocked the progress of thought, and in the case of marital rape, Harman believed readers needed to know the truth in order to see the need for reform.⁴⁵ When he published the Markland letter in the June 18th edition of *Lucifer* in 1886, it was prefaced with a warning note from the editor that “dudes, prudes, and statute moralists” should not read the letter.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Moses Harman, “Another Arrest,” *Lucifer*, 25 February 1887.

⁴⁵ Moses Harman, “‘That Line’ Again: Rights of Contributors,” *Lucifer*, 9 April 1886.

⁴⁶ W.G. Markland, “Another ‘Awful Letter,’” *Lucifer*, 18 June 1886. See Appendix B for a full text of the letter.

If Moses Harman thought that some “prudes” would take offense to this letter, he was correct. Recalling its publication, Harman admitted that a “commotion” was produced in Valley Falls.⁴⁷ Two weeks after the publication of the Markland letter, Harman began to feel the heat from upset citizens in the form of harsh criticism, not only from the religious element but also from freethinkers who had previously supported *Lucifer*.⁴⁸ Many people read it and declared that it was obscene. Concerned citizens held a consultation, and a clergyman asserted that he could use the article against *Lucifer*. Harman stated that he would take no actions and that he had no apologies or retractions for the printing of the letter. He claimed that it was the editor’s and contributor’s right, as American citizens, to “say our say in our own way.” Harman favored the use of plain and straightforward language and believed that when discussing “organs of reproduction,” it was best to use scientific terms. He contended that the real cause of obscenity was “the prohibition against the use of these scientific terms” and that just as there was a movement to teach the effects of alcohol on the human body in school to prevent intemperance, so should there be sex education to prevent abuses.⁴⁹ Though Harman mounted a defense, no charges were filed at the time. No mention of the letter or continued community outrage appeared in any local papers. Some Christian opponents had tried boycotting the business and destroying several copies of the paper, but that produced little effect.⁵⁰ Thus, previous to his daughter’s marriage, the townspeople must have thought Harman, while an infidel on religious matters, more of a nuisance than a real threat. For the most part, Harman and his paper continued to be tolerated by the

⁴⁷ Moses Harman, “Our Offense,” *Lucifer*, 1 July 1887.

⁴⁸ Moses Harman, “Republished,” *Lucifer*, 22 June 1888.

⁴⁹ Moses Harman, “Threatened with Prosecution,” *Lucifer*, 2 July 1886.

⁵⁰ Moses Harman, “Close of Volume: Retrospect,” *Lucifer*, 15 April 1887.

community until the free love marriage of his daughter. It was only after this event that citizens raked up a nine month-old copy of *Lucifer* to secure Harman's arrest.

The arrest of Moses Harman, therefore, caused great excitement in Valley Falls. One report stated that it seemed to "meet with general approval," while a press release claimed that "great satisfaction is expressed on the part of the citizens of Valley Falls in consequence of the action of the United States authorities."⁵¹ Community members were happy to see Harman punished for his role in the free love marriage, and they undoubtedly believed that this would finally stop the publication of *Lucifer* since its editor and proprietor was in jail. In an article describing the arrest, editor R.E. Van Meter of the *New Era* indicated that the paper was to be "squelched."⁵² The *Kansas City Times* took his report to be correct, stating that the "free-love abomination, the Valley Falls Lucifer, was a disgrace to the state of Kansas. Its permanent destruction will be a thing to be thankful for."⁵³ Despite the claims of local papers and the expectations of community members, *Lucifer* was not stopped. Harman and his son were released on bond the following day and returned to Valley Falls. This was quite unfortunate for townspeople who had been hoping to silence the publication. As F.H. Roberts lamented, *Lucifer's* publishers returned "in time to issue their delectable sheet."⁵⁴

Harman's arrest and time spent in jail would not stop the publication of *Lucifer*. Several weeks later, E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman paid their court costs and were released from prison in order to help fight these new charges. Both were now needed to

⁵¹ S.O. Groesbeck, editorial note, *Oskaloosa Register*, 4 March 1887 and "Free Lovers Arrested," *Topeka Daily Capital*, 24 February 1887.

⁵² R.E. Van Meter, "'Lucifer' to be Squelched," *Valley Falls New Era*, 3 March 1887.

⁵³ *K.C. Times*, quoted in Moses Harman, "Radical and Illiberal," *Lucifer*, 25 February 1887.

⁵⁴ F.H. Roberts, Editorial note, *Oskaloosa Independent*, 5 March 1887.

work on the production of the paper if it were to survive.⁵⁵ Instead of suppressing *Lucifer*, the arrest of Moses Harman only served to strengthen his cause and the support he received from readers. The sensation of the arrests, both of the free love couple and the editor, functioned to develop a national constituency for *Lucifer*.⁵⁶ One reader noted that in his town of Elma, Iowa the number of subscribers quadrupled after the arrest of Moses Harman and that Harman's continued persecution was only helping the paper in its efforts to expand.⁵⁷ The growing subscription list reportedly numbered over two thousand in 1887, and in April 1888, the *Topeka Capital* stated that *Lucifer* circulated "somewhat extensively throughout this and adjoining states, [thus] a widespread interest has been awakened in the case."⁵⁸ It must have seemed to the citizens of Valley Falls and to the authorities that a hardened resolve was needed in order to punish the editor and finally cease the publication.

The year 1887 marked the beginning of Moses Harman's battles with the courts and time spent in Kansas prisons as postal authorities, now alerted to the potential danger he posed to public morality, looked to silence the aging editor and suppress the publication of *Lucifer*. At his first hearing in October 1887, Robert McAfee himself appeared before the grand jury in the Leavenworth, Kansas court as the complaining witness. He testified to the paper's obscenity and demanded that Harman be indicted for depositing it in the mail.⁵⁹ That the head of the WSSV and chief postal inspector for the Midwestern region made a personal appearance to see Harman prosecuted spoke to the

⁵⁵ E.C. Walker and Lillian Harman, "Past and Present," *Lucifer*, 8 April 1887.

⁵⁶ Hal D. Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Lawrence, KS: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), 99.

⁵⁷ J.A. Huffman, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 19 August 1887.

⁵⁸ George Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 25 February 1887; *Topeka Capital*, quoted in "Church People vs. *Lucifer*," *Lucifer*, 20 April 1888.

⁵⁹ Moses Harman, "Plaintiff and Defendant," *Lucifer*, 6 April 1888.

seriousness with which the authorities were treating the case. McAfee apparently was interested in seeing Harman punished and *Lucifer* prohibited from the mail, both of which were a means to end the threat of free love in the Midwest. Moses Harman believed this to be the case, claiming that an “edict had gone forth” from Anthony Comstock and his chief western agent Robert McAfee “that Lucifer must be suppressed, and its publisher placed behind prison bars.”⁶⁰ The grand jury agreed with McAfee’s declaration that *Lucifer* was “obscene, lewd, and lascivious” and motioned for indictment.⁶¹

In April of 1888, the initial indictment was quashed due to a technicality. Harman’s defense attorneys, G.C. Clemens and David Overmyer, argued that the Constitution stated that the offenders must be told by the grand jury what material was offensive. They pointed out that the defendants were only given the title of the paper and the date that it was mailed.⁶² The court agreed, stating that objectionable matter must be described in some way “without giving offense to the court, or defiling its records with scandalous and indecent matter.” The date of the paper and title of the article(s) would be sufficient.⁶³ Shortly thereafter Harman was re-indicted when the prosecution identified four specific articles that it claimed were “obscene”: the Markland letter; “Mrs. Whitehead to Elmina,” a letter discussing the merits of contraception published on June, 25, 1886; “Family Secrets,” a satirical story about infidelity published on July 25, 1886;

⁶⁰ Moses Harman, “The Prosecution,” *Lucifer*, 14 December 1888.

⁶¹ E.C. Walker, “Indictments by Wholesale,” *Lucifer*, 4 November 1887. E.C. Walker and George Harman, as assistant editors and publishers of *Lucifer*, were also indicted, but charges against them were later dropped after Moses Harman was convicted in 1890, see Lois Waisbrooker, “A Summary of Moses Harman’s Case,” *Lucifer*, 15 July 1892. It appeared that Moses Harman, as chief editor and proprietor of *Lucifer*, was the principle target. Additionally, by this time, George Harman had left the paper to pursue his own editorial career and E.C. Walker had moved to Iowa. Thus, authorities were concerned about the remaining threat symbolized by Moses Harman and focused their efforts on his prosecution.

⁶² Special Correspondent, “Quashed!” *Lucifer*, April 20, 1888.

⁶³ *United States v. Harmon et al.* 34 F. 872 (Kan, 1888). Harman’s name was misspelled in this issue of the *Federal Reporter*.

and “Comments on Chavannes’ Article,” which discussed contraceptives and was published on January 14, 1887.⁶⁴

The editors of *Lucifer* believed the charges of obscenity were merely conjured up to suppress the publication. They had printed the articles to show the need for reform and saw their efforts as benevolent to society much in the way that the Valley Falls Christians imagined their own texts to be. As evidence that *Lucifer’s* articles were similar to Christian works, E.C. Walker offered R.E. Van Meter, a leading accuser, ten dollars to print chosen selections from the Bible in the *New Era*. His point was that the Bible, upheld as the most holy scripture, contained language similar to the Markland letter. Walker wanted to show the citizens of Valley Falls that if they condemned *Lucifer* as “obscene,” they would also have to consider the Bible as “obscene.”⁶⁵ Van Meter, of course, refused this offer. Walker, in turn, interpreted this refusal as Van Meter’s confession that publishing Bible verses would be indictable under the Comstock Act and that the Bible, a book sent through the mail everyday, was “vile and obscene within the meaning of the statute which [Van Meter] boasts will soon halt us in our ‘mad career’.”⁶⁶

Similarly, Moses Harman decided to reprint the Markland letter, the foremost of the offending articles, along side the thirty-eighth book of Genesis to show that the language was similar in that both referenced stories of sexual encounters. Whereas the Markland letter used language such as “penis,” Harman undoubtedly thought the selection from Genesis which referenced Onan spilling his seed was just as “obscene.” Through this juxtaposition, he wanted to show persecutors that “if plain talk on sexual subjects is obscene and criminal then the charge could be made with at least equal truth

⁶⁴ Moses Harman, “Re-indicted,” *Lucifer*, April 27, 1888.

⁶⁵ E.C. Walker, “Flashes,” *Lucifer*, 4 November 1887.

⁶⁶ E.C. Walker, “A ‘Mad Career’,” *Lucifer*, 23 December 1887.

against their own sacred book.” He also wanted to show that while Genesis appeared to contain the same “obscene” language that the Markland letter contained, Genesis, like the Markland letter, was not written with the intentions of being lewd or immoral, but was also written with a higher purpose.⁶⁷ He believed that this comparison would show readers that local authorities unfairly discriminated against *Lucifer* and invoked the Comstock laws with the expressed intention of suppressing the publication.⁶⁸ After this column appeared in *Lucifer*, there were no reports of an arrest or community dissent for the reprinting of the Markland letter when it was put along side Genesis. It seemed then, as he conjectured, that the determination of “obscene” was quite arbitrary, as the postal censors chose when and if they would label something as “obscene.”

Harman sought to further show inconsistencies with the Comstock Act when he republished the letter from Celia B. Whitehead (See Appendix C). Harman told readers he could not understand why it was deemed “obscene” as Whitehead argued in favor of the Comstock objective of preventing contraceptives from being used and mailed. He had published her letter, though it did not agree with his principles, based on his platform of free discussion. He also noted that she was a Christian and reform writer who shared the same interests as those Christians who were persecuting him.⁶⁹ Whitehead herself could not understand what was “obscene” about her letter since she was in line with the dominant moral viewpoint on the dangers of contraception.⁷⁰ Harman’s arrest for printing a letter in support of Comstock’s moral values suggested that the authorities were looking for any reason to suppress the paper.

⁶⁷ Moses Harman, “Lucifer and Genesis,” *Lucifer*, 22 June 1888.

⁶⁸ Moses Harman, “Republished,” *Lucifer*, 22 June 1888.

⁶⁹ Moses Harman, “Second Indictment Article,” *Lucifer*, 20 July 1888.

⁷⁰ Celia B. Whitehead, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 3 August 1888. See Appendix C for a full text of the letter.

The decisions of the court fell in line with the popular view that *Lucifer* contained “obscene” language. Moses Harman appealed his indictment in 1889, hoping to convince the judge that the offending articles were published for reform purposes. However, Justice Foster of the U.S. District Court of Kansas was of the opinion that although similar language was used in medical journals, it was not proper to discuss such subjects in a “family newspaper.” He did not believe that the writers of the Markland letter and the Whitehead article were in “good faith attacking some great, flagrant wrong.” Justice Foster upheld the obscenity laws, maintaining they were founded on “reason and common sense.” They prevented the circulation of obscenity and lewdness, which, in his opinion, had the potential to “corrupt the morals of the people, and especially the young, who are more susceptible to such influences.”⁷¹

With his trial pending, Harman meanwhile continued to publish sensational letters to show the need for sexual reform. In February 1890, he printed a letter from another physician who testified to the truths of marital abuses (see Appendix D). Dr. Richard V. O’Neill of New York wrote in to *Lucifer* to comment on the Markland letter, maintaining that the atrocities it detailed were, in fact, common. O’Neill related the case of “Mrs. M.” of New York City who died because of injuries “caused by the brutal sexual connection of her husband” after she had just undergone a delicate operation. O’Neill described her husband as a “big drunken beast” who was “morally guilty of her murder” but not legally culpable. He stated that “thousands of women every year” were killed and many more made ill in this fashion. O’Neill detailed more instances of sexual deviance among men, such as oral sex and bestiality. He also advised readers to consult medical

⁷¹ *United States v. Harman*. 38 F. 827 (Kan, 1889).

journals for advice on contraceptives.⁷² As a defense for the publication of the O’Neill letter, Harman claimed that “the evil must be laid bare in all its native hideousness.” He wanted to show that the Markland letter did not detail a unique instance but showed real and common abuses, thus proving his point that reforms were needed.⁷³

The community of Valley Falls, however, viewed the O’Neill letter much in the same way that they had viewed the Markland letter—as an offense to common decency and a danger to public morality. A.W. Robinson of the *New Era* declared that Harman was “long depraved” and claimed that he published the article with the intention to injure readers. He stated that Harman would receive the “public condemnation of the good citizens of Valley Falls” and expressed a desire to see him behind bars.⁷⁴ After outraging the community once again, Harman was arrested on February 18, 1890. The *Winchester Herald* was happy to report that he was bound over to the district court “on the charge of publishing a vile and indescribably filthy article in his paper.”⁷⁵ Harman was subsequently let out on bond.⁷⁶

Three years after his first arrest in 1887, Harman finally went to trial. His case came before the U.S. District Court for the state of Kansas on April 16 and 17, 1890. The prosecution called witnesses who testified that they had received the Markland letter and Whitehead article through the mail in *Lucifer*, and it also made an attempt to show how these articles were obscene. Harman’s attorney was unable to counter these charges.⁷⁷

The judge stated that the effects of Harman’s teachings were bad and that Harman could

⁷² Richard V. O’Neill, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 14 February 1890. See Appendix D for a full text of the letter.

⁷³ Moses Harman, “Horror Upon Horror,” *Lucifer*, 14 February 1890.

⁷⁴ A.W. Robinson, editorial, *Valley Falls New Era*, printed in *Lucifer*, 7 March 1890.

⁷⁵ Editorial note, *Winchester Herald*, 28 February 1890.

⁷⁶ Moses Harman, “Again Arrested,” *Lucifer*, 21 February 1890. Harman answered to these charges after being released from his first term of imprisonment for the Markland letter.

⁷⁷ Moses Harman, “Topeka Notes,” *Lucifer*, 18 April 1890.

not “plead martyrship to decency for indecency.” He believed Harman was trying to undermine the foundation of all morality by destroying marriage.⁷⁸ Harman was found guilty of mailing the Markland letter and Whitehead article and was sentenced to pay a fine of three hundred dollars and serve five years in prison at the Kansas penitentiary. In the end, he only served a few months due to an error in the proceedings.⁷⁹ As to the charges against E.C. Walker and George Harman, their cases were dropped once Moses Harman had been convicted.⁸⁰ Shortly after the trial, Walker moved to Iowa while George Harman was no longer involved in *Lucifer*, having accepted a position as an editor for the *Farmer’s Vindicator*, a Populist paper that avoided the radical journalism of his father.⁸¹ It appeared that the community was most concerned with Moses Harman and considered him the real threat because he persisted in advocating unpopular ideas about sex reform and defying the postal laws regarding obscenity. Employing the Comstock Act, it seemed as though they had been successful in sending him to prison.

By imprisoning Moses Harman, the community thus hoped to silence him. He was met with strict rules while in prison; he was forbidden to have any freethought or liberal papers and was only allowed “popular” magazines which were screened by the chaplain. Also, his friends and family members were restricted to one visit every three months.⁸² It was clear that prison life was meant to stifle Harman’s reform spirit, as the community undoubtedly hoped that free love and any challenge to traditional marriage

⁷⁸ Moses Harman, “Lucifer and the Obscenity Laws,” in Moses Harman, ed. *The PERSECUTION and the appreciation. Brief account of the trials and imprisonment of Moses Harman, because of his advocacy of the freedom of women from sexual enslavement and of the right of children to be born well...* (Chicago: By the Author, 1907), 35-41.

⁷⁹ Moses Harman, “Convicted,” *Lucifer*, 18 April 1890; Moses Harman, “Sentenced,” *Lucifer*, 2 May 1890; William Lemore West, “The Moses Harman Story,” *The Kansas Historical Quarterly* 37 (1971): 59.

⁸⁰ Lois Waisbrooker, “A Summary of Moses Harman’s Case,” *Lucifer*, 15 July 1892.

⁸¹ James C. Malin, *A Concern About Humanity: Notes on Reform, 1872-1912, At the National and Kansas Levels of Thought* (Lawrence, Kansas: By the Author, 1964), 107-112.

⁸² Clarence L. Swartz, “The Situation,” *Lucifer*, 2 May 1890.

would subside with the ring leader behind bars. *Lucifer*, however, continued, as Harman appointed a temporary editor, Clarence Swartz, to publish the paper until his release on August 30, 1890.⁸³ Yet, after he was released he was not free, as he still had to answer to other obscenity charges.

The Valley Falls community continued to prosecute Moses Harman for violating sexual morals and looked to see him imprisoned for mailing the O'Neill letter. The citizens would get their wish when Harman again came to trial in January 1891. In Justice Phillips' opinion, the O'Neill letter was obscene. The subjects discussed were "too coarse and indecent" as well as "filthy in thought and impure." Because of Dr. O'Neill's "bluntness of speech and a baldness of immodesty of expression" in discussing "instances of bestiality and human depravity," the letter lost "all claim to respectability." The judge believed it would have an overall bad effect on society as it was a "shock to the common sense of decency and modesty." The consensus of the people, he maintained, was that the letter would be "hurtful to public morals." Because the government had a responsibility to promote public welfare in its administration of the postal system, such "indecent literature" should not be permitted to be mailed. Harman was found guilty of violating the postal laws.⁸⁴ After a failed appeal, he spent eight months in prison and was released in February 1893.⁸⁵

Authorities, concerned that Harman was again free but not yet properly punished for his publication of the Markland letter, sought out a conclusion for this matter. The

⁸³ Moses Harman, "Future Management," *Lucifer*, 25 April 1890; Moses Harman, "Home Again," *Lucifer*, 29 August 1890. This issue was dated 29 August, but was actually published and mailed on 1 September 1890 so that Harman's homecoming could be announced.

⁸⁴ *United States v. Harmon*, 45 F. 414 (Kan, 1891). Harman's name was misspelled in this issue of the *Federal Reporter*.

⁸⁵ Moses Harman, "An Unexpected Turn," *Lucifer*, 24 June 1892; Moses Harman, "Change of Base—Another Respite," *Lucifer*, 24 February 1893.

district attorney filed a motion to resentence him and Harman again appeared before the District Court in the spring of 1895. Though his attorney argued that he had already served prison time for this crime and was therefore not subject to further punishment, the judge did not agree. The error, Justice Phillips concluded, was not with the trial itself but with the sentence, which omitted the required clause of imprisonment “at hard labor” for this particular crime. The case would thus resume at the point before the error took place, which was after the verdict of guilty had been read. The judge resented Harman to prison at hard labor, but modified the time from five years to one year “out of regard for the infirmity of the defendant.” Yet the judge also hoped that Harman “may not persist in opposing his individual opinion as to what the law ought to be against what the courts declare it to be, and thereby invite further trouble.”⁸⁶ This was a strict warning to Harman not to continue to violate obscenity laws by publishing sexually explicit material in *Lucifer*. He was taken to prison on June 2, 1895 and released on April 4, 1896.⁸⁷

The community’s original goal in initiating prosecution against Moses Harman was to punish Harman for his role in the free love marriage, suppress the publication of *Lucifer*, and end the threat of free love. While succeeding in imprisoning the aging editor in three instances over nine years, they failed to stop his paper and efforts to spread the ideas of free love. Local correspondents Clarence L. Swartz, Abner Pope, Lillie White, and Lois Waisbrooker each served as assistant editor at some point during Harman’s various prison terms, and the paper continued on a regular basis.⁸⁸ *Lucifer* was, however, removed from Valley Falls. In order to better oversee the publication of the paper while

⁸⁶ *United States v. Harman*, 68 F. 472 (Kan, 1895).

⁸⁷ West, 61. See West, 54-61, for a full account of Harman’s court proceedings and imprisonments associated with his publication of the Markland letter.

⁸⁸ West, 44.

dealing with the necessities of his court battles, Harman moved his residence and the *Lucifer* office to the capital of Topeka in 1890.⁸⁹ The *New Era* expressed great satisfaction concerning the removal, exclaiming “Thank the Lord, we are rid of it.”⁹⁰ Though *Lucifer* had left Valley Falls, it still maintained a presence in Kansas.

Postal authorities did not limit their prosecution to Moses Harman; after his arrest they targeted several of *Lucifer*'s main contributors. Both Elmina Slenker, a sex reform writer, and Lois Waisbrooker, a novelist and the editor of her own paper, faced prosecution for mailing “obscene” literature. Perhaps concerned officials were not satisfied with Harman's arrest and looked to make an example out of more free lovers, or possibly they reasoned if contributors were arrested that others would fear writing in to the publication. In any event, the prosecution of both women differed from that of Harman; though Comstock and his allies worked up cases against them, the charges were eventually dismissed.

Elmina Slenker had long been a sex radical, advocating reform through her own personal correspondence and also in various publications including *Lucifer*. Slenker became well-known in the Kansas free love network in addition to her East Coast contemporaries. Writing from her home in Virginia, she conducted a mail order service for sex radical literature.⁹¹ Vice society official Robert McAfee began working up a case against her when he first encountered her pamphlets while traveling through Indiana, then sought assistance from the Virginia postal inspector W.H. Barclay.⁹² Both men sent decoy letters to Slenker, requesting more information on her sex reform topics, as she

⁸⁹ Moses Harman, “Removal,” *Lucifer*, 25 September 1890.

⁹⁰ A.W. Robinson, editorial, *Valley Falls New Era*, 4 October 1890.

⁹¹ “One ‘Whom Love of God Hath Blessed’,” *Winstead (Kansas) Press*, printed in the *Kansas Liberal*, October 1881 and E.C. Walker, “Mrs. Slenker's Works and Worthiness,” *Lucifer*, 20 May 1887.

⁹² “Defiant Mrs. Slenker,” *New York Times*, 30 April 1887; Sears, 216.

was a prominent promoter of the “Diana method” of continence and distributor of the pamphlet *Diana* which explained to readers how to practice sexual expression without fears of conception. Slenker replied to the letters and provided the postal inspectors with evidence they believed to be incriminating.⁹³ The *New York Times* reported on her arrest in April 1887, remarking that she had a long reputation for her “pernicious writings” and had been carrying on “a wide ‘free love’ correspondence of the vilest character.” Many obscene letters and publications were discovered at her residence, as the *Times* asserted that “her belief in free love has doubtless developed into a mania which has rendered her unguarded in her frequent violations of the postal laws.”⁹⁴ Certainly the authorities had more than enough evidence with which to charge Slenker.

Many spoke out against Slenker and her attempts to spread the discussion of sex reform. The *New Era* relished in the fact that “one of Lucifer’s vile contributors” had been arrested for the “dirty work” she had been doing for the paper.⁹⁵ One woman wrote to Slenker after receiving a copy of *Diana*, stating she had no use for the free love doctrine and would “willingly spend my last breath and my last cent securing the conviction and imprisonment of the teachers and senders of such infamous creed.”⁹⁶ Another critic sent Slenker a scathing letter after reading about her in “one of the most diabolical papers,” presumably *Lucifer*. He told her that she was “one of the most faithful agents the devil ever had” and that she plied her trade so that “all manner of licentiousness and fornication appear as principles of truth, and corruption and rottenness

⁹³ E.C. Walker, “Manufacturing Crime,” *Lucifer*, 2 December 1887; Henry Parkhurst, “Why I Wrote ‘Diana,’” undated, Ralph Ginzburg Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin; Sears, 217.

⁹⁴ “Violating Postal Laws: A Woman Arrested for Mailing Obscene Matter,” *New York Times*, 29 April 1887.

⁹⁵ R.E. Van Meter, Editorial, *Valley Falls New Era*, printed in *Lucifer*, 20 May 1887.

⁹⁶ Mrs. E.M.E., “Letter to Elmina Slenker,” quoted in Elmina Slenker, “Free-Love,” *Lucifer*, 29 July 1887.

lay concealed beneath a flowery surface.” As to her character, the writer asserted that “your brain is a mental slop bucket and your mouth a cesspool of filth.” He lamented the fact that her doctrines had corrupted so many victims.⁹⁷ It was opinions such as these that led to Slenker’s arrest. Shortly thereafter, authorities remanded her to a local jail where she waited six months for an appearance in the district court.⁹⁸ At her trial, the jury agreed that her publications were obscene and returned a guilty verdict, but the judge dismissed the case on the grounds that Slenker was ignorant of the obscene nature of her writings and did not “knowingly” deposit lewd material in the mail.⁹⁹

McAfee was also responsible for the arrest of Lois Waisbrooker. She had been a regular contributor to *Lucifer* during the 1880s as well as a life-long promoter of women’s emancipation and free love, making her a prime target for postal authorities. While living in Topeka in the 1890s, Waisbrooker helped to edit *Lucifer* when Harman served a term in prison in 1892 and 1893. She perhaps earned the wrath of the postal authorities when she printed an excerpt from the Department of Agriculture’s *Special Report on the Diseases of the Horse*, which contained the word “penis” and other anatomical descriptions, beside a passage from the Markland letter containing similar language in *Lucifer*. Her aim was to show that the postal authorities drew upon the Comstock Act arbitrarily, allowing some materials through the mail while banning other literature that did not agree with their own moral tastes. The postmaster at Topeka was

⁹⁷ Herman Westgrove, Jr. to Elmina Slenker, 10 February 1894, Theodore Schroeder Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois.

⁹⁸ Sears, 218.

⁹⁹ *U.S. v. Slenker*, 32 F 691 (Vir 1887).

alerted to the article by J.W. Ady, the attorney who prosecuted Moses Harman, and he barred what came to be known as the “horse penis” issue of *Lucifer* from the mails.¹⁰⁰

After leaving the editorship of *Lucifer*, Waisbrooker published her own free love journal titled *Foundation Principles* from 1893 to 1894. Its goals were “to purify and improve mankind’s sexual manners and customs—especially for the sake of much abused womanhood.”¹⁰¹ In 1894, Waisbrooker printed a letter from a lawyer asking for advice about his unhappy marriage and affair with another woman. It was her written opinion that he should divorce his wife and marry the other woman. Waisbrooker was subsequently arrested and charged with mailing “obscene” literature by McAfee.¹⁰² What was most objectionable was likely her suggestion of divorce. Comstock himself thought marriage was “most sacred” but that obscene literature and the lust it created could break these bonds.¹⁰³ Thus, any promotion of divorce by free lovers was a crime in the eyes of the postal authorities.

The principle reasoning for Waisbrooker’s arrest was to silence the free love reforms found in *Foundation Principles*. At her indictment, the court charged that the lawyer’s letter “contained language ‘so vile, obscene,’ etc., ‘that it could not be spread upon the court records’.”¹⁰⁴ When Waisbrooker’s case came to trial in 1896, it was eventually dismissed. The court acknowledged that she had since ceased the publication of her paper, “did not intend to violate any law,” and that “the defendant is more than seventy years of age, a cripple and in feeble health.”¹⁰⁵ It seems that the authorities were

¹⁰⁰ Joanne E. Passet, *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women’s Equality* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 114-121; Sears, 229-231.

¹⁰¹ “Bleeding Kansas,” reprinted from *Dr. Foote’s Health Monthly* in *Lucifer*, 7 September 1894.

¹⁰² Malin, 121.

¹⁰³ Comstock, 14, 133.

¹⁰⁴ Moses Harman, “Retrospect,” *Lucifer*, 28 December 1894.

¹⁰⁵ Malin, 130-131.

more interested in the suppression of her free love publication than the punishment of the elderly editor. As stated in a letter to the prosecuting attorney, the postal department had “no desire to be severe with her.” Its only concern was that “she be made to cease her filthy publications for all time to come.”¹⁰⁶

Curiously, Elmina Slenker and Lois Waisbrooker did not receive the same treatment from the state as Moses Harman when they were arrested for violating the Comstock Act. In all three of these cases, vice society agent Robert W. McAfee was the leading postal inspector and exhibited an almost personal vendetta against the free lovers as he worked to secure their arrests and convictions. He conducted surveillance on their writing and publishing activities, constructed elaborate decoys in which to trap them, and appeared in court for their trials. Yet the outcomes differed between Harman and the two women. In the case of Slenker, she was arrested for mailing private matter in sealed envelopes and testified in court that she only sent what was requested of her.¹⁰⁷ The Virginia district court judge was more lenient in her case, as he was willing to consider that the kindly married woman was in fact unaware that her writings on the Diana method might be considered lewd.¹⁰⁸ In Waisbrooker’s situation, the authorities were most concerned that she stopped publishing her free love journal. When her case came to trial, she had ceased the publication, and this information along with the fact that she was in failing health motivated the judge to dismiss her case.¹⁰⁹

Moses Harman’s case, however, was different. He published a widely circulated journal which contained sexually explicit material, his blatant objections to the postal

¹⁰⁶ Ben. S. Henderson to W.C. Perry, 1 January 1896, folder “Waisbrooker, Lois,” Ralph Ginzburg Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

¹⁰⁷ Sears, 217-218.

¹⁰⁸ *U.S. v. Slenker*, 32 F 691 (Vir 1887).

¹⁰⁹ Malin, 130-131.

laws, and admitted defiance of them. Harman had no intention of ceasing his publication and declared that he would continue publishing materials of a sexual nature despite what the laws allowed, even arguing that his paper was beneficial to the sexual education of young people. He further intended to mount support across the country to oppose Comstock, the postal department, and, it seemed, the state itself. Harman was a threat not only to the social and sexual order of his Kansas community but now also to the government on a more national level. Such a dangerous man could only have been dealt with in the most severe manner; thus, Harman, unlike the female free lovers, was punished to the full extent of the law.

In the prosecution of free lovers connected to the *Lucifer* publication, the Kansas community was most interested in preventing the spread of free love and suppressing the paper that promoted disreputable reforms concerning marriage, sexuality, and gender. Moses Harman was targeted as the instigator of free love because of his approval and promotion of his daughter's free love marriage to a man townspeople considered to be a wife-abandoner and adulterer. He had proven to be a poor example as a father, failing to protect his daughter; rather, the popular opinion was that Harman tainted his daughter with his vile teachings, causing her to be "misguided" in matters of sexual propriety. The community further blamed Harman for corrupting local school children by providing them with access to explicit sexual language and contraceptive methods. This information was seen to be damaging to young minds and youthful morality. Citizens quickly decided upon the suppression of *Lucifer* as the solution to ridding the community of the free love threat and protecting their children from sexual temptations. After concerned individuals alerted postal authorities to *Lucifer's* threat, Harman spent several

years fighting court battles and charges that his paper was obscene. Through his repeated convictions and prison sentences, it was clear that the manner in which *Lucifer* discussed sexual topics and promoted sexual reform was unacceptable to public tastes and the moral standards of the postal censorship authorities.

Though Harman did not stop publishing *Lucifer* after repeated arrests and prison sentences, communal persecution eventually drove him from the state of Kansas. In 1896, he moved his residence and the *Lucifer* office to Chicago. He reasoned that this more urban, central location would be favorable to the further promotion and distribution of the paper.¹¹⁰ Though he did not admit it, Harman must have believed that leaving Kansas would end the persecutions against him and that he would be more accepted in a diverse and urban city like Chicago. After all, it was at the direction of local citizens that he was persecuted. Harman, however, continued his work in sex reform. His departure did not represent a capitulation to popular opinion or the moral disciplining of the postal authorities. The free love threat in Kansas seemed to be over, but Harman was not finished in his career. Once in Chicago, *Lucifer* proved to maintain its connection to free love correspondents and continued to promote sex reform, although its focus shifted from the emancipation of women to the new science of eugenics.

¹¹⁰ Moses Harman, "Removal," *Lucifer*, 17 April 1896; Moses Harman, "Change of Base," *Lucifer*, 17 April 1896.

CHAPTER 6

EUGENICS AND “FREEDOM IN MOTHERHOOD”

Be mine the song of Maternity!
Away with ignoble wars, petty strifes and commercial contentions!
Make room for the Mother!
Ignored and neglected and taken for granted, how long!
Her age-long wrongs shall be righted,
Her place shall at last be established in the minds of men and of children.
I wage war for the mother of men!
I sing paeans of praise to the mother!
I greet her, I laud her, I love her!
Behold her—the Life-Giver!
—Lillian Browne-Thayer, “A Song of Maternity,” *American Journal of Eugenics*,
August 1907.

IN 1903, *LUCIFER* CORRESPONDENT ROBERT B. KERR began a heated discussion with several female contributors when he compared women to domesticated animals, indicating that they could choose mates in order to breed the best quality of children. “If women were free, and well informed about heredity,” he argued, “they would very likely become as careful in the choice of a father as breeders and gardeners now are.”¹ Furthermore, Kerr suggested that women abandon any idea of monogamy in favor of what sex radicals called “variety.” No expert breeder of dogs, horses, sheep, or cattle, he explained, “would ever dream of breeding on monogamous principles.” The laws of heredity were the same for animals as they were for humans, he pointed out. Therefore, the same principles concerning reproduction could be applied. In order to obtain the highest quality specimen, one needed to carefully select fathers and reject those who did not fit superior standards. Monogamy, he asserted, allowed all men to become fathers, regardless of their fitness. If women were to pick the fathers of their children and make

¹ R.B. Kerr, “Various Reflections,” *Lucifer*, 8 January 1903.

sure to choose different fathers for their children, the human race would be much improved. Kerr believed that both men and women could adopt these scientific principles. It would not be a hardship for men to have children by several women, as “all men are varietists by instinct.” Women, too, could adapt to new sexual practices, and he even claimed that “the sex movement has revealed the fact that a great many women are as fond of variety as any man.”²

Kerr had a particular interest in the betterment of humanity. A Scottish attorney by trade, he became a socialist and started exploring the Malthusian ideas regarding family limitation. After completing his education, he traveled to the United States to practice law, where in 1891 he married Dora Forster, author of the serial articles “Sex Radicalism” that appeared in *Lucifer* in 1904, later moving to Canada to continue his career. While maintaining a practice first in the United States and then in Canada, Kerr became a regular correspondent to *Lucifer*, figuring prominently in its pages during the early 1900s. He was one of the paper’s most outspoken exponents on heredity, eugenics, and variety, contributing almost weekly to the publication. Kerr maintained connections to his home country while abroad, staying involved with the British Malthusian League and later returning in the 1920s to edit their monthly journal. In his work concerning the topics of poverty and overpopulation, he supported the efforts of Margaret Sanger, who, in turn, helped raise funds for his struggling publication in Britain.³ Given his ideas and

² R.B. Kerr, “Monogamy and Heredity,” *Lucifer*, 9 April 1903.

³ For Kerr’s contributions to *Lucifer*, see issues of the paper from 1896-1907. For biographical data, see *The Margaret Sanger Papers Electronic Edition: Margaret Sanger and The Woman Rebel, 1914-1916*, eds. Esther Katz, Cathy Moran Hajo and Peter Engelman (Columbia, S.C.: Model Editions Partnership, 1999), On the Web at <http://mep.blackmesatech.com/mep/> [Accessed 8 July 2012];. Marriage information provided by FamilySearch.org, "New York, Marriages, 1686-1980," index, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/F63N-HC5> : accessed 12 Jun 2013), Robert Bird Kerr and Dora Forster, 21 Aug 1895; "Canada Census, 1901," index, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/KHVL-1W7> : accessed 12 Jun 2013), Robert B. Kerr, 1901.

interest in eugenics, it was not surprising that he earned a favorable reputation among most *Lucifer* contributors while at the same time garnering the wrath of several female contributors who believed he took issues regarding reproduction too callously.

Lucifer's female correspondents disagreed with Kerr's perspective on "variety." They felt degraded by being compared to animals and insisted that their sexuality was not merely about reproducing. Long time contributor Lizzie Holmes stated that "the human race are not cattle and cannot be managed in the same way."⁴ She resented the comparison Kerr made between breeding animals and women's reproductive decisions. "A woman, a human mother," she argued, "cannot be compared to a horse, a cow or a sheep."⁵ Likewise, her sister Lillie D. White, who once edited *Lucifer* while Moses Harman was in prison, indicated that women's sexuality was more than just "breeding prize animals." A woman's choice for a husband, she asserted, should be based on love and happiness, not on the question of whether the two would produce a superior child.⁶ Yet, Kerr and others, including the venerated editor himself, continued to insist on the careful selection of fathers by potential mothers in order to improve the human race.

The argument over variety and whether to treat human reproduction as scientific breeding represented the shift *Lucifer* experienced in its later years. No longer was it concerned with the emancipation of woman for her own sake. Editor Moses Harman and contributors such as R.B. Kerr shifted the discussion to "Motherhood in Freedom" and the advancement of the human race through the principles of eugenics, as understood by the paper's contributors. Those writing for the paper now depicted women as mothers

⁴ May Huntley, "From an 'Old Writer' for Lucifer," *Lucifer*, 18 August 1904. May Huntley was a pseudonym used by Lizzie Holmes, according to Joanne E. Passet in *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women's Equality* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 154.

⁵ Lizzie M. Holmes, "A Free Woman's Duties," *Lucifer*, 14 May 1903.

⁶ Lillie D. White, "Breeding Prize Animals," *Lucifer*, 6 August 1903.

who had the responsibility of furthering human advancement by birthing superior children rather than individuals deserving of equal rights. Woman, Harman claimed, was the “architect and builder of the race” who must be able to secure the best possible conditions in which to have a child. It was the future of the human race—the children—who became the new focus for *Lucifer* in the twentieth century. The greatest right of all, Harman asserted, was “to be born well—if born at all.” According to his new philosophy regarding motherhood, women had full responsibility for choosing a suitable father and making sure her children were born into the best conditions. Woman became, in Harman’s view, the “race-builder.”⁷

In its final years, *Lucifer* focused on the questions of motherhood and eugenics and how both could serve to better humanity. The paper attempted to take on a more scientific tone, and contributors more frequently discussed how to improve the human race using the principles of eugenics, that is, having women select potential mates based on their fitness for fatherhood and insuring the best maternal conditions possible. Rather than concentrating on freeing women from marital control founded on an equal rights argument, *Lucifer* began advocating women’s freedom based on the fact that women became mothers. By allowing women to choose when and if they would become mothers, contributors maintained that women would give birth to better babies and would thus improve the human race. Women should be emancipated, then, not for their own sake but for the sake of the race.

The shift from a theme of women’s emancipation to eugenics and “freedom in motherhood” also served to reinscribe male hegemony on sex radicalism. In the later years, *Lucifer*’s discussion was more about the advancement of the human race than

⁷ Moses Harman, “Motherhood in Freedom,” *Our New Humanity* 2, no. 1 (September 1896): 75-92.

about women's individual rights. Women could not escape their sexual functions to become individuals; rather, contributors ultimately portrayed them as mothers. In *Lucifer's* enlightened vision for the future, women were still bound to the role of motherhood. Men, on the other hand, were not compelled to become fathers. In fact, as Kerr argued, many men were not suitable for fatherhood; only a select few would make the cut. Kerr imagined that variety should replace monogamy, allowing for men to have multiple sexual partners. There were several voices of dissent, but into the twentieth century *Lucifer's* pages were dominated by male contributors and supporters of "motherhood in freedom."

Ultimately, the new focus on eugenics served to satisfy freethinking men's original goal of bringing individual freedom. Harman and other Kansas freethinkers in the early days imagined themselves to be part of an oppressed class, dominated by the church, state, and economic system. Later, eugenics offered a new means to achieve personal autonomy and escape this oppression, not just for individual men but for the entire human race. Their ideas followed the logic that free women would give birth to fewer and superior children, thus diminishing the degenerate underclasses that capitalists depended upon to move the industrial machine. In their place would be free, independent men who could break from the oppressive chains of the class system and serve to better humanity. Likewise, the power shift would help to reconstruct manliness for *Lucifer's* readers who felt robbed of their masculinity by the new industrial order, bringing about a world in which autonomy and individualism breathed new life.

As this chapter demonstrates, the shift to eugenics and freedom in motherhood functioned to draw the sex radicals closer to mainstream thought. Fading away were

Lucifer's radical tones that pushed the boundaries of acceptable discussions of sexuality. Instead, Harman and other contributors picked up on the new social science topic of eugenics and the rhetoric of motherhood. *Lucifer* adopted a more scientific discussion of how to better the human race through the improvement of women's functions as mothers. Women were freed from sex slavery not to be sexually emancipated but to bring forth biologically superior children. The "sex radicals," it seemed, were becoming less radical into the twentieth century. Even *Lucifer* itself became less controversial when Moses Harman made the decision to change the name of the paper to the *American Journal of Eugenics* in 1907. Harman no doubt grew tired of the prejudice against the name "Lucifer" and the persecution he faced as the editor of a radical journal. The new scientific name was intended to appeal to a wider audience and bring his correspondents into more popular discussions of sexuality and race progress. Though he denied it, Harman was clearly seeking respectability and acceptance. By embracing the science of eugenics and the rhetoric of motherhood, sex radicals became less radical as they moved closer to new trends in twentieth century thought while at the same time their ideas reinforced the notions of male dominance and individual freedom.

* * *

Moses Harman returned to his home in Topeka on April 4, 1896 after spending almost a year in prison. With this last term finished, he was now free and clear of all charges incurred due to the printing of the Markland and O'Neill letters that had protested marital rape. Harman was met at the train station by his family and friends, later proceeding to the Topeka Post Hall for a reception held in his honor. His supporters made many encouraging and commendatory speeches for his efforts. A Valley Falls

newspaper that reported on the event even claimed that since the time Harman was sentenced, public sentiment had changed and was starting to regard some of *Lucifer's* subjects as important topics of discussion.⁸ It is doubtful the article was referring to the Kansas community as the “public;” rather, it most likely was pointing to the general trend in larger society as American thought started to investigate sexuality from a more scientific perspective. After Harman’s release from prison, the direction and tone of *Lucifer* began to change. His efforts in fighting for freethought and free love, his years of persecution, and the growing interest in sexual science and eugenic thought would serve to shift the course of the paper and discussions of the sex radicals.

One of the first changes Harman made was to move the printing office from Topeka, Kansas to Chicago, Illinois. The city and its urban environment was a promising choice for the future of *Lucifer*. America itself had become increasingly urban, as almost thirty percent of all Americans resided in cities near the end of the century. By 1890, Chicago was a bustling metropolis of over one million people, the second largest in the country with a population that was growing at an exponential rate. To its residents, Chicago seemed to embody the new social and economic forces at work as America moved into the twentieth century. It was the gateway to the West, connecting people, capital, and goods in an ever-expanding commercial and industrializing nation. The outlook for enterprises such as *Lucifer* was exceptionally good; in 1890, printing and publishing comprised the fourth largest business in Chicago’s economic sector.⁹ Harman

⁸ “Moses Harman’s Return,” *Topeka Daily Co-operator*, printed in *Lucifer*, 17 April 1896 and “From the Birth-Place of the Light-Bearer,” *Valley Falls Vindicator*, printed in *Lucifer*, 17 April 1896.

⁹ Carl Smith, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, the Haymarket Bomb, and the Model Town of Pullman* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Bruce C. Nelson, *Beyond the Martyrs: A Social History of Chicago’s Anarchists, 1870-1900* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

cited the nature of the publishing business as the reason for the move; printing from a large commercial center like Chicago would allow for wider circulation, and many current subscribers had addresses at its post office.¹⁰ In fact, just two years later Harman reported that the subscription numbers had more than doubled. This was attributed not only to the move but to what he assumed was a growing interest in sex reform.¹¹

Moses Harman had personal experiences which led him to believe Chicago would be a beneficial location for his paper. In 1888, he had taken a trip to Chicago to visit with like-minded freethinkers, meeting with Moses Hull, the editor of *New Thought*, a freethought publication. Hull had recently moved his paper from Des Moines, Iowa to Chicago and presented a model for which Harman could emulate. Harman also met with E.A Stevens, the secretary of the National Secular Union.¹² The Chicago Secular Union subsequently invited Harman to give an address at one of their conventions, at which his reception was “kind and generous.”¹³ Harman returned to Chicago again in 1893 with the Kansas Editorial Association to attend the World’s Fair. His experiences at the World’s Fair served to further his idea that Chicago might be a good choice due to its location at the forefront of civilization and technology. While at the fair, he witnessed the marvels of the White City and the Ferris Wheel, “one of the most unique and wonderful of all the wonderful features connected with the Columbian Expedition.”¹⁴ Harman’s most impressionable experience, however, was engaging with other freethinkers. He attended the World’s Congress of Freethinkers, which was held on the

¹⁰ Moses Harman, “Removal,” *Lucifer*, 17 April 1896 and Moses Harman, “Change of Base,” *Lucifer*, 24 April 1896.

¹¹ Moses Harman, “The Outlook for Lucifer,” *Lucifer*, 12 January 1898.

¹² Moses Harman, “Notes of Travel,” *Lucifer*, 21 December 1888.

¹³ Moses Harman, “Notes of Travel,” *Lucifer*, 28 December 1888.

¹⁴ Moses Harman, “At the Fair,” *Lucifer*, 22 September 1893.

fair grounds. Harman was invited to give a talk concerning *Lucifer* and the subjects of freedom of speech and freedom of the press on the last day of the meeting.¹⁵ He relished this chance to speak on topics that had come to have so much relevance to his reform work. After the Congress concluded, the group proceeded to an exhibition on Thomas Paine, whom Harman described as “that old pioneer in the work on human emancipation.”¹⁶ His experiences at the World’s Fair proved to him that Chicago was welcoming to freethinkers and could serve as a center for the freethought network he had been building.

Beyond the opportunity for an expansion of readership, Chicago offered potential connections with other reformers. During the Progressive Era, the modern city was quickly becoming a location of social science and humanitarian work, in both of which Harman and other *Lucifer* contributors had expressed interest. Reformers in the Chicago area articulated great concerns for the growing numbers of the working class and the depressed social conditions they faced, mainly poverty, crime, and labor unrest, as a result of industrialization. Women such as Jane Addams engaged in settlement house work, while others like Sophonisba Breckinridge and Edith Abbott used their education in political science to expose the plight of the urban poor, later founding social work education at a major Chicago university. The city was also home to organizations such as the Chicago Civic Federation, established in the wake of William T. Stead’s *If Christ Came to Chicago*, a controversial book that pointed to the city’s social and moral failings.¹⁷ On the sex radical front, some of *Lucifer*’s well-known contributors operated

¹⁵ Moses Harman, “World’s Congress of Freethinkers,” *Lucifer*, 13 October 1893.

¹⁶ Moses Harman, “At the Fair,” *Lucifer*, 13 October 1893.

¹⁷ Laura Westhoff, *A Fatal Drifting Apart: Democratic Social Knowledge and Chicago Reform* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007); Ellen F. Fitzpatrick, *Endless Crusade: Women Social Scientists and*

from Chicago. Dr. Alice B. Stockham was an obstetrician and gynecologist in the Chicago area whose books *Tokology* and *Karezza*, which offered contraceptive and sexual advice, were freely advertised in *Lucifer*.¹⁸ Dr. Juliet Severance, a water-cure physician, sex reform writer, and labor activist had recently moved to Chicago where she practiced medicine and participated in liberal causes throughout the city. After Harman relocated, she interacted with other sex radicals at his residence and was involved in the production of a series of pamphlets titled the “Light-Bearer Library.”¹⁹ Harman also had the opportunity to engage with birth control advocate and social radical Emma Goldman during her stay in the “Windy City.”²⁰

After its move to Chicago, sex radicals began meeting fortnightly at the *Lucifer* printing office to discuss sex reform topics. Harman announced each meeting in *Lucifer*, inviting readers to attend, listen to the various speakers, and have a chance to debate a variety of issues. The group was called the “Lucifer Circle,” and it reflected the shift towards a more scientific and scholarly agenda. Many of the speakers held the titles of medical doctors or professors, while the topics they addressed included subjects such as phrenology, sexual selection, the “new woman,” the population question, heredity, psychology, and the physical sciences.²¹ Emma Goldman gave a lecture at a meeting in

Progressive Reform (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Shelton Stromquist, *Reinventing the “The People”: The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

¹⁸ John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 67, 154-165; Hal D. Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Lawrence, KS: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), 262. Sears notes that Dr. Stockham was also prosecuted under the Comstock Act for mailing “obscene” literature.

¹⁹ Passet, 129-131.

²⁰ Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1931).

²¹ See editorial notes in *Lucifer*, 12 June 1896; 26 June 1896; 10 July 1896; 24 July 1896; 21 August 1896; 25 September 1896; 23 October 1896; 6 November 1896; 19 May 1897; 2 June 1897; 7 July, 1897; 6 October 1897; 13 October 1897; 27 October 1897; 10 November 1897; 30 March 1898.

1901 and was, for a time, actively involved in *Lucifer*.²² She later recalled that meeting Harman was one of several events that “lent significance to my stay in the city [of Chicago], proving a lasting factor in my life.” She revered the aging editor and related to his persecutions in that her own sex reform work led to personal harassment by local police.²³ Harman also made a connection with the Chicago Society of Anthropology, attending most of the weekly meetings which focused on the scientific topics of sexology, race improvement, and race culture.²⁴ Its president reciprocated, speaking at one meeting of the Lucifer Circle.²⁵

More significant was the change in *Lucifer* itself; it seemed that the editor desired to make it more scientific and, therefore, more respectable. Shortly after the move the format was converted from a four page folio to an eight page quarto, giving the paper an appearance of a scholarly journal rather than that of a small town newspaper. Though Harman stated this was done for binding purposes, he must have also believed the new format gave *Lucifer* a more professional look.²⁶ In contemplating this change, Harman and his daughter, who had also relocated to Chicago to help her father with *Lucifer*, modeled the new format from scholarly journals such as the *American Journal of Sociology* and the *North American Review*. Historian Hal Sears suggests that Harman saw this as a chance for his journal to gain credit with the new professional classes of the city and to cultivate a more sophisticated readership rather than relying on the “village iconoclasts” that it had in its more rural Kansas days.²⁷

²² Moses Harman, “Notes and Comments,” *Lucifer*, 20 July 1901.

²³ Goldman, 217-219.

²⁴ Moses Harman, “Close of Volume and Beginning of Year,” *Lucifer*, 15 January 1903.

²⁵ Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 26 June 1896.

²⁶ Moses Harman, “Change of Form,” *Lucifer*, 6 January 1897.

²⁷ Sears, 267.

Likewise, the topics of *Lucifer* slowly evolved, focusing less on women's sexuality and more on the improvement of the human race, what came to be known as "eugenics." The sex radicals still advocated the emancipation of woman, but their reasoning shifted from what benefits it could bring for individual women to the benefits it would bring to all of mankind. The main problem, according to sex radicals, was the human race itself. They attributed the unfavorable conditions observed in modern society to the production of defective individuals. The issue was not the environment but bad heredity. The greatest of all reforms, argued sex radical R.B. Kerr, was to better the human race.²⁸ Most correspondents agreed that "fewer and better children" would lead to racial progress and that this could be accomplished by freeing women in their choices as mothers.²⁹ As Harman stated, "woman is the race."³⁰ When societal customs and laws disallowed women choice in reproduction, they could only give birth to slavish children who would grow up to become "poor apologies for men rather than well developed specimens for the genus homo."³¹ By shifting the focus from women to the human race, *Lucifer* and its correspondents began to replace woman's emancipation with eugenics as the greatest reform interest and effort towards which to work.

Harman and the paper's contributors were picking up on the growing interest in the topic of eugenics and evolution as they pertained to social reform which developed in the latter half of the nineteenth century. New concerns about the progression of the human race were sparked by the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 and his subsequent study on human evolution, *The Descent of Man, and*

²⁸ R.B. Kerr, "The Quintessence of Harmanism," *Lucifer*, 27 January 1900

²⁹ E.J. Paul, "Heredity," *Lucifer*, 30 June 1900.

³⁰ Moses Harman, "Reply," *Lucifer*, 26 August 1899.

³¹ Moses Harman, "Replies to Critics," *Lucifer*, 4 December 1902.

Selection in Relation to Sex in 1871. Darwin's theories of evolution and the survival of the fittest prompted others to consider how to apply this knowledge to human improvement. Scientist Francis Galton, Darwin's cousin, was inspired by his work and sought to develop a theory of heredity to explain how certain biological and social behaviors were passed down through the generations. He believed that with this knowledge men could alter the evolution of the human race, speeding up its progress. Galton coined the term "eugenics" to define the social science of improving the human race through the controlling of heredity.³²

Eugenicists in the nineteenth century had a particular understanding of heredity that predated the discovery of genetics. Darwin and most of his contemporaries believed that acquired traits, such as mental, temperamental, and moral characteristics, could be passed down to offspring. Any environmental conditions or learned behavior thus had the potential to be transmitted to the next generation. Eugenicists supported the idea that any condition that improved the individual would work to improve the species, and conversely, any bad behaviors by the parents would produce ill effects in the children. Scientists thought this was especially true during the period of conception and gestation; any emotions experienced by the mother could be passed down to the child.³³ Popular guide books for pregnant women warned that "mental impressions" would be transmitted to the fetus, recommending that expectant mothers be protected from all disturbances.³⁴

The theory of acquired characteristics was challenged by German scientist August

³² Donald K. Pickens, *Eugenics and the Progressives* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 14-26; Diane B. Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity 1865 to the Present* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995), 5-6.

³³ Paul, 40-41; Pickens, 37-38.

³⁴ Linda Gordon, *the Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 76-77.

Weismann in the 1890s, but it was not until the rediscovery of the work of Gregor Mendel in 1900 that the scientific community began to rethink heredity. Yet up through the early twentieth century, many respected biologists and social scientists adhered to the belief that acquired traits could be inherited. Galton's work, combined with the interest in Mendel's concepts of heredity, prompted American eugenicists to take charge of their own evolution, believing that they could shape the development of the race.³⁵

Social scientists of the time period were especially interested in how to apply Galton's ideas about eugenics to solve current problems. Early eugenicists believed that social ills such as poverty and crime resulted from defects in heredity. They noticed that modern society supported the mentally and physically weak, who were reproducing at a faster rate than those who were stronger. Darwin had warned that if the lower classes continued to outbreed their social superiors, evolutionary regression would result. The human race, it seemed to many intelligent observers, was degenerating.³⁶ Social scientists saw heredity as the key factor. They believed that the human race could not only be saved but that its evolution could be controlled and directed using the scientific principles of inheritance.³⁷ However, eugenicists disagreed on the precise methods to accomplish this goal and often referred to "the race" without specifying whether they meant the human race, the Anglo-Saxon race, or some other type of racial differentiation.³⁸

³⁵ Pickens, 42-50.

³⁶ Paul, 4-6.

³⁷ Pickens, 40-55.

³⁸ Simone M. Caron, *Who Chooses? American Reproductive History Since 1830* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 49-50; Wendy Kline, *Building a Better Race: Gender, Sexuality, and Eugenics from the Turn of the Century to the Baby Boom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 5.

Because it was seen as a means of social and biological improvement, eugenics appealed to a wide range of Americans at the turn of the century. The white middle classes were its most prominent adherents, fearing that they were losing authority in the face of growing immigrant and African-American populations in northern cities. Progressive reformers such as Theodore Roosevelt preached against “race suicide,” the theory that the lower, non-white classes would out-reproduce the middle-class, Anglo-Saxon race and thus cause the downfall of civilization.³⁹ While Roosevelt encouraged middle class women to have more children, other reformers used eugenics to popularize the notion that the government should prevent the reproduction of those they considered to be “unfit.” This solution, what came to be known as “negative eugenics,” held that state intervention could protect society from social ills such as prostitution, poverty, crime, and the reproduction of “morons.”⁴⁰ Negative eugenics was especially attractive to charity workers, prison wardens, sociologists, physicians, and social workers involved in the care of the “feeble-minded,” criminals, and the insane.⁴¹

Due to the varied interpretations and methods of application, eugenics also appealed to a variety of social radical groups. Critics of capitalism, social revolutionaries, and birth control advocates believed that eugenics could provide a means to solve social problems. They argued that large families weakened the poor in their struggle against capitalists who depended on an ever-expanding workforce to exploit. Birth control would function to help in this struggle.⁴² Women’s rights activists endorsed the hereditarian thinking of eugenics by claiming that women’s subjection had corrupted

³⁹ Kline, 3-11.

⁴⁰ Caron, 50-52.

⁴¹ Mark H. Haller, *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1963).

⁴² Paul, 2, 94-96.

men who passed on that corruption to successive generations, thus endangering the future of the whole race.⁴³ Free lovers and other sex radicals picked up on the ideas of eugenics, believing that a free selection of one's partner (positive eugenics) was a better alternative to negative eugenics and the state control of individuals which it would necessarily entail. They contended that unwanted children were likely to be physically or mentally defective while children produced through love would be superior in mind and body.⁴⁴

Moses Harman and the sex radicals who corresponded in *Lucifer* readily adopted the new concerns about the human race and the logic of eugenics. Contributor R.W. Shufeldt contended that man had not made any serious attempt to improve the human race thus far.⁴⁵ Sex radicals pointed to a myriad of social problems, including poverty, disease, the rise in crime, and other ills faced by the working classes as evidence that some kind of reform was needed. R.B. Kerr argued that even natural selection amongst humans was absent, leading to "abundant poverty, disease, misery, etc." It was his opinion that the human race was actively degenerating.⁴⁶ Harman agreed with this conclusion and pointed to specific evidence in Chicago, where there were thousands out of work, shortages of food, and an abundance of crime, suicides, and general despair.⁴⁷

Harman's observation was accurate; social disorder was a constant condition in the city. Due to the industrial nature of Chicago, workers were depersonalized, their bargaining power declined, and thousands vied for monotonous jobs working ten to fourteen hour days at low wages. It was a place of class conflict, strikes, and labor

⁴³ Gordon, 80-81.

⁴⁴ Paul, 92-93; Gordon, 76.

⁴⁵ R.W. Shufeldt, M.D., "The Science of Stirpiculture," *American Journal of Eugenics*, October 1907.

⁴⁶ R.B. Kerr, "Darwin, Weismann and Harman," *Lucifer*, 4 March 1899.

⁴⁷ Moses Harman, "What it Means," *Lucifer*, 9 February 1898.

unrest, the Haymarket riot and the Pullman strike being the most violent examples of class conflict.⁴⁸ Because of the increasing number of inhabitants, the slums exploded in the 1890s, bringing a host of problems, including poorly ventilated tenements, overcrowding, disease epidemics, and high infant mortality rates.⁴⁹ These conditions, Harman stated, were self-perpetuating, and if nothing was done the degeneracy would become chronic.⁵⁰ Kerr noted that the antebellum free lovers, in their sex reform efforts, focused chiefly on the pleasures of men and women and that they had little concern for the “children question.” Yet *Lucifer*, under the editorship of Moses Harman, was beginning to make the improvement of the human race its most central question.⁵¹ Eugenics started to take precedence, and sex radicals debated about how to apply this new science to human improvement.

The readers and contributors to *Lucifer* subscribed to the idea that acquired traits and characteristics could be passed down to the next generation, believing this to be the key to race improvement. They were especially concerned with the transmission of heredity from mother to child, contending that conditions surrounding the mother had a potential to affect the course of her maternity. During the nine month gestation period, they maintained, maternal thoughts and feelings could be impressed upon the developing embryo and create a lasting effect.⁵² This worried sex radicals because they adhered to a Lamarckian view of embryonic development. As explained by Professor Edgar Larkin,

⁴⁸ Smith, 8, 102-106.

⁴⁹ Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Noblesse Oblige: Charity & Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago, 1849-1929* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 28, 100.

⁵⁰ Moses Harman, “What it Means,” *Lucifer*, 9 February 1898.

⁵¹ R.B. Kerr, “Moses Harman: An Appreciation,” *Lucifer*, 11 October 1906.

⁵² See Lucinda B. Chandler, “Motherhood and Fatherhood,” *Lucifer*, 4 December 1896; Lois Waisbrooker, “Declaration of Independence,” quoted in Moses Harman, “Among the Pioneers,” *Lucifer*, 6 January 1897; Moses Harman, “Woman in the Home,” *Lucifer*, 22 September 1900; Moses Harman, “Sexology—As Related to Poverty, Vice and Crime,” *Lucifer*, 8 January 1903.

the human embryo passed through primitive forms as it grew. “Cells are added to his body and brain during gestation that have characteristics of every creature that ever lived on earth,” he stated. “Thus every attribute of mind of every animal is stored in the human mind.” Because a fetus progressed through different stages of human evolution, it was possible, the professor argued, that the progress might stop prematurely, a condition he referred to as “arrested embryonic development.” The cause of this condition was directly related to maternal feelings and impressions. If a woman experienced emotional trauma, such as loathing and disgust for her husband while the fetus was moving through one of the primitive phases, the child could exhibit more primitive mental and physical characteristics.⁵³ Harman believed that the prenatal period was so important that “character, for good or ill, for strength or weakness, for symmetry or deformity, for health or disease, for success or failure, is stamped upon each human individual—stamped so fixedly, so irrevocably, that no postnatal training can do more than merely to modify, restrain or to some minor extent regulate the traits or tendencies implanted.”⁵⁴

Sex radicals therefore reasoned that mothers should be under the best maternal conditions possible to ensure the production of well born children. Even the mother’s health and state of mind months or years preceding conception as well as during the period of lactation could shape the child.⁵⁵ Women who became pregnant in unfavorable conditions were likely to produce diseased children: “hereditary drunkards, hereditary epileptics, hereditary consumptives, hereditary criminals.” *Lucifer’s* correspondents targeted marital rape, domestic discord, and spousal abuse as the main causes of defective

⁵³ Edgar L. Larkin, “A Jolly Good Time: All-Day Visit of Moses Harman to the Lowe Observatory,” *Lucifer*, 14 March 1907.

⁵⁴ Moses Harman, “Life, Health, and Longevity,” *American Journal of Eugenics*, August 1907.

⁵⁵ Dr. E.B. Foote, Jr., “Preparation for Maternity and Paternity,” *Lucifer*, 29 December 1900; Moses Harman, “Sexology—As Related to Poverty, Vice and Crime,” *Lucifer*, 8 January 1903.

children. If a woman experienced any of these traumas, it would negatively affect the developing embryo. The result would be a child that was less developed, more primitive, and otherwise defective in its hereditary traits.⁵⁶ These children were victims, and, as sex radical J. Madison Hook asserted, “every child has a right to be well born, properly nourished, and educated so as to enable it to successfully cope with its environment.”⁵⁷

The sex radicals conceived of the means to improve the human race through positive eugenics, which required freedom of individual choice rather than state control. While the contributors observed and lamented that numerous children were born every year in deplorable conditions which only further contributed to the problems of poverty, crime, disease, overcrowding, and class conflict, they did not subscribe to a theory of negative eugenics. Many of their contemporaries recommended forced sterilization and state-controlled reproduction of the “unfit” by the “fit.”⁵⁸ Sex radicals, on the other hand, promoted positive eugenics, which focused on how to encourage the birth of fewer and healthier children by free mothers where coercion was not a factor. One of *Lucifer's* platforms became “The Right to Be Born Well,” as Harman titled a key article in 1904. He maintained that mothers and fathers had the duty to ensure proper maternal conditions so that each child born would retain positive hereditary qualities. As Harman and his correspondents understood eugenics, superior children could be born by following these guidelines, and these children would serve to better the entire human race.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Moses Harman, “Sexology—As Related to Poverty, Vice and Crime,” *Lucifer*, 8 January 1903; An English Socialist, “A Contract Between Principles and Conditions of Free Love and Bond Love of the Highest Orthodox Type,” *Lucifer*, 20 January 1900; Victor E. Southworth, “The Ethics of Parentage,” *Lucifer*, 10 February 1900.

⁵⁷ J. Madison Hook, “Some Counter-Thoughts,” *Lucifer*, 28 April 1897.

⁵⁸ Caron, 49-50.

⁵⁹ Moses Harman, “The Right to Be Born Well,” *Lucifer*, 12 May 1904.

The importance of bettering society through improvement of the race took precedence in *Lucifer*. The primary focus shifted away from the rights of women to the production of superior children. In the 1880s, sex radicals had been concerned with liberating women from abusive husbands and according them rights to their sexual functions. Articles such as “Marriage,” “Man’s Inhumanity to Women,” and “Contraceptics” headlined the pages of *Lucifer*, indicating the central concerns of women.⁶⁰ However, into the twentieth century, the new focus became eugenics, which to the sex radicals meant “the science of properly begetting—or of race culture through the best conditions for reproduction.”⁶¹ More articles were devoted to the topics of eugenics and the advancement of the human race with titles such as “Does Evolution Favor Exclusiveness?,” “Interest in Eugenics Increasing,” and “Sexology—As Related to Poverty, Vice and Crime.”⁶² The rights of women, especially her empowerment in marriage and other romantic relationships, were still highly valued to the sex radicals, but more so because women had the potential to be mothers and were the key to the future of the race.

For the new direction of *Lucifer*, eugenics and the goal of producing high quality children became the new reason to allow women choice in their sexuality and reproduction. If free to select the fathers of their children, women would choose those best suited to ensure healthy children. As long time contributor Albert Chavannes explained, the “way to hereditary improvement lies through freedom of the individual.”

⁶⁰ J. Hacker, “Marriage,” *Lucifer*, 12 March 1886; Mrs. E.A. Abbey, “Man’s Inhumanity to Women,” *Lucifer*, 6 December 1889; Elmina Drake Slenker, “Contraceptics,” *Lucifer*, 23 July 1886.

⁶¹ Moses Harman, “Lucifer’s Metempsychosis,” *Lucifer*, 23 May 1907.

⁶² R.B. Kerr, “Does Evolution Favor Exclusiveness?” *Lucifer*, 11 April 1907; Jonathan Mayo Crane, “Interest in Eugenics Increasing,” *Lucifer*, 28 March 1907; Moses Harman, “Sexology—As Related to Poverty, Vice and Crime,” *Lucifer*, 8 January 1903

The “mother must be free to achieve the best results” and should therefore decide on a partner.⁶³ Lillian Harman again proved to be an example for “motherhood in freedom,” upholding the *Lucifer* principles as she lived her own life. In 1893, she elected to have a child with E.C. Walker, despite the fact that they had been living apart for several years. Lillian first required him to sign a document in which he pledged financial support and parental responsibilities for the child, named Virna Winifred Walker.⁶⁴ By 1900, Lillian was a “free mother,” having relocated to Chicago with her father earlier, while E.C. Walker resided in New York City, still functioning as a prominent contributor to the paper.⁶⁵

In order for women to exercise choice over reproduction and produce better babies, they needed assistance. Lois Waisbrooker pointed out that because prenatal influences shaped the future generations, woman would need the best possible conditions during her maternity.⁶⁶ Also important was the education of women. Moses Harman had made it one of *Lucifer's* goals to educate women on sexual subjects and, with the growing emphasis on eugenics, he maintained that women needed the knowledge of sexual science, what was referred to as “sexology,” in order to make the best reproductive choices. Women’s ignorance in the matter would lead to disastrous effects on offspring; therefore woman as a prospective mother of the race needed sexual education in order to

⁶³ Albert Chavannes, “Motherhood in Freedom,” *Lucifer*, 20 January 1897.

⁶⁴ Lillian Harman, “Freedom of Choice, the Foundation Principle,” *Lucifer*, 24 February 1897.

⁶⁵ Sears, 268; see also census data for Walker: “United States Census, 1900,” index and images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/MSK4-8VC> : accessed 03 Nov 2012), Edwin C Walker, ED 625 Borough of Manhattan, Election District 21 New York City Ward 23, New York County, New York, United States; citing sheet 12A, family 262, NARA microfilm publication T623, FHL microfilm 1241108. Their separation appeared to be amicable, as neither reported ill will toward the other.

⁶⁶ Lois Waisbrooker, “Declaration of Independence,” quoted in Moses Harman, “Among the Pioneers,” *Lucifer*, 6 January 1897.

“do her best work in child-building.”⁶⁷ Female sex radicals even called on men to step up to help woman achieve her reproductive potential. Lucinda Chandler told *Lucifer’s* men they should educate other men in the importance of woman’s freedom, how to help woman choose to enter maternity, and how to protect her during the prenatal period. In Chandler’s opinion, a woman depended on a “manhood that frees her from selfish exactions, preparing himself to co-operate with the unselfish love of a wise motherhood.” If men followed this recommendation, it would “make the best conditions for an improved and progressive humanity.”⁶⁸

Lucifer’s new eugenic agenda also lent support to the birth control movement. The majority of the paper’s readers had argued for contraceptive use in the past, but now the rhetoric of eugenics made this reform seem more respectable in that it promoted the betterment of humanity. In the past, social conservatives such as Anthony Comstock linked contraception to sexual promiscuity, unbridled lust, and even prostitution. But eugenics offered a legitimate pathway for popular approval of contraception because of the way it focused on the advancement of the human race rather than the sexual desires of individual men and women. With eugenics being accepted in respected scientific circles, the idea of contraception was also becoming less controversial. *Lucifer’s* correspondents recognized women’s sexual desires and the need for contraceptive knowledge, yet they emphasized to readers that the primary goal was fewer and better children.⁶⁹ Several readers wrote letters to the *Lucifer* office requesting information on contraceptives so that they might limit the number of children in their families to a manageable number. But, as

⁶⁷ Moses Harman, “The Campaign of Education,” *Lucifer*, 13 November 1896.

⁶⁸ Lucinda B. Chandler, “Motherhood and Fatherhood,” *Lucifer*, 4 December 1896.

⁶⁹ See Elsie Cole-Wilson, “The Limitation of Population, and Woman’s Freedom,” *Lucifer*, 14 April 1897; Amy Linnett, “Continenence and Contracepts,” *Lucifer*, 5 May 1897.

Moses Harman remarked, he was prevented from sharing any direct information because of the Comstock laws.⁷⁰ However, he continued to print articles which discussed the topic and advertisements for books that gave more detailed medical advice, with Dr. Stockham's *Karezza* as one prime example. Harman believed that the growing interest in eugenics would further legitimize contraceptives and birth control knowledge.

Other prominent reformers used eugenic arguments to support the legalization and popular acceptance of contraception. Emma Goldman contended that contraception would ameliorate economic conditions for the working class, believing that it would help raise wages and expand workers' political power. Her impact was minimal, as she garnered a notorious reputation as being a left-wing radical and social agitator.⁷¹

Margaret Sanger, however, became a more influential birth control advocate by utilizing a eugenic perspective. She blamed the problems of overpopulation, urban crowding, masses of uneducated immigrants, and disease on the fact that women were forced to bear multiple children because they did not have access to birth control. By limiting births, women would be better able to care for their children and keep them healthy, and thus overpopulation and mass poverty would cease to be a problem.⁷² Sanger further worked to legitimize birth control by appealing to leading eugenicists and physicians.⁷³

Lucifer's correspondents supported the eugenic principles of birth control. E.C. Walker argued that women should only bring children into the world if they could be assured of their health and happiness. Using contraceptives would aid in this goal with

⁷⁰ Emil L, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 10 March 1897; S.D.W., "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 9 July 1898; MH, Comment, *Lucifer*, 9 July 1898.

⁷¹ Caron, 59.

⁷² Margaret Sanger, *Woman and the New Race* (New York: Truth Publishing Company, 1920).

⁷³ Caron, 79-80.

the added benefit of a reduced infant mortality rate.⁷⁴ A reader from Kansas agreed; large families only served to overburden a woman and produce ill effects on her health, disallowing her to take proper care of her family.⁷⁵ Contraceptives could help women limit their family sizes, but as contributor William Platt opined they would not free women from motherhood. Women using contraceptives to avoid having children, in his opinion, were practicing “racial suicide.” If a woman was “healthy and capable,” he thought she should do her duty to the race. It was his belief, and the intent of many sex radicals, that women would use contraceptives with the expressed purpose of having fewer children who would be healthier, stronger, and racially superior.⁷⁶

The principles of positive eugenics became the new rationale for *Lucifer's* argument that women should be emancipated and free to make decisions concerning their sexuality. Moses Harman voiced this sentiment shortly after returning from prison in 1896 when he stated that the most pivotal reform of *Lucifer* was to demand “the freedom of woman as creator of the race; the reform that demands woman’s right to the ownership and control of her sex-nature, her maternal powers and functions.”⁷⁷ Harman outlined his philosophy concerning women’s freedom and eugenics in an article titled “Motherhood in Freedom.” He argued that women should be in control of all aspects of “race-reproduction,” from the selection of fathers to the education of male children on the necessity of woman’s freedom. The outcome of the human race thus depended on women’s free choice. “As long as Motherhood is enslaved,” he maintained, “just so long will men be slaves—or tyrants.” Therefore, granting women reproductive freedom

⁷⁴ E.C. Walker, “The Medical Priesthood and Woman’s ‘Duty,’” *Lucifer*, 3 February 1897.

⁷⁵ New Subscriber, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 7 August 1896.

⁷⁶ William Platt, “On Prevention—A Test Question,” *Lucifer*, 29 September 1904.

⁷⁷ Moses Harman, “The Pivotal Reform,” *Lucifer*, 24 April 1896.

would translate into greater freedom for all men and the production of superior offspring.⁷⁸

Harman's ideas about "freedom in motherhood" and the sex radicals' ideas about heredity constructed a rhetoric that limited the role of women to motherhood, contrary to the voice of a small minority who wanted greater roles for women. In discussing the new direction of *Lucifer* and speaking for the majority of his readers, the editor stated that while it was a goal, "we do not regard financial independence for woman the pivotal or most important reform." It was more important, he thought, that woman be freed due to her maternal functions because she was the "creator of the race."⁷⁹ This was not necessarily a change in *Lucifer*, as the paper had advocated for women's full equality with men, but Harman's statement put a precedent on the two issues, indicating that the paper would work towards eugenic goals rather than economic independence for women. Responding, a Portland, Oregon woman identified only as "M.P." refuted Harman's statement, telling him "I think you are wrong." She claimed that "industrial independence" was much more important, maintaining that she and other women only remained in a dependent marriage because of the "fear of want."⁸⁰ Lillie D. White, one of *Lucifer's* prominent female contributors, also agreed that woman must be financially independent and self-reliant in the new age.⁸¹ These opinions were reflected in the work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose popular treatise *Women and Economics* argued that

⁷⁸ Moses Harman, "Motherhood in Freedom," *Our New Humanity* 2, no. 1 (September 1896): 75-92.

⁷⁹ Moses Harman, "The Pivotal Reform," *Lucifer*, 24 April 1896.

⁸⁰ M. P., "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 22 May 1896. The anonymous letter writer asked Harman not to publish her name, as she read *Lucifer* in secret.

⁸¹ Lillie D. White, "Love and Finance," *Lucifer*, 19 August 1899.

the focus on woman's sexual functions were holding back the race and that women should be educated and economically independent in a modern society.⁸²

Other contributors, however, agreed with Moses Harman that women's financial independence was not necessary. It was difficult for women with small children to leave the home and find a job, Lillian Harman contended, while veteran free lover Lois Waisbrooker argued that "man is, by nature's law the provider and woman the builder." Reader Hulda G. Heacock was of the opinion that the time would never come when women would be self-supporting. Both Heacock and Lillian Harman put forth the idea that if woman's work as a race builder was so important then man should be willing to support her.⁸³ R.B. Kerr agreed that women could not bring up children at their own expense; instead, the community should pay them for their work, as "motherhood is a public service." He envisioned a future where women could be economically independent but only if they relied on the public to support them and only because they devoted a significant portion of their lives "occupied in maternal functions."⁸⁴ While sex radicals contemplated how women could be paid for their duties, their ideas still rested on the fact that women's primary function was seen as that of a mother.

Their limited viewpoint was in line with the current thinking of their time, as many Progressives also conceived of women as mothers and focused on maternalism in their reform efforts. When considering how best to help fatherless children, reformers

⁸² Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1898; repr. with introduction and notes by Carl N. Degler, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966).

⁸³ Lillian Harman, "Woman and Home in Freedom," *Lucifer*, 5 August 1899; Lois Waisbrooker, "Woman and Economics," *Lucifer*, 5 August 1899; Hulda G. Heacock, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 17 July 1896. Though Waisbrooker put forth these arguments, she was self-supporting for much of her life, depending on payments she received for lecturing, writing, and selling books. See Passet, 112-121.

⁸⁴ R.B. Kerr, "Must Economic Freedom Precede Sex Freedom?" *Lucifer*, 7 July 1904; R.B. Kerr, "The Economic Emancipation of Women," *Lucifer*, 13 October 1904; R.B. Kerr, "Should Women Demand Pay for being Mothers?" *Lucifer*, 18 January 1906.

advocated a “mother’s pension,” a monthly stipend that essentially paid women to remain in the home raising their children. The Progressives did not expect “worthy” mothers to leave their children and go to work. Similar to Kerr, they viewed motherhood as a public service that functioned to better society as a whole. Furthermore, reformers agreed with sex radicals that better education of mothers was needed in order to ensure the birth of healthy children. Alarmed at the high infant mortality rates of the poor, maternalists worked to improve the health of children and uphold domestic motherhood. Their efforts eventually culminated in the Sheppard-Towner Act of 1921, which provided federal funds to promote public welfare in connection with maternity and the care of infants. Like the sex radicals, maternalists of the Progressive Era based their efforts on new understandings of science combined with a genuine concern to help the poor, thereby improving humanity.⁸⁵

As the focus of *Lucifer* shifted to themes regarding how to use eugenic principles to improve the race, women’s maternal abilities took precedence over their individuality. R.B. Kerr reasoned that one of the main functions of woman’s body was connected with maternity and that she should do her duty to the race by having children. In fact, Kerr estimated that to continue the human race each woman would need to give birth to an average of three children. Maternity and the care of children would disadvantage women and put them on an unequal footing with men, but he stated that this inequality should be acceptable because “the individual is to a great extent sacrificed to the species.”⁸⁶ Thus,

⁸⁵ Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequity in the Welfare State, 1917-1942* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); S.J. Kleinberg, *Widows and Orphans First: The Family Economy and Social Welfare Policy, 1880-1939* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935*.

⁸⁶ R.B. Kerr, “The Logic of Chivalry,” *Lucifer*, 10 December 1898.

the more sex radicals discussed the emancipation of woman it was not because women deserved freedom for themselves but because the human race depended on free mothers to raise free and superior children. “Woman,” for many of *Lucifer’s* correspondents, was becoming equated with “mother.” Yet, not all contributors shared this viewpoint.

Eugenics and the rhetoric of motherhood served to reinscribe male hegemony over the sex radical movement. While the earlier ideas of “free love” celebrated female sexual autonomy, the new focus on eugenics and “the race” was decidedly male-centered. Several female correspondents were quick to point this out and reacted against what they saw as a new subordination of women. Lois Waisbrooker criticized this trend, questioning whether the race or the individual was more important.⁸⁷ To Lillie D. White, the answer was clear; the individual should take precedence. “I have always advocated woman’s freedom in motherhood with reference to herself only,” she stated, “not as to this effect on society or the race.”⁸⁸ Her sister, Lizzie Holmes, agreed. She demanded equal liberty “on the grounds of human existence” rather than sex. It was degrading to women, she argued, to be “constantly dwelling on her sex nature and her sex function.”⁸⁹ To Holmes, women were more than just mothers. To relegate woman to the role of mother made no more sense to her than to see men only as fathers.⁹⁰ Yet, that was what *Lucifer* seemed to be doing. She smartly pointed out that the paper appeared to be working for the freedom of women only so that better children may be born, not because women were human beings deserving of equal treatment.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Moses Harman, “The Realm of Motherhood,” *Lucifer*, 16 October 1896.

⁸⁸ Lillie D. White, “Population and Economics,” *Lucifer*, 14 April 1897.

⁸⁹ Lizzie M. Holmes, “Woman’s Freedom is Human Freedom,” *Lucifer*, 26 August 1899.

⁹⁰ Lizzie M. Holmes, “More of the Problem,” *Lucifer*, 10 November 1900.

⁹¹ Lizzie M. Holmes, “The Population and Economic Question,” *Lucifer*, 29 July 1899.

Many women also protested the ideas expressed in Moses Harman's article "Motherhood in Freedom." When he recommended women have multiple men serve as fathers and that mothers take full responsibility for raising their children, female sex radicals rejected the lack of responsibility placed on men. Harman's ideas about fathers, argued correspondent Caroline de Maupassant, basically positioned them as mere fertilizers of the ovum. Yet, she believed that fathers should be an essential part of the home, that they should not just contribute biological material and disappear.⁹² One reader concurred, contending that a father should not leave the mother on her own to raise the child but stay and cultivate a loving relationship.⁹³ Another correspondent voiced a similar opinion and rejected Harman's proposal that women choose multiple fathers for their children. She thought that a woman should have one man as the father of her children and that he should increase rather than decrease his parental responsibilities.⁹⁴ Their complaints demonstrated that many female sex radicals resented the view of women only as mothers and that the burden of child rearing was placed squarely on their shoulders, leaving men with virtually no responsibilities.

As the editor, Moses Harman printed these female criticisms, but he defended his ideas and continued to promote the vision of women as mothers. Fatherhood was important, but in his mind the mother should be the head of the household.⁹⁵ Man's responsibility in creating and raising children was "subordinate to that of the woman in this matter." Harman asserted that "woman must assume all responsibility of maternity,

⁹² Caroline de Maupassant, "Father, Mother, and Child," *Lucifer*, 10 February 1897.

⁹³ Luna Hutchinson, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 11 December 1896.

⁹⁴ Helen S. Johnson, "Motherhood and Fatherhood," *Lucifer*, 3 March 1897.

⁹⁵ Moses Harman, "Reply," *Lucifer*, 10 February 1897.

(including choice of paternity) on behalf of the children.”⁹⁶ The reproduction and care of offspring, he maintained, “should be the work, mainly, of the mother.”⁹⁷ Contributor R.B. Kerr summarized *Lucifer’s* position when he wrote that “the life of the father is at his store, or in his club; the life of the mother is with her children.”⁹⁸ His comment indicated what most sex radical men most likely thought—that women’s lives were devoted to the role of mother while men could have careers and social lives outside of their role as fathers.

Any effort by sex radical women to change *Lucifer’s* trajectory was unsuccessful, largely due to the fact that as the editor, Moses Harman chose the direction of the paper and selected what to print. Harman did give a voice to the minority opinion, but was quick to print a rebuttal, either from his pen or that of other sex radical men. Sara Crist Campbell argued that reformers should focus on developing women’s sexuality rather than limiting their discussions to motherhood.⁹⁹ Harman disagreed; his view was that furthering the race with “good childhood” required women to take on the role of motherhood, that as mothers, women should desire to help the race by producing “better children.”¹⁰⁰ A female reader criticized Harman, stating that although he has tried to help emancipate women, “pictures of the emancipated woman as a mother make her nothing more than a dependent weakling.”¹⁰¹ Lizzie Holmes, too, was quite exasperated by the motherhood question. “I do not believe in any man’s right to compel women to do anything,” she contended, ““for the sake of having her children well born’.” Holmes was

⁹⁶ Moses Harman, “At Forrest Park, Ottawa,” *Lucifer*, 9 September 1899.

⁹⁷ Moses Harman, “Replies to Correspondents,” *Lucifer*, 16 June 1900.

⁹⁸ R.B. Kerr, “The Guardianship of Children,” *Lucifer*, 14 July 1900.

⁹⁹ S.C. Campbell, “Womanhood and Manhood in Freedom,” *Lucifer*, 13 January 1897.

¹⁰⁰ Moses Harman, Editorial comment, *Lucifer*, 13 January 1897.

¹⁰¹ Cynthia M. Tregear, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 18 March 1899.

angered that “so many radical men have presumed to tell free women what they ought to do.” By limiting women to the role of mothers, it seemed to her that men were only trying to control women.¹⁰²

The criticism by Holmes and other women failed to change the new agenda of *Lucifer*, and women continued to be portrayed as mothers. Holmes’s comments were brushed off by contributor Alex E. Wight who asserted that she appeared to assume a “struggle between the sexes.”¹⁰³ Clearly he, along with other sex radical men, did not think they were practicing any kind of gender discrimination. Rather, they still envisioned themselves as helping women by arguing for their emancipation. Yet, what they were actually doing was reinforcing male dominance over the sex question through the rhetoric of motherhood.

Another disagreement between male and female sex radicals was the question of “variety.” Men began arguing that in the new sexual order monogamy would give way to multiple sexual partners. E.C. Walker, who by this time had amicably separated from Lillian Harman, viewed monogamy as a form of “slavery,” and that variety, either having one lover and changing often or having multiple lovers at the same time, would eventually replace it.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, famous free lover Francis Barry thought that society was evolving towards non-exclusivity. When woman were emancipated and marriage abolished, he believed that there would be a general acceptance of the practice.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Lizzie M. Holmes, “A Free Woman’s Duties,” *Lucifer*, 14 May 1903.

¹⁰³ Alex E. Wight, “The Fatherhood Question,” *Lucifer*, 28 May 1903.

¹⁰⁴ E.C. Walker, *Variety vs. Monogamy: An Address before the Ladies’ Liberal League of Philadelphia*. Chicago: M. Harman, 1897. Lillian Harman remarked that “Mr. Walker and I have made and dissolved business contracts.” “We have fulfilled our agreements honorably and amicably.” Lillian Harman, *Marriage and Morality* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1900), 33.

¹⁰⁵ Francis Barry, “Crudities Criticised,” *Lucifer*, 26 January 1898.

Sex radical men readily believed women would be accepting of variety. Exclusiveness, Albert Chavannes contended, was a product of “social virtue” constructed by conservative forces. Once more progressive forces took hold, variety would be the new form. He viewed “the new woman” as “a varietist of a very marked type.”¹⁰⁶ Another male correspondent claimed that women endorsed the practice. He even thought that many were already practicing variety out of the public eye.¹⁰⁷ *Lucifer’s* women, for the most part, disagreed. A female reader from Iowa blatantly stated that “variety is not a woman’s ideal.”¹⁰⁸ According to Lucinda B. Chandler, the men who advocated variety had failed to consult women in the construction of this new sexual code. These ideals, she stated, were established merely to suit men.¹⁰⁹

Though some women voiced opinions against variety, sex radical men argued that variety was beneficial beyond personal choice; it would help to further *Lucifer’s* goal of bettering the human race. At the forefront of this argument was R.B. Kerr. He compared human reproduction to animal breeding in that monogamy was counter-productive to breeding superior animals. If humans were to adopt variety, or “scientific breeding,” he argued, they too could produce better children. Variety would thus be beneficial to the human race.¹¹⁰ Moses Harman applauded this comparison, echoing Kerr by stating that he wanted to see “the best possible results of breeding animals, whether quadrupeds or bipeds.” He told *Lucifer* readers that “I believe in breeding human beings so nearly perfect in mind and body that all will be winners of prizes.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Albert Chavannes, “Variety Scientifically Considered,” *Lucifer*, 2 March 1898.

¹⁰⁷ Alex E. Wight, “The Fatherhood Question,” *Lucifer*, 28 May 1903.

¹⁰⁸ Frederica de l’Espinasse, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 19 January 1901.

¹⁰⁹ Lucinda B. Chandler, “Free Woman Legally and Economically,” *Lucifer*, 29 September 1897.

¹¹⁰ R.B. Kerr, “Monogamy and Heredity,” *Lucifer*, 9 April 1903; R.B. Kerr, “Does Evolution Favor Exclusiveness?” *Lucifer*, 11 April 1907.

¹¹¹ Moses Harman, “Ideals, Ascending and Descending,” *Lucifer*, 27 August 1903.

While men sanctified variety for the sake of better the race through scientific breeding, several women were horrified at the comparison. Leading the way was Lizzie Holmes. She contended that women, as human mothers, could not be compared to farm animals, and that the decision to have a child was not like breeding prize animals. Holmes believed that the real reason that men like Kerr promoted variety was not to improve the human race but to pander to “the passions of men.”¹¹² Another correspondent, Carrie Austin, called Kerr’s ideas a “cold and heartless philosophy.” In her view, he was a “poor guide” and his conclusions regarding the human race wrong.¹¹³ The women, however, were on the losing side of the argument. As *Lucifer* focused more on bettering humanity through eugenics, their voices were drowned out.

In fact, as *Lucifer* evolved, it became apparent that more men than women were given a voice. In a letter to the editor in 1898, Elsie Wilcox noticed that “‘our paper’ seems to be changing gender.” Seldom did she see an article written by a female, and she had even sent in several articles herself that never appeared. Wilcox noted that others had complained to her that *Lucifer* was “deteriorating in tone,” and it appeared hardly reasonable that there was more space for male writers. She called for a stronger female element, even if their articles “did not show quite so much literary skill, or ‘masculine grasp of intellect.’”¹¹⁴ Wilcox’s letter not only objected to the decline of strong female writers, but also indicated that many women believed that the male writers were far more skilled than they. With *Lucifer*’s new focus on eugenics and scientific topics, no doubt many other women could have felt similarly. Longtime correspondent Mattie Hursen voiced this opinion when she wrote that because many women lacked education and the

¹¹² Lizzie M. Holmes, “A Free Woman’s Duties,” *Lucifer*, 14 May 1903.

¹¹³ Carrie Austin, “The Soulful Woman and Stirpiculture,” *Lucifer*, 20 August 1903.

¹¹⁴ Elsie Cole Wilcox, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 3 September 1898.

“ability to reason clearly,” they kept silent for fear of criticism.¹¹⁵ Harman defended the lack of female writers by claiming that he selected articles based on content, not the gender of the author. He also noted that only a small number of articles came in from women and that in *Lucifer’s* public meetings women seemed to prefer that men take control and do the talking. Harman did urge more women to write in, but in the following years men continued to dominate.¹¹⁶

The prevalence of male contributors and the new focus on eugenics both served to reinscribe male hegemony on the sex radical movement in the twentieth century. Previously, in *Lucifer’s* Kansas days, more women’s voices had graced its pages. Female contributors such as Elmina Slenker, Lois Waisbrooker, Mattie Hursen, M.C. Gurney, Lucinda B. Chandler, and Rachel Campbell had written countless articles advocating women’s emancipation from tyrannical husbands, the right of women to freely express their sexuality, and of women’s desires to control their reproduction.¹¹⁷ However, as *Lucifer* shifted focus to eugenics in the twentieth century, its pages became dominated by men like R.B. Kerr, Jonathan Mayo Crane, Albert Chavannes, C.L. James, and Professor

¹¹⁵ Mattie Hurson, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 1 October 1898. Her last name was also listed as “Hursen,” which was the most common spelling throughout her many *Lucifer* contributions. For consistency, “Hursen” has been used throughout this work.

¹¹⁶ Moses Harman, Editorial comment, *Lucifer*, 3 September 1898.

¹¹⁷ See *Lucifer*, 1883-1896 for examples, also Chapter 3 for specific examples: Elmina Slenker, “Borning Better Babies,” *Lucifer*, 29 May 1886; Elmina Drake Slenker, “Contraceptics,” *Lucifer*, 23 July 1886; Elmina Drake Slenker, “Mrs. Whitehead, Diana and Elmina,” *Lucifer*, 3 August 1888; Elmina Drake Slenker, “Elmina’s Response to Francis,” *Lucifer*, 7 June 1889; Elmina Drake Slenker, “Response to Edgeworth,” *Lucifer*, 1 April 1887; Elmina Drake Slenker, “Dianaism,” *Lucifer*, 24 September 1886; Elmina Drake Slenker, “Comments on Chavannes’ Article,” *Lucifer*, 14 January 1887; Elmina Slenker, “Free-Love,” *Lucifer*, 29 July 1887; Elmina Drake Slenker, “Marriage,” *Lucifer*, 29 October 1886; Aunt Elmina, “A Crime of Mothers,” *Lucifer*, 8 September 1893; Lois Waisbrooker, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 30 August 1889; Mattie E. Hursen, “Letter to Judge Foster,” *Lucifer*, 1 November 1889; Mattie Hursen, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 13 March 1891; Mattie Hursen, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 13 March 1891; M.C. Gurney, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 16 April 1886; M.C. Gurney, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 2 November 1883; M.C. Gurney, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 9 April 1886; Mrs. M.C. Gurney, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 5 March 1886; M.C. Gurney, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 15 October 1886; Lucinda B. Chandler, “What is Marriage?” *Lucifer*, 10 February 1888; Rachel Campbell, *The Prodigal Daughter*, printed in *Lucifer*, 12 June 1885; Rachel Campbell, “Sex Ethics No. 1,” *Lucifer*, 24 June 1892.

Edgar L. Larkin. The men served to shift the discussion towards more scientific topics, such as heredity, “stirpiculture” or scientific breeding, human advancement, and evolution.¹¹⁸ While they still promoted sex radicalism and open discussions of the sex question, their ideas about women were more limited to thinking about how woman contributed to the advancement of the human race as mothers.

At its very core, *Lucifer's* new focus on freeing women for the sake of the race by means of eugenics ultimately served the long time freethought goals of its male adherents. Many men had originally become involved in the freethought movement because of the economic and religious oppression they faced. They had joined liberal leagues and founded the *Valley Falls Liberal* to express their desires to escape pressures from church, state, and capitalists. *Lucifer's* men soon advocated free love as a way to achieve personal independence in their love affairs, arguing that the abolition of marriage would throw off church and state oppression. Simultaneously, free love provided men with power over women as they acted as rescuers and protectors while also allowing them to pursue their own destinies as individuals. As *Lucifer* entered in its final phase of advocating eugenics, this shift served to reinforce male dominance. By improving the heredity of the human race, sex radicals believed they could disempower the dominant economic forces while also achieving what was ultimately a goal of reconstructing their manhood: regaining personal autonomy and asserting manly independence.

¹¹⁸ See R.B. Kerr, “Darwin, Weismann and Harman,” *Lucifer*, 4 March 1899; R.B. Kerr, “The Quintessence of Harmanism,” *Lucifer*, 27 January 1900; R.B. Kerr, “Monogamy and Heredity,” *Lucifer*, 9 April 1903; R.B. Kerr, “Does Evolution Favor Exclusiveness?” *Lucifer*, 11 April 1907; Jonathan Mayo Crane, “Interest in Eugenics Increasing,” *Lucifer*, 28 March 1907; Albert Chavannes, “Variety Scientifically Considered,” *Lucifer*, 2 March 1898; C.L. James, “Heredity,” *Lucifer*, 21 July 1900; Edgar L. Larkin, “All-Day Visit of Moses Harman to the Lowe Observatory,” *Lucifer*, 14 March 1907.

Sex radicals now pointed to the enslavement of women in marriage as the source of economic oppression for the working classes. Harman explained that enforced maternity led to a “hap-hazard, improvident method of populating the world” that only increased those who lacked intellect and energy because they were born under bad conditions. The “monopolists,” he reasoned, depended on a perennial supply of “submissive slaves;” they wanted the poor to have large families so that their workers would be more downtrodden. Based on his understanding of heredity, Harman argued that the children of the working class would be born tired, “the result of the overworked and physically and mentally enslaved condition of the mother during gestation.”¹¹⁹ Furthermore, these families did not have the resources to properly care for large numbers of children, which only served to perpetuate the growing number of workers. As contributor Henry Thayer maintained, the capitalist “lives on the blood of the worker,” and in order to do so “it is necessary for the worker to approximate the condition of a slave.”¹²⁰ The ruling classes, therefore, desired ignorant workers and orchestrated laws such as the Comstock Act to restrict knowledge of contraception. Marital laws and customs, by preventing women choice, also functioned to ensure that large numbers of children would be born and replenish the supply of workers.¹²¹

In the view of *Lucifer's* contributors, the church and state conspired to enslave the masses. Harman claimed the race had become submissive to the church due to its control over sex and because the mother’s strict religious teachings were passed to her offspring during the prenatal period. The result was that “the child easily becomes a servant, a

¹¹⁹ Moses Harman, “Comments on Correspondence,” *Lucifer*, 19 June 1896.

¹²⁰ Henry Thayer, “Compulsory Ignorance,” *Lucifer*, 29 April 1899.

¹²¹ Henry Thayer, “Compulsory Ignorance,” *Lucifer*, 29 April 1899; Moses Harman, “Comments on Correspondence,” *Lucifer*, 19 June 1896.

slave, to the church-state officials under whose rule he was born.”¹²² Politicians, too, saw benefit in encouraging mothers to have many children, one anonymous contributor wrote. While the masses “are kept quiet by the comforting fiction that through ‘manhood suffrage’ they are self-governing,” it would be “easier for the power-loving politician and the self-loving lawyer to get in their schemes for self-aggrandizement.”¹²³

Even Theodore Roosevelt, with his rhetoric of “race suicide,” was pushing this agenda. Harman stated that the president was championing the interests of church, state, and capitalist with the call for women to have more children. Quantity, not quality, was what the politicians, priests, and capitalistic bosses wanted in order to further their own power. Harman explained that those in power understood that a continued oversupply of children would “not have [the] strength of will or power of intellect sufficient to be self-reliant, or to demand their equal right to nature’s opportunities, but will ask and expect nothing better than a good and kind master—in economics, in politics, in religion, in judicial matter, in all the relations of life.”¹²⁴

The sex radicals believed they could use the principles of eugenics to free the working classes, including themselves, from economic, church, and state oppression. If a family was able to regulate its size, the eugenic argument stated, the quality of children produced would be much higher. Thus, the working classes would be better able to resist domination. Henry Thayer explained that if a worker was free from a large family, his female companion would be more than just a “drudge” and her offspring, one or two who

¹²² Moses Harman, “Birth, Death, and Funerals,” *Lucifer*, 27 January 1897.

¹²³ Investigator, “Editorial: The Opponents of Eugenics,” *American Journal of Eugenics*, November 1907.

¹²⁴ Moses Harman, “Lucifer and the Obscenity Laws,” in *The Persecution and the Appreciation: Brief account of the trials and imprisonment of Moses Harman, because of his advocacy of the freedom of women from sexual enslavement and of the right of children to be born well...* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1907), 40-41.

were wanted, would be “happy children with clear minds.”¹²⁵ Sex radicals agreed that the main way to achieve this goal was to give women the freedom to make choices about reproduction by emancipating her from “sexual slavery.” But, in order for woman to control her fertility, laws restricting the dissemination of birth control information needed to be struck down, including the infamous Comstock Act.¹²⁶ Once people learned how to regulate the size of their families through scientific control, Harman argued that it would lead to “an end to the control of the masses by the ruling classes—an end to the haphazard reproduction now everywhere practiced—an end to enslaved motherhood and to ill-born and poorly endowed children.”¹²⁷ Contributor Jonathan Mayo Crane asserted that poverty would then decrease because “the poor no longer would have undesired children and the labor market no longer would be overstocked.”¹²⁸

Eugenics, then, was a way for the sex radicals to regain control over their own lives. As they understood heredity, children born to free mothers would retain qualities of independence and self-reliance needed to rebel against oppression. As Moses Harman stated, it is only “the strong, the intelligent, the self-reliant, the self-respecting men who can be relied on to bring salvation for themselves and their fellow toilers, and such men as these are not born of submissive, improvident mothers.”¹²⁹ Freeing women, therefore, would free men to be more independent. This goal and the problem of control by the church, state, and economic systems had long been a complaint of the Kansas freethinkers in the early days of the paper. *Lucifer's* contributors had first advocated free

¹²⁵ Henry Thayer, “Compulsory Ignorance,” *Lucifer*, 29 April 1899.

¹²⁶ Jonathan Mayo Crane, “Interest in Eugenics Increasing,” *Lucifer*, 28 March 1907; Jonathan Mayo Crane, “Reproduction of the Unfit,” *American Journal of Eugenics*, July 1907.

¹²⁷ Moses Harman, *Institutional Marriage* (Chicago: M. Harman, 1901), 32-35.

¹²⁸ Jonathan Mayo Crane, “Interest in Eugenics Increasing,” *Lucifer*, 28 March 1907.

¹²⁹ Moses Harman, “Remarks,” *Lucifer*, 14 April 1897.

love as a way for men to regain control over some aspects of their lives, but eugenics presented a much more complete solution—it promised individual freedom as well as the end to class conflict and economic oppression.

Eugenics also allowed for a reconstruction of manhood in the same manner as free love. Freeing women to have fewer and better children would also bring benefits to men. The issue of variety and a father's duty put the responsibility of childcare directly on women's shoulders while simultaneously allowing men to form sexual relationships with multiple women with little regard to child rearing. Furthermore, if a eugenic solution was implemented and the numbers of the poor decreased, sex radical men could envision a future in which they took away power from the capitalists, politicians, and priests whom they imagined controlled their destiny. Ultimately, then, eugenics was a way for sex radical men to reconstruct a masculine identity revolving around individualism and personal autonomy.

In its last few years, *Lucifer* made eugenics its top priority. As a final symbol of the commitment to eugenics, Moses Harman changed the name of his paper to the *American Journal of Eugenics* in 1907. He explained that for years *Lucifer* had been insisting on “the right to be born well” and that this was “just what the science of eugenics is designed to promote.” The paper had a specific field, that of the study of sexual science, so it needed a name to reflect this. Harman had also grown tired of the controversy surrounding the name “Lucifer.” He wanted a name with no stigma attached, one that was easily explained. The paper, he claimed, was the first to be devoted to the study of eugenics and continued to be a pioneer in the field. Thus, the name change was

appropriate to him and others.¹³⁰ Contributors agreed; one noted that the name sounded much more “scientific” while another stated that it suggested a much more “serious purpose.”¹³¹ It could even be argued that the type of sex radicalism promoted by *Lucifer’s* successor had finally attained a mark of respectability. Eugenics itself had become a respectable topic amongst the scientific community, and Harman was no doubt looking forward to a less controversial career with the *American Journal of Eugenics*.¹³²

As *Lucifer* transitioned into the *American Journal of Eugenics*, it lost its more radical focus on women and shifted into more male-centered themes of science, heredity, and race improvement. Instead of advocating the emancipation of woman for her own sake, the paper argued that women should be freed for the sake of bettering the human race. By focusing on eugenics, sex radicals constructed a rhetoric that positioned women as mothers and limited their freedom to that of motherhood. Men, on the other hand, saw eugenics as a means of achieving total freedom for their sexual, economic, and religious lives. While women would be bound to the commitments of motherhood, men would be born into independence and would be free to shape their lives as they pleased.

¹³⁰ Moses Harman, “Lucifer’s Metempsychosis,” *Lucifer*, 23 May 1907.

¹³¹ Juliet Severance, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 6 June 1907; Theodore Schroeder, “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 6 June 1907.

¹³² Moses Harman, “Editorial,” *American Journal of Eugenics*, February 1908.

CONCLUSION

Neither my birth-control discussion nor Margaret Sanger's efforts were pioneer work. The trail was blazed in the United States by the grand old fighter Moses Harman, his daughter Lillian, Ezra Heywood, Dr. Foote and his son, E. C. Walker, and their collaborators of a previous generation.

—Emma Goldman, *Living My Life*, 1931.¹

ON A COLD WINTER'S DAY IN 1906, Moses Harman broke rock at the Joliet penitentiary just outside the city of Chicago. A seventy-five year old man, his health was fading as he endured the grueling punishment that the court had set for a term of one year. When not weathering the frigid conditions, he was forced to share a cell with a man dying of tuberculosis and another who was in the habit of using tobacco and suffering from dysentery.² In fact, Harman's daughter Lillian believed that his treatment in prison was intended to kill him. Officials at Joliet were especially hard on Harman and ignored his pleas to be sent to a doctor for a serious cough he acquired while at the prison, commenting that they had just the right place to bury him. If not trying to kill him intentionally, the prison officials did nothing to help him and tried their hardest to break his spirits.³

After four months of enduring this sentence, Harman was transferred to a hospital at the prison of Leavenworth, Kansas.⁴ He was able to receive medical treatment for his cough, bronchitis, and other ailments he had contracted while in Joliet. Though his release date was set for December 26, 1906, in July 1906 Harman still expressed doubt as

¹ Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1931), 553.

² Moses Harman, "Another Brief Greeting from the U.S. Prisoner," *Lucifer*, 19 July 1906.

³ Lillian Harman, Editorial note, *Lucifer*, 19 July 1906.

⁴ Moses Harman, "Another Brief Greeting from the U.S. Prisoner," *Lucifer*, 19 July 1906.

to whether he would make it out of prison alive. Aside from his pessimistic attitude about his physical condition, Harman stated that he cared more about the work he was doing in sex reform than prolonging his life. He felt that it was more important to humanity and would gladly serve time in prison if it meant he could further the cause.⁵ Though he doubted it at the time, Moses Harman would survive his time in prison and continue in his sex radical career. Shortly after his release in 1907 he transitioned *Lucifer* into the *American Journal of Eugenics*, a publication that would continue another three years until his death. Symbolized by his time in prison and his commitment to continue the paper, Harman's life's work was dedicated to sex reform and the potential good it could serve humanity. Harman was not alone in his convictions; over the course of *Lucifer's* thirty year history, others shared his enthusiasm that sex radicalism could solve the numerous problems they faced in an industrializing and modernizing world.

In the late nineteenth century, men across America's heartland battled forces which seemed to challenge their place in the political and socioeconomic order as well as their very identities as men. As exemplified in Kansas, religious organizations were hard at work, attempting to influence the passage of legislation that many freethinkers construed as attempts to combine church and state. The "Liberals" witnessed the efforts of the Woman's Christian Temperance Organization which pressured the legislature to pass laws on prohibition, raise the age of consent for girls, and grant women municipal suffrage, with the intention that women could work politically to make sure these laws were enforced. Freethinking men of Kansas viewed these efforts as a threat to their personal freedom and liberty of conscience. Joining together in local groups such as the

⁵ Moses Harman, "Letters from Leavenworth," *Lucifer*, 19 July 1906.

Valley Falls Liberal League, the freethinkers challenged reformers' attempts to combine church and state.

The Kansas Liberals and other rural men across the Midwest were further confronted with deteriorating economic conditions and interpreted the situation in terms of a class conflict. Most freethinkers who wrote to publications such as the *Kansas Liberal* and its successor *Lucifer* were small farmers, barely making ends meet in an agricultural economy that experienced falling prices, constant drought, and clashes with railroad companies who controlled land and charged high shipping rates. Of those readers from larger cities, most were wage workers who struggled to support their families. Freethinkers were quick to blame capitalists and the rise of the industrial machine for their loss of economic autonomy, asserting that the top half of society monopolized resources and treated laborers as wage slaves. They also targeted the state itself as an entity that had become corrupted by religious incursions and corporate influences.

What these men desired was a kind of individualism that they feared was rapidly slipping away. Their ideas and arguments harkened back to the early nineteenth century when America was an agrarian society and most white men could claim the status of economic independence as a yeoman farmer or independent businessman. They yearned for the promise of economic opportunity and political freedoms envisioned by the founding fathers, especially the ideals of equality among men and privilege for none. Yet, as the freethinkers corresponded and debated in the pages of the *Kansas Liberal*, they struggled to overcome the religious, economic, and political oppressions they experienced and witnessed at an increasing rate.

For these men, sex radicalism seemed to hold the possible solution to their concerns. Readers and correspondents of *Lucifer* began discussing free love in the mid-1880s, wanting to form and dissolve sexual relationships based on personal affections alone. But free love entailed more than just romantic affairs; at its very heart it represented a rejection of both church and state authority, as sex radicals advocated the abolishment of legal marriage. Free love came to symbolize a way for men to recapture a sense of individualism and feel in control of their own destiny. While free love was not an immediate answer to economic inequalities, it did allow men to assert their independence in personal affairs.

Free love also offered men a potential pathway to resolve the crisis in masculinity that was building at the end of the nineteenth century. In addition to the loss of economic independence, men faced challenges regarding the rise of feminism and women's rights, best symbolized in this study by the power of the WCTU to affect change. By calling for the emancipation of women from "sex slavery," what sex radical men were actually doing was repositioning their power over women. As emancipators, men compared themselves to antebellum abolitionists who worked to free African slaves. They created an identity of rescuers and protectors of women through their promotion of free love, indicating that women could not free themselves from abusive marriages without the help of men like Moses Harman. Men who exemplified the ideals of free love like Harman and his junior editor E.C. Walker were idolized by women writing in to *Lucifer*, and Walker himself provided the example of how men could recapture personal autonomy through free love when he formed an autonomistic union with Lillian Harman.

Alternatively, female readers and contributors were convinced that free love would help to discipline men's sexual practices and bring about a kinder and gentler manhood.

As freethinkers and believers in rational science, the men of *Lucifer* eventually adopted the contemporary trend of eugenics as a larger solution to their oppression. By concentrating on the advancement of the human race, they thought that they could find a way to improve their own status in an increasingly chaotic world. The focus of men's discussion in *Lucifer* shifted from woman's emancipation for her own sake to what they called "freedom in motherhood," or eugenics. Their new rationale for freeing women from the bonds of sex slavery was now to better humanity. Sex radicals reasoned that women who were free to choose the fathers of their children would select superior men and, being free to control their reproduction and have the best conditions in maternity, would thus give birth to a better race of men. Free women, their eugenic thinking argued, could only produce children who would grow to be free and independent men, able to break the chains of economic oppression thrust upon them by capitalism and the modern industry. Eugenics, as a last step for the men of *Lucifer*, represented the final means of resolving their perceived economic oppression and reclaiming a sense of lost masculine identity. Consequently, the shift to eugenics also served to reinscribe male hegemony on the sex radical movement, as women's roles were limited to that of motherhood while men envisioned themselves as becoming autonomous individuals.

While *Lucifer* maintained a committed following throughout its existence, society at large, however, never accepted free love or sex radicalism even during the height of the movement. *Lucifer* and its editor Moses Harman were too radical, and Harman's methods of sex reform, which included defying postal laws and lambasting public

censors, created too much notoriety. The free love marriage promoted by Harman and carried out by his junior editor and daughter produced a scandal in their small Kansas community, as local residents rejected their ideas on sexuality and marriage reform. Harman's controversial opinions about sex and his publishing of "obscene" materials in *Lucifer* subsequently outraged the already upset citizens. More than anything, it was the bold way in which they openly and purposefully defied the law and publicly refuted long-held marital and sexual customs that provoked the townspeople's rage. Because of the manner in which Harman and the free lovers scandalized the community and made spectacles of themselves to prove their theories, local citizens felt they had no choice but to turn to the state and postal authorities to suppress what they saw as a danger to sexual morality and public order.

Moses Harman did not find peace and acceptance in Chicago, nor did *Lucifer*. Lillian, who was serving as assistant editor, first had difficulties obtaining a second class mailing status for *Lucifer*. She was convinced that R.M McAfee, the regional inspector of the mail, was determined to suppress *Lucifer* and was trying to prejudice the post office in Chicago against the publication.⁶ Again in 1903, the post office held up issues of the paper as "unmailable," deeming them "obscene literature."⁷ Only after the Free Speech League of New York City, with whom Harman had been in correspondence, sent a representative to Washington, D.C. did the postal authorities readmit *Lucifer* to second class mailing rates.⁸ Harman suspected that McAfee would not give up until *Lucifer* was squelched, and his suspicions were confirmed on February 23, 1905 when he was again

⁶ Lillian Harman, "The Latest Attempt at Suppression," *Lucifer*, 19 June 1896.

⁷ Lillian Harman, "The Censor Strikes at Lucifer," *Lucifer*, 31 December 1903.

⁸ Lillian Harman, "The Postal Department Orders a Rehearing," *Lucifer*, 28 January 1904; Lillian Harman, "Lucifer Readmitted to Second-Class Rates," *Lucifer*, 10 March 1904.

arrested for violating the Comstock Act. The charges stated Moses Harman “had ‘knowingly’ deposited in the post office an ‘obscene publication, namely *Lucifer*’.”⁹

The two offending articles followed the basic tenants of Harman’s sex reform agenda. The first item, published in *Lucifer* on November 24, 1904, was part of a series of articles written by Dora Forster titled “Sex Radicalism” in which she argued that sex as a subject needed to be addressed and studied in its importance to sociology. She believed that both adults and children would benefit from sex education. Forster also derided what she called “Puritanism,” which was embodied by social control, “bond-marriage,” and ignorance on the subject of sex. She discussed the importance of not only regenerative sex but also “recreative” sex and the use of contraceptive methods.¹⁰ Sara Crist Campbell authored the second offending item, titled “More Thoughts on Sexology,” which appeared in the December 8, 1904 issue. In this article, Campbell stated that it was “the pleasant sensation that is sought [in the act of sex] and not conception.” She argued, however, that sex should be sought only after love had been cultivated between the couple and that “when people once learn how to enjoy the sexual association according to this method [of avoiding orgasm] they will not wish to do otherwise excepting by design for the purpose of securing offspring.” By following these guidelines, Campbell asserted that the human race would be improved.¹¹

Unlike Harman’s previous experiences, his trial was speedily carried out soon after his arrest. Harman faced the judge on May 22, 1905 in the U.S. District Court and

⁹ Moses Harman, “Under the Harrow Once More,” *Lucifer*, 2 March 1905.

¹⁰ Moses Harman, “Cause of the Trouble,” *Lucifer*, 2 March 1905; Dora Forster, *Sex Radicalism: As Seen by an Emancipated Woman of the New Time* (Chicago: Moses Harman, 1905).

¹¹ Moses Harman, “Cause of the Trouble,” *Lucifer*, 2 March 1905. This article incorrectly states that the article was published 28 December 1904 and is titled “More Thoughts on Sex.” Upon reviewing *Lucifer*, the article’s title is actually “More Thoughts on Sexology” and was published 8 December 1904. Sara Crist Campbell, “More Thoughts on Sexology,” *Lucifer*, 8 December 1904.

was indicted for “circulating through the mails undesirable literature on questions of sex.” Harman was allowed to speak in his defense, asserting that he believed the “questions of sexual physiology and science should be taught in the public schools” and that “it should be the first and foremost scientific study” because it pertains to “the production of life.” No physicians, however, were allowed to give evidence to affirm his claims. The Associated Press reported that the court room was “crowded with men and women who [were] followers of the teachings of the editor, and much interest was shown in the words of the old man.”¹² He was found guilty based on his publication of the Forster article and sentenced to one year at hard labor at the state penitentiary. Harman asserted the judge’s personal beliefs, that sex should not be discussed in public or private, influenced his decision.¹³

Harman appealed his case but without success. At a new trial in the U.S. Appellate Court of Illinois in January 1906, his attorney argued on points of technical law, while the U.S. district attorney attempted to show the demoralizing effects of the subject of sex. Harman was not allowed to make statements on his behalf and the original sentence was upheld.¹⁴ He was taken to Cook County Jail on February 26, 1906 and then transferred to Joliet Penitentiary on February 27, 1906 to serve out his year’s sentence “at hard labor.”¹⁵ Harman endured a prison sentence more like that of a hardened criminal, believing that the sentence and the treatment he received in prison

¹² Associated Press Report, *Lucifer*, 22 June 1905; Jonathan Mayo Crane, “Brief History of Latest Attempt to Suppress All Free and Fair Discussion of Race Improvement,” *Lucifer*, 24 May 1906.

¹³ Moses Harman, “What Our Exchanges Say About It,” *Lucifer*, 6 July 1905; Moses Harman, “Elected For a Fourth Term,” *Lucifer*, 6 July 1905.

¹⁴ Moses Harman, “On the Firing Line,” *Lucifer*, 18 January 1906.

¹⁵ Moses Harman, “To Lucifer’s Friends: Greeting and Farewell,” *Lucifer*, 1 March 1906.

were meant to kill him and crush the spirits of his supporters.¹⁶ He survived and was released in December 1907.¹⁷

It seemed that once Inspector McAfee and postal authorities became aware of *Lucifer's* existence, thanks to the Valley Falls community in 1887, they would not leave Moses Harman alone as long as he continued his work. Speaking with her father in the midst of his breaking rock, Lillian stated that they both had good reason to believe that he might have been released from prison on a “promise to discontinue the publication of *Lucifer*.”¹⁸ Harman, however, did not give in to the desires of public censors. Even as *Lucifer* became the *American Journal of Eugenics*, what was to be a more scientific and respectable publication, the authorities pursued him. The post office held up and declared issues of *AJE* for the months of July through October 1907 “unmailable,” citing both articles and book advertisements as offending items. However, instead of trying to fight the post office as they had in the past, Lillian Harman removed articles from the January 1908 issue before it was printed in an effort to appease the postal censors.¹⁹ This marked a turn in the paper’s response to postal hostilities. Perhaps Moses Harman was tired of fighting with the post office or feared another trial. He clearly wanted the new *AJE* to pass by the postal filters unmolested, revising the journal in order that inspectors not deem it “obscene.”

Strangely enough, postal authorities continued to pursue sex radicals such as Moses Harman just as many of the ideas *Lucifer* promoted were being accepted by

¹⁶ Moses Harman, “Return to Home and Friends,” in Lillian Harman, ed., *Memorial of Moses Harman* (Chicago: By the Author, 1910), 6.

¹⁷ William Lemore West, “The Moses Harman Story,” *The Kansas Historical Quarterly* 37 (1971), 62.

¹⁸ Editorial comment by Lillian Harman in Moses Harman, “Return to Home and Friends,” in *Memorial of Moses Harman*, 5.

¹⁹ Lillian Harman, “Explanatory,” *American Journal of Eugenics*, January 1908.

popular morality into the twentieth century. More Americans were adopting contraceptive practices in attempt to curtail their fertility and for the expressed goal of allowing for creative sexual expression between husbands and wives. Reformers such as Margaret Sanger helped to popularize and legitimize the use of birth control, convincing the medical establishment to become involved. The acceptance and use of contraceptive practices were linked to the recognition of sexual expression as a new positive value. The works of psychologist Sigmund Freud and sexologist Havelock Ellis contributed to the growing value and importance of sexuality to American culture. By the 1920s, America had entered a new sexual era where positive values of sexuality were intertwined with notions of a companionate marriage, the pursuit of love, a new commercial and leisure culture, and a growing visibility of sex in print and movie culture.²⁰

Just as their ideas were being incorporated into popular morality, the sex radicals themselves fell out of the limelight. Harman continued to publish *AJE* until his death in 1910; Lillian brought out the last edition in March as a memorial tribute to her father.²¹ In remembering her father, she related to readers that he died preparing the last edition of *AJE*, stating “no one can know how long he kept going by sheer force of will.”²² Some of *Lucifer’s* most prominent contributors had preceded the editor in death, including Elmina Slenker and Lois Waisbrooker.²³ Lillian Harman had been the poster child for free love with her 1886 autonomistic marriage to E.C. Walker, but after her father’s death she elected to return to private life. In 1904, she briefly retired from the *Lucifer* office

²⁰ John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: a History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 171-201, 222-235.

²¹ Hal D. Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Lawrence, KS: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1977), 267-268.

²² Lillian Harman, “Farewell Tributes,” *Memorial of Moses Harman*, 7.

²³ Sears, 268.

but was soon called back to the editor's chair while Moses Harman served out his last prison term. At the time, she admitted to readers that she liked domestic work more than the pressures of editorial work and only returned so that *Lucifer* would continue.²⁴ Once the publication ceased in 1910, Lillian was free to resume her domestic existence, which she now shared with George O'Brien, a printer whom she quietly and legally married shortly after the turn of the century.²⁵

While sex radicalism may not have ever become "respectable" in its time, it can tell us about how Americans across the heartland struggled in a transitional time between a country that was agrarian and valued individualism to a nation that was rapidly urbanizing, industrializing, and modernizing. These trends affected the sex radicals' identities and conception of their lives as they lost social and economic power and were faced with a changing gendered order that witnessed female transcendence into traditional fields of male power. Their ideas were often contradictory, as men envisioned themselves as protectors of women but also declared their independence from women. The sex radicals combined elements of the past, namely agrarian individualism manifested in freethought and free love, with elements of the present through the science of eugenics, perhaps as a way to reconcile their nostalgia for a lost world with their hopes for a brighter future. Sex radicalism was their attempt to deal with the perceived social, economic, and gendered crises and to understand and remake their roles as men at a time when that task seemed nearly impossible.

²⁴ Lillian Harman, "Letter to Mrs. Untermann," *Lucifer*, April 11, 1907.

²⁵ Sears, 268. Sears obtained this insight into Lillian's life when he interviewed her son George Harman O'Brien, 22 June 1971.

APPENDIX A

AUTONOMISTIC MARRIAGE PRACTICALIZED¹

While distinctly denying the right of any citizen or citizens whether minority or majority, to inquire into our private affairs, or to dictate to us as to the manner in which we shall discharge our private duties and obligations to each other, we wish it understood that we are not afraid nor ashamed to let the world know the nature of the civil compact entered into between Lillian Harman and Edwin C. Walker, at the home of the senior editor of *Lucifer* on Sunday, the 19th of September 1886, of the common calendar. As our answer, then, to the many questions in regard thereto we have reproduced as near as possible the aforesaid proceedings.

M. Harman, father of Lillian Harman, one of the parties to this agreement or compact, read the following, as a general

STATEMENT OF PRICIPLES IN REGARD TO MARRIAGE

Marriage—by which term we mean the various attractions, Sentiments, arrangements and interests, psychical, social, material, involved in the sex-relations of men and women—is, or should be, distinctively a personal matter, a strictly private affair. There are, or should be but two parties to this arrangement or compact—a man and a woman; or perhaps we should say a *woman and a man*—since the interests, the fate, of a woman is involved, for weal or woe in marriage, to a far greater extent than is the fate of interests of man. Some one has said, “Marriage is for a man only an episode, while for woman it is the epic of her life.” Hence it would seem right and proper that in all arrangements pertaining to marriage woman should have the first voice or control. Marriage looks to Maternity, Motherhood, as its most important result or outcome, and as dame Nature has placed the burden or maternity upon woman it would seem that marriage should be emphatically and distinctively woman’s work—woman’s Institution.

It need not be said that this is not the common, the popular, and especially the legal view of marriage. The very etymology itself of the word tells a very different story. Marriage is derived from the French word *mari*, meaning the “husband!” And never did the etymology of a word more truly indicate its popular and legal meaning than does the etymology of this one. Marriage as enforced in so-called Christian lands, as well as in most heathen countries, is preeminently man’s affair—man’s institution. Its origin, (mythologic origin) declares that woman was made for man, not man for woman, not each for the other. History shows that man has ruled over woman as mythology declares he should do, and the marriage laws themselves show that they were made by man for man’s benefit, not for woman’s. Marriage means or results in the family as an institution, and the laws and customs pertaining thereto make man the head and autocrat of the family. When a woman marries she merges her individuality as a legal person into that of her husband, even to the surrender of her name, just as chattel slaves were required to take the name of their master.

¹ Moses Harman, “Autonomistic Marriage Practicalized,” *Lucifer*, 1 October 1886.

Against all such invasive laws and unjust discriminations, we as autonomists hereby most solemnly protest. We most distinctly and positively reject, repudiate and abjure all such laws and regulations, and if we ever have acknowledged allegiance to these statute laws regulating marriage we hereby renounce and disclaim all such allegiance.

To particularize and recapitulate:

Marriage being a strictly personal matter we deny the right of society, in the form of church and state to regulate it or interfere with the individual man and woman in this relation. All such interference, from our standpoint, is regarded as an impertinence and worse than an impertinence. To acknowledge the right of the state to dictate to us in these matters is to acknowledge ourselves the children or minor wards of the state, not capable of transacting our own business. We therefore most solemnly and earnestly repudiate, abjure and reject the authority, the rites and ceremonies of church and state in marriage as we reject the mummeries of the church in the ceremony called baptism and at the bedside of the dying. The priest or other state official can no more prepare the contracting parties for the duties of marriage than he can prepare the dying for life in another world. In either case the preparation must be the work of the parties immediately concerned. We regard all such attempts at regulation on the part of the church and state as not only an impertinence, not only wrong in principle but disastrous to the last degree in practice. Here, as everywhere else in the realm of personal rights and reciprocal duties, we regard intelligent choice—untrammelled voluntaryism—coupled with responsibility to natural law for our acts, as the true and only basis of morality.

As a matter of principle we are opposed to the making of promises on occasions like this. The promise to “love and honor” may become quite impossible of fulfillment, and that from no fault of the party making such promise. The promise to “love, honor and obey so long as both shall live,” commonly exacted of woman the inferior, the vassal of her husband, and when, from any cause, love ceases to exist between the parties, this promise binds her to do an immoral act, viz: It binds her to prostitute her sex-hood at the command of an unloving or unlovable husband. For these and [sic] other reasons that will readily suggest themselves, we, as autonomists prefer not to make any promises of the kind usually made as part of marriage ceremonies.

E.C. Walker, as one of the contracting parties, made the following statement:

This is a time for clear, frank statement. While regarding ALL *public* marital ceremonies as essentially and ineradicably indelicate, a pandering to the morbid, vicious, and meddlesome element in human nature, I consider this form the least objectionable.

I abdicate in advance all the so-called “marital rights” with which this public acknowledgment of our relationship may invest me. Lillian is and will continue to be as free to repulse any and all advances of mine as she has been heretofore. In joining with me in this love and labor union, she has not alienated a single *natural* right. She remains sovereign of herself, as I of myself, and we severally and together repudiate all powers legally conferred upon husbands and wives.

In legal marriage, woman surrenders herself to the law and to her husband, and becomes a vassal. Here it is different, Lillian is now made free.

In brief, and in addition: I cheerfully and distinctly recognize this woman’s right to the control of her own person; her right and duty to retain her own name; her right to

the possession of all property inherited, earned or otherwise justly gained by her; her equality with me in this co-partnership; my responsibility to her as regards the care of offspring, if any, and her paramount right to the custody thereof should any unfortunate fate dissolve this union. And now friends, a few words especially to you. This wholly private compact is here announced, not because I recognize that you, or society at large, or the State have any right to inquire into or determine our relations to each other, but simply as a guarantee to Lillian of my good faith toward her. And to this I Pledge my honor.

Lillian Harman then responded as follows:

I do not care to say much; actions speak more clearly than words, often. I enter into this union with Mr. Walker of my own free will and choice, and I agree with the views of my father and of Mr. Walker, as just expressed. I make no promises that it may become impossible or immoral for me to fulfill, but retain the right to act, always, as my conscience and best judgment shall dictate. I retain, also, my full maiden name, as I am sure it is my duty to do.

With this understanding, I give to him my hand in token of my trust in him and of the fidelity to the truth and honor of my intentions toward him.

Then M. Harman said:

As the father and natural guardian of Lillian [sic] Harman I hereby give my consent to this union. I do not "give away the bride," as I wish her to be always the owner of her person, and to be free always to act according to her truest and purest impulses, and as her highest judgment may dictate.

Then followed the usual congratulations.

APPENDIX B

THE MARKLAND LETTER

Another “Awful Letter”¹

[Dudes, prudes and statute moralists had better not read this letter.—ED.]

Eds. Lucifer: To-day’s mail brought me a letter from a dear lady friend, from which I quote and query:

“About a year ago F— gave birth to a babe, and was severely torn by the use of instruments in incompetent hands. She has gone through three operations and all failed. I brought her home and had Drs. — and — operate on her, and she was getting along nicely until last night, when her husband came down, forced himself into her bed and the stitches were torn from her healing flesh, leaving her in a worse condition than ever. I don’t know what to do.”

Now, Searlites; “Laws are made for the protection of life, person and property.”

Will you point to a law that will punish this brute?

Was his conduct illegal? The marriage license was a permit of the people at large given by their agent for this man and woman—a mere child—to marry.

Marry for what? Business? That he may have a housekeeper? He could legally have hired her for that. Save one thing, is there anything a man and woman can do for each other which they may not legally do without marrying?

Is not that one thing copulation? Does the law interfere in any other relations of service between the sexes?

What is rape? Is it not coition with a woman by force, not having a legal right?

Can there be legal rape? Did this man rape his wife? Would it have been rape had he not been married to her?

Does the law protect the person of woman in marriage? Does it protect her person out of marriage?

Does not the question of rape turn on the pivot of legal right regardless of consequences!

If a man stabs his wife to death with a knife, does not the law hold him for murder?

If he murders her with his penis, what does the law do?

If the wife, to protect her life, stabs her husband with a knife, does the law hold her guiltless?

Can a Czar have more absolute power over a subject than a man has over the genitals of his wife?

Is it not a fearful power? Would a kind, considerate husband feel robbed, feel his manhood emasculated, if deprived of this legal power?

Does the safety of society depend upon a legal right which none but the coarse, selfish, ignorant, brutal, will assert and exercise?

¹ W.G. Markland, “Another ‘Awful Letter’,” *Lucifer*, 18 June 1886.

If “marriage is a civil contract,” has the female partner a legal right to “twenty-five dollars” of the firm’s money to purchase the civil consent of CIVILIZED law, to a civilized dissolution of said contract?

Why charge one dollar to get into the show and “twenty-five” to get out? Why not reverse it?

Does “conjugal fidelity” depend upon a “Be it enacted?”

Does chastity, honor, truth, love, justice, honesty, purity, depend upon “an act to define, regulate and enforce” the said virtues?

If “love is taken as the only guide there will be no trouble” says A.J.S. Is there any necessity, then, in such cases, of a legal guide?

If the legal bond is recognized, is love the only bond? (“guide”)

If there is no “love guide” in a case, what is the legal guide?

Is not consistency a jewel, competency another, truthfulness another, honesty another?

Is a person whose moral horizon is bounded by statute law a safe citizen, entitled to confidence in preserving the aforesaid jewels?

Has freedom a gender?

Will some archist, or semi-archist, please tell the mother quoted above, “what to do?”

Sherwood, Tenn.

W.G. Markland

APPENDIX C

THE WHITEHEAD ARTICLE

Mrs. Whitehead to Elmina¹

Ed. Lucifer: Several weeks ago I saw the book—"Borning Better Babies, etc"—alluded to by Elmina D. Slenker in the last issue of your paper. At the time, and afterwards when seeing reviews of it, I felt moved to write somewhat thereon, but refrained, thinking—There is some one else, Elmina D. Slenker, who will take it up and handle it as it deserves.

How my hopes died within me when I read her views on the subject of preventing conception. I cannot say anything that I have not said before. The subject—not of conception but of prevention—fills me with the same loathing that I felt on hearing of a dyspeptic old lady who would eat her fill "because vituals [sic] tasted so good" and then go out around the corner of the house, run her finger down her throat and throw up her dinner.

Elmina Slenker says—"The one question of how to prevent conception is of more real interest to the world than any or all others." This statement needs modification. It is apparent to everybody and anybody who knows how a child is conceived knows how to prevent conception.

Further on we are told, "if we had 'Contracepts' of the best and most harmless kinds and the law should turn about and furnish these 'free gratis' to every woman, what a grand thing it would be."

Now I cannot put into intelligible [sic] language the felling this gives me, but as nearly as I can, let me interpret what the language of such a law would be. It would virtually be saying to women—you are the lawful prey of the sexual passions of men. Formerly you have made your masters uncomfortable because when they would follow the lead of their lusts, you, for fear of burdening them and yourselves with children, have protested against their gratification. Protesting slaves are a dangerous class. No slavery is hopelessly slavery until the slaves are willing slaves. We have seen that more and more women were revolting against sexual slavery; therefore we have resolved, in order to make their degradation sure and their bondage perpetual, to take away from them all excuse for not yielding to the sexual demands of their masters. Hereafter you may, for their benefit (?) allow all that is noble and refined in your natures to be absorbed in sexualism with no danger of harming the selfish enjoyment of your lords and masters by allowing the natural results of sexual intercourse. We have furnished you the means of contravening nature's laws; now go and remain contented slaves forever. Nature designed you for free mothers, but we will that instead you shall learn that you were made for man. We intend to deepen the impression that "continence is torture," and so put far off the day when humanity's forces will be directed into higher channels.

Stumblingly and imperfectly as it is done I believe the above truly interprets the language of "preventives." I do not wish to be understood as attributing these motives to those who advocate preventive measures but I cannot help feeling that they do not realize

¹ Celia B. Whitehead, "Letter to the Editor," *Lucifer*, 25 June 1886.

how terribly the weapon of defence [sic] they offer to woman would be turned against her.

It is not alone the bearing of children that ruins the health of women. I know in my limited acquaintance several "barren" women but they are made sick by sexual intercourse. Every physician of extended practice must know a great many. Where is any "preventive" for *this* state of things?

I am sorry, exceedingly sorry, that Elmina D. Slenker has come down from her high position as an inspirer of belief in continence and stooped to become an apologist for "physical necessity;" for surely there were already enough engaged in *that* work.

Celia B. Whitehead

Southington, Conn., June 3 1886.

APPENDIX D

THE O'NEILL LETTER

A Physician's Testimony¹

DEAR SIR:—I desire to add a few facts to the discussion going on in your paper.

I will not waste time and space in expressing my contempt of the gang of infernal hypocrites, led by the notorious and infamous Comstock, who attempt to pass as “Moral Censors” in this land of alleged freedom.

The brutal outrage recorded in the Markland letter is not at all uncommon. During the nineteen years I have been studying and practicing physic I have seen and heard of a multitude of such cases, as well as cases similar to that of Belle Dickinson.

Mrs. M— of this city *died* of injuries caused by the brutal sexual connection of her husband, a few days after an operation had been performed for perineal laceration. Her husband was a big drunken beast, and was morally guilty of her murder, although not *legally* guilty.

It is a well known fact that thousands of women are killed every year by sexual excesses forced on them. Many women are made sick by every act of coition. I know of several women who slowly perished from this cause.

It is said that elephants occupy several hours *in one act of coition*. I know that many men resemble them to a great extent; the results to their unhappy wives being mental and physical destruction—the mad-house or a premature grave.

I often recall to mind the question I once saw discussed in a book for Catholic priests, on the Hearing of Confessions: vix, as to what penance should be imposed on a man for insisting on putting his private organ into his wife's mouth. A woman once came to me with her mouth and throat full of chancres (venereal ulcers) caused by *her husband's* doing as above intimated. There seems to be no limit to the brutality and bestiality of many men.

Mr. F. of Wyoming wrote me for advice concerning a disease resembling syphilis and scrofula, but he never had coition with a woman: always with sheep, pigs, mares, etc., all his life. He was aged 48.

Mr. P.C. of California wrote asking if I could cure him of an *insatiable* appetite for *human semen*; he is a rich man; all his family (grown u men and women) *suck* each other's *private parts* in the presence of each other. He himself goes roaming all over the country trying to find men to allow him to “suck them off” as he says. He wrote me about it two years ago. He says he inherited this fearful legacy from his father.

Mrs. D. of this city is slowly dying now of general exhaustion and neurasthenia caused by her husband's brutal lust; he is a regular “elephant” (*vida supra*). Mrs. B., Mrs. O.M.V., and many others are in the same pitiful condition. A former patient of mine, Mrs. N—n, is in the mad-house from the same cause. In some few cases, men suffer from the excessive lust of their wives.

With regard to prevention of conception, there is not a physician who does not give advice how to do that everyday in the week. Many medical journals contain full instruction as to use of sponges, injection, etc. See, for instance, the Columbus (Ohio)

¹ Richard V. O'Neill, M.D., “Letter to the Editor,” *Lucifer*, 14 February 1890.

Medical *Journal* for February, 1889 (last year) and numerous others. Yet they are not prosecuted. Why?

I desire to enter my stern protest against the malicious persecutions of yourself and your associates by the enemies of freedom. Those unutterable ruffians, liars and perjurers, as they are, ought certainly to meet the fate which befell the same class of villains in France from 1789 to 1794.

I hope to be able to be present at your trial (if it ever comes off, which I am inclined to think is doubtful.) I am ready to verify upon oath and solemn affirmation all I say herein.

Wishing you a long life to labor for the cause of humanity, and speedy and complete destruction of your enemies, who are also the enemies of human liberty and progress, I am:

Yours fraternally,
RICHARD V. O'NEILL M.D.,
330 E 70 street, New York, N.Y.

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VITA

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Andrea received her B.A. as a dual degree in History and English in 2002 from the University of Missouri. After working full time in banking and information technology for three years, she decided to pursue graduate work in American history. Andrea earned her M.A. degree in History in 2007 from the University of Missouri, and continued at that institution working towards a Ph.D. in American history with a minor in Women's and Gender Studies, which she completed in July 2013.