SPEAKING OF SEX: THE RHETORICAL STRATEGIES
OF FRANCESS WILLARD, VICTORIA WOODHULL, AND IDA CRADDOCK

Inez L. Schaechterle

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2005

Committee:

Lovie Sue Carter, Advisor

Leigh Ann Wheeler
Graduate Faculty Representative

Kristine Blair

Bruce Edwards
ABSTRACT

Lovie Sue Carter, Advisor

While a growing body of rhetorical and historical research about American female reformers and the movements in which they were involved exists, little or nothing has been done focusing on the sexual aspects of reform speech. This is a significant omission; just as women’s social and legal standing at that time was inexorably bound to their sexual and reproductive capacities, so too did many reform efforts center on issues of women’s sexuality. Defining "public sexual discourse" as reform-oriented text that explicitly or obliquely addressed vaginal intercourse between men and women and that was produced specifically for distribution to an audience via speech or publication, this study first examined the texts of three late nineteenth-century female reformers: Frances Willard, president of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union; Victoria Woodhull, public speaker and publisher of a free love newspaper; and Ida Craddock, writer and distributor of sex-in-marriage booklets. Rhetorical examination of each text was based in the general biographical information and the sexual experiences and opinions of each rhetor and was foregrounded against the social and reform climates of her time. A specific historical or rhetorical problem for each rhetor was also explored based on her public sexual discourse. Next, a model of late nineteenth-century women reformers' public sexual discourse was developed. According the most generalizeable points of the model, nineteenth-century women reformers’ public sexual discourse was based on the perception that men sexually victimized women and that contemporaneous marriage could trap women into sexual, financial, and reproductive abuse. Sexual reform would protect women’s rights to control their own bodies within sexual relationships and to choose when to become pregnant. Reform would
also encourage couples to form intimate relationships founded in supportive religious or spiritual belief systems, and those relationships would, in turn, improve the entire culture. Sexual reformers themselves held radical religious beliefs relative to the protestant Christian norm. Finally, the model was interrogated in light of the discourse of white women's sexuality found in the anti-lynching rhetoric of Ida B. Wells.
For my parents, Eugene and Loretta Curran Schaechterle

and

for the feisty, funny, dedicated women and men of Planned Parenthood of Northern Nevada
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I wish to thank my committee members, Sue Carter, Kris Blair, Bruce Edwards, and Leigh Ann Wheeler for their unfailing support, patience, and good humor. Also, I could not have begun or even imagined this work without the coursework and class discussions of four amazing women and model feminists: Sue Carter, Ellen Berry, Leigh Ann Wheeler, and Kris Blair. Finally, resounding thank-yous to my siblings Linda, Carol, Henry, and Diane for hand-holding, occasional gifts of money or loans, laundry facilities and good meals, and a throughgoing rhetoric of belief that I could, and should, pursue this degree.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>WOMEN’S REFORM RHETORIES IN THE 19TH CENTURY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women, Rhetoric, and History</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Women’s Rhetorical Canon</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specific Concerns in Women’s Rhetorical History</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women’s Public Speech in the Late Nineteenth Century</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speaking of Sex: A Brief Introduction to the Study</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three Ways of Talking About Sex</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>WOMEN REFORMERS’ PUBLIC SEXUAL DISCOURSE</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Social Contexts of Late Nineteenth-Century Sexual Discourse</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why Talk About Sex</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who Talked About Sex and How</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How Sexual Discourse was Controlled</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Study</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why Ida Craddock</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why Frances Willard and Victoria Woodhull</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Why Public Sexual Discourse: Goals of the Study</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assumptions</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Terms and Definitions</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Study Design</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Problem of Woodhull’s Dual Character ............................................................. 127

CHAPTER V. IDA CRADDOCK: SOCIAL REFORM IN A DIFFERENT VOICE ........ 134

Biography................................................................................................................... 135

Sexuality and Marriage: Craddock’s Opinions and Experiences ......................... 138

Craddock’s Public Sexual Discourse: “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital
Living” ....................................................................................................................... 140

Sex in “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living: .................................... 141

Audiences........................................................................................................... 144

Craddock’s Ethos: Situated and Constructed...................................................... 149

Use of Enthymemes ....................................................................................... 152

Style ............................................................................................................ 153

“The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living”: Conclusion....................... 154

The Problem of Ida Craddock............................................................................. 156

CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION: 19TH CENTURY PUBLIC SEXUAL DISCOURSE –
WILLARD, WOODHULL, CRADDOCK, AND WELLS IN COVERSATION .......... 163

Continua of Women Reformer’s Public Sexual Discourse................................. 165

Nineteenth-Century Public Sexual Reform Discourse: A Model...................... 168

Public Sexual Discourse and Uses for the Model.............................................. 171

Interrogating the Model: Ida B. Wells’ Public Sexual Discourse...................... 173

Why Public Sexual Discourse: Revisiting the Goals of the Study .................... 177

Final Comments.................................................................................................... 181

WORKS CITED .................................................................................................................... 183

APPENDIX A. “THE WEDDING NIGHT” AND “RIGHT MARITAL LIVING” ........ 192
CHAPTER ONE

WOMEN’S REFORM RHETORICS IN THE 19TH CENTURY

Introduction

While a growing body of rhetorical and historical research about American female reformers and the movements in which they were involved exists, little or nothing has been done focusing on the sexual aspects of reform speech. This is a significant omission; many, perhaps even most, of the social and political reforms women sought in the latter Nineteenth Century were related to women’s sexuality. In an 1875 speech on social purity, Susan B. Anthony catalogued the laws which were particularly oppressive to women, yet in which they had no voice: “statutes for marriage and divorce, for adultery, breach of promise, seduction, rape, bigamy, abortion, infanticide,” as well as a legal and social system that punished prostitutes but not the men who visited them. She added that women’s position in society compelled them “to depend on men for subsistence, for food, clothes, shelter, for every chance to even earn a dollar” (Anthony). Clearly, latter nineteenth-century women had to negotiate deeply unequal relationships with men in order to survive, and many of these relationships involved some aspect or result of sexual intercourse or marriage. As a result, women reformers were often obliged to speak publicly about sex and sexual issues, sometimes explicitly, often obliquely, adding an additional element of risk to the challenges of female public discourse.

In this study, I examine the public sexual discourse of three late nineteenth-century female reformers: Frances Willard, president of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union; Victoria Woodhull, public speaker and publisher of a free love newspaper; and Ida Craddock, writer and distributor of sex-in-marriage booklets. Willard was a leader in the temperance and social purity movements, calling for social change in a variety of sexuality-related matters, yet
inhabiting a carefully conservative ethos. Woodhull was a notorious free-lover and agitator, touring the country speaking for women’s suffrage, labor reform, spiritualism, and the abolition of marriage; her ethos was definitely not conservative. Craddock occupied a space between these two well-known women: not famous, not representing a movement or organization, borrowing rhetorical strategies from both sides and bringing her sexual discourse directly to the populace that it was meant to benefit. Examining these women and their public sexual discourse separately and in relation to each other allows me to hypothesize a model of late nineteenth-century women’s sexual reform speech.

Before discussing the details of this study, it is necessary to examine both the state of current research on women's rhetoric in history and the context in which nineteenth-century sexuality speech occurred. Therefore, chapter one of this document explores issues surrounding feminist rhetorical/historical research, focusing at the last on concerns specific to the study of latter nineteenth-century female reform speakers. Chapter two investigates the contemporaneous environment in which late nineteenth-century sexuality discourse occurred; specifically, what types of public sexual discourse were engaged in at the time, who employed sexual discourse, and how such discourse was controlled. Chapter two also outlines the methodology used in this study and defines my terms. Chapter three examines public sexuality discourse employed by Frances Willard; chapter four, public sexuality discourse of Victoria Woodhull; and chapter five, that of Ida Craddock. Each of these chapters also examines a specific problem or issue of feminist rhetorical/historical research related to the woman in question. Chapter six draws conclusions based on my investigation of female reformers' public sexuality discourse and posits a model of such speech. Finally, I complicate that model by examining it through the lens of the sexuality discourse in Ida B. Well’s anti-lynching rhetoric.
Women, Rhetoric, and History

The study of women’s rhetoric in Western history has flourished in the decade since Lunsford edited Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women In the Rhetorical Tradition. As James Murphy wrote in the forward to that anthology, while Reclaiming offered a broad, even surprising, array of information about women’s rhetoric, so much more remained to be done (ix). Feminist scholars have, indeed, done more, uncovering and recovering women’s rhetorical acts throughout Western history and expanding the definition of "rhetorics."

That figuratively and literally weighty embodiment of the Western rhetorical canon, Bizzell and Herzberg's The Rhetorical Tradition, defines rhetoric as, among other things,

the practice of oratory; the study of the strategies of effective oratory; the use of language, written or spoken, to inform or persuade; the study of the relation between language and knowledge; the classification and use of tropes and figures; and, of course, the use of empty promises and half-truths as a form of propaganda.

(1)

This six-part definition appears to cover all rhetorical bases and largely reflects the canon contained within The Rhetorical Tradition. A quick look at the definition through a feminist lens, however, reminds us just how far removed the rhetorical tradition has been from women (and from those men who lacked power): throughout Western history, women have generally not been allowed to speak in public, educated in basic literacy, or occupied positions from which to inform or persuade; they have not been allowed to study language, its relationship to knowledge, or its tropes and figures in any systematic way, and they have often been the victims of propaganda – the “Enlightenment” was also the height of witch-burning mania.
Faced with this paucity of others in the rhetorical canon, feminist scholars have worked to recover female rhetors whom the canon has overlooked and, by widening the definition of 'rhetorical,' to expand the subject field of rhetorical inquiry, thus legitimizing what formerly had been seen as not within the province of, or appropriate for, rhetorical study. The work and the subjects of recovery and redefinition of course overlap, but for the purposes of this discussion, I will define each in a narrower manner and then explore a small measure of what each effort has accomplished.

The term 'recovery' can be understood as identifying women whose actions have met the most basic definition of rhetoric: "... the strategies of effective oratory; the use of language, written or spoken, to inform or persuade... the classification and use of tropes and figures...." Such women participated in the public discourse of their day, but were not written into, or were dropped from, the canon of rhetors worthy of study. An iconic example is Aspasia, an intellectual courtesan who moved in elite Athenian society, was reputed to have taught Socrates and other orators, and may have written Pericles' famous funeral oration (Glenn 39-44). She was mentioned in several texts written by, or about, canonical Classical figures – Plato, Xenophon, Cicero, Plutarch, and Athenaeus – and was depicted in a fresco over the doorway to the University of Athens, in the company of famous orators and philosophers (37). Yet, Aspasia and other female rhetors have been, Glenn states, subjected to the test of X + 1 by the "arbiter of canonical acceptance":

Whenever a woman has accomplished the same goals as her male counterpart (theorizing, public speaking, successful argument, persuasive letter writing, for example), the stakes immediately rise. She may have achieved X, but she needs X plus 1 to earn a place in rhetoric. (15)
In Aspasia's case, the '1' is extant text: nothing written by her remains. However, Glenn points out, no texts by Socrates exist, and yet he is a firm foundation of the rhetorical canon. Due to the work of feminist scholars since 1990, fortunately, Aspasia has joined Socrates in the second edition of Bizzell’s and Herzberg’s *The Rhetorical Tradition*. She did not appear in the first edition of that collection, published in 1990. Between the first and the second edition, published in 2002, Aspasia’s rhetoric was explored by Jarrett and Ong in *Reclaiming Rhetorica* (1995) and by Glenn in *Rhetoric Retold* (1997), compelling arguments that have returned Aspasia to the position that she held, by all reports, among the rhetoricians of her time.

Other examples of recovery can be found in Campbell's study of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminist rhetoric, published as two volumes, one of critique and one of the actual texts. The first act of recovery was Campbell’s two-volume work itself. Published in 1989, *Man Cannot Speak for Her* contains complete texts of women’s speeches that were not otherwise easily available to scholars (1: 9); by presenting complete texts and careful analysis, the collection challenged long-standing notions that public address in United States history was largely a male endeavor. Campbell’s second act of recovery was to redefine the rhetorical effectiveness criterion for public, persuasive appeal. The rhetors she studied, including Angelina Grimke, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Ida B. Wells, and Mary Church Terrell, were without question engaged in public, persuasive acts. Their "1," however, was the fact that their speeches failed to achieve results or effects in any immediate manner (1: 2), which has often been the measure of worth for male speech; yet canonical male rhetors were those very individuals who had access to political, religious, or social forums and whose words, therefore, had much greater potential of immediate or noticeable effect.
In addressing this issue of perceived effectiveness, Campbell noted that the rhetorical efforts of many men and women may fall short of the desired effect for reasons that have little to do with style, content, or delivery. The women Campbell anthologized, for example, faced multiple disadvantages in their efforts to create change through public speech: they spoke out at a time when women were expected to avoid notoriety; they challenged separate-spheres ideology by speaking to "promiscuous" audiences of men and women and, in the cases of Black women, to white audiences; and they spoke from underclass positions to promote reforms that both challenged and would fundamentally alter the dominant culture. In such cases, according to Campbell, works should be judged on "whether the choices made by the rhetors were skillful responses to the problems they confronted, not whether the changes they urged were enacted" (1: 3). Thus, Campbell not only recovered female rhetors speaking within the canonically-defined rhetorical tradition, she also redefined the notion of rhetorical success and extended the field of rhetorical inquiry. Although operating under a traditional definition of public, persuasive oratory, Campbell’s study invites the critic to move beyond the text and to position both text and rhetor in a socio-cultural space.

Another aspect of redefinition occurs in Mattingly’s study of nineteenth-century temperance rhetoric, Well-Tempered Women. In this case, members of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) were unarguably engaged in persuasive, public discourse and were quite successful at the time – as the sheer size of the WCTU membership, the success of its legislative efforts, and the popularity of its president, Frances Willard, attest. However, the rhetorical work of the WCTU, both in producing persuasive public speech and in training its female members in rhetorical practices, was long overlooked by feminist scholars who viewed the repeal of the eighteenth amendment as evidence of the failure of the temperance movement.
and who, operating through a second-wave feminist lens, expected nineteenth-century feminist speech to have a radical or marginalized appearance. In contrast, Mattingly shows how Frances Willard and the WCTU, by carefully maintaining a "womanly" or ladylike image, successfully promoted many of the same reform goals as more radical groups and individuals. This redefinition, then, is concerned not with the contemporaneous context or results of the speech act, but rather with feminist scholars’ perceptions of which acts or individuals are appropriate for study. In this case, feminist scholars had decided that the nineteenth-century women’s rights movement was more appropriate for study than was the temperance movement. Mattingly, however, redefined “appropriate” feminist historical inquiry to include women and women’s movements that did not appear feminist to contemporary scholars. In doing so, she discovered that the WCTU did, indeed, function to advance women’s rights. However, even had the WCTU pursued a more conservative agenda, its remarkable success as a women’s organization in a male-dominated culture would make it equally appropriate for feminist study.

Although Campbell's and Mattingly's redefinitions of rhetorical success may seem to be small changes, they are, in fact, challenges to fundamentals of traditional, Western, masculine, historical study, rhetorical or otherwise: Campbell challenged the idea that only winners are worthy of scholarship, while Mattingly challenged the desire to focus solely on those who seem to mirror or justify scholars’ present actions, values, or politics.

Precisely because women's rhetoric in history has been ignored, discounted, or treated as the work of a few female savants within the masculine tradition, we must be careful not to commit a similar error as we recover and (re)define a feminist tradition. Throughout Western history, women’s rhetoric has been discounted and ignored because it was produced in a masculinist culture, which meant that women produced less public speech and writing than did
men, that their public speech and writing were less valued, and, in consequence of these two conditions, that less of women’s public speech and writing has been preserved. The resulting lack of evidence of women’s public speech and writing, in turn, led scholars of rhetoric to believe that public speech had always been a masculine endeavor in Western history, with the exception of a very few remarkable women. Likewise, twentieth- and twenty-first century discussions of nineteenth-century women’s rhetoric in the United States have dealt primarily with the public speech of middle-class white women, casting a few African-American women speakers as exceptional. Collections of women’s rhetoric and discussions of women speakers consistently feature Sojourner Truth on women’s rights and Ida B. Wells on lynching; also presented, albeit less consistently, is Maria Stewart, thought to be the first American woman of any ethnicity to lecture publicly.

In Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women, Royster offered a theoretical framework that encourages expansion of scholars’ work with groups that have been marginalized. Advocating a kaleidoscopic or multidimensional view – in this case, of literacy practices – Royster suggested

\[ \ldots \] placing the “thick descriptions” of the literate practices of a particular group in the company of similar descriptions of other groups. \ldots this analysis is rooted in the idea that we need a more concrete sense of human variety in the use of literacy in order to support the abstractions we might very well draw more clearly at a later point in the analytical process. \ldots (6)

In referring to “a later point in the analytical process,” Royster challenged researchers to continue recovering and redefining, and to “resist a drifting toward speedy claims, static conclusions, or overgeneralizations” (8). In terms of African-American women’s rhetoric, then,
Royster’s framework required scholars to cease positioning Sojourner Truth and Ida B. Wells as generalizable examples, placing them instead within an ever-developing matrix of Black female reform speakers of the time. Only in relations to other African-American women speakers, as well as in relation to contemporaneous female speakers of every ethnicity and condition, can the rhetorical practices of this (or any) group be understood.

The related strategies of redefining rhetorical success and recovering women who participated in public, persuasive address have opened valuable and promising avenues of feminist rhetorical study. In fact, Bizzell attributed the greatly increased presence of women throughout the second edition of *The Rhetorical Tradition* to the surge of feminist rhetorical scholarship in the ten years between editions (6). However, feminist explorations of rhetoric have also moved far beyond the traditional "public, persuasive" qualifiers that define the rhetorical canon. As Lunsford noted in her introduction to *Reclaiming Rhetorica*, "the tradition has never recognized the forms, strategies, and goals used by many women as 'rhetorical'"(6). In focusing attention on the "forms, strategies, and goals" used by women (and perhaps the only ones available to them) in Western history, feminist rhetoricians have explored diaries, personal letters, religious writing, health writing, books of manners, advice columns, cookbooks, club materials, fashions, needlework and decoration, parlor performances and recitations, charitable work, work for pay, and activism (a partial list, which also does not include a myriad of twentieth- and twenty-first century women's rhetorics studied). In *Rhetoric Retold*, Glenn wrote that such non-traditional, non- "public, political, agonistic, masculine discourse" offers "'other' (but equally valuable) kinds of rhetorical performances" (175). Lunsford's and Glenn's invitations to expand feminist rhetorical studies beyond public, persuasive discourse have been well-heeded, even to the extent that Glenn's other-but-equal assurance is no longer necessary, at
least among feminist scholars. This is illustrated not only by the many areas of non-traditional investigation already mentioned, but also in work that combines examination of traditional public, persuasive rhetoric with more "womanly" rhetorics. One example is Johnson’s examination of parlor rhetorics – self-improvement texts that promised a home education in public speech and writing to both men and women and therefore brought traditional, masculine rhetorical instruction into women’s grasp.¹ A second example is Mattingly’s *Well-Tempered Women*, which analyzes public speech acts of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and also examines how stage décor, dress, and goods-for-sale strengthened and extended the WCTU's message. In addition to constructing a ladylike ethos for WCTU speakers and the organization in general, these handmade banners, goods-for-sale bearing temperance messages, and clothing emblems such as white ribbon pins promoted the temperance message beyond traditional acts of public speaking. Thus, Mattingly showed how combining the feminine "forms, strategies and goals" of domestically-produced handicrafts with more traditional (masculine) public, persuasive speech helped make the WCTU one of the most effective reform organizations of the late Nineteenth Century.

**A Women's Rhetorical Canon**

Just as this discussion began by addressing how the traditional rhetorical canon has excluded women and treated the few included women as exceptional, we must now ask if the scholarship of feminist rhetoricians in the last ten to fifteen years has created a canon of women's rhetoric. I would say, in keeping with the feminist goal of avoiding masculinist absolutes, that the answer is a resounding "yes, with a caveat." Yes, because one purpose of a canon is to

¹ Although the textbooks brought rhetorical instruction directly into the women’s sphere and often made promises of successful results in gender-neutral language, Johnson found that they nonetheless consistently implied that women’s speech was proper only for entertainment and uplift in the private circle, while men could fulfill that role and also speak for business and governance in the public world.
establish a field of works which will, in turn, influence and legitimate the addition or creation of later works. Crucial to a canon of women's rhetoric, then, are primary rhetorical works by women such as those collected in Ritchie and Ronald's *Available Means*, which begins with Aspasia and ends with Gloria Steinem, Donawerth’s *Rhetorical Theory by Women Before 1900*, or Campbell's *Man Cannot Speak for Her (Vol. 2): Key Texts of the Early Feminists*. Such collections have established a canon of women rhetors based on their common choices for inclusion; nineteenth-century female rhetors that appear in at least two of the three texts include Susan B. Anthony, Angelina Grimke, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and Frances Willard.

However, while such primary works are what we typically think of when we imagine a canon (the literary canon, *The Rhetorical Tradition*), works of analysis must also be a fundamental component of a women's rhetorical canon. As I've discussed, to work with women's rhetoric is to discover, recover, redefine, reposition, and reimagine women's texts that were, inevitably, produced in, and under, a masculine dominion. In this sense, Glenn's *Rhetoric Retold* and the essays in Lunsford's *Reclaiming Rhetorica* are foundational to a canon of women's rhetoric because they illustrated the richness of the field and made possible further explorations and publications within it. Works such as Campbell's *Man Cannot Speak for Her (Vol. 1)* and Mattingly's *Well-Tempered Women* extended the canon by redefining rhetorical success and who (and in the case of WCTU rhetoric, what) is appropriate for study, while Royster's *Traces of a Stream* offered a theoretical framework that invited continuous explorations of, around, and between female rhetors. In essence, by recovering and analyzing primary texts, the women who authored them, and the context in which they were produced, these types of analysis shape the very idea of a canon of women's rhetoric, both extending the margins beyond traditional,
masculine, public, persuasive speech and implicitly leaving the margins open to future expansion.

It is at the margins of a canon of women's rhetoric that the caveat is necessary. We cannot forget that a second function for a canon is to define a field via exclusion; once the contents of a canon have been named, everything else becomes other. This has been the fate of most women's rhetoric throughout Western history, and of non-white, non-middle class, and non-textual women's rhetorics until quite recently. However, it is possible that the solution to canonical exclusion lies in something so simple as article choice: while a masculine traditional perspective would create the rhetorical canon, a feminist perspective creates a rhetorical canon, a concept less grandiose and much more mutable, something that eschews defensiveness and thrives on addition and revision. A canon of women's rhetoric, then, provides for re/dis/covery of texts and rhetors and continuous redefinition of the rhetorical act, the rhetorical context, and the rhetor herself.

A woman's rhetorical canon must also be separated from traditional canonical notions of linear structure. One may argue, along with the postmodernists, that linearity itself is a problematic concept, but that is not the issue here. Until quite recently in Western culture, any sense of women's rhetorical linearity or rhetorical heritage has been compromised because women's rhetoric, even of the most traditional, public-persuasive kind, has been suppressed, so that women rhetors in one age have not generally been cognizant of the work of female rhetors before them. Therefore, a women's rhetorical canon must reject "from classical times to the present" as a primary organizational trope in favor of other, possibly multiple, means of arrangement or presentation. The collections of women’s rhetoric discussed in this section, Available Means, Man Cannot Speak for Her, and Rhetorical Theory by Women Before 1990 do
employ a date-ordered system, with Available means actually including women’s rhetoric from classical times to the present. A model for a non-linear, feminist form of organization, however, can be found in Kolmar and Bartkowski’s Feminist Theory: A Reader. While the selections are organized in date-order and preceded by a standard table of contents, an alternative method for approaching the contents is also included. Titled “Lexicon of the Debates” (33-51), this section identifies key feminist issues across time, such as “Bodies,” “Epistemologies,” “Language,” and “Power;” each subsection, after a brief introduction, lists relevant entries from throughout the reader. This strategy not only breaks away from the masculinist Western ideal of an essential linearity, but also allows a particular female rhetor to be considered in very different contexts and company. For example, Sojourner Truth is listed in the sections “Bodies,” “Essentialism/Social Construction/Difference,” “Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender,” and “Power.” A total of 40 other feminist rhetors are listed with Truth in these sections (an average of ten women per section), yet only three of the rhetors appear with Truth in more than one section, allowing readers to consider Truth’s words in a variety of contexts. This separation from a foundational idea of linearity anticipates Royster’s theoretical framework of studying one person or group “in the company of similar descriptions of other[s]” in order to profit from a “concrete sense of human variety” (6) before moving on to abstractions and generalizations.

While the female rhetors listed in each subsection do appear in date order, I believe this model illustrates what is possible when feminist scholars question traditional tropes of organization.

In all, my parameters for a canon of women's rhetoric fit with Lunsford’s description of the essays in Reclaiming Rhetorica. Refusing the role of redefining rhetorical tradition or positing a new rhetoric, Lunsford wrote, the essays function rather
to interrupt the seamless narrative usually told about the rhetorical tradition and to open up possibilities for multiple rhetorics, rhetorics that would not name and valorize one traditional, competitive, agonistic, and linear mode of rhetorical discourse but would rather incorporate other, often dangerous moves: breaking the silence; naming in personal terms; employing dialogics; recognizing and using the power of conversation; moving centripetally toward connections; and valuing – indeed insisting upon – collaboration. (6)

Central to Lunsford’s description of women's rhetorics is the tension between refusing the limitations of traditional, masculine speech acts and promoting newer, feminist methods to explore rhetorical discourse. One could argue that a feminist imagining of women's rhetoric is, then, little more than rejection of masculine rhetoric, and that an endeavor so colored by philosophical, even emotional, intent cannot be true research. Bizzell tackled this criticism in "Feminist Methods of Research in the History of Rhetoric: What Difference do They Make," commenting that while feminist researchers often utilize traditional rhetorical research methods, they "do not seek the traditional goal of objective truth. Rather, they work for truths that are relative to the interests of specific communities" (5). Referring to Royster's work in Traces of a Stream, Bizzell concluded that such an emotionally- or philosophically-based intention in rhetorical work is perfectly acceptable, as long as the researcher presents and discusses her investment with the topic or individuals studied (12-15). Furthermore, Bizzell argued, feminist methods of research and feminist subjects have not produced a new or parallel rhetoric to the traditional Western canon – here Bizzell agrees with Lunsford – but rather enhanced it by expanding our view of Western rhetorical history and by bringing the researcher's self into her work (16). Thus, a canon of women's rhetoric, as I have hypothesized it, is not a separate
construct conceived as a rejection of masculine-centered rhetoric, but is a vital part of the existing rhetorical tradition, whether or not recognized as such. And, like female rhetors themselves throughout Western history, a women's canon continually challenges and will fundamentally alter the dominant canon/culture in which it exists.

Specific Concerns in Feminist Rhetorical History

When Bizzell discussed Royster's strategy of naming and discussing one's emotional connection to one's research, she described and offered a solution to one possible consequence of feminist scholarship in the history of women's rhetoric – the charge of unscholarly perspective. Indeed, I was first drawn to the topic of sexuality in nineteenth-century female reform speech, and especially to the work of Ida Craddock, because of my own past career as a community educator for Planned Parenthood. Heeding Royster's and Bizzell's advice, I discuss the relationship between my own experience and this study in chapter two. In addition to this issue of personal identification with one's subject, however, there are other problems attendant in the feminist construction of history, rhetorical or otherwise.

One's preferences and conceptions might color not only what one chooses to study in feminist rhetorical history, but also what one omits. For example, according to Mattingly, feminist scholars long ignored the rich possibilities inherent in the study of the temperance movement in general, and of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union in particular, because they were more comfortable identifying with the much more radical suffrage movement (1-2). Likewise, in wondering why little work had been done on the discourses of Sarah Grimke and Margaret Fuller, Fiesta first conjectured that it was due to the religious nature of their rhetoric (163), then pointed out that Grimke's and Fuller's rhetorics dealt primarily with women's position in the private sphere of the home, whereas later nineteenth-century women's suffrage rhetoric
was concerned with women's induction to the public sphere via the vote (163). The supposition echoed Mattingly's conclusion that feminist scholars have generally been drawn to the radical nature of the suffrage movement – which, of nineteenth-century reform movements, looked the most like second-wave feminism – and have placed less value on seemingly conservative positions.

In addition to scholars' preferences and perspectives, other factors determine whom feminist rhetoricians may study. Because rhetorical research is predicated largely on the production and preservation of texts, issues of socio-economic class and literacy come into play. To research nineteenth-century female reformers, for example, is to research primarily white, middle- and upper-class women who produced a large body of textual work. Much less rhetorical research has been done on the subjects and beneficiaries of such reformers, women and men who, even if literate, were too busy with the daily work of existence to produce significant amounts of text, and who were unlikely to engage in public, persuasive discourse. Also, within a specific historical construct such as nineteenth-century female reformers, working to redefine one qualifier does not mean that other qualifiers will be displaced. In her introduction to *We Are Coming: The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women*, Logan acknowledges that studying Black women's reform speech means examining texts produced by a "relatively educated and social elite" (xii). Like Logan then, feminist historical rhetoricians must be aware of the margins and exclusions inherent in their areas of study.

Another margin/exclusion that may occur in feminist rhetorical and historical study – and is perhaps unavoidable in nineteenth-century, U.S. work – is regionalism. Throughout the century, for both ethnic and gendered populations, life in the Northeast and Midwest, the South, and what we may broadly construe as the West was very different. Ginzberg's *Women and the*
Work of Benevolence, for instance, is subtitled Morality, Politics, and Class in the 19th-Century United States. While undeniably a significant work of feminist scholarly research, Ginzberg's study nonetheless represents women's benevolent work in the Northeastern United States only. The trope of women's benevolence, and the purposes to which women were able to put that trope, must necessarily have differed widely between the Northeast and the South, both pre- and post-Civil War.

Although comparisons between the Northeast and South are perhaps the easiest to imagine, frontier or western regional differences are also significant. In terms of nineteenth-century women's reform, for example, the number of women available to pursue reform, the types of reform seen as necessary, and the forums within which to promote reform would have shaped women's efforts in the West. The abolition movement, for instance, had much greater exigency in states bordering the South and in northern cities with free African-American populations. This is not to say that women living in frontier states and western territories had no interest in abolition; indeed, that the pre-Civil War designations of "free" or "slave" affected territories' chances to achieve statehood guaranteed pro- and anti-abolition discussion on the frontier, in addition to personal convictions about the morality of slavery. However, female reformers concerned with human rights may have been more interested in issues centering on Native Americans or, in the latter-century, far west, in issues surrounding Chinese laborers and immigrants, given that those populations were present in far greater numbers than were Blacks. Additionally, opportunities to disseminate female reform speech were greater in the Northeast and Midwest, where we have ample record of female reformers speaking at conventions and at local, regional, and national meetings, and of certain reform groups hosting speakers from other, like-minded groups. In the West, opportunities to disseminate reform speech throughout the
century would have been significantly fewer due to lower population density, greater distances and less transportation between communities, and fewer publications such as newspapers and magazines. One consequence of this lower level of contemporaneous reform speech means, of course, less textual material for feminist rhetorical historians to study.

In this section, I have discussed several problems attendant on studying women's rhetorical history, namely preference, omission, issues of class, literacy, and ethnicity, and regionalism. No doubt myriad other problems exist, themselves contingent on the self- and social awareness of a given feminist researcher. The solutions to these problems must necessarily be as numerous as the problems themselves, but they are grounded in Bizzell's and Royster's suggestion that feminist researchers understand, name, and discuss their partisan (or anti-partisan) relationships to their subject matter. Also, in the feminist tradition of collaboration, researchers should not refrain from basing their studies on work that has gone before, solely in the hope of being original. Rather, it is in examining the same issues through different lenses that we arrive at a fuller understanding; as Glenn reminded us in *Rhetoric Retold*, rhetoric's standard figures (Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, etc.) have been examined and theorized for millennia (178). Finally, feminist rhetorical scholars must strive to position these problems instead as sites ripe for discovery, recovery, redefinition, and reimagination. This is what Royster did in *Traces of a Stream* when she argued against the idea that Black female rhetors were somehow exceptional, and what other scholars do when they turn from a public, persuasive, masculine ideal of rhetoric to the "forms, strategies, and goals" specific to women. In all, the problems and issues we confront as feminist scholars investigating women's rhetorical history serve only to expand and enrich our field.

---

I grew up in the far West and am very cognizant of issues such as distance, population density, and east-to-west regional assumptions.
Women's Public Speech in the Late Nineteenth Century

Throughout the Nineteenth Century, female rhetors faced challenges to their public speech, challenges often based as much on their gender as on their messages. Especially prior to the Civil War, female rhetors persistently had to fight for the opportunity to speak at all. Campbell calls women's rights speakers of that time "a group virtually unique in rhetorical history" (1: 9) because the very oppression they were fighting prohibited them from public speech about that issue or any other. This was because for women, especially white women of the middle- and upper-classes, appropriate female role performance meant adhering to what has been termed "the Cult of True Womanhood" (Welter 115). Amid the increasing economic and social changes of the Nineteenth Century, the ideal of the True Woman provided stability and security. This vigorously-promoted image portrayed women as naturally pure, pious, submissive, modest, maternal, and domestic. Magazine and newspaper articles, advice books, novels, and the pulpit claimed that women who violated their ordained natures faced ruin – physical, moral, emotional, and social.

Although at times female reformers were able to speak publicly prior to the Civil War, women often fell victim to cultural enforcement of the True Womanhood ideal. In 1840, for example, five women delegates to the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London were refused seating, an incident that Lucretia Coffin Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton later cited as one beginning of the women's rights movement (Campbell 1: 4). In 1852, Susan B. Anthony, an invited delegate, was not allowed to speak at a New York temperance meeting, and Antoinette Brown was hooted off the stage at a later temperance convention, mostly by a group of ministers calling "Shame on Woman" (Mattingly 23). When women did succeed in speaking, they were forced to navigate a set of contradictory positions. In order to present a credible argument, a
woman needed to speak authoritatively and rationally. When doing so, however, she ran a likely risk of being labeled mannish, aggressive, and unwomanly (Campbell 1: 12), or of being portrayed as a bitter spinster, a woman who had failed her role. In 1854, for example, *The United States Democratic Review* characterized a female speaker as one "forgotten of love and hope. She had unquestionably passed the main street of life, and read in the ominous future no prospects."

Women abolitionists in the 1830s keenly felt the weight of True Womanhood, simultaneously feeling timid about venturing outside their accustomed place when speaking and chaffing against roadblocks to their speech, often put in place by their comrades in reform (Bacon 109). Angelina and Sarah Grimke, for example, felt much conflict between their determination to promote abolition and the public attention it brought them. Moving cautiously first from letters in abolitionist newspapers, to "parlor talks" delivered to female-only groups, to public speeches before men and women, the sisters were publicly excoriated both by Catherine Beecher and by the Congregational Church of Massachusetts, which read a condemnatory letter during services and published it in *The New England Spectator* (112). The Grimke sisters retired from lecturing the following year.

Faced with criticism from within and outside the abolition movement, female speakers developed rhetorical strategies that would be employed by women activists throughout the century. In *The Humblest May Stand Forth: Rhetoric, Empowerment, and Abolition*, Bacon examined the tactics of disempowered abolition speakers. Bacon found that white female speakers3 appropriated the conventions of True Womanhood to define their speech not as masculine-style combative argument, but as a Christian moral duty, entered into with a spirit of

---

3 Because the purpose of this section is to examine women's reform speech in the latter part of the Nineteenth Century, background dealing with earlier rhetorical issues will be kept brief. Thus, Black women's ante- and postbellum strategies are discussed together later in the section.
charity and deference (114-117). White female speakers also justified their entry into public debate by positioning it as a domestic duty, an extension of their obligation of care as wives and mothers (128); yet another strategy was to clothe abolitionist ideals as natural, womanly sympathy for both the oppressed and the oppressors (120-123). Such tactics were successful in creating room for white women to speak publicly throughout the century about abolition, suffrage, and temperance, and to work for a wide variety of benevolent causes (Ginzberg 11-35).

The Civil War was, of course, a watershed for all aspects of nineteenth-century culture, including women's reform movements and women's reform speech. Ginzberg grounded Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States in the very different ante- and postbellum assumptions she found about women's virtue and duties (5). In large part, these changes in assumption were based on women reformers' war work, which exposed them to both complex administrative duties at multiple levels and to the politics of funding and favor (133-173). Many women reformers now viewed government and legislation, rather than moral transformation, as the key to bettering society; women sought formal access to governing officials and bodies (176) and were often appointed to governing boards and other positions (179-183). In essence, the very necessary public work that women did during the Civil War supported one of women speakers' key rhetorical strategies – positioning women's reform work and reform speech as part of women's natural sphere. However, as the century progressed, other socio-cultural ideologies arose that challenged the rigid gender roles underlying True Womanhood – growing class identification, rejection of sisterhood (sameness) among women across class lines – and created hostility toward dramatic social change (198). This was the environment in which latter nineteenth-century female reformers worked. Having
established their ability to speak and right to speak earlier in the century, they now spoke to enact specific, legislated reforms.

The most visible latter nineteenth-century women's reform movements were temperance and suffrage. Ostensibly promoting different goals – anti-alcohol legislation and women's franchise – members under the two banners worked for similar reforms, including raising the age of consent, liberalizing divorce laws, retaining women's wages and property rights in marriage, restraining the alcohol trade, and securing the vote for women. Despite such similarity, however, the two movements constructed themselves very differently. When Frances Willard, president of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, said in a speech, "Mrs. [Elizabeth Cady] Stanton leads the largest army of women outside, and I the largest one inside, the realm of a conservative theology" (Willard, “First Triennial Meeting”), members of both groups and the general public knew exactly what she meant.

Throughout the Nineteenth Century, suffrage women were seen as more radical than temperance workers, a perception they often cultivated. In the early 1850s, Stanton, Anthony, and other women formed their own temperance organization after women were not permitted to speak at the meetings of male-led groups. This organization, however, split over differences of opinion and policy in its second year, with Stanton and Anthony leaving temperance work for a narrower focus on women's rights (Mattingly 23-24). Years later, in their History of Woman Suffrage, Stanton, Anthony, and Gage depicted the split as one between radicals (themselves) and conservative, even timid, temperance women (Mattingly 25).

In Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric (Vol 1), Campbell analyzed key speeches of the women's rights/suffrage movement, finding that throughout the Nineteenth Century, suffrage speakers utilized natural rights arguments, among
other strategies, in their attempts to secure the vote. The earliest natural rights arguments, prior to the Civil War, maintained that women and men were equal persons under the law (1: 14). Later, after the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment introduced the term "male" into the U.S. constitution for the first time in 1868, natural rights arguments centered on elevating the rights and obligations of citizenship above the narrow, recent consideration of gender (109-110). Later still, in her 1892 farewell address to the National American Woman Suffrage Association, Stanton returned to the more purely natural rights argument of women's fundamental personhood (133-136). While natural rights arguments for women's franchise resonate strongly with modern feminists, however, they contrasted sharply with the ideal of True Womanhood. Women arguing from natural rights were seen as trying to gain the vote for their own advantage, a selfish position when contrasted with the self-abnegating True Woman. Women claiming their rights in such a way, it was assumed, wanted to exist on equal footing with men in all areas (15), violating the nineteenth-century ideology of separate spheres and fundamentally transforming the social order. Many men and women found this type of appeal frightening, and female speakers who employed it, such as Anthony and Stanton, occupied an ethos of radicalism that was both constructed through their individual speeches and situated in the women's rights movement itself.

Just as natural rights arguments were the chief tool of the suffrage movement, temperance speakers relied largely on arguments of expediency (Campbell 1: 14). This position simultaneously embraced the ideal of True Womanhood and radically redefined it to position the entire nation as women's domestic sphere. If women were better educated, the reasoning went, they would be better wives and mothers; if women could vote, they would bring their natural purity and piety to the task of improving the nation (14). In order to make such claims, female temperance speakers cultivated personal and organizational images of competent femininity best
described by WCTU president Frances Willard's catchphrase, "Womanliness first – afterward, what you will" (Mattingly 65).

Mattingly examined the oral and non-verbal rhetorical strategies of the WCTU in *Well-Tempered Women: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric*. She found that the WCTU motto, "For God, and Home, and Native Land," served as an exemplar for the tactic of bending cultural expectations to wider purposes (40). "Native Land" called up images of patriotism and citizenship, which were then merged with the more traditionally female concerns of religion and domesticity. Overall, the combination reassured conservative audiences and, at the same time, allowed women to recreate their image and their duties (40). In speeches, WCTU women often employed Christian imagery, scripture, and prayer, positioning women as disciples of Christ with definite work to do (49), thus combining traditional religious ideals with a radical regendering of Christian labor. They also invoked women's special mission as guardians of the home, insisting that women had the right to leave the home in order to defend it (51). Appeals to patriotism caste temperance women as warriors (55), Biblical heroines, and Joan(s) of Arc (41) battling for the good of the nation – militant language softened by familiar female icons. WCTU speakers also feminized their speech through personal appearance and by decorating meeting halls with flowers and handmade banners (67), making public meeting places as warm and comfortable as they made their homes and as, it was implied, they could make the nation.

The strategy of embracing the ideal of True Womanhood to speak for women's rights has been criticized by contemporary theorists as ultimately harmful to the woman's rights movement because it established for women a merely enlarged status quo (O'Neill qtd Campbell 1: 121). Rather than refiguring the podium as a rhetorical space equally suited to men and women, feminized performances inscribed female speakers as extraordinary representatives of reform.
movements that were firmly anchored in domesticity (Johnson 144). That some women could, even should, speak publicly did not mean that public speech was appropriate for women in general. On the other hand, reform based in True Womanhood, such as the work of the WCTU, did encourage women to claim a larger sphere of action and convinced many otherwise conservative women that the vote was not inconsistent with femininity (Campbell 1: 121-122).

While hindsight from the second wave of feminism and beyond positions the embracing of True Womanhood as a stumbling block to women's rights, the contemporaneous success of the strategy cannot be denied. Even women's rights activists who relied more on natural rights rhetoric in their speeches adopted domestic, feminine terms in their descriptions of one another. In Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life, 1866-1910, Johnson examined how famous white women reformers depicted one another in biographical sketches written for nineteenth-century collections such as Our Famous Women and Women of the Century. Women whose careers were chiefly made via public speaking were consistently portrayed as "the noble maid or wise mother, called reluctantly from her domestic duties to speak out for the helpless and the weak" (Johnson 113). Positioning women speakers as paragons of domestic virtue, either in public discourse itself or afterwards in biography, justified the individual speaker's public work and made her credible, yet in no way questioned or disempowered the average, middle-class white woman and the system that supported her (121). Such a strong reinscription of gender may have been especially important for women such as Frances Willard and Susan B. Anthony, who remained single, or Elizabeth Cady Stanton, whose public speech tended toward the acerbic. In fact, Stanton and other biographers went to great lengths to portray the tall, unmarried, and (according to their own descriptions) unbeautiful Anthony as feminine and maternal, even crediting her with a hand in raising Stanton's children (138-141).
A second critique of nineteenth-century women's reform centers on the unequal, uneasy relationship between white and Black female reformers. While the term "Cult of True Womanhood" has been used to describe nineteenth-century views of women, it really refers to middle- and upper-class white women. Thus, African-American female reform speakers have been marginalized in reform discourse both during the Nineteenth Century and in contemporary examinations of nineteenth-century reform speech.

Prior to the Civil War, Black women's reform discourse centered on abolition (Logan 3). These female speakers faced dual problems of sexism and racism in their efforts to be heard: they were often ignored in issues ostensibly dealing with all African-Americans; white men and women, and Black men, expected them to fulfill the True Womanhood ideal; and white women abolitionists often marginalized them despite referring to them as sisters (Bacon 165). However, because of their different subject position, Black women abolition speakers were able to access a greater range of arguments than white female abolitionists, and to question and extend ideals of womanhood. For example, both African-American men and women employed self-help rhetoric, a form that critiqued white America and called for urgent, communal action among Blacks (Bacon 168). African American women speakers further extended this immediate need for action to justify their own work in the public arena (168). Therefore, in dealing with questions of True Womanhood, Black women abolitionists were able to complicate the domestic/public paradox because their own tradition of community work, which dated back to the 1790s (Royster, Southern 25), violated it (Bacon 176). Moreover, Black female abolitionists who had been slaves, such as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Jacobs, critiqued the universality of True Womanhood by detailin their own experiences of motherhood and womanhood under bondage (Bacon 181, 187).
After the Civil War, African-American women reformers spoke on a wide range of issues, including women's rights, temperance, civil rights, mob violence, self-help, and racial uplift (Logan 44). In *We Are Coming: The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women*, Logan examined the rhetorical strategies of specific Black female speakers, "identify[ing] common practices across rhetorical acts that were molded and constrained by prevailing conventions and traditions" (xiv). In general, she found that prior to the Civil War, many African-American female rhetors spoke of abolition and women's rights as related issues; this strategy was perhaps most notably employed by Sojourner Truth (8, 11). After the Civil War, Black women reformers clearly supported women's rights, but more often concerned themselves with racial issues rather than purely gender issues (11) and, when speaking for women's rights, were well aware of the possible effects of white female racism (12). Additionally, as the latter half of the century progressed, Black and white women speakers both challenged the civil rights/women's rights partnership so widely employed at mid-century. In an 1866 speech, for example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton claimed that the middle-class female vote would offset the votes of the poor, of Blacks, and of immigrants (59). In 1893 at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper suggested that women voters might constitute an 'ignorant mass' and suggested that all voters, not just Black voters, be subjected to qualification testing (66-67). Clearly the agendas of Black and white female reformers grew apart after emancipation and speakers faced different exigencies.

One notable exigency that African-American women reformers confronted was lynching. While many Black women worked against mob violence at the end of the Nineteenth Century (Logan 96), Ida B. Wells was and is the best known by far. It is not the purpose of this section to discuss Wells’ anti-lynching campaign in detail; however, Wells’ rhetorical strategies and the rift
anti-lynching reform caused between white and Black women reformers do bear mention. According to Logan, Wells employed great attention to detail and avoided euphemism in describing lynching to her audiences (90). While the subject matter itself was dramatic, women speaking in public about violent issues such as rape and wife beating often employed euphemistic language in order to preserve their womanliness and not alienate their audiences. Wells’ speech, in contrast, was described by Logan as “direct and confrontational, yet factually irrefutable” (96).

Frances Willard and other representatives of the WCTU evidently found Wells too confrontational; Willard’s focus on promoting WCTU work amongst elite Southern whites caused her to discount Wells’ claims about lynching (Mattingly 85). This led to open conflict, with Wells and Willard speaking publicly in England about one another’s deficiencies in understanding and action (Royster, Southern 38); given Willard’s immense popularity, the exchange may have harmed Wells’ ethos among Northern whites. Among Black women, however, Wells’ work had positive results beyond lynch-law reform. An 1893 dinner honoring Wells drew more than 250 women, ultimately resulting in the first national convention of African-American women (Royster, Traces 212). These events helped create a national club movement among Black women, generating more training and opportunities for public discourse, and solidified the racial uplift movement.

At first glance, African American female reformers and their white counterparts appear to share many similarities. In addition to working for similar reforms, both tended to be well-educated members of a social elite. However, ideas of racial superiority/inferiority were common even among white abolitionists, rendering markers such as ‘educated’ and ‘elite’ unequal. Slavery, emancipation, the very different needs of white and Black lower classes, and
North/South regionalism further complicated the relationship between these female reformers. For example, white female reform speakers struggled against the ideal of True Womanhood to gain a public voice; African-American women speakers had to construct themselves not only as True Women, “but as ‘human,’ as capable and deserving of human regard” (Royster, Southern 22). At the same time, Black women reformers had the advantage of traditional social ideals that positioned women as “interpreters of life, teachers and transmitters of culture, and preservers of the community and race” (Royster, Traces 210); while African-American women reformers had to prove their right to the podium to their audiences, they may not have felt the internal qualms that white women such as Sarah and Angelina Grimke reported.

In this section, I have outlined the challenges female reform speakers faced throughout the Nineteenth Century and the strategies they employed to navigate such challenges. However, because the bulk of research on nineteenth-century women rhetors centers on white, middle-class women in the suffrage and temperance movements and, to a lesser extent, middle-class Black female reformers, this depiction is necessarily incomplete. Much more work needs to be done with non-elite female reformers of all ethnicities, including Native American women and immigrants, and with women who worked in other areas of reform, such as health, dress, labor, and education.

**Speaking of Sex: A Brief Introduction to the Study**

In Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women, Royster commented on the surprise she continually encounters from people hearing about nineteenth-century Black women’s reform and literacy work for the first time. And surprise is not the only reaction; according to Royster, many wish to think of literate Black women as unique or exceptional, rather than as evidence of a much larger, largely unexplored, cultural
movement (Traces 4-5). Similarly, when I mention this study of late nineteenth-century women reformers’ public sexual discourse, listeners typically express surprise that such discourse occurred at all outside of a radical margin, much less that it was tolerated or had any measurable effect. On the contrary, as I discuss in chapter two, public discourse about sexual intercourse and related issues was widespread in the late Nineteenth Century, taking many forms and being produced by many sources, including medicine, the entertainment media of the day, and reform movements. Indeed, reform movements led by female activists, such as suffrage and temperance, were fundamentally rooted in sexual discourse, whether denying the idea that woman’s reproductive function rendered her unfit for public participation or affirming that woman’s natural maternal feeling made her especially suited to caring for the national interest. More specifically, much of the legislation sought by women reformers in the late Nineteenth Century revolved around women’s sexual availability within and outside of marriage. Liberalization of divorce and child custody laws and of property rights within marriage, for example, were not simply about a woman’s ability to leave a drunken or adulterous husband; reform newspapers of the day were replete with accounts of marital rape, which was not legally recognized as a crime. Reforms calling for female supervision in women’s prisons or for raising the age of consent were primarily concerned with protecting vulnerable women from sexual abuse. Likewise, many reformers viewed prostitutes as victims of a system that denied women adequate employment, forcing them into a sexual service for which they, but not the men who frequented them, were legally and socially punished. Discussion of any of these issues, as well as discussion of pregnancy, contraception, abortion, infanticide, bigamy, adultery, seduction, sexuality education, maternal health, or even women’s ability to find employment as an alternative to marriage, therefore, constituted sexual discourse.
For this study, I define “public sexual discourse” as 1) reform-oriented speech or text produced for and delivered to an audience, which 2) discussed either the physical aspects of heterosexual, vaginal intercourse, the environments in which such intercourse occurred (marriage, rape, etc.), or the possible results of such intercourse (pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, the need for preventative measures, etc.). This multi-part definition is explained more fully in chapter two, as are my methodology and theoretical framework. Here, however, I wish to outline why I chose the three particular female reformers who are the subjects of this study and to briefly position their public sexual discourse within the context of nineteenth-century women’s reform rhetoric.

Frances Willard, president of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union; Victoria Woodhull, public speaker and publisher of a free love newspaper; and Ida Craddock, writer and distributor of sex-in-marriage booklets, are the primary subjects of this study. These three women, working for social change contemporaneously in the final three decades of the Nineteenth Century, in many ways typified women reformers of the period. All three were white, raised in the Midwest, and they created and distributed discourse for similar audiences: primarily white, male and female, middle-class, Midwest and Northeastern American. Thus, one reason for focusing on the public sexual discourse of Willard, Woodhull, and Craddock is their similarity, both to one another and to other white, middle-class, nineteenth-century female reformers who have been studied in the past.

Another reason I chose these women is because they each engaged in some type of public sexual discourse. Willard discussed positive and negative relationships between men and women as part of her overall temperance/social purity campaign: unhappy or violent relationships illustrated the consequences of drunkenness and vice, while relationships of
healthfulness and joy resulted from pure living and women’s equality. Woodhull’s sexual discourse focused on the abolition of marriage and the right of women to enter and leave sexual relationships as easily, and with as little social consequence, as men did – basic tenets of the free love movement. Craddock’s discourse was clearly indebted to both the social purity and free love movements, but was wholly representative of neither. Her goal was to provide married couples with specific instructions for achieving physically, emotionally, and spiritually satisfying intercourse.

Despite great differences in ideology and rhetorical strategy among these three rhetors, their discourse itself was in some ways similar. Contrary to censors’ claims about Woodhull’s and Craddock’s texts, all three intended their discourse to improve society as a whole and the individual relationships between men and women specifically; producing pornography or entertainment was not their goal. Their discourse was social and religious or philosophical in viewpoint rather than purely medical, although Craddock did employ some medical terminology, and it was contemporaneous to the final three decades of the Nineteenth Century (1870-1902). Willard and Woodhull were similar in that both enjoyed a measure of fame and produced their discourse knowing it would be heard and read by large audiences. Craddock, unfortunately, achieved fame largely through her 1902 trials for Comstock violations and her suicide soon thereafter. While the trials themselves effectively advertised Craddock’s sex-in-marriage pamphlets and resulted in many requests for the works, Craddock’s convictions meant that the pamphlets were deemed obscene and could not be sent through the mail.

Three Ways of Speaking About Sex

A brief introduction to the public sexual discourses of Willard, Woodhull, and Craddock may be made by examining their comments about rape in marriage. The problem of husbands
forcing sex upon their wives was much discussed by reformers throughout the Nineteenth Century. While a woman could attempt divorce on the grounds of cruelty or brutality, marital rape was not in itself a crime; the law considered it a woman’s duty to have intercourse with her husband, even if she were ill, afraid of pregnancy, or forced to participate (D’Emilio and Freedman 79-80). Because marriage was generally regarded as the foundation of society, as well as a legal and a religious concern, discourse about marriage, sex in marriage, and divorce was potentially risky. How a rhetor approached marital rape, therefore, may function as a microcosmic view of her public sexual discourse.

As head of the highly visible and respectable WCTU, Willard both performed and shaped public reform discourse. Adopting a strategy that so well served female abolition speakers and earlier temperance leaders, Willard and her followers presented themselves as True Women, applying women’s virtuous, maternal touch within and beyond the home. When speaking of sexual issues, this womanliness dictated the use of euphemism and circumlocution. In “A White Life for Two,” a speech and pamphlet extolling socially pure marriage, for example, Willard referred to the legal and physical power a husband held over his wife as “mediaeval continental and harem philosophies” (323). This description was the closest Willard came in the text to admitting the problem of marital rape, a topic more frequently discussed by free lovers and some suffragists. Euphemisms Willard employed for the crime of rape – meaning forced sexual intercourse outside of marriage – were “awful deeds,” “brutal relations,” and “unspeakable atrocities” (329). By employing such terms, Willard condemned the crime of rape without ever speaking the word, and she linked sexual violence within marriage to a fading, decidedly non-American perspective. Her reticence to say the word “rape” assured her conservative audience of her status as a True Woman; more importantly, by touching so slightly on the problem of
marital rape in a speech praising marriage, Willard confirmed her allegiance, and the allegiance of the WCTU, to the existing social order of white, middle-class America.

While Frances Willard was the consummate True Woman, Victoria Woodhull, depicted in a Thomas Nast cartoon as Mrs. Satan (Nast), represented everything the True Woman was not: of dubious background, divorced and remarried, an advocate of free love, and unabashed seeker of public recognition. For a time she was allied with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Paula Wright Davis, and other natural rights suffragists, but eventually her public speeches on free love and spiritualism, as well as scandals in her personal life, caused Susan B. Anthony to eject her from the suffrage movement, literally turning off the lights during Woodhull’s speech at the 1872 convention (Horowitz 346-349). As a free lover, Woodhull made a point of discussing sex and sexuality in common terms. Thus, in an 1872 speech and pamphlet titled “Tried as By Fire; or, The True and The False, Socially,” Woodhull named and defined marital rape:

Of all the horrid brutalities of this age, I know of none so horrid as those that are sanctioned and defended by marriage. Night after night there are thousands of rapes committed, under cover of this accursed license; and millions . . . of poor, heart-broken, suffering wives are compelled to minister to the lechery of insatiable husbands, when every instinct of body and sentiment of soul revolts in loathing and disgust. (Woodhull, “Tried” 8)

In this speech, however, Woodhull did much more than bluntly state that husbands habitually raped wives. She spoke from the common free love standpoint that marital sex was necessarily coercive. In a social system that designated marriage as a woman’s main financial support and as her only acceptable sexual relationship, a wife who “ministered” to a husband’s sexual demands was as abused as one who submitted or was forced. Because marriage was viewed as the very
basis of all social and religious order, *Mrs.* Woodhull’s words and her willingness to speak them in public simultaneously functioned as her critique of late nineteenth-century society and as that society’s critique of her.

As representatives of True Womanhood and free love, Willard and Woodhull may be viewed as opposite poles of nineteenth-century women’s reform discourse. Ideologically, Ida Craddock occupied a position between the two. In terms of sexual speech, for example, Craddock employed the free love philosophy of using correct terms for genitalia and the sex act, yet she positioned heterosexual intercourse firmly within Christian marriage. An instructor of shorthand and dedicated spiritualist, Craddock authored two sex-in-marriage pamphlets, “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living.” Blending advice about the physical act of heterosexual intercourse and the emotional and spiritual relationship between husband and wife, these pamphlets-for-sale were distributed through doctors and others who bought them for their clients, through the mail, and through Craddock’s personal consultations with men and women.

The main purpose of “The Wedding Night” was to guide couples through what was assumed to be the wife’s (and perhaps the husband’s) first experience of intercourse. By following Craddock’s advice,

> every newly married couple . . . would never descend to the methods commonly practiced among married people today – methods which involve loss of sexual self-control, tigerish brutality, persistent rape of the wife’s person, and uncleanness. (Craddock, “Wedding” 5)

Like Woodhull, Craddock named rape as a common occurrence in marriage, yet, like Willard, she believed a loving, co-respondent union would transcend such indecencies.
However, whereas Willard referred to marital rape via circumlocution (“harem philosophies”) and Woodhull employed dramatic terms (“accursed license,” “lechery of insatiable husbands”), Craddock discussed marital rape and related issues in everyday language. These differences highlight Craddock’s position relative to Willard, Woodhull, and many of the iconic nineteenth-century female reformers who have been studied by feminist rhetoricians. For all their differences of social philosophy and self-representation, Willard and Woodhull were similar in that their public discourses occupied the same plane, encouraging audiences to support broad socio-cultural reforms for the good of all. Craddock’s speech, in contrast, was delivered directly to the individuals it was meant to benefit and described specific sexual activities in plain, practical language. In terms of public sexual reform discourse, then, Craddock was neither a True Woman nor a free love radical, but an early sexuality educator, allied more firmly with the people she wished to help than with a single social ideology.

Conclusion

Ignored or discounted throughout most of Western history, women’s rhetoric has received increasing attention in the past twenty years. Feminist scholars have worked to recover the discourse of female rhetors by studying those who have been forgotten, by redefining rhetorical success, and by challenging scholars’ perceptions of which speakers or acts of rhetoric are appropriate for study. As a result of these efforts, a canon of women’s rhetoric has begun to form, consisting both of primary texts and of feminist scholars’ discovery, recovery, redefinition, repositioning, and reimagination of female rhetors and their discourse.

One of the more accessible women’s rhetorics is that of nineteenth-century American reformers. Scholars have focused on the reform discourse of female abolition, suffrage, and temperance speakers and writers, both white and African-American. Due to issues of class,
literacy, regionalism, availability of primary materials, and scholarly preference, however, white women have generally been more studied than women of color, middle- and upper-class women have been more studied than working class and immigrant women, and women living in the Northeast and upper Midwest have been more studied than women living in the South or West. These deficiencies are being addressed in part through the theories of Royster and Bizzell, who encourage feminist scholars to analyze and contextualize their own motivations and preferences relative to their research subjects, and by researchers who focus on the rhetorical “forms, strategies, and goals” particular to women.

Despite the relatively larger body of work on nineteenth-century women’s reform speech, one area that has received little attention is sexuality discourse. Given the fact that many nineteenth-century reforms centered on women’s sexuality, including age of consent reform, the provision of matrons for women in prison, liberalization of divorce laws, and legislation regarding rape, contraception, abortion, and prostitution, however, women reformers’ public sexual discourse is an important component of reform rhetoric. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the public sexuality discourse of three female reformers: temperance leader Frances Willard, free lover Victoria Woodhull, and sex-in-marriage pamphlet writer Ida Craddock.
CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN REFORMERS’ PUBLIC SEXUAL DISCOURSE

Introduction

Susan B. Anthony’s 1875 description of the inequalities women faced in their intimate relationships with men, codified by “statutes for marriage and divorce, for adultery, breach of promise, seduction, rape, bigamy, abortion, infanticide” in which women had no vote nor voice (Anthony), contrasted sharply with the contemporaneous views of conservative male authors of marriage manuals. In a study of three such manuals, written in 1877, 1882, and 1887, Melody and Peterson found that all assumed men married for sexual access, among less base reasons. Women, who enjoyed sex little or not at all, according to the writers, married because they consciously wished to have children, because they were controlled by biological imperatives of their reproductive systems, or because they simply had an innate love for men, ordained by God (25-40). Clearly, for these male writers, power inequities in marriage were simply not an issue: a relationship ordained by God and/or biology could not be viewed in terms of equality. While not in agreement with female reformers about the consequences women chanced by marrying, however, this conservative male view confirms that the most common adult, female-male relationships in the late Nineteenth Century were marital and sexual.

Despite the centrality of sexual and reproductive issues to women’s rights movements in general, and particularly to the women’s social and political reform efforts of the late Nineteenth Century, however, little, if anything, has been done to investigate women reformer’s public discourse of sex and related issues. This omission leaves a significant gap in our understanding of women’s reform speech at that time. Considering that studies of nineteenth-century women’s reform speech repeatedly cite the diffidence women felt (or, to fulfill expected tropes, claimed to
feel) when speaking from the podium and in print, we can see that women took a double risk when they engaged in public discourse centered specifically on sexual matters. Women speaking in public about sex or sexual issues violated not only enthymemes of female public modesty, but of womanly purity as well. If the topic of discussion were women’s enjoyment of intercourse, the right for women to refuse marital sex, or the liberalization of divorce laws, the immodest female rhetor also found herself contesting religious tenets regarded as foundational by many Christian faiths. Yet women reformers did speak publicly about sexual issues. In fact, public discourse of sexuality and related issues was plentiful in the late nineteenth-century United States, not only in women’s reform speech but also in newspaper and magazine articles, advertisements, pornographic novels and pictures, guides to healthy living, conduct manuals, medical journals, and sexual advice books and pamphlets.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the parameters of this study of nineteenth-century women’s public sexual discourse, specifically the theoretical perspective, methodology, and definitions of terms. However, an important preliminary step is to gain an understanding of the context in which late nineteenth-century reform discourse on sex and sexually-related issues occurred – specifically, to ascertain what types of public sexual discourse were engaged in at the time, who employed sexual discourse, and how such discourse was controlled. In preface to this discussion, it is crucial to note that in the social context of the late nineteenth-century United States, the terms “marriage” and “heterosexual intercourse” were in many ways synonymous. Marriage granted men and women social and religious sanction to engage in intercourse, and reproduction was taken for granted as both a result of, and a reason for, marrying. As mentioned in Melody and Peterson’s analysis of conservative marriage manuals, securing sexual access was one of the primary reasons men were thought to enter marriage, while women were assumed to
marry in order to gratify their conscious or unconscious desires for motherhood. Additionally, as with Melody and Peterson’s classification of “marriage manual” to represent books focusing on sex in marriage, the terms “marriage,” “married,” and “marital” were often coded to represent sexual intercourse. For example, *A Confidential Letter to the Married*, *The Marriage Guide*, *The Young Married Lady’s Private Medical Guide*, and *The Habits of a Well-Organized Married Life: By a Married Woman* all dealt primarily with contraceptive information (Brodie 180-184). Throughout the following section, then, we can often read “marriage,” “married,” and “marital” as connotations for heterosexual intercourse.

**The Social Contexts of Late Nineteenth-Century Sexual Discourse**

The United States in the late Nineteenth Century has long been stereotyped as a time and place of sexual repression and prudery. Historians and other scholars have challenged this assumption, however, arguing that a vigorous public discourse about sexuality existed. In fact, as the basis of the ideal Christian family unit and as a means of expressing and, literally, reproducing social, political, and class values, heterosexual relationships and the mechanics of vaginal intercourse were central to both conservative and reform social agendas. Loosely divided here into three dominant social discourses, conservative, social purist, and free love, late nineteenth-century American sexual viewpoints reflected white, middle-class concerns about industrialization and urbanization, immigration, and women’s rights and changing roles. Social purity and free love were self-identified social movements, while the conservative stance represented an entrenched perception of gender roles. Quite different ideologically, these three

---

4 A fourth discourse could be termed “commercial,” representing advertisements for contraceptives, abortifacients, abortion services, and cures for sexually transmitted diseases, as well as the products themselves, plus various forms of pornography, erotica, etc. While such commercial sexual discourse was common in the late Nineteenth Century and provides evidence about sexual practices and attitudes, the focus of this discussion is public discourse primarily intended to reinforce or change socio-cultural attitudes about sex.
positions converged among themselves on several points and will be discussed here via three rhetorical foci:

- Why talk about sex
- Who talked about sex and how
- How public sexual discourse was controlled

Why Talk About Sex?

Throughout the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, increasing urbanization, industrialization, and opportunities for women took sons and daughters to anonymous cities away from parental and church influence and control; marriage and sex manuals were written with this changing demographic in mind (Melody and Peterson 20). These tracts were meant not only to guide the individual’s sexual and marital behavior, but also to reinforce middle-class, protestant values (Haller 71). These values included sexual control – women maintaining their purity and thereby controlling men and creating an appropriate family life, and men controlling their own base urges in order to succeed in the marketplace. This sexual control ideally separated the white middle-class from the lower classes and from other races (D’Emilio and Freedman 57).

Thus, public discourse about acceptable forms and expressions of sexuality could provide guidance to a newly urban population in the absence of parental and religious supervision, and inform lower classes, especially European immigrants and African Americans, of the standards they must achieve to attempt class mobility within the United States.

Campaigns against prostitution also created public discourse about sex and sexual behavior in the late Nineteenth Century. While legislation and social reform movements addressed prostitution sporadically throughout the century, the social purity movement created a more consistent discussion of prostitution and its attendant ills in the post-Civil war years.
This, too, occurred at least partly in response to growing urbanization, industrialization, and mobility; in the northern industrial cities, as well as on the Western frontier, prostitution thrived (141). The discussion positioned prostitution as a social problem and as a personal issue intertwined – the behavior of individual men and women carried lasting consequences for personal and national good or evil. An 1887 book, Sexual Health: A Plain and Practical Guide for the People on All Matters Concerning the Organs of Reproduction in Both Sexes and All Ages by medical doctor Henry Hanchett, cautioned men that, among other things, visiting a prostitute

... costs health, strength, wealth, self-respect, and virtue... exchanges liberty for the domination of a creature too vile to be called a woman; barters useful citizenship for the state of the criminal sapping the foundations of society by striking at marriage and the family. (qtd Melody and Peterson 23)

Clearly, prostitution posed a grave risk to men, to marriage and the family, and to the state. In this respect, prostitution was akin to masturbation, an activity which also figured largely in late nineteenth-century sexual discourse and which threatened the health of individuals, their offspring, their closest relationships, and their nation.

“The secret vice of the worst kind,” masturbation was condemned, in men and women, throughout the century. As the century progressed, however, prohibitions to masturbation shifted from a solely religious basis to concerns about physical and mental debility and sexual gratification outside of the procreative act (Mumford 80). Warnings to males against masturbation, like many of the warnings against visiting prostitutes, focused on the need to contain sexual energies. Too-frequent emissions enfeebled men, draining and exhausting them and forcing their bodies to produce more precious seminal fluid at great cost (Melody and
Peterson 23-31). This sapping would have a negative effect on all of a man’s personal and social actions and interactions: in the marriage relationship, in the procreation of less than optimal offspring, and in the marketplace. Nocturnal emissions and too-frequent intercourse also were advised against for this reason and, with masturbation, occupied much of the sexual advice literature written for men. Female masturbation seems to have been less generally addressed in sex and health manuals, but was objected to because, like male masturbation, it provided sexual gratification independent of procreative marital intercourse. Female masturbation also promoted sexual feelings and urges that ruined women’s natural purity and endangered her ability to grow into a healthy wife and mother (Haller 73) and in turn, produce healthy children. Ironically, as Degler pointed out in a reassessment of nineteenth-century sex and health manuals, the fears expressed about female masturbation were an explicit acknowledgement of women’s capacity for sexual feelings (91), despite the fact that many authors – quite often the same ones concerned with the evils of masturbation – argued that women had little, if any, natural desire for sexual activity.

Confining acceptable sexual activity to occasional intercourse between married couples, as most sex and health manuals did, would seem to limit their subject of discussion; however, late nineteenth-century marriage relations were complicated by an increasing expectation of romance and emotional intimacy, by the use of contraceptives, including abortion, and by social reforms emphasizing women’s rights. Contraceptive information, including natural methods, prophylactic methods, and abortion methods, was widely available prior to 1873, when the federal Comstock law was passed (D’Emilio and Freedman 59, 66). As reproduction became more manageable, a middle-class emphasis on love relationships and emotional and sexual intimacy in marriage grew (73), further weakening the direct connection between intercourse and
reproduction. Contrary to our popular notion of the sexually submissive Victorian-era wife, women, especially reformers and physicians, as well as some male doctors and other men, increasingly questioned the enthymeme that women had intercourse solely because it was a marital duty that, when children resulted, also fulfilled their maternal yearnings.

In an extensive study of late nineteenth-century marriage manuals and medical journals, Degler found many assertions that women should enjoy intercourse for optimum physical and mental health and the health of the relationship (86-90). Some doctors and manual writers emphasized that husbands needed to tailor the initiation and pace of intercourse to their wives’ desires, rather than “force themselves upon women or ‘overpersuade’”5 (90). Taken together, this advice and the behavior it was meant to alter illustrated the conflicting ideologies of the time, both in sexual dynamics and in women’s socio-cultural position.

As has been shown, public discourse on heterosexual relationships and the act of vaginal intercourse was common in the late nineteenth-century United States, at least within the white middle-class. Economic, social, and ideological changes fostered the discussion, which was dominated by three viewpoints. Conservative rhetors wished to reinforce ideals of the reproductive purpose of intercourse, of female passivity, and of masculine control in order to keep the middle-class family unit anchored in traditional gender roles. Social purists, very often supporters of the temperance and suffrage movements, wanted to protect women and children by elevating marital sex above a male right and by instituting a single acceptable standard of sexual behavior for men and women, founded in current notions of women’s moral purity. This agenda could be accomplished by changing cultural perceptions as well as through legislation regarding marriage, divorce, rape, adultery and prostitution (D’Emilio and Freedman 150-154). Despite

5 Note how “force” functioned as a synonym for “rape” in nineteenth-century discourse of sex within marriage, just as “marriage” itself was often synonymous with “sexual intercourse.” Whether “overpersuade” in this context referred to physical rape or to emotional coercion is unclear.
fundamental differences between the ideals of conservatives and social purists in terms of gender relations, however, social purists also wished to maintain the connection between reproduction and sex. Although acknowledging the pleasurable and romantic aspects of physical love, the social purity agenda was highly vested in the ideal of women as fundamentally moral, domestic, and maternal, working to change the nation for the better via social mothering (155).

Supporting many of same reforms as social purists, free lovers wanted to create a culture willing to discuss sexuality as central to men’s and women’s lives and health and as a matter of personal choice. In the home lives of its advocates, free love philosophy most often indicated nothing more than the freedom to enter and leave a marriage without coercion (McLaren 147). Free love public discourse, however, embraced a wide array of relationship possibilities, including amending marriage or abolishing it altogether (Horowitz 414), or accepting alternate forms of union such as polygamy and group marriage (407). Like the social purists, proponents of free love advocated a single sexual standard for men and women, but their standard was based on individual choice and lack of legislative interference. Ideally, women would attain a sexual freedom similar to that enjoyed by men, rather than men being limited to the sexual decorum and restraint typically expected of nineteenth-century women, as social purists advocated.

Who Talked About Sex and How

Marriage and sex manuals, as well as other public discourses concerning sex and marriage, supported various ideological viewpoints in a time of profound social, political, and economic change. At early and mid-century, much marital advice came from clergy and was expressed in religious terms. However, as growing urbanization and other social changes eroded religious authority, and as medicine gained in professional status, male and female doctors increasingly published sex and marriage information (D’Emilio and Freedman 66-67). Social
reformers and other lay individuals also wrote marital, sex, and health advice literature. The growing publication of such manuals throughout the century met the demands of an ever-more literate populace and reflected advances in the publishing industry (67); sexual and health publications likely also appealed to the reading public’s desire for self-help literature.

Some manuals focused directly on the sex act, offering prescriptive and proscriptive advice. Ida Craddock’s “The Wedding Night,” for example, told readers “there is a wrong way and a right way to pass the wedding night” (1) and outlined the correct way in careful detail. Dr. John Kellogg, of cornflake fame, decried such explicit discussion in the introduction to his marriage manual, *Plain Facts for Old and Young*. He claimed that a certain type of marital health text, often containing lust-inducing illustrations, had a “pernicious influence” on the reader (qtd Melody and Peterson 28). Other manuals, especially those written for young women, addressed courtship and marital conduct with only peripheral references to sexuality. Such texts generally advised girls to avoid touching their sexual organs, to eschew romance novels and dancing, to have nothing to do with strangers, and to maintain strict modesty in courtship (Haller 73-75).

In addition to sex and marriage advice texts, public sexual discourse of a more explicitly socio-political nature was available via specialized magazines and newspapers, such as free love and free thought papers published by George E. MacDonald (*The Truth Seeker*), Moses Harmon (*Lucifer, The Light Bearer*) and Victoria Woodhull (*Woodhull and Claflin’s Weekly*). Various health movements, social purity and suffrage groups, and temperance organizations also published tracts or newspapers touching on sexual and marital issues.

When talking or writing about sex, conservatives and social purists were more likely to employ euphemisms (animal propensities, the solitary vice, voluptuous spasms), while free lovers based much of their philosophy upon open discussion of sexuality and the use of correct
terms. An extreme example was Angela Haywood, who was determined to transform language use and, thereby, society. She was notorious first for using Latinate terms for sex organs and sex acts in her public discourse, and later for insisting on Anglo-Saxon vernacular: cock, cunt, fuck. Even some other free lovers found this too uncomfortable (Battan 113).

How Sexual Discourse was Controlled

In his reassessment of nineteenth-century sex and health manuals, Degler warned readers against assuming that conservative nineteenth-century public discourse on sexuality reflected actual middle-class behaviors. Rather than illustrating current practices, conservative marriage and sex discourse sought to impose a desired ideology (88). D’Emilio and Freedman agreed, pointing out that “sexual advice literature does not tell much about how people acted, but it does reveal the system of ideas against which they measured their behavior” (71-72). From this perspective, we can view most public sexual discourse of any type – conservative, social purist, or free love – as an attempt to guide, mold, or control individual sexual behavior and social mores. To the extent that each was successful, they also shaped public sexual discourse itself.

Social purists called for a single sexual standard for men and women. This standard was based on marital monogamy, controlled by the wife’s decision on when to have sex, and on abstinence outside of marriage. Because they wanted men to control their sexual behavior as women were expected to, social purists joined conservatives in legal battles against prostitution, although conservatives focused on punishing prostitutes while social purists wished to “save” prostitutes and punish the men who visited them (D’Emilio and Freedman 152). By the 1870s, social purists had realized that limiting male sexual privilege and giving women more control over their sexuality would result only from state intervention; to this end, social purity and temperance and suffrage groups worked for legislation to raise the age of consent, provide
matrons for women’s prisons, give married women control of their property and wages, and control the alcohol trade. Social purists also ushered in the sex education movement, forming Moral Education Societies and arguing that women and mothers should educate children lest they pick up incorrect information about sex elsewhere (155). Largely successful in its legislative goals, by the close of the century social purity had shaped public sexual discourse in profound ways, changing the country’s ideology, if not actual practice, of sexual relations (156).

While social purists campaigned for state control of sex, the free love movement objected to any government control, including state-sanctioned marriage. Termed “sex radicals” by some contemporary researches (Freedman 275), many of the free lovers’ goals resonated with the social purity movement, especially the idea that women should be able to exercise personal choice in sex and reproduction, and most free love couples were married or in long-term monogamous relationships (D’Emilio and Freedman 163). On the other hand, as a philosophical movement aligned with free thought and anarchism, free love advocated social changes that shocked much of society, including the abolition of marriage, the sexual and socio-economic independence of women, and frank public discussion of sex (164). Free love speakers and writers insisted on using “true names” for genitalia and sexual acts, arguing that it was the secrecy surrounding sexuality, not sexuality itself, that damaged society and produced individual perversions. Claiming her goal was to expose the hypocrisy of sexual activity cloaked by public silence, for example, Victoria Woodhull’s weekly newspaper “outed” popular minister Henry Ward Beecher for having an affair with a married parishioner; Woodhull was charged under federal obscenity laws and imprisoned, but later acquitted (163). Although Woodhull scaled back her public career after her trial and eventually immigrated to England, the publicity of the Beecher-Tilton scandal and of Woodhull’s arrest and imprisonment attracted more adherents to
the free love movement, which continued well into the Twentieth Century (163-164). Overall, the free love movement’s greatest influence on nineteenth-century public sexual discourse was its very existence; by theorizing radical views of sexuality and advocating the public use of sexually correct terms, free lovers expanded the margins of public sexual discourse (Battan 120-121), giving more moderate reformers a larger space within which to work.

It is also likely that, in addition to widening the frame of public sexual discourse in late nineteenth-century America, the free love movement shielded less radical reformers by acting as a lightning rod for anti-obscenity legislation. In addition to Victoria Woodhull, scores of free love publishers and writers were arrested and tried under “The Act for the Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use,” also known as the Comstock law. Enacted in 1873 as an expansion of an 1872 statute and strengthened by congress throughout the remainder of the century (D’Emilio and Freedman 159), the federal law, as well as state-enacted statutes known as “little Comstock laws,” sentenced violators to up to five years in prison at hard labor, with fines from $100 - $2000 (Document 58). The law defined obscenity in broad terms, allowing Anthony Comstock, self-appointed vice crusader and unpaid postal inspector, to prosecute anyone whom he deemed guilty of passing obscene materials through the U.S. mails, including erotic items, contraceptive devices, medications or information, abortifacients, sexual implements (such as masturbation aids), and advertisements for any of these items (Horowitz 382). In Washington D.C. and the territories, Comstock’s power was even greater because direct federal jurisdiction applied; people in those areas could be charged for selling, giving away, or intending to sell or give away such items (382-383).

To understand the extent of this legislation, we need only look at the results of a single year’s enforcement in New York City (1875):
... forty-seven arrests, twenty eight convictions ... and ninety-one hundred fines. [Comstock’s] New York Society for the Suppression of Vice seized twelve hundred pounds of books and destroyed over twenty-nine thousand sexually explicit photos, songs, leaflets, rubber goods, and circulars. (D’Emilio and Freedman 159-160)

Although social purists and suffragists initially supported the legislation, Comstock’s aggressive, intimidating methods eventually drew some criticism (160).

The successful passage and enforcement of Comstock laws represented a victory for conservative forces in shaping public sexual discourse. In its effort to return sexual discourse to the private sphere, “Comstockery,” as opponents termed it, threatened not only free lovers and purveyors of titillating materials, contraception information, and abortions, but also doctors writing for medical journals (which had to pass through the mails) and those, like the social purists, who advocated changes in women’s sexual and marriage roles. Because all sexual language was by definition obscene, any reformist discussion of sexuality could be charged if it occurred in print and was mailed. We may safely assume that many publishers, writers, reformers, and medical professionals practiced self-censorship rather than face possible prosecution, either quitting the discussion or adopting rhetorical strategies that allowed discussion of sex and sex-related issues without alarming censors.

Anthony Comstock and the conservative forces he represented employed government-sanctioned control of public sexual discourse in the final twenty-seven years of the Nineteenth Century. However, just as we cannot assume that marital and sex advice manuals reflected what men and women were actually doing in bed, we cannot imagine that conservative control of public sexual discourse was complete or unchallenged. The trials of Victoria Woodhull and other
free love and free thought proponents brought new members to the free love movement, many of whom where arrested and convicted in turn, yet they continued to speak out. Repeatedly charged under state Comstock laws, marriage manual-writer Ida Craddock continued to distribute her materials and to castigate Comstock in articles and letters to newspapers. Other reformers, such as Frances Willard and the members of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, advocated for reform in sexual relations by using euphemistic public speech and maintaining a careful ethos of respectability.

Public sexual discourse in late nineteenth-century America reflected the profound social, political, and economic changes of the time. In contrast to the image of determined prudery summoned up by the very epithet “Victorian,” the white middle-class engaged in a lively sexual debate of gender roles, the meaning of marriage, and the very words that could be used to explore such issues. Despite the seeming victory of conservative discourse represented by passage of federal and state Comstock laws, late nineteenth-century public sexual discourse set in motion challenges and changes that would be realized in the Progressive Era and beyond.

The Study

In *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women*, Royster described the theoretical underpinnings of that particular study and of her blended subject position as an African American, feminist, academic woman studying African American women whom she admired. Bizzell further explicated the affective aspect of Royster’s relationship to her subjects, stating that Royster had articulated a vital component of feminist scholarship: “the acknowledgement of the multiple functions of emotions and experiences in defining one’s relationship to one’s research” (13). In this section, I hope to do just that: discuss the theoretical perspectives and attendant assumptions of my study and clearly articulate my own
attachment to the women studied and to the subject matter. In creating and theorizing this study, I am indebted to Royster and Bizzell, as well as to Susan Kates for her *Activist Rhetorics and American Higher Education, 1881-1937*.

**Why Ida Craddock?**

I first encountered nineteenth-century sexual reform discourse when I read Burton’s “Obscene, Lewd, and Lascivious: Ida Craddock and the Criminally Obscene Women of Chicago, 1873-1913.” Shortly thereafter, I found an online copy of Craddock’s pamphlet “The Wedding Night,” which encouraged couples to approach first intercourse gradually over the course of several nights and with consideration for each partner’s pleasure. Craddock offered this advice as an alternative to the “loss of sexual self-control, tigerish brutality, [and] persistent rape of the wife’s person” (5) that, she claimed, was commonly practiced among married couples of the day. Because Craddock sold this pamphlet and others through the mail, she was subject to state and federal Comstock laws and was charged with distributing obscene materials several times. In the spring of 1902, Craddock was convicted for violating the New York State obscenity statutes and served three months in the Blackwell’s Island workhouse (Green 29). Released in June, she was then convicted in October for federal Comstock violations. The day before she was to be sent to prison, October 16, 1902, Ida Craddock committed suicide (30).

That Craddock’s story would invite sympathy in the modern reader seems almost inevitable, more so because her gentle sexual advice hardly seemed to be the stuff of criminally obscene pornography. Free speech proponents of her own time felt the same, and Craddock’s trial and suicide were mentioned in anti-Comstock literature for several years. For me,

---

6 For example, Craddock’s story was often recounted by Theodore Schroeder in books and tracts he wrote for The Free Speech League.
however, Ida Craddock’s sexual reform efforts resonate beyond her persecution by Anthony Comstock and her suicide.

From 1990 to 1992 I worked directly with clients at Planned Parenthood of Northern Nevada and I was the affiliate’s Community Education Director from 1992 until 1996. Pro-reproductive rights discourse was under attack during that time, most prominently in the form of the federal Gag Rule and in anti-abortion activists’ protests, clinic bombings, and even shootings of clinic doctors and staff members. As easy as it would be to draw connections between the Comstock law and the federal Gag Rule, or between the social atmospheres that fostered clinic violence and Craddock’s choice to commit suicide, however, my strongest connection to Craddock lies in her personal mission. During those six years, I spoke with countless women and men of widely varying ages, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, education levels, religious affiliations, and gender identifications who were seeking information about the physical, emotional, ethical, and moral aspects of sexuality. Often people simply wanted some assurance that their feelings and experiences fell within the norm. Providing such services certainly was within Planned Parenthood’s mission. Nonetheless, I was sometimes astonished at the public’s sheer need for sexuality information and reassurance, considering not only the preponderance of sexual themes in our entertainment media, but also the sexuality education materials available through schools, health fairs, the Internet, men’s and women’s magazines, HIV/AIDS education efforts, etc. Considering the need for sexuality education in the relatively sexually-open 1990s helped me to fully appreciate Craddock’s self-appointed mission in the late Nineteenth Century. Despite the growing presence of sexual and health information at

---

7 Now Planned Parenthood Mar Monte
8 The Gag Rule prohibited women’s health care providers receiving federal Medicaid funds from performing abortions or referring clients to abortion providers. The rule applied even if the abortion or counseling services themselves were not funded by federal monies or offered to Medicaid clients.
that time, Craddock’s short pamphlets obviously filled a very real need. Written in a friendly, encouraging tone and describing intercourse without being prim or prurient, “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living” were purchased by individuals and prescribed by physicians. Word of mouth seems to have been Craddock’s greatest advertisement, and individuals also purchased replacement pamphlets after lending their copies out to friends.

One way to encounter Craddock’s public sexual discourse would be to position it within the sexuality education literature of the time, from Dr. Henry Guernsey’s conservative Plain Talk on Avoided Subjects, which went through four reprinterings between 1882 and 1915 (Melody and Peterson 35), to Dr. Alice Stockham’s 1896 sexual guide Karezza, heavily flavored with Tantric practices, which Craddock also sold from her office. Craddock, however, saw her work as reformative rather than educational. In an 1893 letter to her friend Dr. E.B. Foote, she wrote,

   But my great hobby for years past has been the subject of sex on its emotional and ethical side . . . For a long time to come – perhaps for the rest of my earthly life – it is probable that my public work will be in the direction of sex reform.

Craddock hoped to change the way the people she lived among (white, middle-class) both performed and thought about sexual intercourse. As did the social purists and free lovers, Craddock wanted women to enjoy the sex act and to control it, rather than be at the mercy of their male partners. Even more, however, Craddock wished for couples to bring a religious/spiritual sense to coition; she saw this aspect of intercourse, articulated most clearly in “Right Marital Living,” as a crucial element of personal and marital happiness. Thus, it was on the strength of Craddock’s own sense of public mission that I chose to explore her work as a public discourse of sexual reform.
Why Frances Willard and Victoria Woodhull?

Positioning Craddock as a sexual reformer led me to consider the major women’s reform and sexuality reform discourses of her time: temperance, suffrage, social purity, and free love. Looking at the speeches and reform efforts of women such as Anthony, Cady Stanton, Willard, Davis Wright, and Woodhull, I perceived the great extent to which the issues they fought for and against were grounded in women’s sexuality, sexual availability, and sex-assigned gender roles. From that point, I decided to explore Craddock’s public sexual discourse in relation to the sexual discourse of one of the most famous female reformers of her time, Frances Willard, and to that of the most infamous, Victoria Woodhull. The notoriety of these two women, however, is not the reason I selected them per se. Rather, their fame was indicative of their messages, their rhetorical strategies, and their ethos. Together with Craddock’s practical advice, Willard’s and Woodhull’s heavily ideological discourses marked out a wide range of public sexual speech. Investigating this great range fulfills Royster’s challenge in Traces of a Stream to “…make visible many features, factors, relationships, people, and practices that heretofore were not visible – to articulate what is there and what seems to be going on” (8). Despite Willard’s and Woodhull’s visibility in their own time and in the present, studying their public sexual discourse in relationship to one another and to Craddock will indeed make visible that which has been largely overlooked in women’s reform speech – a rhetoric of sexual reform.

Placing the public sexual speech of Willard, Woodhull, and Craddock in dialog with one another allows me to construct rich, complex descriptions of their discourses, best described in terms of continua. A continuum of conservative speech to radical speech in terms of language use and cultural context, for example, places Willard (social purist) and Woodhull (free lover) at opposing poles, with Craddock in between. Not fully representative of either position, Craddock
combined the free love philosophy of plain sexual language with the Social Purist position of female-controlled sexuality within Christian marriage.

A continuum of the radicalness of speech delivery, on the other hand, shifts Craddock to the radical extreme, leaving Willard at the conservative pole and moving Woodhull much closer to Willard. Although Woodhull’s speech was much more radical in both delivery and ethos than Willard’s, the discourse of both had a similar purpose, advocating general socio-cultural reform to large audiences. Craddock’s speech, in contrast, frankly and specifically addressed the physical mechanics of heterosexual intercourse and was delivered directly to the individuals it was meant to benefit, via the mailing and hand-distribution of pamphlets and in one-on-one consultations. Thus, Craddock occupied the most radical position in terms of why, how, and to whom her public sexual discourse was delivered.

A third continuum concerns the potential effectiveness of the rhetors’ public sexual discourse in creating reform. As president of the WCTU, Willard unquestionably wielded the most power. Whereas Willard was famous, however, Woodhull was notorious – spiritual medium, free lover, first female financier on Wall Street, first female candidate for president – and any effectiveness she had in creating sexual reform originated in her very notoriety. Thus, despite the differences in their aims and their ethos, Willard and Woodhull again occupy one end of a continuum, in this case because their ability to be heard and, therefore, to be potentially effective, rested on their fame and on the size of their audiences. Measured this way, Craddock’s potential effectiveness was quite low, because she did not achieve fame (except for her trial and suicide) and certainly was not able to carry her sexual reform message to audiences beyond the individual. On the other hand, if we define “creating sexual reform” as inducing change in the lives of individuals, Craddock’s method becomes the most potentially effective.
Why Public Sexual Discourse: Goals of the Study

My goals in studying how late nineteenth-century female reformers spoke about sex and related issues are threefold. First, by analyzing the public sexual discourses of Willard, Woodhull, and Craddock, I hope to shed light on a neglected aspect of nineteenth-century women’s reform speech, one that is potentially significant not only across nineteenth-century reform movements, but also across time. As a late twentieth-century feminist and, through much of the 1990s, a clinic staff member and Community Education Director for Planned Parenthood of Northern Nevada, I have always considered the second wave of feminist activity to be primarily grounded in women’s sexuality. Issues of sex and sexual relationships permeated the discourse of the late twentieth-century women’s rights movement: contraception, co-habitation, marriage, abortion, sex education, sex work, child care, reproductive health care, lesbianism, divorce, rape. And, not only were (and are) these issues avidly discussed in and of themselves, they are part of a seemingly-endless cultural metadiscourse over how and why sex and sexually-related issues should be presented or suppressed in families, in schools, in government, in houses of worship, in entertainment media, and on the Internet.

Because women have the potential to bear children, and because that reproductive function has not yet successfully been separated from the gendering of social roles, it seems inevitable that any discourse of women’s social and political rights must address women’s sexuality and sexual relationships. Similarly, discussions of women’s sexuality in the Nineteenth Century were neither rare nor quaint, nor were they the province solely of physicians and pornographers. Rather, changing cultural perceptions of women’s sexuality and supporting those changes through legislation was the very stuff of many significant nineteenth-century reform movements. Therefore, examining the sexual aspects of nineteenth-century women reformers’
discourse allows us to draw clearer connections between seemingly disparate movements, such as social purity and free love, and to theorize a nineteenth-century sexual reform rhetoric model. Additionally, recognizing the central position of women’s sexuality in women’s reform movements in general allows us to draw connections between seemingly disparate times, such as the 1960s Sexual Revolution and the (oft perceived) sexually-silent Nineteenth Century.

The second goal of this study is to apply public sexual discourse as a lens through which to examine late nineteenth-century reform speech. That is, insofar as speaking of sex and sexually-related issues further complicated a woman’s act of public discourse, we may assume that during such an undertaking, issues of ethos, purpose, audience, and delivery method came to the fore. Thus, the infamous Victoria Woodhull’s speeches on free love would have drawn a very different audience, requiring a different self-presentation, than her speeches on labor reform; the manner in which Frances Willard addressed marital issues could potentially alienate or secure her typically conservative supporters; Ida Craddock’s determination that plain, exact speech best suited her audience and purpose conflicted with her method of delivery through the mails during the Comstock era – a delivery method that brought her an unwanted audience of censors. Put another way, sex – a socially, politically, and personally risky topic of public discourse – distilled the effective and unsuccessful rhetorical choices of nineteenth-century female reform rhetors. We may then use that distillation to reexamine and revaluate the larger realm of late nineteenth-century female reform speech.

The third goal of this study moves from the purely rhetorical realm toward the historiographic. For each female reformer and her public sexual discourse, I pose and discuss a specific question. For example, in “A White Life for Two,” Frances Willard portrayed her ideal of socially pure marriage. This depiction was perfectly aligned with Willard’s larger body of
work on behalf of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, which asked women to extend their naturally moral roles as wives and mothers to improve the larger community. Moreover, with an estimated 200,000 members, the backbone of the WCTU was middle-class, white, married women. Willard, however, never married. Unencumbered by the demands of a husband or children, she seems to have existed for her work, living and traveling with her mother and select female companions. Contemplating this disparity between Willard’s message and her actions brings others to light. In fact, Willard blatantly inhabited multiple subjectivities: an unmarried women championing marriage; a powerful woman at liberty advocating for women’s domestic role (however politically active); an acknowledged champion of the poor and downtrodden taking a racist position about Southern black poverty, lynching and the work of Ida B. Wells. In Willard’s case, then, I explore these multiple subjectivities in light of her public sexual discourse.

Assumptions

This study centers on three roughly contemporaneous texts: Frances Willard’s speech and pamphlet text “A White Life for Two” (1890); Victoria Woodhull’s speech and pamphlet text “Tried as by Fire; Or, The True and The False, Socially” (1874); and Ida Craddock’s sex-in-marriage pamphlets “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living” (~1900). Spanning the final 26 years of the Nineteenth Century, these texts are linked in several ways. First, the texts were authored by women who self-identified as reformers. Second, the texts were written by middle-class, white women of the upper-Midwest/Northeastern United States, and delivered to audiences of a similar background. Third, all three texts were written, spoken, and distributed at

---

9 There is some disagreement among scholars about whether Woodhull wrote the texts of her speeches, or if they were written by various men who wrote for her newspaper, Woodhull & Claflin’s Weekly. This issue is discussed in chapter 4 of this document.
a time when state and federal Comstock laws were in effect to censor sexual speech. Based on these similarities, my examination of the texts is based on the following assumptions:

1) All three women composed their own texts or, in the case of Victoria Woodhull (see footnote 12), fully understood and approved the content of the text.

2) All three women understood the socially-sanctioned sexual language connotations of their time, i.e. the synonymous relationship between “marriage” or “marital” and “sexual intercourse,” or between “force” and “rape,” as well as other terms.

3) All three women produced and delivered their texts with some understanding of the rhetorical significance of audience awareness, situated and constructed ethos, and enthymeme, although they might not have used or understood these actual terms. That is, all three women understood that a writer/speaker makes certain rhetorical choices in order to best accomplish her goals.

4) All three women were fully cognizant of the social and legal dangers inherent in public sexual speech, especially pamphlet distribution through the mails, under state and federal Comstock laws.

Terms and Definitions

Because sex and sexuality are complex, multifaceted issues, any sustained discussion requires concrete definitions. For the purposes of this study, I am defining “public sexual discourse” and related terms in the manner explained below. Italicized terms within definitions are then further defined.

Public sexual discourse: reform-oriented text produced specifically for distribution to an audience, via speech or publication, which explicitly or obliquely addresses sexual intercourse between men and women.
Sexual intercourse: penis-vagina penetration.

Explicit discussion: addresses the physical mechanics of the act of sexual intercourse.

Oblique discussion: places sexual intercourse in a broader context, typically marital (examples: “a husband should be patient with his wife’s needs in all things,” The Young Married Lady’s Private Medical Guide)

OR addresses the results of sexual intercourse (pregnancy, sexually-transmitted disease) or the environments/conditions in which sexual intercourse occurs (marriage, age of consent laws, need for prison matrons)

OR defines acceptable intercourse (heterosexual, genital, marital) by condemning other sexual acts or behaviors, such as masturbation, oral sex, rape, sexual activity outside marriage, etc.

Study Design

The purpose of this study is to examine the public sexual discourse of three nineteenth-century female reformers: Frances Willard, Victoria Woodhull, and Ida Craddock. Each woman is the subject of one chapter. For each reformer, I first provide a brief biographical sketch, positioning her within the particular social movements with which she identified. Second, I examine the reformer’s opinions and experiences of sexuality and marriage. Next, I perform a rhetorical analysis of the reformer’s text, examining situated and constructed ethos, strategies related to audience awareness, including language use and style, and the authors’ use of
enthymemes. Finally, for each reformer I examine an issue arising from an intersection of the
writer/speaker and her public sexual discourse.

The final chapter of this document examines the relationships between the three rhetors
and between their texts. Exploring and building upon the continua described earlier in this
chapter (pp 55-56) I construct a model of nineteenth-century female reformers’ public sexual
discourse. I then challenge and interrogate that model, which can only apply to middle-class,
white, upper-Midwestern and Northeastern reformers, by considering how white female
sexuality is described in the anti-lynching rhetoric of Ida B. Wells. Questioning my own work in
this way fulfills Royster’s admonition to “resist a drifting toward speedy claims, static
conclusions, or overgeneralizations” (Traces 8). Finally, I consider the rhetors and their public
sexual discourses in the context of the goals outlined for this study (pp 57-59).
CHAPTER THREE
FRANCES WILLARD: THE “TRUE WOMAN” OF SEX REFORM

Introduction

Frances Willard was the most well-known, well-respected American woman of her time. When she died in 1898, flags flew at half-mast and memorial services were held throughout the country (Strachey 305-306). President of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union from 1879 until her death, Willard designed and directed the reform activities of 200,000 female members. During her tenure, she transformed the WCTU from a small temperance group into a nationally and internationally powerful political pressure organization dedicated to temperance, women’s suffrage, and a broad agenda of social reform (Gifford 7).

The highly successful public image Willard created for herself and for the WCTU tapped into nineteenth-century ideals of True Womanhood, which envisioned women as naturally pure, pious, submissive, modest, maternal, and domestic. Willard and her temperance women appealed to this trope with moderate, attractive clothing and manners. They also fostered this traditional, non-threatening image by decorating their meeting spaces with flowers and their own needle arts. At the same time, however, Willard redefined women’s duties of piety and submission to mean allegiance to a specific, female-centered Christian ideal rather than existing social norms, and she redefined womanly purity, maternity, and domesticity to mean taking care of the entire nation, as well as one’s own home and family.

Willard’s radicalized True Woman was emblematic not only of her public image and the mission she developed for the WCTU, but also of her personal life, her public discourse, and her relationship with feminist scholars. In this chapter, then, I use Willard’s practice of redefinition as a thread connecting a brief biography, an investigation of her experiences in and opinions of
sexuality and marriage, an examination of her public sexual discourse, and a problem she presents to contemporary feminist rhetoricians and historiographers.

**Biography**

Frances Willard was born on September 28, 1839 to Josiah Flint and Mary Hill Willard. The family, including an older brother, Oliver, and a younger sister, Mary, lived on a farm in western New York until 1841, when they moved to Oberlin, Ohio. In 1846, they moved to a farm in southeastern Wisconsin and in 1858 they settled, more or less permanently, in Evanston, Illinois (Gifford 5). With her sister, Willard attended first Milwaukee Female College and later North Western Female College, taking advantage of expanding educational opportunities for women (5). The family was also strongly Methodist; Willard’s father studied for the ministry at Oberlin, her brother attended seminary and became a minister, and Willard herself not only sought always to lead a Christian life, but also traveled briefly as an evangelical preacher with a revival group in 1877 (Donawerth 242). As president of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, Willard’s background served her well; she shared many early life experiences with the women who became WCTU members, including education, westward migration, rural to metropolitan relocation, class status, and protestant faith (Gifford 9). This similarity of background and experience goes a long way toward explaining Willard’s immense popularity (9).

Willard’s early professional life focused primarily on teaching. Throughout the 1860s, she held a series of positions at elementary and secondary schools (Gifford 12) teaching a variety of subjects, including algebra, geometry, history, and elocution (Donawerth 241). In 1870, Willard’s career turned from teaching to school administration. She helped found Evanston Ladies’ College, which soon merged with North Western Female College and then with
Northwestern University, at which time Willard became Dean of Women (241). In 1874, Willard left Northwestern and began her career with the national WCTU, acting as Corresponding Secretary through 1877. She became president of the Chicago chapter in 1876 and was briefly president of the Illinois state chapter in 1879 before becoming president of the national WCTU, also in 1879 (242). She held that position for 20 years, until her death.

Sexuality and Marriage: Willard’s Opinions and Experiences

In the spring of 1861 when she was 21, Willard met seminary student Charles Fowler and they became engaged by early summer. She wrote in her journal how much she admired his person, his opinions, his intellect, and his sermons (Willard, “Journal” 120-127). By August, however, Willard’s joy in meeting “the One Man in all the world, to me” (128) was allayed by the emotional distance growing between herself and her closest friend, Mary Bannister, who had recently become engaged to Willard’s brother. Over the next five months, Willard recorded the demise of her engagement and the chilling of her friendship. While still valuing Fowler’s admirable qualities, Willard found that physical intimacy with him was “irksome, always; -- [his caresses] never aroused an emotion” (146). In October she broke with Fowler. In November they reconciled, deciding that her lack of physical feeling was simply part of her nature. At the end of January 1862, Willard broke the engagement for good, citing again her lack of proper feeling for Fowler (163-164).

All the while Willard struggled to understand her feelings for Fowler, she was also growing jealous of Mary Bannister’s love for Oliver. She agonized in her journal over the passion she felt for Bannister, comparing it to her feelings for Fowler and finding she loved Bannister more and felt much more physical attraction to Bannister than to Fowler (Willard, “Journal” 147). Smith-Rosenberg examined such aspects of women’s emotional attachments in

\[10\] Willard’s emphasis.
“The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between American Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” stating that “such deeply-felt, same-sex friendships were casually accepted” (168) and that the relationships were “both sensual and platonic” (169). Indeed, entries in Willard’s journal echo the experiences of Smith-Rosenberg’s subjects, including jealously of male beaux; kissing, lap-sitting, and other physical expressions of intimacy between women; and feelings the women themselves identified as male or husbandly.

In one significant aspect, however, Willard’s “female world of love” differed from that depicted by Smith-Rosenberg. Whereas Smith-Rosenberg stated that such deeply-devoted female friendships often continued after marriage (174, 177-179), it is abundantly clear throughout this section of Willard’s journal that both her family and Bannister expected the relationship to cool appreciably once the young women became engaged. When Willard could not bring her emotions under control, she quarreled repeatedly with both her brother and Bannister (Willard, “Journal” 135-145). Perhaps because of these conflicts, Willard frequently referred to herself and her feelings as unnatural and as setting her apart from other women: “It is not right or natural – so they say – that [we] should love each other as we do”\(^{11}\) (134); “I am made up of curious stuff . . . we must both know it is abnormal” (138); “It is ‘my nature.’ I know – no other woman of whom I ever heard would feel as I do” (152); “[I am] tormented with the abnormal love & longing of a woman for\(^{12}\) a woman” (157). A few months after her final break with Fowler, Willard summed up the whole affair: “I think myself emotionally peculiar . . . Naturally I love women & sometimes I think, can feel no earnest, vigorous love toward their brethren”\(^{13}\)

Smith-Rosenberg cautioned against viewing the strong emotional and physical attachments between women in the Nineteenth Century through a contemporary lens, and it is

---

\(^{11}\) Willard’s emphasis.  
\(^{12}\) Willard’s emphasis.  
\(^{13}\) Willard’s emphases.
not my intent to label Willard’s sexual preferences. However, we may assume that Willard’s public sexual discourse was influenced by her sexual experiences. For example, in “A White Life for Two” Willard wrote very little of marital rape and quite glowingly of the perfect Christian marriage. While such emphases certainly did reflect her own Christian beliefs and the conservative character of her audience, they may also have reflected her own lack of experience of a sustained female-male relationship, including the fact that her own deepest friendships were with unmarried women and her widowed mother. Similarly, Willard’s frequent characterization of sex outside marriage as brutal or, at the very least, the result of seduction, may indicate not only a general concern about rape crime legislation at the time, but also a sense of vulnerability on behalf of herself and the unmarried women with whom she most closely associated, as well reflecting the distaste she felt for her fiancé’s physical advances.

The objection may be made that, while examining Willard’s public sexual discourse in light of her journal entries and the facts of her life may help us better understand her speech, such understanding can only be the product of guesswork. Yet there is a second benefit from exploring Willard’s perspectives on sexuality and marriage, especially her Bannister/Fowler journal entries: the view of Willard as a sexual being. In the Nineteenth Century, a respectable spinster such as Willard was viewed as asexual; Willard herself stated that a woman’s alternative to marriage was to remain “a maiden in perpetuo”\(^\text{14}\) (Willard, “White Life” 335). Likewise, in the absence of markers such as marriage, childbirth, or self-report or contemporaneous rumor of sexual activity, it is all too easy for the historian to overlook a subject’s innate sexuality. Fortunately, Willard’s journal affords a glimpse of her physical and emotional experiences and ideals. Although she spoke little in public about the physical aspects of intimate relationships and her speech was coded in the accepted euphemisms of her time, Willard did participate in

\(^{14}\) Willard’s emphasis
emotionally- and physically-intimate love relationships. Her experiences and musings must have colored her opinions and, because of her immense popularity and successful leadership, Frances Willard’s opinions were heard by the entire nation.

**Willard’s Public Sexual Discourse: “A White Life for Two”**

The text I examine here, “A White Life for Two,” was collected in Campbell’s *Man Cannot Speak for Her*, (Vol. 2). According to Campbell, the text was published as a WCTU pamphlet in 1890, but portions also appeared in Willard’s speeches and other WCTU publications around the same time (2: 318). I chose this particular text because marriage and sexual intercourse are discussed consistently throughout; other Willard speeches and texts that address marriage or intercourse (most often rape or age of consent legislation) deal with a variety of other issues as well.

The central goal of the pamphlet was the promotion of social purity, an ideology endorsed by various individuals and groups in the United States and Great Britain and first added to the WCTU’s plan of work in 1883 (Bordin 131-132). The chief goals of social purity included raising the age of consent (from as low as seven years old in one state), strengthening and implementing rape crime legislation, and instituting a single acceptable standard of sexual behavior for men and women, founded in current notions of women’s moral purity. These issues did, indeed, form the greater part of “A White Life for Two.” In addition, Willard cited suffrage as the best way to secure the goals of social purity. She also briefly mentioned the benefits of coeducation and the need for vocational training and physical education for schoolgirls, the need for women to keep their surnames after marriage as a symbol of equality, and the utter, Christian rightness of married women controlling their own fertility within marriage, although whether by contraception or abstinence is unclear.
Willard’s references to sex and sexual intercourse in “A White Life for Two” were comprised of coded terms, “unutterable abominations” (rape) and “the investiture of life with form” (pregnancy) for example, as well as frequent mention of marriage and its possible alternatives, such as an “impure life” for men and maidenhood for women. This oblique discussion was dictated by Willard’s largely conservative audience and her own self-construction as a True Woman. Despite the lack of explicit sexual terms, however, “A White Life for Two” undeniably was public sexual discourse through and through. The pamphlet’s identification with the social purity movement was a de facto admission of sexual content because social purity dealt primarily with rape, age of consent, and sexual mores. Also, the pamphlet title itself referred to marriage, and marriage in the Nineteenth Century was nearly synonymous with heterosexual intercourse.\(^{15}\) Within the text, Willard confirmed that synonymy, several times ascribing sexual force to marriage in less enlightened times, contrasting marriage with impurity and virginity, and equating marriage with reproduction.

**Sex in “A White Life for Two”**

Although “A White Life for Two” qualifies as public sexual discourse because of its social purity content, the text appears to say very little about intercourse itself. Despite the lack of explicit sexual references or descriptions, however, the pamphlet does indeed present definite views of heterosexual intercourse. In Willard’s depiction, male-female sexual relations outside of marriage were both violent and induced by men. Men were the “outragers of women,” committing “unutterable abominations” (328), “unspeakable atrocities,” and “crimes against nature” (329). Men committed “the sins that do most easily beset them . . . the mad temptations that clutch at them on every side” (328) and young men were especially in danger from “inherited appetite and outward temptation . . . a force strong as gravitation and relentless as

\(^{15}\) See chapter two, pages 39-40
Such a system was rooted in the past, according to Willard: “for selfish ends, primeval and mediaeval man wrought out, with fiercest cruelty, virtue as the only tolerated estate of [women]” (326-327); in “barbarous ages” women were made “subjects of the stronger [sex]” (327) and women suffered “the unnatural subjugation of the age of force” (323). Because of this, marriage in previous times gave woman little security, making her subject to indignities from one man instead of many. Married women were held under “mediaeval continental and harem philosophies” (323) and even Christian marriage had merely “separate[d] one man and one woman into each home, telling the woman to remain there in grateful quietness” (333). Man defended the home and his rights of property, which came to include “the physically weaker one within ‘his’ home” (333). Willard claimed that modern marriage, though better, could still be bleak. In addition to powerlessness under the law, no right to vote, and no control over her own income, a wife did not have “custody” of her own body, yet was held solely responsible if she “arrested development in the genesis of a new life”\(^{16}\) (336).

In contrast to sexual violence outside of marriage and domination within, Willard described the ideal Christian marriage and the society it would create as egalitarian, mutually-supportive, and virtually passionless. At marriage, the wife would “surrender . . . no right not equally surrendered by the husband” (Willard, “White Life” 335). Women in the coming age would exhibit “more of the sisterly, less of the siren [sic] – more of the duchess and less of the doll,” becoming “the companion and counsellor not the incumbrance (sic) and toy of man” (325). In response to such women, men were becoming “considerate and brotherly . . . pure in word and deed” (325). Even as parents – that is, men and women who had manifestly participated in sexual

\(^{16}\) Willard wrote this in 1890, at a time when abortion was illegal, contraceptives were considered pornographic under Comstock laws, and rape within marriage was not a crime.
intercourse – husbands and wives would hold one another in “brotherly and sisterly affection” (319).

While Willard’s championing of female-directed sexual mores reflected the social purity movement, however, the fraternal-sororal construction of ideal marriage in “A White Life for Two” was Willard’s particular vision. Some social purity rhetors, such as Susan B. Anthony, had little to say about ideal marriage, focusing instead on women’s injuries under the social system already in place (Anthony). Others, including Ida Craddock, Elizabeth Blackwell, and Alice Stockham, emphasized the sexual pleasure women enjoyed when they truly desired intercourse and could chose when to have it (D’Emilio and Freedman 154). Willard’s sisterly wives and brotherly husbands were not representations of social purity as such, then, but rather products of Willard’s Christian faith and personal experiences. Willard’s Christian upbringing assured her that the pairing off of men and women in marriage was God’s will; hence, she believed that Christian marriage was the cornerstone of a healthy Christian society. Moreover, as her journal makes clear, Willard tried to have faith that, with the right man, she could fulfill a Christian wifely role. However, Willard also wrote in her journal, both during the Fowler/Bannister affair and afterwards, that she felt little physical attraction to men; likewise, she continued to form intensely emotional and sensual relationships with women (Willard, “Journal” 190-194, 279-285). In contrast, two significant romantic relationships Willard did have with men – her fiancé Charles Fowler in 1861 and fellow teacher Delevan Scoville in 1866-6717 – seem to have been based primarily on intellectual and spiritual compatibility. It was the non-sexual, mutually respectful male-female companionship Willard experienced with those men that echoed throughout “A White Life for Two.”

17 Willard described Scoville as one of the few men to whom she “could say anything, nearly.” She prayed with him and, on his advice, tried fasting as a “means of grace.” They parted ways at the end of the school year (Gifford 237-250).
Audiences

When Willard wrote “A White Life for Two,” she had been president of the WCTU for almost a dozen years; both the organization and Willard’s public image were well-established features of the American social reform landscape. Consequently, whether writing or speaking, her audience was threefold: an intended audience, a public audience, and a spontaneous audience. In “A White Life for Two,” Willard’s primary audience was the intended one—readers interested in social purity. Such people were most likely WCTU members, temperance supporters, and/or members or supporters of related social reform movements, such as suffrage. Overall, this audience would have been receptive to Willard’s arguments and may well have carried her message farther afield. Willard directly praised the bulk of this audience when she wrote, “In many a home presided over by a Temperance voter and a White Ribbon worker, I have thought the Heavenly Vision was really coming down to terra firma” (325) What married, pro-temperance reader would not want to see her- or himself in such a light?

Willard praised both marriage and married persons throughout the text. Marriage was “the strongest [proof] of a beneficent Creator. . . the fairest, sweetest Rose of Time” (Willard, “White Life” 319). Every married man was a “patriot,” every married woman a “philanthropist,” and together, their faithfulness “alone makes possible the true home, the pure church, the righteous Nation, the great, kind brotherhood of man” (319). Despite faults in the present system, marriage was “the greatest triumph of past Christianity, and . . . has created and conserves more happy homes than the world has ever before known” (333). In contrast, Willard characterized the negative aspects of contemporaneous marriage as the relics of past times and past or alien civilizations: “the age of force” (323), “mediaeval continental and harem philosophies” (323), “primeval and mediaeval man” (326), “barbarous ages” (327); this strategy allowed her to
criticize certain aspects of marriage without impugning married persons or supporters of marriage in her audience. In fact, given that in the late Nineteenth Century the majority of men and women reading Willard’s text were married or would expect to become married, “A White Life for Two” functioned as an encomium to its own audience, as well as to the greater social and religious systems they occupied. Such an astute approach to intended audience explains much about Willard’s overall effectiveness and popularity.

Willard’s second audience was the press and policymakers. The social and political influence wielded by the WCTU in general and by Willard specifically meant that any WCTU-sponsored activity, speech, or pamphlet was of interest in the public forum. Recognizing this, Willard and the WCTU crafted every event and communication with the greater public audience, as well as the intended audience, in mind. For example, WCTU meeting organizers were advised to decorate their spaces with flowers, mottoes, and national and state flags, and to include religious songs in their programs (Mattingly 67). Such adornments and activities no doubt welcomed and inspired meeting attendees, but they also declared the WCTU’s womanliness, Christianity, and patriotism to the wider world. In the first paragraph of “A White Life for Two,” Willard appealed to the press and policymakers by connecting social purity to current political events. She began with a reference to the recent presidential election of 1888\textsuperscript{18} and its primary issue, the tariff. Stating that the election had been won “only by convincing Labor that a high tariff meant material protection for the home” (319), Willard deftly separated that political victory from republican/democrat and North/South dichotomies and attributed it to citizens’ determination to safeguard American homes and families. Next, Willard employed anaphora to

\textsuperscript{18} An election characterized by corruption, vote-buying, and North/South politics. Harrison (R) defeated the incumbent, Cleveland (D), in the electoral college, despite the fact that Cleveland won the popular vote. The issue that dominated the election was tariff rates (“Election of 1888”).
link the three great questions she claimed faced the American people: labor (mentioned in the first clause, above), temperance, and suffrage (“the woman question”):

. . . only by convincing wage-workers and women that the outlawing of the saloon means protection for those who dwell within in the home, will Prohibition ever gain the day; only by convincing wage-workers and temperance voters that through equal suffrage women will help to protect both the external and the internal interests of the home, will the Woman Question ever be wrought out in government. (319)

This statement served to further reduce current political discussions to the question of what would benefit the home. Also, by equating these goals with the successful use of the tariff issue in the recent election, Willard both showed her intended audience how they could achieve their goals and informed the press and policymakers of the political power her followers wielded.

Next, Willard positioned labor, temperance, and suffrage as a “trinity of issues” flowing from the “fount . . . that is Home itself” (319), invoking Christian images and again centering all political and social issues in the home. Finally, Willard asserted that the home was founded upon Christian marriage, thus introducing the text’s guiding theme: that Christian marriage would attain its highest pinnacle when the tenets of social purity and related issues were embraced and implemented.

This step-by-step transition from presidential politics and trade policies to the nation’s critical need for Christian marriage and social purity illustrates Willard’s skill in redefining social, political, or religious issues to support her work. As a technique for persuading her second audience, the press and policymakers, Willard’s redefinition led them from familiar political ground, centered on a male-directed system of party politics and economic and trade issues, to a
conclusion wherein female-identified morality and sexuality would produce ideal Christian marriages. Those marriages, in turn, would create model homes and thus perfect the entire nation. In fact, “A White Life for Two” began and concluded on a national level (the final words were the fifth verse of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”\(^\text{19}\)), giving press and policymakers a familiar entrée to Willard’s social purity vision and leaving them with a glimpse of America transformed.

Willard’s third audience could be called the spontaneous audience: chance readers who might encounter the text and so be persuaded. While any text has the potential to reach a spontaneous audience, three circumstances made “A White Life for Two” especially likely to do so: Willard’s authorship, the WCTU’s imprimatur, and the text’s pamphlet format. Essentially, one purpose of the pamphlet was to reach as wide a distribution as possible in order to promote social purity and the larger WCTU mission. However, a spontaneous – and therefore, unknown – audience presents problems in terms of making an effective appeal. Willard appealed to her intended audience by praising marriage, and to her public audience by citing recent political events; both appeals were based in values or interests the audiences were presumed to already hold. In a similar manner, Willard appealed throughout the text to the largest denominator attributable to all three of her audiences: Americanism.

From the first phrase, “America may well be called ‘God’s Country,’” to the final words, a verse from “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” “A White Life for Two” is replete with explicit and oblique references to America and American achievement. Identifying noble “heart-histories” (320) from the past, Willard named Dante, Petrarch, and Michael Angelo, and then placed among those elite the American author Washington Irving, American poet Bayard Taylor,

\(^\text{19}\) In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea/With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me/As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free/While God is marching on” (Willard, “White Life” 338).
American lyricist and actor John Howard Payne ("Home Sweet Home"), and George Washington. Also while praising Payne, Willard recited verses written about him by American poet Will Carleton. To make a point about the gender-equalizing potential of technological advances, Willard mentioned the Corliss engine, invented by American G. H. Corliss (323). Willard claimed that it was the "American Home, with its Christian method of a two-fold headship, based on laws natural and divine" (323) that was replacing "mediaeval continental and harem philosophies" (323) of marriage, thus showing how American Christian ideals had transcended unpleasant Old World customs. American womanhood and American art had also surpassed old European ideals. Willard cited American sculptor Joel Hart’s comments to her about his statue, “Woman Triumphant”: “The Venus de Medici, with its small head and button-hole eyelids matched the Greek conception of woman well, he thought, but America was slowly evolving another and a loftier type” (324). Later in the text, Willard related the story of fishermen and their wives and daughters on the Adriatic coast, recounting how, when the men stayed out fishing at night, the women would gather on the shore and sing the first lines of the “Ave Maria,” and then hear their men reply with the next lines (332). Willard likened that loving call and response across the darkness to the women of America calling out to their own men, but singing instead “a dearer song,” its “sacred words . . . “Home Sweet Home” (333). Here again, Willard superimposed an improved American image over an Old World figure and, not incidentally, firmly replaced Old World Catholicism with New World Protestantism.

Willard employed Americanism throughout “A White Life for Two” as a goodwill appeal to the broadest possible audience: spontaneous readers, the press and policymakers, and WCTU and social purity supporters. The text’s support for Christian marriage and its contemporaneous political references undoubtedly also crossed audience boundaries. Indeed, apart from personal
interests or the ways or reasons readers might have encountered the text, Willard’s three audiences occupied the same basic demographic; she wrote “A White Life for Two” for middle- and upper-class, white, American, protestant Christian men and women. The individuals and types Willard discussed to illustrate the need for or the results of social purity – the happily reformed prostitute leading a useful life in Massachusetts (329), the men performing “unspeakable atrocities” against women in Alaska, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Whitechapel\(^{20}\) (329), and those married couples that acted in “utter recklessness of the immortal consequences” (337) were subject matter, neither potential auditors of the text nor supporters of the social purity cause.

**Willard’s Ethos: Situated and Constructed**

Ethos refers to a rhetor’s character, both as the audience perceives it and as the rhetor projects it. Depending on the audience, the speaker, and the occasion, “character” may function as an umbrella term for any of the following: reputation, class status, marital status, affiliations, actions and habits, appearance, gender, style of speech, topic of speech, method of speech delivery, and other variables. Throughout her career, Willard artfully employed ethos to appeal to her largely white, middle- and upper-class, protestant Christian, American audiences, including dressing and comporting herself carefully in public (Bordin 122) and instructing all WCTU speakers to project “womanliness” and “Christian courtesy” (Mattingly 65).

Situated ethos refers to those characteristics over which the rhetor has little or no control at the time of speaking, and may have a positive or negative effect. In Willard’s case, at the time she wrote “A White Life for Two” her situated ethos included her gender, her position as president of the WCTU, and her singlehood. At that time, being female could inhibit a rhetor’s

---

\(^{20}\) Between 1888 and 1891, the murders of eleven prostitutes in and around Whitechapel, London, became international news. Eventually five of the murders committed in 1888 were attributed to Jack the Ripper, but at the time Willard mentioned them, all eleven were connected in the public’s perception (“Enduring Mystery”).
effectiveness. Although women in the late Nineteenth Century did not need to defend their right to public voice as vigorously as women had to do prior to the Civil War, etiquette and advice manuals still depicted women as quiet, nonassertive homebodies (Johnson 69). Violating these expectations for womanly conduct could earn a female rhetor the label “strident,” a fate that befell many suffragists. Thus, female social reformers generally constructed themselves as the “eloquent mother” or “noble maid,” extending their approved domestic sphere to encompass the nation (152). Willard did construct a womanly ethos to counteract the situated liability of her gender, but in many ways her other situated ethos, president of the WCTU, also mitigated the gender problem.

The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union was founded on temperance roots reaching back to the early Nineteenth Century, and women had always been a mainstay of the temperance effort (Mattingly 39). Thus, when the WCTU was created in 1874, the propriety of women’s public participation in temperance was already firmly established. The adjective “Christian” lent further decorum to membership in the union; women had long been situated as the caretakers of American Christianity (Brekus 274, 293), responsible for raising Christian children and making up the larger part of most congregations. As a designation, then, the terms “Women’s,” “Christian,” and “Temperance” reflected and amplified one another, drawing on accepted enthymemes of women’s duties and interests. The terms granted inherent respectability to the organization carrying them and to its female members and president.

Connection with such an acceptable cause and organization also mitigated Willard’s unmarried status. Throughout the Nineteenth Century, it was generally assumed that women would prefer to marry; not only were marriage and childbearing considered a woman’s Christian duty, but women’s earning potential was much lower than that of men. While spinsterhood was

21 See chapter one
not a shameful state as such, it could be used as ammunition when denouncing a woman’s actions. Susan B. Anthony was often criticized for her unmarried state, ridiculed for her unlovely appearance, and taken to task for “attempting to teach mothers and wives their duty” (Grand Rapids Times, qtd Johnson 139). Anthony’s spinsterhood was an easy target for suffrage opponents, but Willard’s single status was to some degree protected by her affiliation with “Christian Temperance,” even though Willard also promoted the vote for women. In addition, and perhaps wary of the harsh treatment Anthony had long received, Willard carefully and continuously portrayed her singlehood as personal sacrifice for a greater good. Especially in “A White Life for Two,” a text devoted to describing and promoting Christian marriage, Willard risked the criticism of “teaching wives their duty.” Early in the text, however, and in several places throughout, Willard described acceptable conditions under which men and women might not marry, thus replacing her own situated ethos of spinsterhood with a constructed ethos of marital choice.

In its most basic form, constructed ethos is created by the rhetor at the time of speaking or writing in order to establish credibility. For example, a senator speaking to a group of churchgoers may reminisce about his or her experiences in Sunday school as a child. Constructed ethos may also transcend the individual rhetorical act, however, especially for public figures. Frances Willard constructed her ethos of True Womanhood on a daily basis in her dress, her manners, her associations, and her activities. Her construction of sacrificial singlehood in “A White Life for Two” was entirely consistent with constructions she made elsewhere, such as the Biblically reminiscent “instead of the sweetness of home, I was to become a wanderer on the face of the earth (qtd Parkman 88). In “A White Life for Two,” Willard offered three reasons why men and women might not to marry. The first was heartbreak: “a memory cherished, an
estrangement unexplained” (320); the second, lack of a suitable partner: “an ideal unrealized” (320) and “woman left free . . . rather than marry a man whose deterioration through the alcohol and nicotine habits is a deadly menace” (335). The third, and one Willard most often invoked for herself throughout her career, was a higher obligation: “a duty bravely met” (320) and “the explanation of . . . unaccompanied lives may be found in that principle that underlies those memorable words applied to Washington: ‘Heaven left him childless that a Nation might call him Father’” (322). While not directly excusing her own singlehood, such variety allowed each member of Willard’s audience to perceive her unmarried status in the most acceptable light. Even more telling of Willard’s acute rhetorical skill was the fact that she constructed her ethos of acceptable singlehood as a matter of personal choice. When critics pointed out Susan B. Anthony’s lack of beauty, they were implying that she could find no one to marry her and that her political ideals and activism were the result of bitter spinsterhood; Willard’s construction of personal choice in marital status in “A White Life for Two,” as well as her daily ethos of respectable womanliness, deflected such charges.

Willard also constructed an ethos of patriotic leadership in “A White Life for Two.” She aligned herself with other leading male Americans – and them with her cause – when she wrote, “I believe, as do the best men of the nation, that woman will bless and brighten every place she enters, and that she will enter every place on the round earth” (325). Here again, she left to her audience the determination of exactly what she meant; each reader could fill in his or her own preferred leading figures. At the same time, Willard assured her audience that those “best men,” whoever they might be, supported her vision of the new woman. Later in the text, extolling Christian marriage and condemning any law that would harm such unions, Willard invoked what might be termed the nation’s very best men, the founding fathers, writing “I hold these truths to
be self-evident,” the truths being that “around [marriage], which alone renders possible a pure society, and a permanent state, the law should build its utmost safeguards, and upon this union the gospel should pronounce its most sacred benedictions” (333). In this brief passage, Willard not only constructed her role as a patriotic leader but, by calling to mind the Declaration of Independence, confirmed her larger argument that American, Christian marriage must break away from Old World mores and construct more equitable, hallowed unions – marital, social, and national.

A third ethos Willard constructed in “A White Life for Two” was that of a woman who admired men. The tenets of social purity – higher ages of consent, more and better rape legislation, and a single, moral sexual standard for men and women – positioned women as sufferers under masculine power, as did the temperance movement and often the suffrage movement. Additionally, all three movements hoped to change the social and political order in fundamental ways. Thus, supporters risked accusations of usurping men’s God-given role, of subverting the natural order, of selfishness, of lacking modesty and Christian faith – in essence, of not being True Women. Despite Willard’s careful and effective construction of conservative womanliness, she may have felt that the very blunt and specific criticisms of men and of masculine power in “A White Life for Two” required balance in order to persuade her audiences and preserve her image. Thus, Willard assured her readers that “sometimes I think that of the two it is man who loves home best” (320); that to equal the new woman, men were growing “considerate and brotherly, …pure in word and deed” (325); and that she supported social purity “because of the blessing that it prophesies for the stronger sex” (331). She believed that, despite the many temptations that beset them, “many men are pure and true,” (332) and, in spite of laws and customs that made it easy for men to err, “the magnificent possibilities of manly character
are best prophesied from the fact that under such a system so many men are good and gracious” (334). Willard’s admiration created an ethos of goodwill that allowed her audience to assume that men reading the pamphlet were counted among the “pure and true,” especially since her criticisms were leveled at working class men in specific places and occupations (lumber camps and the “soldiery . . . of the plains” (329)) and at laws and customs bequeathed by a brutal, European past. Such goodwill would also reassure conservative women that Willard hoped to improve, rather than overturn, the social order.

Use of Enthymemes

An enthymeme is a rhetorical proof based on the audience’s common assumptions, which are often the common assumptions of their larger culture. Because enthymemes are rooted in strongly-held or commonsensical beliefs, rhetors can use them to create powerful appeals. Enthymemes may also support or damage a rhetor’s ethos. For example, Willard spoke, dressed, and conducted herself as a True Woman, while at the same time she endorsed the vote for women. By exhibiting the markers of True Womanhood, Willard was able to support suffrage and yet avoid the slurs often leveled at the suffragists. Willard’s successful combination of True Womanhood and suffrage created a strong appeal, helping to convince many conservative women that votes for women were acceptable, or even desirable.

In “A White Life for Two,” Willard buttressed her cause with a host of enthymemes, including her own True Womanhood, women’s natural religiosity, the worth of democratic ideals, and America’s superiority among nations. In four instances, however, Willard not only invoked very specific social, Biblical, and legal enthymemes, she employed her talent for redefinition to challenge those commonplaces and support her argument of equality between men and women. Early in the pamphlet, after establishing marriage as her primary subject, Willard
wrote, “Marriage is not, as some surface-thinkers have endeavored to make out, an episode in man’s life and an event in woman’s” (Willard, “White Life” 320). She then listed evidence to illustrate just how important love relationships were to men – male lovers’ suicides, “sweethearts shot, and murdered wives” – to prove her point, and then revised the enthymeme: “[Marriage] is the sum of earthly weal and woe to both” (320). Redefining the significance of marriage for men early in the text served several purposes. First, it assured male readers that a text about marriage was, indeed, important to read. Second, establishing equality between men and women in the value of marriage was a primary step toward establishing the need for legislative equality later in the text. Third, placing man and woman on equal footing regarding the importance of marriage allowed Willard to take a further step and declare that man may love marriage and home even more than woman does, because woman must marry, but man, “chooses home freely and royally for her sake who is to him the world’s supreme attraction” (320) – the first of Willard’s extravagant compliments about men.

The next two enthymemes Willard redefined were Biblical. Part of the basis of Christian male authority, they had been invoked to subjugate and silence women for centuries: that God created man (Adam) first and in his own image, and that because Eve’s transgression cursed mankind, Eve’s daughters should suffer the consequences. Rather than state the enthymemes directly, however, Willard alluded to them in the process of redefining them:

The true relations of that complex being whom God created by uttering the mystic thought that had in it the potency of Paradise: ‘In our own image let us make man, and let them have dominion over all the earth’ [Gen 1:26], will ere long be

---

22 Willard’s italics
23 Masculine power over women was often justified by Paul’s words: “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1Timothy 2:12-14).
ascertained by means of the new correlation and attuning, each to the other, of a more complete humanity upon the Christ-like basis that ‘there shall be no more curse’ [Rev. 22:3, Gal 3:13].

By emphasizing “them” in her first quotation, Willard asserted that when God said “man,” God meant “mankind” – men and women equally. To support that interpretation, she also challenged the conventional masculine image of God with her emphasis on “own” and “us” – if man and women together mirrored God’s “own” image, then God must somehow embody both genders (“us”). Thus, simply by stressing plural pronouns in Genesis, Willard redefined the Christian enthymeme that Adam (and therefore, men), but not Eve (and therefore, women), was the fullest expression of God’s image and power on earth.

Willard’s next redefinition was the second logical step in affirming the Christian equality of women. The common enthymeme, so often attributed to Paul, was that Eve’s sin justified the subjugation of women ever after. Willard, however, argued that just as Christ’s crucifixion overcame the need to follow Old Testament law (“Christ-like basis”), it also absolved Eve’s curse. Although Eve’s curse is not specifically mentioned in Galatians, by quoting Revelation 22:3, “there shall be no more curse,” Willard used the word “curse” to create a bridge between Christ’s reversal of Old Testament law and the curse that resulted from Eve’s sin in eating from the forbidden Tree and tempting Adam – the previous verse, Revelation 22:2, specifically names and describes the Tree. While Willard’s reasoning may seem a bit oblique to the modern reader, her audience would have been well aware of both the Biblical justifications for woman’s

---

24 Willard’s italics
25 I am indebted to Campbell for identifying the relevant Bible passages.
26 “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).
27 “In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Rev 22:2).
subjugation and of the passages Willard used to redefine the meaning of “mankind” and to refute Eve’s curse.

The third enthymeme Willard redefined also dealt with the subjugation of women, this time in legal matters. Willard wrote that a “well-worn maxim of the common law, ‘Husband and wife are one, and that one is the husband’” (333) was not appropriate “in our peaceful, home-like communities” (334). Attributing the maxim and its necessity to earlier, European times, when women “were shut up in castles and . . . were the booty chiefly sought in war” (334), Willard listed the powers men still held over women: control of their property, of the law itself, of women’s court trials, of women prisoners, of the vote, of the age of consent, and of the penalties to which criminals such as rapists were subject. To remedy this state of affairs, Willard offered a new enthymeme: “Husband and wife are one, and that one is – husband and wife” (334). The concept of two persons functioning as one and yet retaining their individual personhoods was not contradictory for Willard and mirrored the image of God (“us”) she constructed when she quoted Genesis. Social and legal acceptance of the new enthymeme would redress male-female inequities and transform marriage and, as Willard maintained throughout “A White Life for Two,” the transformation of marriage would remake America.

Just as women’s social, legal, and religious roles had long been defined and defended by cultural and Biblical assumptions, so Willard redefined those assumptions to create new enthymemes that supported her vision. Campbell described Willard’s penchant for redefinition as “rhetorical alchemy” (1: 126) that changed her demands into “reaffirmations of traditional arrangements and values” (126). The frequency and ease with which Willard employed such redefinition illustrate her determination, despite her conservative demeanor, to promote an agenda often at odds with the social norm.
Style

Willard’s rhetorical style in “A White Life for Two” has been described as “feminine feminist” – romantic, idealistic, and supportive of traditional standards, while simultaneously promoting an undeniably feminist agenda (Campbell 1: 123). The description is apt; the entire text, criticisms and accolades, combined to present Willard’s ideal of perfected Christian marriage resulting in a better humanity. Romantic language and imagery, along with frequent quotations (including Shakespeare and Wordsworth), Biblical verses and references, and touching examples, provided drama for the audience and confirmed Willard’s education and passion. The idealism and romance, however, were in service to reforms that would empower women and fundamentally alter legal and social norms. Willard’s style was also personal and personable. She frequently used first- and second-person pronouns and collective pronouns, giving the text a conversational feel and aligning herself with the audience and the audience with her vision. She also included mentions of her own experiences – her conversation with Joel Hart, an experience from her time in Paris – adding to the conversational feel and producing a text which could have been written only by Frances Willard. Willard’s identifiable presence in the text of “A White Life for Two” was important because of her celebrity; her audiences would prefer Willard’s voice over an institutional WCTU voice. The personal, conversational style also contributed to Willard’s skill in transforming feminist demands into quiet, sensible reaffirmations of the traditional social order.

“A White Life for Two”: Conclusion

In her pamphlet “A White Life for Two,” Willard promoted both the larger social purity agenda and a vision of egalitarian Christian marriage that was strongly influenced by her particular religious beliefs and her own romantic experiences. The text appealed to three
audiences – intended readers, the press and policymakers, and spontaneous readers – by praising married persons, linking social purity to current political events, and celebrating America and protestant Christianity. All three audiences, however, occupied the same social positions: white, middle-and upper-class, American protestant men and women.

As the pamphlet’s author, Willard constructed several ethos. She positioned herself as a patriotic leader, as a woman who, though critical of some men and of masculine power, nevertheless admired men greatly, and as a single woman who chose not to marry. These constructed ethos helped alleviate her situated ethos as an unmarried woman speaking in public. In addition to manipulating ethos, Willard depended on enthymemes of True Womanhood, women’s natural religiosity, the virtue of democratic ideals, and Americanism to support her arguments. She also redefined selected social, Biblical, and legal enthymemes in order to establish equality between men and women and to induce male interest in a text about marriage.

“A White Life for Two” is significant among Willard’s texts because it not only showcases her considerable rhetorical acumen, but also displays the public sexual discourse of one of the most prominent women in late nineteenth-century America. Because of her rhetorical skill and the influential position it supported, Willard’s particular visions of the inevitability of male force in non-marital intercourse, of the violent inequity of non-American, non-protestant marriage, and of the idyll of mutually supportive, passionless Christian marriage reached a large number of admiring American readers.

The Problem of Willard’s Multiple Subjectivities

“A White Life for Two” may be considered Willard’s paean to marriage as both a support for and an expression of social purity. Yet Willard herself was unmarried and, age 51 when she produced the pamphlet, firmly settled into spinsterhood. Why did her audience accept what
amounted to the prescription for perfect marriage from a single woman, especially when another unmarried female reformer, Susan B. Anthony, more than once had been rebuked for “attempting to teach mothers and wives their duty” (Grand Rapids Times, qtd Johnson 139). One answer is Willard’s carefully developed and maintained ethos of True Womanhood. Another answer, perhaps, is that her audience admired Willard precisely because of such contradictions:

Part of her appeal may have been the paradoxes she embodied. She extolled marriage and the home, yet she was unwed. . . . She discussed the most controversial sexual issues in public, but in a language of delicacy and circumlocution. . . . Seeing and hearing Willard, her audiences – male and female – must have believed they could have it all: femininity and reform, successful female leadership which affirmed true womanhood and separate spheres.

(Campbell 1: 130)

Whether or not Willard’s audiences embraced her paradoxes, however, feminist rhetoricians and historiographers are left to grapple with them. Willard’s support for marriage and female domesticity is one example. Not only did Willard remain single while advocating marriage for other women, she seems to have truly enjoyed her work, her public position, and her liberty to travel the country and the world. Was she a nineteenth-century Phyllis Schlafly, using her own power and public voice to reinforce conservative repression of women? Another example of Willard’s paradoxical subjectivities is her evident racism. Willard and the organization she guided pursued a broad agenda of social reform on behalf of the voiceless, regardless of race, and the WCTU both accepted black female members into local chapters (especially in the North) and helped black women form their own local WCTU chapters (Mattingly 93). Yet in an ongoing, well-publicized clash with Ida B. Wells, Willard persisted in accepting and supporting
the assertions that lynching was most often a response to rape and that black men were a danger to white women and children (Mattingly 78-82). Was Willard, the most famous American social reformer of her time, a racist?

In “Women and the History of Rhetoric: The Past and The Future,” Christine Mason Sutherland explored a similar paradox regarding Mary Astell, “thinker, writer, educator, and political activist [who] lived from 1666 to 1731” (15). Astell scholars, according to Sutherland, have had trouble reconciling Astell’s progressive stances regarding women’s education and abilities with her deeply conservative political and religious opinions, which included the submission of women within marriage (16). According to Sutherland, the conflict could be resolved by exploring and contextualizing the assumptions and premises upon which Astell based her arguments. In doing so, Sutherland concluded that any apparent conflict in Astell’s positions were not of Astell’s making, but sprang from researchers’ difficulty in moderating between their own contemporary notions of feminism and the cultural realities of another time (14) and the person enmeshed in those realities (30). I believe that Willard’s apparent paradoxes can be addressed in a similar manner, particularly that of a single, professional woman advocating marriage and domesticity and that of a widely-hailed reformer persisting in a publicly racist viewpoint. The keys to both conflicting positions may be found in Willard’s Christianity, her middle-class, white culture, and in her beliefs about male-female relationships as articulated in “A White Life for Two.”

The Unmarried Supporter of Marriage

As president of the WCTU, Frances Willard was indeed a working woman, and the work she did was constant. She wrote frequently, including “mountains of correspondence,” newspaper and journal articles, pamphlets, and books (Gifford 355). She also traveled
extensively, both nationally and abroad; during the decade of the 1880s, she attended one meeting a day, on average (Donawerth 242). Willard classified her work and the ideals she promoted under the broad heading “Home Protection,” invoking enthymemes of women’s duty, maternity, and domesticity to promote a political and often radical agenda. Willard herself, however, was unmarried, childless, and not responsible for housekeeping, conditions that granted her time and freedom to lead the largest voluntary organization of the time.

Although Willard’s personal life appears to have contradicted the life she promoted for other women, both Willard’s journal and her public sexual discourse tell a different story. In her journal, Willard wrote repeatedly of the conflicts she felt about marriage. Not only was she troubled by the lack of physical attraction she felt toward men, she also yearned to pursue what she imagined to be a male life – living in the world and having a career (Gifford 116). At the same time, however, Willard’s cultural understanding and her religious beliefs told her that marriage was “the greatest good” (Willard, “Journal” 178) in life. Caught between her beliefs and her ambitions and personal feelings, Willard remained single but did not entirely discount the idea of marrying. She was engaged to Charles Fowler for half a year at age 22; she was 27 during her romance with fellow teacher Delevan Scoville; and at age 30 wondered in her journal if she were “fitted for marriage”28 (303). Thus, in promoting marriage for other women while remaining single, Willard was not prescribing a fate she herself disdained, however unlikely marriage was for her. Rather, it is clear throughout Willard’s journal that her physical attraction to women made her feel abnormal in general and sometimes even insufficient compared to other women who fell in love and married.

---

28 Willard stopped writing a personal journal the next year, 1870, on her 31st birthday (Gifford 351). We have no record of her ideas about marrying or any romances she may have had in her middle years.
By remaining single, Willard was able to devote all of her time and energy to her work, a luxury not available to most women responsible for homes and families. Given the constraints a busy wife and mother might feel in any marriage, as well as the legal inequities that attended marriage in the Nineteenth Century, Willard appears again to have prescribed something she herself would not partake of. On the other hand, much of Willard’s work was dedicated to creating a social atmosphere in which marriage was neither laborious nor harmful to women. In “A White Life for Two,” Willard described her vision of Christian, egalitarian marriage:

One undivided half of the world for wife and husband equally; co-education to mate them on the plane of mind; equal property rights to make her God’s own free woman, not coerced into marriage for the sake of support, nor a bond-slave after she is married, who asks her master for the price of a paper of pins and gives him back the change . . . In that day the wife shall surrender at marriage no right not equally surrendered by the husband, not even her own name” (314-315).

She also advocated for married women’s right to choose when to become pregnant (336). In addition to working for women’s rights within marriage, Willard also promoted household labor-saving devices and ideas, including centralized kitchens that would serve the needs of multiple homes (Bordin 131). Such strategies were foreshadowed in Willard’s journal of 1868, when she wrote, “If I ever shall marry. . . I shall employ, & pay, a first-rate [housekeeping] proxy! I’ll do my kind of work, & earn money to pay my proxy in my homelike home” (Willard, “Journal” 260). Clearly, although the unmarried Willard promoted marriage as the “greatest good” for most women, the relationships she envisioned did not adhere to conventional or conservative views.

---

29 Willard’s emphasis.
In her analysis of Mary Astell, Sutherland warned against scholars applying, “even celebrating” (29) their own biases when exploring rhetors from the past. In that vein, perhaps the unmarried/married conflict centered on Frances Willard is more a product of our time than hers, created by the second-wave-feminist friction between married and single women and fed by recurring news and entertainment media discussions of woman’s true role. Rather than conflicting with her own single status, Willard’s focus on equitable marriage in her journal and in her public work was evidence of her strong regard for that relationship and for those who entered into it – Willard herself, after all, derived no benefit from improved marital conditions.

The Racist Reformer

Between 1880 and 1886, Willard made several tours of the southern states to promote temperance and the WCTU. She was a popular draw as a speaker, due to her own skills and to the relative novelty of female public speaking in the South, and she addressed both white and black audiences (Bordin 113-114). Willard was able to make inroads on behalf of WCTU and temperance that had not been possible in the South before; she also found the culture and her hosts hospitable and charming (Townes 146). It has been suggested that Willard’s remarks in an 1890 newspaper interview were a result of that charm – that Willard was flattered by the attentions of prominent, wealthy white Southerners and thus gave weight to their depictions of southern Blacks (Mattingly 83):

The problem on [white southerners’] hands is immeasurable. The colored race multiplies like the locusts of Egypt. The grog-shop is its center of power. The safety of women, of childhood, of the home is menaced in a thousand localities at this moment, so that the men dare not go beyond the sight of their own rooftree.

(Thompson, qtd Mattingly 77)
Though not directly mentioning the lynching of blacks, Willard’s remark seemed to support southern whites’ claim that lynching was a response to black men’s rapes of white women. Ida B. Wells cited the interview on an anti-lynching crusade in England when asked how American reformers were responding to lynching (Royster, *Southern* 38). Willard responded publicly to defend herself and the WCTU, Wells renewed her charges, and the exchange continued through mid-decade.\(^30\)

The Wells/Willard conflict rested on a complex foundation, including not only southern lynching of blacks and the response of Northerners, but also North/South politics in general and white suffragists’ reactions to the enfranchisement of black men (the Fourteenth Amendment). In its simplest form, however, Wells’ condemnation assailed Willard on several levels. First, by not speaking out against lynching in general, Willard was guilty of a general racism against blacks. Second, by accepting that rape of white women was the valid reason behind most lynchings – an argument Wells devoted herself to dispelling – Willard was implicitly supporting lynching by accepting the premises upon which it was based (Mattingly 80). Third, by persisting to believe and assert that all instances of sexual intercourse between black men and white women were the result of rape, Willard absolved southern white women of their complicity in lynchings that were the result of sexual relations between the races.

Willard’s responses to Wells’ accusations were varied. In response to general charges of racism, she pointed out the mixed membership of northern and western WCTU chapters and the equal voting privileges of black chapter presidents. The WCTU also sent resolutions against lynching to every state chapter and publicly recognized the head of the Department of Work among Colored People and increased department funding (Mattingly 78, 82). Willard’s response

\(^{30}\) As Mattingly notes, modern scholarly accounts of the Wells/Willard conflict tend to be weighted toward one participant or the other, depending upon the larger project in which they appear. Mattingly’s account in *Well-Tempered Women* is extensive and appears to be fairly balanced.
to the accusation that she implicitly supported lynching was less convincing; she reaffirmed her belief that black men presented a danger to white women and children, but also stated that white men had committed similar crimes against black women in the past. “It is inconceivable,” she added, “that the WCTU will ever condone lynching, no matter what the provocation” (qtd Mattingly 79). As Mattingly points out, Willard’s remark about provocation confirmed her belief that black men raped white women and children (79).

Willard’s third response to Wells was the most direct and was completely unapologetic. Wells’ critique of lynching maintained that sexual intercourse between white women and black men was “voluntary and clandestine” (Wells, “Red Record” 79) and that “white men lynch the offending Afro-American not because he is a despoiler of virtue, but because he succumbs to the smiles of white women” (Wells, “Southern Horrors” 54). Wells’ statements, claimed Willard, had “put an imputation upon half the white race in this country,” by claiming that “white women have taken the initiative in nameless acts between the races” (qtd Mattingly 80). Despite Well’s extensive evidence to the contrary, Willard “found it impossible to believe” that white women would willingly have sexual intercourse with black men (Newman 68).

It is not my intention in this section to examine or explain Willard’s overall views and actions regarding blacks, lynching law, or Wells’ accusations. It does seem likely that Willard, along with other white women suffragists such as Stanton and Anthony, was frustrated that black men received the vote and white women did not (Newman 62-65). Certainly the pamphlet title “A White Life for Two,” in addition to relying on the trope that the color white symbolized purity, confirmed that Willard’s intended audience was white Americans. I do, however, believe that Willard’s public sexual discourse in “A White Life for Two” sheds new light on Wells’ third
accusation, that Willard construed all black male-white female intercourse as rape, thus relieving white women of complicity in lynching.

Willard’s characterization of sexual intercourse between white women and black men as “nameless acts” echoed the euphemisms for rape she used in “A White Life for Two:” “unutterable abominations” (328), “unspeakable atrocities,” and “crimes against nature” (329). In the pamphlet, however, Willard made clear that she viewed all heterosexual intercourse outside of marriage as the result of violence and as induced by men, the result of a system developed over the course of “barbarous ages” as women were made “subjects of the stronger [sex]” (327). Under this argument, Willard condemned not only white male force applied to white women, referring to white slavery in Wisconsin and Michigan lumber camps (329), but also white male abuse of Native American women (“the brutal relations of our soldiery to the Indian women of the plains” (329)), and the British military’s abuse of women in India.31 We also know from Willard’s journal that she herself did not feel physical attraction to men, even men she otherwise admired. Thus, I would argue that rather than finding it “impossible to believe that southern white women would engage voluntarily in sexual relationships with black men” (Newman 68), Willard found it impossible to believe that any woman would willingly have sexual intercourse with a man to whom she was not married. In failing to fully condemn southern lynching of black men, Frances Willard may well have been occupying a racist position, but in asserting that all black male-white female sexual intercourse was rape, she was simply being Frances Willard.

31 Willard referred to British military operation of houses of prostitution in India when she wrote, “England . . . has repealed the atrocious army regulations of India” (White Life 330). These brothels had been exposed by medical doctor, scholar, and missionary Katherine Bushnell (Collins).
CHAPTER FOUR

VICTORIA WOODHULL: SEX REFORM AND SHOWMANSHIP

Introduction

From February of 1870, when she and her sister became the first female stockbrokers in American history, to the present (two young adult books and one academic text published in 2004 alone), Victoria Claflin Woodhull has been publicly admired and reviled, lionized and dismissed. Elizabeth Cady Stanton supported her even in times of public scandal (Passet 97, Underhill 247, 246); Susan B. Anthony turned off the lights and forced Woodhull from the podium at an 1872 suffrage convention (Horowitz 349). Cornelius Vanderbilt set Woodhull and her sister up on Wall Street and introduced them to other influential financiers; cartoonist Thomas Nast depicted Woodhull as “Mrs. Satan,” luring devoted wives with the promise of free love. Whether Victoria Woodhull was an innovative reformer or a self-serving opportunist is open to debate. What may be stated about her with complete confidence, however, is that she sought public attention, got it, and has retained it for more than a century.

Woodhull’s reform career in America lasted a mere seven years, during which she addressed the public in person and in print as a suffragist, a spiritualist, a Marxist revolutionary, a financier, a free lover, and a candidate for the U.S. presidency. Woodhull’s views, however, remained consistent across her many incarnations, as did her ability to draw and hold an audience. Her speaking style was described as eloquent and moving; a newspaper reported that “she electrifies, startles, astonishes, and melts her audience to tears” (Passet 103).

Just as Frances Willard was the most famous American woman of her time, Victoria Woodhull was the most infamous. Her fortunes rose and fell, as did her popularity with her various constituencies; yet from her declaration of candidacy for the 1872 presidential election to
her arrest for exposing a minister’s adulterous affair, she garnered almost constant public attention. Indeed, whether Woodhull’s chief object was social reform or celebrity is difficult to gauge, and her biographers and scholars seem to hold differing opinions. It is Woodhull’s duality that connects the components of this chapter: a brief biography, her ideas of sexuality and marriage, an examination of her public sexual discourse, and the problem she presents to contemporary feminist rhetoricians and historiographers.

Biography

Victoria Claflin was born in Homer, Ohio, in September of 1838, one of ten children of Roxanna Hummel and Rueben Buckman Claflin. During her childhood, the family traveled the Midwest, selling miracle-cure elixirs and performing as spiritualists and magnetic healers (Stern 1). At age 15 or 16,32 Victoria married Dr. Canning Woodhull and they had two children: son Byron, who was mentally challenged, and daughter Zulu Maud. She briefly supported her nuclear family (and Dr. Woodhull’s alcoholism) in San Francisco by working as a seamstress and actress (Passet 96), but eventually the Woodhulls returned to the Midwest. Working as a clairvoyant, Victoria met Colonel James Harvey Blood, Civil War veteran and spiritualist, in 1866, for whom she left and later divorced her husband; Blood also eventually divorced his wife (Stern 2, Gabriel 22-23). Woodhull and Blood probably did not marry33, but they referred to one another as husband and wife. Woodhull, however, kept her previous surname (Stern 2).

In 1868, Woodhull, Blood, and the Claflins moved to New York City. Woodhull’s father arranged a meeting with Cornelius Vanderbilt, who sought spiritual contact with his deceased mother and son (Horowitz 343, Stern 2). Woodhull provided the spiritualism; her sister Tennessee’s relationship with Vanderbilt was almost certainly sexual (Horowitz 343). In 1870,

32 Sources vary.
33 The couple filed an “intention” to marry in Montgomery County, Ohio, but evidently did not go through an actual marriage ceremony (Stern 2).
Woodhull, Tennessee, and Blood opened Woodhull, Claflin & Company, a stockbrokering firm financed by Vanderbilt, and created a sensation in the press as the “Bewitching Brokers” and “Fascinating Financiers” (Stern 2-3). That same year, also financed by Vanderbilt, the sisters began publishing Woodhull & Claflin’s Weekly, an organ for the social reform views of Blood and associate Stephen Pearl Andrews (Horowitz 343). The sister’s names appeared over most articles, although the majority of writing was probably done by Blood, Andrews, and others. However, as Horowitz points out, Woodhull “represented and defended the ideas and positions printed in the paper and accepted legal accountability for them” (343).

Woodhull & Claflin’s Weekly also publicized Woodhull’s candidacy for President of the United States in the 1872 election (Stern 4). Her platform, informed by Andrews and Blood, included women’s suffrage, free love, a non-profit system of commerce, and land for all (Stern 4). Adopting Andrew’s and Blood’s views, Woodhull joined the leading American section (number 12) of Marx’s International Workingman’s Association. Unfortunately for Section 12, Woodhull’s consistent internal lobbying for suffrage and free love issues, rather than worker’s rights, caused the IWA to castigate and expel the section as dilettantes (5). However, Woodhull’s brush with Marxism did result in first English translation of the Communist Manifesto published in America, in Woodhull & Claflin’s Weekly (5).

Around the same time, Woodhull began attending suffrage meetings. With the support of Massachusetts senator Benjamin Butler, she appeared before the House Judiciary Committee in January 1871, arguing that women already had the right to vote as citizens of the United States. The argument was not new, but Woodhull was the first woman to gain access to government at such a level (Horowitz 345). Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and others were impressed by Woodhull’s accomplishment and her cash – she pledged $10,000 to the movement,
much of which was never paid (345-346, 349). Suffragists’ enthusiasm for Woodhull quickly waned, however, when her free love views gave anti-suffragists potent ammunition, contributing to the defeat of the Iowa suffrage amendment in 1872 (Passet 97-98). Upset by their cooling regard, Woodhull sent some women’s rights leaders a proof sheet called “Tit for Tat,” threatening to publish it and expose their sexual secrets. Some of the recipients said that Woodhull demanded $500 blackmail money from each woman (Horowitz 355, Passet 98). Woodhull claimed in her paper that blackmail had not been her object; rather, she wanted to stop gossip against her (Horowitz 355). Finally, at the May 1872 convention of the National Women’s Suffrage Association, which Woodhull and her supporters tried to turn into a Woodhull-for-president rally, Anthony forced Woodhull from the stage and had the hall’s lights extinguished (Horowitz 349, Passet 98). Woodhull’s career as a legitimate suffragist was over.

Also in 1871, Woodhull began speaking to spiritualist groups. Because they respected Woodhull’s past career as a clairvoyant, and because many spiritualists were also involved in other reform movements of the day, they formed a perfect constituency. Woodhull was elected president of the American Association of Spiritualists that year, and held the office for through 187534 (Braude 173). It was at the September 1872 annual convention of the AAS that Woodhull, rather than making her keynote speech, exposed an adulterous affair between the popular, married Reverend Henry Ward Beecher and Elizabeth Tilton, one of his married parishioners. In late October, she also published the affair in Woodhull & Claflin’s Weekly, which she had stopped printing earlier in the year but revived especially for that purpose.

Beecher’s affair with Mrs. Tilton had long been rumored among his social peers. Woodhull first learned of it from Stanton and from Paula Wright Davis in 1869 (Horowitz 346).

34 Woodhull’s presidency of the AAS was always contentious and was further harmed by her notoriety. Schisms occurred, and when she resigned the presidency in 1875, the organization effectively died (Braude 172-173).
Her motives in exposing the affair are unclear. Woodhull claimed that she did not disapprove of Beecher’s affair itself, but rather of the fact that he practiced free love in private yet denounced it in public; Woodhull wanted to expose his hypocrisy (Stern 7). Horowitz attributes Woodhull’s exposure of Beecher to her failing career. Vanderbilt had withdrawn his support and both the brokerage house and her paper were in debt (350). Her presidential bid was effectively dead, and she had been rejected by the suffragists and the Marxists (349-350). Additionally, scandals concerning her family had been featured in the press. Woodhull’s mother had filed a complaint against Blood for threatened violence (Stern 7), leading to a sensationalized trial; at the trial, it came out that Woodhull’s ex-husband, along with the extended Claflin family and Stephen Pearl Andrews, lived in Woodhull’s home (Stern 7, Gabriel 99-103). Given Woodhull’s stance on free love, it was inevitable that the press and gossips would make the most of this situation (Stern 7). It was also during this time that Nast published his “Mrs. Satan” cartoon and that Harriet Beecher Stowe (Beecher’s sister) caricatured Woodhull as Audacia Dangereyes in her novel, My Wife and I (7). By publishing the Beecher-Tilton affair, Woodhull may have hoped to renew interest in her paper and her lecture career, as well as to reap a little vengeance.

What Woodhull did reap, however, was another court trial. Anthony Comstock charged her with sending obscene literature – the Beecher-Tilton story in Woodhull & Claflin’s Weekly – through the mail. Woodhull was jailed for four weeks (Stern 8). The trial ended in acquittal because the 1872 federal obscenity law did not cover newspapers (Horowitz 379), an omission Comstock quickly lobbied Congress to correct (381). Woodhull made the most of her situation, bringing back Woodhull & Claflin’s Weekly to publish her experiences in prison and discuss penal reform (Stern 8). She also continued to rehash the Beecher-Tilton affair in her paper and to lecture on free love (Ross 126).
Between 1873 and 1877, when she left the country for England, Woodhull supported herself and her extended family by lecturing, drawing large crowds in the Midwest (Passet 101). There, Woodhull’s stage presence and her advocacy of personal freedom were fairly well-accepted; although some newspapers denounced her, others printed positive accounts of her speaking style and published excerpts of her speeches (101).

In 1877, Woodhull, along with her extended family but minus Colonel Blood, moved to England. Eventually, both sisters married wealthy, socially prominent men35 (Stern 8-9, Ross 130). Woodhull, now Victoria Woodhull Martin, continued to lecture publicly and to publish, eschewing her free love and suffrage past and focusing instead on eugenics and economics. In 1892, Woodhull Martin returned briefly to the United States to announce that she was again running for president and would lead the American women’s movement (Stern 10, Ross 131). The press and the American women’s movement did not respond well, and Woodhull Martin returned to England. Widowed in 1897, she moved to her country home, where she sponsored the village kindergarten (Ross 134), founded various women’s clubs, and engaged in fundraising during World War I (Stern 10). She died June 10, 1927.

Sexuality and Marriage: Woodhull’s Opinions and Experiences

In an 1871 speech, Victoria Woodhull announced, “Yes, I am a Free Lover” (Gabriel 148). That declaration was an apt description of Woodhull’s intimate life, which indeed reflected the free love philosophy of her time. Free love discourse argued for a wide array of relationship possibilities, including amending or abolishing marriage (Horowitz 414); however, most free lovers themselves simply wished to enter and leave marriages without coercion (McLaren 147).

35 Henry James caricatured Woodhull in Siege of London as Mrs. Headway, a social climber who “must have repudiated more husbands than she had married” (Stern 9).
Woodhull did exactly that, leaving Dr. Canning Woodhull\textsuperscript{36} when she fell in love with Colonel Blood.

Woodhull’s first marriage is of particular interest relative to the prevailing marital/sexual philosophies of the latter Nineteenth Century. Dr. Woodhull was a drunkard and possibly a drug addict. During eleven years together, Victoria supported him and their two children, one of whom was born with a mental handicap. Working-class, supporting a drunken husband and a difficult family, Woodhull was in many ways the woman whom social reformers sought to aid. Both social purity and free love reformers cited the financial inequities of marriage, made so much worse in marriage to a drunken or abusive husband, as support for their causes. Both also held that marriage to a drunkard could produce unhealthy children. Social purists would solve the problem through temperance and property rights legislation. Free lovers, on the other hand, called for changes in the concept of marriage itself, allowing a woman or man to leave an unsatisfactory union without facing social opprobrium.

Free lovers were much more likely than social purists to lead the types of lives they promoted. The middle- and upper-class social purists viewed alcoholic marriages and their attendant ills as lower-class phenomena, and many social purists made use of alcohol or patent medicines (Mattingly 161). Also, social purity reformers were not above hushing up or ignoring marital scandal in their own ranks, as attested by the long-running Beecher-Tilton affair. Free lovers, in contrast, tended to practice free love: they entered legal marriages that differed in some way from the social norm or lived together openly without marrying (Passet 137) and they divorced amicably and remarried without shame (127). Thus, as the wife of an alcoholic and mother of a mentally-deficient child, Woodhull was the object of social purity ideology – social purists talked \textit{about} women like her – and the subject of free love ideology – free lovers spoke \textit{to} \\

\textsuperscript{36} Dr. Woodhull later moved in with Victoria and Blood; both cared for him in his final years (Gabriel 166).
women like her. From this perspective, it is not surprising that Woodhull chose free love rather than social purity, first as a lifestyle and later as a reform movement to champion.

Woodhull attributed another of her reform interests to being the mother of a mentally-challenged son. Stirpiculture, or “the scientific propagation of the human race” (Woodhull, “Stirpiculture” 5) was one forerunner of the eugenics movement. According to Woodhull’s philosophy of stirpiculture, “puling, weak, miserable, damned” (“Tried” 15) children resulted from unions between men and women of poor health, especially when the union itself was not founded upon love and freedom. Inferior children also could result from unwanted pregnancies (27) and from undesired sexual intercourse during pregnancy (33). Curiously enough, considering that she herself had borne a deficient child in a union with an alcoholic husband, Woodhull vehemently blamed mothers alone for the condition of their children: “How shall I show [women] the destruction they have sown broadcast over the earth. . . how make them feel the horrid misery that they have wrought by the outrage and desecration of their divine maternal function?” (26).

Woodhull claimed that women could only escape their doom of polluting the earth with drunken, criminal, or insane children by throwing off the chains of marriage that they had accepted for centuries and embracing the tenets of free love (29-31). Her viewpoint contrasted sharply with that of Frances Willard, who not only promoted perfected, Christian marriage as the remedy of social ills, but blamed men and patriarchal culture throughout history for women’s repression.

In later years, Woodhull repudiated free love and settled down in a traditional marriage (Ross 129), publishing and speaking on stirpiculture and finance. At the time she delivered and published “Tried as by Fire,” however, she still lived with Colonel Blood, was still making hay
from the fallout from the Beecher-Tilton scandal, and was still an ardent supporter of free love ideology.

**Woodhull’s Public Sexual Discourse: “Tried as by Fire”**

“Tried as by Fire” is one of twenty-four Woodhull texts collected in Stern’s *The Victoria Woodhull Reader*. According to the print version of “Tried as by Fire,” Woodhull delivered the speech on “one hundred and fifty consecutive nights to audiences together numbering a quarter of a million people” (1) before printing it in *Woodhull & Claflin’s Weekly*. I chose this text out of six addressing sexual issues because it deals the most consistently with sex in marriage. Of the remaining texts, two focus on stirpiculture and two on Woodhull’s role in exposing the Beecher-Tilton affair. The remaining speech, Woodhull’s first on free love, expended much of its length on establishing constitutional rights to freedom of choice in general and was most likely authored by Stephen Pearl Andrews and/or Colonel Blood. While Woodhull’s sole authorship of “Tried as by Fire” cannot be guaranteed, the text is certainly more passionate and more personal.

“Tried as by Fire” appears to have had three goals: promotion of free love, promotion of stirpiculture, and promotion of Victoria Woodhull. Free love ideology endorsed a single sexual standard for men and women based on individual choice and lack of legislative interference, accomplished through the amendment or abolition of marriage and open discussion of sexuality. Woodhull’s vision adhered to these ideals; she wrote that she was “conducting a campaign against marriage” (5) and that sexual information “should be the topic of conversation at the breakfast table, at dinner, at supper – everywhere – until the whole matter is well understood by everybody” (13). Throughout the text, Woodhull linked abolition of marriage and better understanding of sexual matters to the production of better children, writing that “sexual relations [are] the place to begin the work of improving the race” (29). Women’s enjoyment of
intercourse was also key, both within the free love movement itself and in Woodhull’s stirpiculture-based interpretation. Throughout, she firmly and repeatedly linked women’s enjoyment of sex to the “science of sexuality” (38); “Women cannot bear their best children except by the men they love best and for whom they have the keenest sexual desire,” (37) for example.

The promotion of herself as an ardent and effective social reformer occurred throughout “Tried as by Fire;” the title itself referred to Woodhull. In the penultimate paragraph she stated that

. . . no one who has not passed through the fiery furnace of affliction, and been purged of selfishness by the stern hand of adversity, and become emancipated from public opinion, could stand the load of opprobrium that I have been forced to carry. I sometimes grow weary under its weight and sigh for rest, but my duty to my sex, spurs me on. (44)

Woodhull’s attempts to create social change were mentioned regularly in the text, including her arrest for exposing the Beecher-Tilton scandal. Her heroic self-depiction is discussed more thoroughly in the section on ethos. I note it here because self-promotion was indeed one main purpose of this text; at this stage in her career, Woodhull supported herself and her family on her earnings from the lecture circuit.

Sex in “Tried as by Fire”

In the second paragraph of “Tried as by Fire,” Woodhull declared her intention to “call things by their plain, Saxon names” (3) because “the pure in heart and thought” (3) would find such vocabulary neither vulgar nor blush-inducing. Using plain language to discuss sexual matters was indeed a tenet of free love philosophy; Angela Haywood made even other free
lovers uncomfortable by using words such as cock and fuck in public speech (Battan 113).

Woodhull’s language choices were not as potentially shocking as Haywood’s, but they no doubt caught the attention of her auditors and the press. Although she frequently employed some version of the word “sex” – sexual relations, sexual problem, sexual freedom, sexual commerce – Woodhull did not refer to genitalia or describe intercourse in any detail. She did, however, address her topic in a direct manner. While Willard used the euphemism “unutterable abominations” to both imply and describe rape, Woodhull used the term “rape” and proceeded to describe the problem of rape in marriage:

Night after night there are thousands of rapes committed . . . millions of poor, heart-broken, suffering wives are compelled to minister to the lechery of insatiable husbands, when every instinct of body and sentiment of soul revolts in loathing and disgust. . . . [marriage] invests men with the right to debauch women, sexually, against their wills. (8)

In this depiction, Woodhull did not use anatomical terms, as Haywood or Ida Craddock might have done, yet she went much farther than Willard’s “unutterable abominations.” In fact, Woodhull explicated such common euphemisms for sexual violence, uttering exactly why forced sex in marriage was abominable. It was likely Woodhull’s willingness to describe and explore sexual issues, rather than her sparse use of “plain, Saxon names” that marked her and her speech as radical.

The prevailing theme in “Tried as by Fire” was sexual intercourse as the basis of all social interaction. The forced or obligatory intercourse inherent in marriage was, according to Woodhull, responsible for “more misery, sickness and premature death than all other causes combined” (7). Marriage was the “last and greatest of all the slaveries” (10), based in lust rather
than love. Because a couple could socially and legally do everything outside of marriage that they could do within it, except engage in sexual intercourse, marriage was merely a license for coition, and forced coition at that (7-8). Men, therefore, married primarily to have free access to sexual intercourse (19), and women who married for financial support compared badly to hard-working prostitutes (19-20).

The abolition of marriage, on the other hand, would purify sexual intercourse and place it under the control of women rather than men (39). Rather than lust, the universal principle of love would reign (23). So pure was the willing sexual act, Woodhull stated, that it was the only true religion: “Let your religious faith be what it may if it do not (sic) include the sexual act it is impotent” (25). And when “the sexual act shall be the religion of the world” (25), men “would regard women as of angelic order, to be approached only as . . . the Goddess of Purity” (26).

The most compelling reason to replace marriage with willing sexual intercourse between healthy men and women was the production of optimal children. Children born from “sexual commerce that is based upon reciprocal love and mutual desire” could not be bad “physically, mentally or morally” (15), while the children of “improper sexual congress” will “inevitably be bad children, either physically, mentally or morally, or . . . partially bad throughout” (15). Because better children were entire reason for social reform,

... a woman who bears a dozen or less scraggy, scrawny, puny, half-made-up children, by a legal father, is a disgrace to her sex and a curse to the community; while she who bears as many perfect specimens of humanity, no matter if it be by as many different fathers, is an honor to womanhood and a blessing to the world.

(30)
Comparing the mother of a dozen “scraggy, scrawny, puny” children with the “Goddess of Purity” invoked earlier brings us to an interesting facet of Woodhull’s sexual philosophy in “Tried as by Fire”: the dual subject position of women. As the raped wife of a lecherous husband, a woman trapped in marriage was to be pitied, yet as the mother of children resulting from such a union, she was to be scorned. Although elsewhere in the text, Woodhull excused women from “willfully sending the race to destruction” (32) and blamed men of the church for keeping women in sexual slavery to their husbands (and sometimes, to their pastors) (40-41), by sheer weight of the text her condemnation of women was much greater than her sympathy. Woodhull’s censure of non-free love women may be viewed as a logical extension of the doctrine of individual sovereignty promoted by her mentor, Stephen Pearl Andrews: if the premise of free love was rejection of government influence in sexual relations, only women could free themselves from sexual subordination. On the other hand, casting blame upon most of the women in the United States placed Woodhull in a superior position, one we know she enjoyed occupying. It is likely, then, that the sexual philosophy of “Tried by Fire” reflected free love ideology in general, the doctrine of individual sovereignty, and Woodhull’s love of celebrity.

Audiences

When Woodhull presented “Tried as by Fire” in 1874, she was supporting herself and her extended family with her lecture circuit income. Consequently, the text needed to fulfill two purposes: argue for free love-based social reform and promote Victoria Woodhull. Her audiences were the intended audience and the press. Unlike Willard, Woodhull did not hope to influence policymakers because free love was based on a rejection of government regulation. She also did not need to appeal to a spontaneous audience because, given her reputation, an
auditor was unlikely to chance upon a Victoria Woodhull speech or text unawares. Rather, Woodhull depended upon her very notoriety to attract audiences to her lectures. The press’s interest in Woodhull was directly related to her success in filling lecture halls and in distributing her weekly paper in spite of her social infamy – that is, as long as the scandalous Victoria Woodhull could get bodies into the seats, press coverage would follow. Therefore, Woodhull’s best interests lay in making successful appeals to her intended audience.

According to Passet in Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women’s Equality, Woodhull was denied lecture halls in and around Boston after she exposed the Beecher-Tilton affair (100), and she generally was the object of hostile press in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states (101). As a result, she toured the Midwest and West, enjoying a broad and lucrative popularity (101, 103). The populace of these states struggled with economic depression, often holding the East Coast financial world responsible for their financial woes (105). Consequently, many turned to free love, free thought, and/or spiritualism as a means of protest or as a coping mechanism (105, 100). Woodhull spoke directly to these people, just as free love had spoken to her; “Tried as by Fire” contained distinct appeals to a number of audience subjectivities.

Although any one person in Woodhull’s audience mostly likely embodied several, or possibly all, of the subjectivities to which she appealed, for discussion’s sake the subject positions can be divided into free love, spiritualism, distrust of those in power, and the sexual/maternal potential of women. Of these, Woodhull consistently positioned the latter three as supports for her greater free love agenda. Here, I wish to elide the overall free love appeal of “Tried as by Fire,” since it is the stated purpose of the text, and instead discuss Woodhull’s

---

37 As one Michigan matron observed of Woodhull’s lectures, “All classes everywhere have a desire to see the ‘elephant’” (qtd Passet 101).
appeals to the three more discreet subjectivities: spiritualism, distrust of those in power, and women’s sexual/maternal potential.

While most spiritualists were not free lovers and did not promote the total abolition of marriage, they did agree that marriage-as-practiced was harmful to women (Braude 120-129). On the other hand, most free lovers were also spiritualists (129). Therefore, it was advantageous for Woodhull to appeal to spiritualists in the promotion of free love. Spiritualism itself evolved early in the century as an alternative to organized Christianity (2); when Woodhull stated, “I advocate complete freedom for sexuality the same as for religion,” (“Tried” 16), she tapped into an American enthymeme foundational to such alternative religious movements. One of spiritualism’s most strongly-held alternative views was that true marriage occurred only when affection resulted from “the purer influences of celestial harmonies” (qtd Braude 119) and that marriage was part of “a sexualized divine reality” (120). Thus Woodhull, after expounding basic free love philosophy for slightly more than half her text, turned to spiritualized sexuality. “When the sexual act shall be the religion of the world, as it is now my religion,” she proclaimed, “then, and then only, may we reasonably hope that [the world’s] redemption is nigh” (“Tried” 25). Woodhull compared spiritualized intercourse to God’s interaction with Nature and asked her audience to “make that act the most divine of all your worship” (25). Such direct appeal to spiritualist principles no doubt assured non-free love spiritualists of Woodhull’s sincerity and good intentions, even if they disagreed with her call for the total abolition of marriage.

Moreover, Woodhull placed this appeal to spiritualism as a bridge between her more orthodox free love discourse and her support for the relatively newer idea of stirpiculture: “This is my religion – the fundamental principles for the generation of the race” (25). She thus appealed to broadest denominator of her audience as a transition between more extreme positions.
Woodhull also appealed to spiritualists by referring to her own practice of spiritualism. “I am . . . a Spiritualist,” she claimed, “and I bend all my religious energies to the advocacy of Spiritualism” (17). Echoing her by then infamous 1871 statement, “Yes, I am a Free Lover,” Woodhull’s avowal of spiritualism not only affiliated her with a good portion of her audience, but also supported her right to knowledge and her right to speak publicly. According to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, spiritualism was “the only religious sect in the world . . . that has recognized the equality of women” (qtd Braude 2). Stanton’s remark was based on spiritualist women’s equal authority within the movement, which was in turn based on women’s powers as mediums (3, 84-85).

Also in “Tried as by Fire,” Woodhull used her own powers of spiritualism as evidence for both her arguments and her mission. A clairvoyant, Woodhull claimed that she had discerned the number of husbands a woman had sequentially wed by seeing the number 4 appear on the woman’s forehead (“Tried” 18). She used the detail to argue that a woman who had four husbands legally was not considered promiscuous, but that a woman who had intercourse with one man to whom she was not married, was. Similarly, when relating how a mother’s actions during pregnancy (in this instance, occasionally sipping alcohol) transmitted consequences to her children, Woodhull stated that she could see liquor bottles covering the child’s chest (30). Woodhull also claimed that spirits supported her work. One sister who had derided Woodhull’s free love philosophy in life, now deceased, spoke to her on the platform and inspired her work (27-28). Angels also spoke to her, showing her how women’s sexual freedom would redeem the world (40). Because spiritualists believed that such experiences combined science with faith and constituted proof of divine truth (Braude 4-6), they were apt evidence for Woodhull to employ.
Woodhull spaced these spiritual appeals throughout “Tried as by Fire,” perhaps to maintain the interest of spiritualist auditors who were uncomfortable with extreme free love ideology.

Another audience appeal that Woodhull spaced throughout her text was distrust of those in power. Early in the text, she justified her need to speak by pointing out the silence of authority figures:

I say, shame upon the newspapers, upon the preachers, teachers and doctors, that it is necessary for me to tell you what they ought long ago to have freely discussed, and have thus relieved me of this unpleasant task!

(4)

Later, she coupled preachers with lawyers as the authorities who had the most at stake in retaining marriage and divorce laws: “hypocritical priests” received ten dollars per couple for “forging the chains” and “blackguard lawyers” averaged two hundred and fifty dollars each time they “broke the fetters” (14). Such men were, according to Woodhull, among her “most bitter opponents” (36) because their financial well-being would be ruined by her successful support of free love. Moreover, pastors, lawyers, and doctors took sexual advantage of the oppressed women who came to them for counsel, and lawyers often accepted sexual favors in lieu of divorce fees (40-41). In addition to preachers, lawyers, and doctors, Woodhull exposed the sins of politicians. “The best, most brilliant men in the nation” (21), senators and representatives frequented the brothels of Washington DC, their sport paid for by lobbyists (22). It was, according to Woodhull, these men and their ilk that supported prostitution, not “the hard-working, industrial masses” or financially insecure young men (22) – not the masses and men who made up her audience.
By appealing to her audience’s distrust of those in power, Woodhull was employing the rhetorical concept *kairos*, a basic definition of which is “the appropriateness of the discourse to the particular circumstances of the time, place, speaker, and audience involved” (Kinneavy 84). Speaking in the Midwest and West because she could not get engagements in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states (place), Woodhull crafted her appeal to an audience mired in economic distress (time). Because of their economic troubles and their position as outsiders to East Coast culture, much of Woodhull’s audience harbored suspicion of the professional class, the upper class, and politicians. Woodhull wisely allied herself with her audience’s suspicions and their outsider status. In fact, by emphasizing that pastors and lawyers were among her “most bitter opponents,” Woodhull entered her own person at the time of speaking, as well as her particular life history, into the kairotic equation.

The third audience subjectivity to which Woodhull appealed was women’s sexual potentiality. Women made up a sizeable portion of both her lecture audiences (Passet 101) and the readership of *Woodhull & Claflin’s Weekly* (Passet 104-105). Thus, women figured in almost every paragraph of “Tried as by Fire,” whether as victims of marital lust or perpetrators of maternal neglect, as downtrodden prostitutes or healthy harlots, and, in the glorious future, as Goddesses of Purity and the saviors of mankind. However, while Woodhull’s emphasis on women throughout the text is understandable given her audience, what confounds is her extensive demonization of women. According to Woodhull, women who married for support were prostitutes, as were married women who had intercourse with their husbands despite their own reluctance (“Tried” 19) – and both were less honorable than true, hard-working prostitutes. “Responsible, hard-working married women” were also less healthy and less beautiful than health-conscious harlots (31). Additionally, Woodhull stated that for every child who died before
reaching age five, for any health reason, a mother was stamped with the mark of Cain (9). When a child was born as a “chattering idiot” or grew up to be a maniac, a drunkard, a murderer, or other type of outcast, the child’s mother was completely at fault because improper sexual relations of some type were responsible for the child’s condition (26-27, 30). Furthermore, women had so maladapted their sexuality by practicing contraception, abortion, and submission to unwanted intercourse that their “sexual instinct” was dead and nine in ten women were “unfit to become mothers” (33). Those who could reproduce were to blame for their sons’ self-damage through masturbation and their daughters’ prolapsed uteri (33). In the face of all this human tragedy, however, women themselves clung to the marriage system, servilely fawning on their husbands (42).

One might assume that Woodhull’s harsh treatment of women might have cost her the female portion of her audience. According to Passet, however, Midwestern and Western women not only attended Woodhull’s lectures and read and wrote to her newspaper, they also portrayed her as a martyr, suffering in order to secure their salvation (103). The answer to this contradiction lies, perhaps, in the manner in which Woodhull portrayed herself and in the self-perception of the women in her audience. In discussing mothers’ responsibility for the physical, mental, and criminal faults of their children, Woodhull cited her own marriage to an alcoholic and the birth of her mentally-challenged son. In doing so, she held herself just as responsible as any other woman for “surrender[ing] control of their maternal functions to any man” (27). Unspoken was the accompanying supposition that if Woodhull could rise from sexual and maternal abasement to her exalted status as one who spoke with angels, so could other women. In addition to Woodhull’s use of herself as evidence were the subject positions of her auditors. Those women who were already free lovers or spiritualists could picture the women Woodhull
described as “other” – as the less-enlightened women of conventional society – rather than as themselves.

A third reason women might have accepted Woodhull’s negative depiction, even women who lived in unhappy marriages or who had lost young children to illness, was the raw power that Woodhull ascribed to them. For women feeling downtrodden, being told they held the power to destroy the nation itself through the disposition of their wombs (32-33) must have been heady stuff. And, as Woodhull stated, “if [women’s] powers for ill are so marked, what must they be for good, when exercised under an enlightened understanding!” (30). According to Woodhull, when women threw off the chains of marital and sexual slavery and procreated only in cases of mutual love and attraction, their children would be perfect; in fact, the “doctrine of heredity and transmission will have to be . . . abandoned” (38). Perfect children would never become idiots, maniacs, criminals, or drunkards – “the temperance crusade [would] begin at home, in the marriage bed” (30). In turn, the production of perfect children would create a perfected society:

It means the replacement of money-getting as the aim of life by the desire to do good; the closing of hospitals and asylums, and the transformation of prisons, jails and penitentiaries into workshops and scientific schools; and of lawyers, doctors, and ministers into industrial artizans . . . it means individual happiness, national prosperity, and universal good. (43)

In essence, Woodhull told the women in her Midwest and Western audiences, living the midst of economic distress that many attributed to East Coast culture, that they could accomplish what all the middle- and upper-class social purists and suffragists could not, simply by taking control of their own sexuality. This powerful vision was available to free love and spiritualist women who
might not view themselves at fault for present conditions, and to women questioning their own sexual, marital or maternal circumstances. By appealing to spiritualist beliefs, distrust of those in power, and women’s sexual/maternal potential, Woodhull made her free love argument attractive to a wide spectrum of her audience. For her Midwestern and Western auditors in general, abolishing marriage would discomfit the authority figures and East Coast powers that created and thrived on others’ misery. Spiritualists, despite their uneasiness at the idea of abolishing marriage altogether, could help usher in a religion of divine sexuality; moreover, the vision melding free love and divinity came from one of their own, a spiritualist-clairvoyant. Counting also free lovers and the merely curious, Woodhull’s arguments were crafted for a white, middle- and working-class, Midwestern and Western audience. Unlike Willard and the social purists in general, the people Woodhull spoke to were also the people she spoke about; while most male auditors likely did not see themselves as marital rapists, they understood that the men who did rape their wives lived among them rather than in a different socio-economic class. Women, even those who had, like Woodhull, unwittingly contributed to the world’s ills by misapplying their sexuality and maternity, held the power to remake the world as an Eden and return humanity “to its original sexual purity, the Scripture fulfilled and the millennium ushered in” (40).

Woodhull’s Ethos: Situated and Constructed

When she delivered “Tried as by Fire,” Woodhull’s situated ethos included her gender, her status as a free lover, and her role in bringing the Beecher-Tilton affair to light. The scandal surrounding the affair lasted through mid-decade, with Tilton finally suing Beecher for alienation of his wife’s affections in 1875 (Ross 127). Woodhull made the most of her exposure of the affair and her subsequent trial for obscenity, which became the focus of two of her lectures and
of many articles in her newspaper, and were mentioned and alluded to throughout “Tried as by Fire.”

Woodhull’s free love beliefs and her exposure of the Beecher-Tilton affair were indeed negatives in New England and the mid-Atlantic states, resulting in anti-Woodhull press and an inability to book lecture halls. In the Midwest and West, however, as seen in the section on audience, Woodhull’s free love ideology enhanced, rather than detracted, from her draw as a speaker. Likewise, both free love and spiritualist auditors acknowledged women’s right to know and to speak. Nevertheless, as other female speakers commonly did, Woodhull both expressed her reluctance to speak in public and invoked her gender-based instincts as an excuse for speaking. She also aligned herself and her ideas with specific authorities. In addition, Woodhull used the Beecher-Tilton affair to construct an elaborate ethos of heroic self-sacrifice.

Just as female speakers had done since before the Civil War (Bacon 128), Woodhull positioned her situated ethos of a woman speaking in public as a duty she reluctantly undertook for the good of others. Explaining the problems of marriage in public was an “unpleasant task” that she undertook not because it was in “her nature or her pleasure” to speak of such things, but “because she desire[d], like Boards of Health dealing with nuisances, to abate them” (Woodhull, “Tried” 4). Thus, although later in the text Woodhull declared that sexual information should be openly discussed around the family table (13), initially she adopted one of the most common tropes of female reform speech: reluctance. Similarly, she referred twice to her “mother’s heart” (20, 32) and once to her “woman’s nature” (32) as reasons for speaking out to help others. With only a handful of such mentions in 44 pages of text, however, Woodhull did not depend on the trope to justify her discourse; her usage was merely a nod to women’s discourse conventions of
Woodhull’s true justifications were her constructed ethos of authority and of heroic martyrdom.

Woodhull’s constructed ethos of authority was built from several sources. First, as a spiritualist speaking to spiritualists, Woodhull cited her own clairvoyant visions and her interactions with a deceased sister and with angels. Second, Woodhull’s authority to speak came from her own experiences, both personal and interactive. The most personal experience Woodhull cited was the birth of her mentally-challenged son. Because her son’s condition was of her own making by having sexual intercourse with an alcoholic, Woodhull was compelled to speak publicly:

Do you think his face is not ever before me pressing me on to declare these terrible social laws to the world? Do you think with this sorrow seated on my soul I can ever sit quietly down and permit women to go on ignorantly repeating my crime? (27)

In other words, Woodhull’s “crime” both gave her authority to speak and forced public speech upon her.

Woodhull’s authority also came from her interactions with others as related in her text. She knew “hundreds of wives who confess privately that they would not live another day with their husbands if they had any other method of support” (19), and she had visited “prisons, insane asylums, and . . . glittering hells . . . [seen] the maniac mother at the cell door of her son” (26). Even more notable where the many who sought Woodhull out for advice or who lauded her efforts: a Massachusetts lady who told of another women’s grief that resulted from ignoring the advice in one of Woodhull’s pamphlets (12-13); a “prominent woman of this country” who asked about free love and promiscuity (16); an “intelligent woman” who asked if Woodhull was
promiscuous (18); her own sister’s deathbed conversion to free love (27-28); a Wisconsin
woman inquiring about the effects of alcohol during pregnancy (30); and fifteen thousand people
at a camp meeting who accepted her arguments (31).

In addition to her personal interactions, Woodhull’s authority was confirmed by the
opinions of experts. “The highest authority in philosophy and science now living, published in
the most popular monthly in the country” (31), Herbert Spencer wrote in The Popular Science
Monthly that marriage was more detrimental to a woman’s health than was prostitution, thus
supporting Woodhull’s claim that promiscuous intercourse was less damaging than forced,
monogamous intercourse (32). Similarly, Woodhull quoted the textbook of Dr. John M. Scudder,
“a large-hearted man and widely-experienced physician” (43) to support her argument that
women must enjoy the sex act in order to retain their health. Finally, in defense of stirpiculture,
Woodhull cited the Chicago Times, “the most influential and widely-circulated journal of the
great North-West” (35). The Times editorialized the need for careful breeding among humanity
to produce a better world. That she and the Times were in agreement sent a powerful message,
according to Woodhull, because it was “a paper in which I have been perhaps more vilely abused
than in any other” (34).

As the Times’ abuse of her and strangers’ questions about her promiscuity illustrate,
Woodhull’s ethos of authority was closely linked to her ethos of heroic martyrdom. In fact,
“Tried as by Fire” was every bit as much about creating a certain vision of Victoria Woodhull as
it was about promoting free love and stirpiculture. In her self-portrayal, Woodhull was both
champion and victim, linked positions because it was for speaking out on behalf of others that
she was pilloried. Woodhull expressed this both in general terms throughout the text and in
lengthy references to her conflict with Beecher.
The twined themes of Woodhull’s heroism and victimization appear throughout “Tried as by Fire.” Overall, in exchange for adding her arguments about free love to “the wise and powerful words of others,” Woodhull was “assaulted with shameful abuse” (6). The press, rather than reporting her words, “daub[ed] me with the feculence of their own thoughts, and [said] I am vulgar and indecent and ought to be avoided by everybody” (13), until she was “regarded with horror all over the land as a person whose presence is contamination and whose touch contagion” (16). By insulting Woodhull, “intelligent men . . . willfully keep the rest of the world in ignorance . . . and hope to frighten the women away, so that I may not reach their ears” (34). Despite such opposition, Woodhull “should like to see the people who can prevent [her]” (28) from discussing sexual issues. And one day she would have the people’s thanks (18), and the children, “for whom I plead, will in after years bless Victoria Woodhull for daring to speak for their salvation” (44).

Early in the text, Woodhull implied that Henry Ward Beecher was one with her worst abusers:

the most persistent and slanderous and foul-mouthed accusations came from precisely those whom I happened to know should have been, from their practices, the last to raise their voices against any one (6).

Referring to him as “the most prominent divine in the land” (6) and “the American Pope” (28), Woodhull claimed that she exposed Beecher’s hypocrisy “to break down the partition walls of prejudice that prevented public consideration of the sexual problem” (7) and explained that in every revolution, someone must be hurt. She had, therefore, “cast the thunderbolt into the very centre (sic) of the socio-religio-moralistic camp of the enemy and struck their chieftain, and the world trembled at the blow” (7). Woodhull’s militaristic language continued in an explanation of
her arrest for obscenity. Beecher and “the Y. M. C. Assassination Association”\(^{38}\) (28) had gotten the United States to jail her and “free press and free speech were . . . struck down in her person” (29). Woodhull “gave battle alone. . . . went into the combat single-handed against both Church and State led on by all their minions . . . [and] whipped the whole cowardly crowd” (29). Just as Woodhull referred to herself as “a little woman” compared to Beecher (28), the language she used was clearly meant to create an ethos of bravery against great odds. Also, by emphasizing her specific conflict with Beecher and the YMCA and, more generally, with the press, priests, and lawyers cited throughout the text, Woodhull showed herself to be fighting against the very East Coast professionals that her Midwest and Western audiences mistrusted. Yet, the fight had taken a toll. Woodhull continued to labor under “the load of opprobrium” (44). Sometimes she wearied and longed for rest, but “duty to my sex” spurred her on (44). Taking her situated ethos of having exposed the Beecher-Tilton affair, then, and combining it with her theme of victimization and her situated ethos of gender, Woodhull constructed a self-image of heroism and martyrdom particularly suited to the audience of “Tried as by Fire.”

Use of Enthymemes

In “Tried as by Fire,” Woodhull employed two levels of enthymemes – those held by her more localized, Midwest and Western audiences and those ascribed to by the larger American culture. Locally, it appears that mistrust of the East Coast establishment, of politicians in Washington D.C., and of the professional class in general was so widespread as to have been enthymemic. Midwestern women who wrote to \textit{Woodhull & Claflin’s Weekly} felt “down-trodden and oppressed” (qtd Passet 106) by the current socioeconomic system, and many Midwesterners and Westerners blamed the East Coast financial world for their troubles (105).

\(^{38}\) A reference to Anthony Comstock, whose New York Society for the Suppression of Vice was originally sponsored by the Y.M.C.A. (Horowitz 383).
Thus, when Woodhull appealed to her audience by stating how priests, lawyers, doctors, newspaper editors, and politicians not only objected to her work, but actively worked to keep her ideas from the people they were meant to help (“Tried” 4, 14, 16, 28, 34, 35, 40, 41), she tapped into that enthymeme of distrust.

On a larger scale, Woodhull refuted the Christian enthymeme that abstinence from sexual intercourse, whether by choice or lack of desire, was a better and more spiritual state than sexual participation. Based in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, the spiritual worth of abstinence had been used for centuries to support the celibacy of Roman Catholic priests and other religious (Potterie) and to encourage sexual abstinence outside marriage in most Christian denominations. When Woodhull stated that “some may assert, as many do, that failure in sexual strength is intellectual and spiritual gain” (“Tried” 24), her audience would have understood the religious and cultural conventions to which she referred. Contrary to the common belief that abstinence and lack of sexual desire were virtuous, Woodhull claimed that “to kill out the sexual instinct by any unnatural practice or repression, is to emasculate character” (24). She added that someone who did not feel desire was “a sexual idiot” and demanded that they “confess that your life is a failure, your body an abortion, and no longer bind your shame upon your brow or herald it as purity. Bah! Be honest, rather, and say it is depravity” (25). According to Woodhull, sexual intercourse was not a practice that took man farther from God, as Paul had stated. Rather, she claimed, only “when the sexual act shall be the religion of the world . . . may we reasonably hope that its redemption is nigh” (25).

39 “I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn (1 Corinthians 7:8-9); He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:32); The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit” (1 Corinthians 7:34).
By refiguring the link between sexual activity and religion as positive rather than negative, Woodhull attempted to replace the original enthymeme of sexless virtue with a new one: “Make that act [intercourse] the most divine of all your worship” (25). Unlike the subtle “rhetorical alchemy” that Willard employed to redefine religious enthymemes, Woodhull’s forceful insistence that sexual abstinence was depravity and sexual intercourse was worship demanded that her listeners completely subvert common beliefs. Her agonistic tone was part of the overall militaristic/heroic language that appeared throughout “Tried as by Fire.”

Woodhull challenged religious and socio-cultural conventions on an even grander scale by simultaneously refuting and refiguring the enthymeme of True Womanhood. This was not a single or direct challenge the to ideal, however; rather, the entire text stood in defiance to conventional ideas of femininity. The True Woman was naturally pure, pious, submissive, modest, maternal, and domestic. In “Tried as by Fire,” Woodhull claimed that within the framework of conventional life, submissiveness really meant marital rape, maternity meant the production of imperfect children, piety meant sexual and intellectual submission to religious leaders, and modesty meant a harmful lack of information about sexuality and related issues. The real True Woman, according to Woodhull, would love when, where, and whom she chose, which in turn guaranteed perfect children, regardless of “the doctrine of heredity and transmission” (38). Real piety and salvation lay in practicing sexual intercourse as worship (25), and so far from immodest was sexual information that it should be discussed around the family table at mealtimes (13). All of these factors together would result in true womanly purity: “woman and, through her functions, the sexual relations elevated; this is the glory with which I would have woman crowned; this is what it means to be virtuous; this is what it means to be pure” (40). In essence, Woodhull held up her own, spiritualist-inspired vision of free love as the true definer of
proper womanhood. In addition, because she had already risen from the abasement of conventional True Womanhood to this purer ideal – the sexual act was already her religion (25) – she stood before her audience as an embodiment of the new enthymeme.

Style

Woodhull’s style in “Tried as by Fire” was, more than anything else, dramatic. As a lecture, the text was meant not only to promote free love ideology, but also to entertain a paying audience and to increase Woodhull’s future draw as a lecturer and newspaper publisher. Woodhull’s situated and constructed ethos were so thoroughly bound up in the text, in fact, that personal pronouns appear in almost every paragraph.

Drama was created in several ways. Woodhull’s own story of victimization and heroism wound through the text, arousing emotion by recounting the numerous tribulations she suffered on behalf of humanity. She also employed very specific types of language to evoke specific emotions: militaristic language to describe her conflict with Beecher (28-29), sentimental language to describe her sister’s deathbed conversion to free love (27-28), and religious language to finish her text and bless her audience (44), for example. Dealing only in extremes was another way to create drama: *all* people who objected to her speech were themselves obscene and indecent (4); *all* marital intercourse was rape or prostitution (8, 19); *all* mothers who neglected the sexual education of their children, whether or not such neglect resulted in death, were murderers (13); *all* priests and lawyers were blackguards (14, 40-41); *all* sexual intercourse outside of marriage was better than *all* intercourse within marriage (32).

Although Woodhull’s text was carefully crafted and was delivered, according to her paper, one hundred and fifty times, she created a sense of passion and extemporaneousness by employing accumulatio, or the use of multiple words or phrases that hold essentially the same
meaning (Quinn and Rathbun 1). For example, Woodhull described the misery produced by women who bore imperfect children as “the black damnation, the sin, misery, shame, crime, disgrace, that come home to them as mothers” (26). Similarly, refuting the claim that prostitution was one of society’s necessary evils, Woodhull warned that [mothers] must yearly contribute a certain percentage of your daughters to fill the infernal maw of prostitution; give them up to be sunk in infamy; to be abhorred of their sisters and despised of their brothers; in a word to walk the prostitutes’ road to hell. (22)

Although Woodhull could have reduced the sentence length and preserved meaning by collapsing the “infamy,” “abhorred,” and “despised” phrases into a single description or deleting any or all of them, she would have sacrificed a sense of her own passion and outrage. Woodhull must have found this strategy quite effective; accumulatio occurs throughout the text as strings of words, phrases, and, occasionally, sentences. Combined with her story of victimization and heroism, specific types of language, and extreme claims, accumulatio created a dramatic style that appears to have been quite effective for Woodhull; one newspaper reported that “she electrifies, startles, astonishes, and melts her audience to tears” (Passet 103).

“Tried as by Fire”: Conclusion

In her speech “Tried as by Fire,” and in the published text, Woodhull advocated for free love based on the abolition of marriage and for the breeding of better children through stirpiculture. She also promoted her own image as a social reformer and lecturer. Because she was unwelcome in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states due to press hostility and difficulties renting lecture halls, Woodhull presented “Tried as by Fire” to a Midwest and Western, middle- and working-class audience. She appealed to this audience in several ways.
First, because spiritualist beliefs were popular and because most free lovers were also spiritualists, she mediated her free love-based abolition of marriage with a vision of divinely-inspired sexuality. Second, Woodhull appealed to her audience’s distrust of East Coast institutions and of the professional classes in general by depicting pastors, lawyers, doctors, and politicians as the enemies of herself, of her ideals, and of the people. Third, Woodhull appealed to women, who made up a large part of her lecture and reading audiences, by emphasizing the world-altering potential of their regenerative power.

Throughout “Tried as by Fire,” Woodhull maintained an ethos of authority based on her own experiences, on her interactions with others, many of whom treated her as an authority, and on the ways in which her ideology was supported by specific professionals. She also created a combined ethos of victimization and heroism. By describing the many ways in which she had been publicly abused and then insisting that she would continue to work for the betterment of humanity in the face of such abuse, Woodhull bestowed martyrdom upon herself. Because she attributed the abuse to professional men living in large, mostly Eastern cities, this martyrdom was especially effective given her audience.

In addition to confirming the local enthymeme of distrust of East Coast culture and refuting the enthymeme of virtuous sexual abstinence, “Tried and by Fire” subverted the nineteenth-century ideal of True Womanhood. Implying that conventional True Womanhood meant marital rape, malformed offspring, and sexual ignorance, Woodhull presented a purified alternative: women loving as they chose, tapping into the divine through sexual intercourse, and producing perfect children. Woodhull provided herself as an example of what such a refigured True Woman would be.
Throughout “Tried and by Fire,” Woodhull created drama by relating stories of her own victimization and heroism, and even of her crime in bearing an imperfect child. In places, she employed specific types of language to evoke specific responses from her audience; in others, she depended upon extreme claims. Woodhull also employed accumulatio to impart a sense of passion and extemporaneity to both her text and her oral delivery. All of these strategies combined to create a strong appeal to the emotions of her audience.

The Problem of Woodhull’s Dual Character

Two stories can be told about Victoria Woodhull. In one, she rose from humble beginnings to become the first female stockbroker and the first female candidate for president of the United States. She was a prominent suffragist who argued before the House Judiciary Committee that women already had a constitutional right to vote. She traveled the country speaking for social reform. A committed disciple of free love and spiritualism, she lived her life by those tenets and exposed the hypocrisy of a prominent, married cleric who preyed upon his female congregants. For this she was pursued, arrested and tried and, although acquitted, faced the scorn and vilification of conservatives until she immigrated to England.

In the second story, Victoria Woodhull was born to a family of traveling hucksters. She performed as a clairvoyant until she deserted her husband to run away with another man. She and her sister prostituted themselves to Cornelius Vanderbilt, who financed their ventures as stockbrokers and publishers, ventures that failed when his support was withdrawn. Avid for public attention, Woodhull joined the Marxists and the suffragists, but was soon ejected by both. Disappointed in her attempts to blackmail Theodore Tilton and Henry Ward Beecher into lending respect to her career, she exposed Beecher’s affair with Tilton’s wife. After her arrest and acquittal on obscenity charges, she took to the lecture circuit for support, rehashing the
Beecher-Tilton case. Upon Vanderbilt’s death, his family paid the potentially embarrassing Woodhull a large sum to leave the country (Stern 8).

Perhaps these depictions are each too extreme, but they do represent the dual character that Woodhull presents to researchers and biographers. Each Woodhull source I have cited in this chapter has taken a stand somewhere along a continuum of Woodhull’s virtue. Horowitz, Braude, and Ross depicted her as a self-serving opportunist concerned more with her own celebrity than with promoting reform. Gabriel and Underhill, in contrast, portrayed Woodhull as much more sinned against than sinning; Gabriel related many of the less savory details but remained uncritical of them, while Underhill seemed determined to create a heroine for the ages. Passet showed Woodhull in a positive light, but worked from the effect Woodhull had on the lives of Midwestern women rather than from her possible motives. Stern occupied the most central position, showing us a flawed woman who accomplished much; this portrayal, however, was limited to an eleven-page introduction to Woodhull’s speeches and therefore omitted extensive critique in either direction.

I would like to navigate between the dual depictions of Woodhull by examining her history and her speech as represented in “Tried as by Fire” through a sophist lens. That is, I am not proposing that Woodhull purposefully enacted a sophist position or knowingly created sophist-inspired discourse. Rather, a sophistic reading of Woodhull’s duality will allow us to transcend the need for absolute placement on a continuum of Woodhull’s self-service/self-sacrifice.

At the most basic level, Woodhull may be compared to the earliest sophists simply because of her gender. As Jarrett argued in Rereading the Sophists, Plato and Aristotle made rhetoric subject to philosophy by degrading the sophist emphases on the practical/knowable, the
material body, and writing in favor of the Platonic insistence on ultimate Truth, the soul, and speech. Just as Plato and Aristotle marginalized the sophists, Western culture has “othered” the feminine character, opposing male “rationality, objectivity [and] detachment” to the devalued feminine: “irrationality (or non-rationality), magical or hypnotic power, subjectivity, emotional sensitivity” (65). Certainly many nineteenth-century female reformers were denigrated in the press by means of this conventional feminine character, either for fulfilling it (irrational, emotional, sexual) or for violating it (attempting or appearing to be mannish). Woodhull, however, occupied the “other” position not only as a woman speaking in a patriarchal world, but also as a woman from the lower-class speaking to and among the largely higher-status female reformers of her time. Before exposing the Beecher-Tilton affair, Woodhull attained a level of fame and social access typically available only to women who were well-established members of the middle- and upper-class, and in reading her memorial on women’s suffrage before a congressional committee, she attained greater political access than any suffragist before her. Woodhull’s aggressive class ascent, even before scandal touched her, alarmed more conservative suffragists aligned with Lucy Stone (Horowitz 345-346) and many veteran spiritualists (Braude 170). Thus, partially before, and certainly after her exposure of Beecher, Woodhull occupied a marginal position within a larger marginalized group. In this respect, Woodhull may be doubly compared to the sophists; they share not only marginalization due to beliefs/character, but also due to birth – Woodhull’s lower-class origins and the sophists’ non-citizen status in Athens.

This shared status of marginalization leads to another comparison between Woodhull and the sophists: audience. One reason the aristocracy, represented by Plato, disliked the sophists was because they taught their rhetoric and ideology to anyone who could pay. In addition to their general message elevating the practical/knowable over transcendent ideals of Truth, sophists
taught their audiences, privileged and non-privileged alike, that improvement rested in the self and not in dependence on the wisdom of civil or social leaders, thus potentially undermining the established order (Bizzell and Herzberg 22). Similarly, Woodhull spoke to paying, largely non-privileged audiences, and the combined spiritualist/free love ideology of “Tried as by Fire” placed sexuality, religion, and the power to recreate society on the individual, while decrying the power and motives of the establishment and the professional class. Thus, both the sophists and Woodhull spoke to at least partially non-privileged audiences, bringing to them visions of the possible future.

Poulakos suggested that for man, “the sphere of actuality always entails a lack, the absence of that which exists only in the future . . . actuality frustrates man when he dreams of being other and binds him to where he already is when he wants to be elsewhere” (30). In response, the sophist rhetorician makes use of this yearning for the future and for the unknown and shows auditors what they can be in the future, providing both goals and direction. The sophist rhetorician does this “by creating and presenting to [auditors] that which has the potential to be, but is not” (30). In this way the sophist rhetorician differs from the Platonic philosopher because the latter is bound to the present actuality as an expression of ultimate Truth. Woodhull, in her actions and her text, embodied this sophist potential. “Tried as by Fire” began in the actuality of its audience, painting a grim picture of sexual and spiritual downtroddeness that was attributed (as Midwesterners attributed their economic woes) to the East Coast establishment and the professional class. From that actuality, she led her audience through a strategy of rejection: rejection of current sexual mores, rejection of current notions about reproduction, and rejection of current ideas of women’s powerlessness. Finally, Woodhull guided her auditors to her vision

40 Especially after her exposure of the Beecher-Tilton affair and subsequent arrest.
of a remade world and asked them, as the sophist does, to abandon the known for “that which exists ‘by favor of human imagination and effort’” (Weaver qtd Poulakos 31).

In addition to presenting the potential future in speech and text, Woodhull created that future in her person. In “Tried as by Fire,” she represented the possible as a woman claiming power to speak in public about sexual intercourse and reproduction. In the course of her career, Woodhull personified the possible for women with her much-publicized run for president, her suffrage speech before a congressional committee, and her creation of the first female stockbrokering firm. Adding her speech and her accomplishments to her free love lifestyle and economic history, Woodhull embodied a future that could be read as liberatory by the non-elite or as evidence of social disintegration by conservative forces in power.

The fear Woodhull must have evoked in conservative circles brings us back to Plato and the sophists. If the sophists had practiced their subversive rhetoric without demanding pay, would the Athenian aristocracy have been less apprehensive of their activities? I ask this because it seems as if the divided opinions about Woodhull rest on the question of her motives – were her accomplishments and foibles based in a sincere desire to promote reform, or in a self-serving pursuit of fame and wealth? The rehabilitation of the sophists, begun in the Nineteenth Century, has made peace between their wealth and supposed braggadocio (Jarrett 2) and their contributions to (perhaps even creation of) modern rhetoric. Perhaps the same peace may be reached in regard to Woodhull if we heed Passet’s example of looking at Woodhull in terms of her effectiveness rather than her motives. Woodhull’s speaking tour of the Midwest and West, for example, emboldened countless women to share their own sexual opinions and fears, in print in Woodhull & Claflin’s Weekly and other free thought papers (Passet 104-105). Her exposure of the Beecher-Tilton affair likewise caught the attention of ordinary women and men around the
country, bringing them to a reconsideration of free love principles (106-107). Because free lovers were also generally in favor of women’s suffrage, Woodhull arguably may have done more for women’s rights in exposing Beecher than she did in her speech before the Judiciary Committee. Thus, the benefits to individual women and to suffrage were the same, whatever Woodhull’s motives for lecturing on free love or for bringing the Beecher-Tilton affair to light.

On the other hand, it could be argued that had they not taken pay, the sophists would not have been the sophists – that is, that their rhetoric and ideology would not have posed the same degree of subversion to Plato’s philosophy. In this vein, we can reposition Woodhull yet again by acknowledging that her individual actions and her career, whether construed as positive or negative, represent an impressive female challenge to patriarchal order. Just as Woodhull herself characterized women’s reproductive potential as producing great evil or great good, yet as equally powerful in either case, we can view Woodhull as a dynamic challenge to nineteenth-century assumptions about economic class and social status, education, literacy, and public speaking, and both the ideal of True Womanhood and the construction of the sinning or fallen woman. In order to celebrate Woodhull as the first suffragist to address a congressional committee, then, we must also accept the fact that she prostituted possibly herself, and most likely her younger sister, to Cornelius Vanderbilt. Taken together, those facts do not cancel one another out, but rather act upon one another to create a striking subversion of both the nineteenth-century social order and of our perceptions of female reformers of the past. From this perspective, Woodhull is historically and rhetorically significant precisely because of the positive and less savory aspects of her career.

The ways of viewing Woodhull I have offered – as a speaker of and self-illustration of the possible, as an effective speaker regardless of motive, and as a subversive force within her
own time and within feminist scholarship – are not meant to heal the rift between the positive and negative depictions of her that scholars have offered in the past. Rather, reading Woodhull through a sophist lens allows all depictions of Woodhull and her work to exist simultaneously; the sophist position “does not strive for cognitive certitude, the affirmation of logic, or the articulation of universals” (Poulakos 26). This does not mean that every scholarly encounter with Woodhull needs to embrace and express all possible depictions of the woman and her work – after all, sophist rhetoric allows the speaker to choose the point of view that will be the most useful on any given occasion (26). It does mean, however, that the feminist scholar must be aware of the possible ways of viewing Woodhull and, as Bizzell stated in discussing Royster’s work, present and discuss her investment in the viewpoint she chooses.
CHAPTER FIVE

IDA CRADDOCK: SEX REFORM IN A DIFFERENT VOICE

Introduction

Ida Craddock achieved her greatest measure of fame through her 1902 trials for Comstock law violations and her suicide soon thereafter. For the next several decades, she functioned as a poster woman for freedom of speech issues, her martyrdom exploited by free-thought publisher George Macdonald, free press advocate Theodore Schroeder, and others. These eulogizers focused on Craddock’s beauty, gentility, and the persecution she suffered rather than her public sexual discourse; in Fifty Years of Freethought, Macdonald referred to the life’s work that culminated in her suicide as “Mrs. Craddock's coeducational hobby” (217).

In many ways, Craddock represented the new woman that reformers such as Frances Willard heralded in the late Nineteenth Century. From a middle-class family, Craddock attended secretarial school and relied on her own support throughout her adult life. Because she could support herself, she remained single and traveled to several western states and to England. She was interested in the reform and religious movements of her day, read and researched widely, wrote several book-length manuscripts as well as many shorter works,\textsuperscript{41} and carried on an active correspondence with physicians, free thinkers, and social reformers in the U.S. and England.

In other ways, Craddock was unique. She combined elements from free love ideology, spiritualism, Theosophy, social purity, and Far Eastern mysticism to create her own religious-sexual vision of marriage, and took it upon herself to share this vision with the public. Craddock’s writing on sexual intercourse, as represented by her pamphlets “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living,” combined ideology with explicit sex-act instruction, both communicated in a gentle, conversational tone touched with humor. Indeed, it is Craddock’s

\textsuperscript{41} Most of Craddock’s work was never published.
approach to public sexual discourse, her methods of dissemination, and her voice and style that stand out when compared to other sex reform texts of her time. Thus ‘difference’ is the thread that connects the components of this chapter: a brief biography, Craddock’s opinions and experiences of sex, her public sexual discourse, and an examination of her place within nineteenth-century women’s reform rhetoric.

**Biography**

Ida Craddock was born in Philadelphia on August 1, 1857, to Lizzie S. Decker and husband, both Quakers. Craddock’s father died when she two years of age (Green 4) and she was raised by her mother, supported on the income from her father’s thriving patent medicine business (15). Craddock took a course of secretarial training from an unknown school, providing herself with a means of support and travel; in addition to cities in the Eastern and Midwestern United States, she lived and worked in England, Alaska (16), San Francisco (17), and Denver (Southworth). Craddock also taught stenography and typing at The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union and at Girard College (Green 17, Westbrook). In 1882, she published *Primary Phonography*, a textbook on Pitman shorthand.

During her childhood, Craddock learned about spiritualism from her mother (Green 13). As an adult, she explored Unitarianism (17), Christian Science, Faith Cure, Mysticism, and Theosophy, as well as Hypnotism, Telepathy, and Crystal Gazing (13-14). Through Theosophy, Craddock became affiliated with The Church of Yoga, compiling their bulletin “Church of Yoga Messenger” and offering instruction in metaphysics (15). She also may have held a leadership or priestly role (15); in a 1902 New York Times article, Craddock was identified as having been

---

42 Little has been written about Ida Craddock, and most of what is known about her is collected at SIU-Carbondale’s Morris Library. Although her father’s surname was Craddock, his first name appears to be unrecorded within that archive. Also unrecorded is why Ida Craddock’s mother used the surname Decker; there is no evidence that she married following her first husband’s death.

43 I am indebted to Elizabeth Green for her excellent masters thesis on Ida Craddock.
“’High Priestess of the Church of Yoga’ in Chicago” (“Chose Death”). Craddock also studied the Eastern philosophies underlying Theosophy and The Church of Yoga, eventually creating her own view of spiritualism’s “sexualized divine reality” (Braude 120). Although she preferred not to be called a spiritualist (Green 46), during her thirties Craddock began regularly communing with spirits. She claimed that the primary spirit, Soph, had been in life a gentleman she had known in her teens (19), who had died from consumption (17). In or around 1892, Craddock declared that Soph was her spirit husband and she began referring to herself as Mrs. Craddock (19). In 1894, Craddock’s mother, upset by her daughter’s frequent references to her spirit husband and her married status, wished to have her institutionalized; Craddock fled to London (22). Four years later, her mother did succeed in having her committed and Craddock spent three months in the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane (23-24).

It was before her flight to England that Craddock decided her life’s work would be public promotion of “sex reform” (Craddock, Letter to Foote). This decision led to a series of arrests and trials for violation of federal and state obscenity statues, although Craddock’s first run-in with Postal Inspector Anthony Comstock was relatively minor. In 1893, she wrote “The Danse du Ventre” in response to a flurry of public criticism about a traditional Middle Eastern dancer at the World’s Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. The four-page article defended the performer and the performance, stating that the dance was “a religious memorial inculcat[ing] purity and self-control” (qtd Burton 1). Published in the Chicago Clinic, “The Danse du Ventre” caught Comstock’s attention and he declared the journal unmailable due to obscene content (2).

Craddock’s second skirmish with the federal Comstock law was much more direct. In 1899 she was living in Chicago, providing face-to-face sexual counseling and a mail-order course titled “Regeneration and Rejuvenation of Men and Women Through the Right Use of the

44 Fahreda Mahzar used the stage name “Little Egypt.”
Sexual Function” (Burton 6). She also published her pamphlet “Right Marital Living” in the Chicago Clinic, which drew Comstock’s attention to her work (6-7). Craddock was indicted in federal court over “Right Marital Living” and three other pamphlets she sold through the mail, and she avoided a stay in jail only because attorney Clarence Darrow posted $500 bail (Green 29, Burton 7). Craddock pled guilty and received a suspended sentence (Burton 7).

Altogether, prior to 1901 Craddock was arrested three times over her work, in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. (“Chose Death”). In 1901, she moved to New York City, announcing her services in a letter to free-thought newspaper Lucifer The Light-Bearer. The announcement claimed she was limiting herself to face-to-face instruction “which, so lawyers inform me, is perfectly safe for me legally” (Craddock, Lucifer 239), although Craddock stated elsewhere she had come to New York to openly challenge “Comstockism” (Burton 13-14). Whatever the case, Craddock did sell pamphlets through the mail, one of which was purchased by Comstock himself through the use of a decoy letter (Craddock, Letter to Pentecost).

Craddock was tried for violation of New York state obscenity statutes; on March 18, 1902, she was sentenced to three months in prison (“Mrs. Craddock”), much of which she served in Blackwell’s Island workhouse (Craddock, Letter to Pentecost). Upon her release, Comstock immediately re-arrested her for violations of the federal Comstock law (Burton 14). On October 10, she was tried and convicted; the judge declared that the pamphlet in question, “The Wedding Night,” was “obscene, lewd, lascivious, dirty” (Craddock, “Letter to Public”). On the morning of her sentencing hearing, Ida Craddock committed suicide by “inhaling illuminating gas and slashing her wrist” (“Chose Death”). In a letter addressed “To the Public,” Craddock wrote that because “the rigors of prison life would be equivalent to my death-warrant,” she considered herself “justified in choosing . . . as did Socrates, the manner of my death. I prefer to die
comfortably and peacefully, on my own little bed in my own room, instead of on a prison cot” (“To the Public”). She ended the letter by asking the public to read and profit from her book “Right Marital Living” and to protect that book from Anthony Comstock.

**Sexuality and Marriage: Craddock’s Opinions and Experiences**

After Craddock’s death, free speech advocate and evolutionary psychologist Theodore Schroeder devoted himself to collecting her correspondence and her manuscripts and interviewing her friends. He had never met Craddock, but based on what he knew of her, he speculated that she had participated in two or more sexual affairs and had subsequently imagined a spiritual husband to fulfill her sexual needs (Green 7). Craddock herself, however, claimed that her only sexual experiences had been with Soph, her spirit husband, with whom she had intercourse in the “borderland” between this world and the spirit realm (25). Craddock was quite open about her marriage to Soph and freely discussed it with her mother, her employer, and her friends (46-47), even offering objective proofs of their sexual activity. In addition to her claim that a physician had examined her and found that the condition of her vagina was consistent with that of a woman who had experienced repeated intercourse (26), Craddock said that her intercourse with Soph was so noisy as to draw complaints from her neighbors (47-48).

Soph’s interactions with Craddock were not limited to the sexual, however; she attributed to him, and to several other spirits, household and advisory roles (48).

It is not my intention to comment on the nature or validity of Craddock’s spiritual marriage. Her relationship with Soph certainly caused trouble in her life, leading to the repeated threat of institutionalization and to time spent in an asylum. On the other hand, the idea of a

---

45 This is how Craddock’s papers came to be housed in the Morris Library at SUI-Carbondale – they were part of the larger collection of Theodore Schroeder’s papers.

46 Green cited Craddock’s diary for this information, which also noted that that the complaining neighbors attributed the late-night noises to Craddock’s typewriting.
“spiritual bridegroom” was emblematic of Craddock’s sexual ideology, which blended elements of spiritualism and Eastern philosophy, as well as free love, social purity, and current medical knowledge. Craddock obviously believed, as did the spiritualists, that interaction with departed souls was possible and that spirits with evil intentions were not capable of communication beyond the grave (Green 19, Braude 186). Both also believed that sexual intercourse was only wholesome or worthwhile when it originated as a soul union “under the purer influences of celestial harmony” (qtd Braude 119) or, as Craddock termed it, under “aspiration to the highest” (“Psychic Wedlock”). Craddock’s relationship with Soph would seem to be a combined extenuation of these beliefs.

In her pamphlets, Craddock took the spiritualist ideal of soul union a step farther. Expanding on the Hindu belief that God can and does enjoy physical pleasure (Green 42) and the Tantric belief that sexual intercourse is a divine experience, Craddock invited married couples to share their sexual pleasure with God, just as a well-mannered child would share a box of bonbons with the people she loved (Craddock, “Wedding”). This could be done through the Tantric practices of extending intercourse for one or several hours and suppressing ejaculation, while at the same time thinking of one’s partner’s pleasure over one’s own and contemplating the divine at the moment of orgasm.

Craddock’s sexual philosophy also reflected more common ideas of her time. One reason for the suppression of ejaculation was to preserve seminal fluid; a prevalent medical notion was that the body was a closed system and too-frequent emissions weakened men (Melody and Peterson 23-31). She discouraged manual stimulation of genitalia during foreplay on the grounds that it could lead to masturbatory tendencies (“Wedding,” “Right”); along with many physicians and reformers, Craddock condemned masturbation as coarsening for women (“Wedding”). She
also promoted the idea, held by both social purists and free lovers, that women should have the right to choose both when to have intercourse and when to become pregnant (“Right”).

Cradock’s Public Sexual Discourse: “The Wedding Night” & “Right Marital Living”

Although Craddock was a prolific writer, only a few of her texts were published in newspapers or journals or were self-printed. Of those, she distributed the self-printed “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living” during face-to-face consultations and through the mail in order to disseminate her sex reform ideology. Although much of the content of “The Wedding Night” also appeared in “Right Marital Living,” I chose to look at both texts because together they provide a more complete view of Craddock’s public sexual discourse. “The Wedding Night,” for example, was shorter and took a more playful tone, while “Right Marital Living” justified Craddock’s authority to speak on sexual issues. Additionally, although it was “The Wedding Night” that led to Craddock’s arrests in New York City, she considered “Right Marital Living” to be the more important work (Craddock, “To the Public”).

The overall goal of both “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living”47 was to give readers an understanding of the “radiantly happy and holy life which is possible for every married couple who will practice these teachings” (Craddock, “To the Public”). Thus Craddock, like the social purists, positioned acceptable sexual intercourse as marital. In addition, by relating her teachings she was fulfilling the demands of both social purists and free lovers for sexuality education; however, by using terms such as vagina, clitoris, ejaculation, and orgasm, Craddock leaned toward the free love practice of employing “plain, Saxon names” (Woodhull, “Tried” 3) to discuss sexual subjects.

---

47 Neither document resides in Craddock’s papers collected at SIU-Carbondale. My source for both is an Internet site containing several of Craddock’s manuscripts, maintained by a spiritualist group that admires her work. Therefore, I am dependent on the transcription abilities of others. “The Wedding Night” seems to be posted in its entirety; “Right Marital Living” does contain ellipses at the ends of some paragraphs.
More specifically, the goal of “The Wedding Night” was to ease a couple into their first sexual experience. Especially in consideration for the young bride, for whom “the experience of sharing her bedroom with a man is sufficient of a shock to her previous maidenly habits” (“Wedding”), Craddock counseled delaying intercourse for one or several nights. Rather, by easing through levels of physical intimacy on successive occasions, the couple could avoid the “loss of sexual self-control, tigerish brutality, persistent rape of the wife’s person, and uncleanness” (“Wedding”) that characterized many marriages.

The primary goal of “Right Marital Living” was to provide instruction in how to suppress ejaculation and instead achieve the “sustained thrill” that awaited beyond orgasm. If both partners managed this, while simultaneously praying to God or otherwise “aspir[ing] to the highest” (“Right”), they would end up “soothed and tranquilized. And the next day, they should feel serene and more than usually clear-headed; they should feel as though they walked on air, and as though the world were full of brightness and joy” (“Right”).

Sex in “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living”

One way to describe these pamphlets is as sex manuals; while Willard’s and Woodhull’s public sexual discourse talked about marriage and sexual relationships, Craddock described exactly how married couples should have sex. Thus, intercourse or some issue related to the sex act occurred in nearly every paragraph. Both presented sexual intercourse, properly performed, as a source of pleasure, health, and increased affection between partners.

In “The Wedding Night,” Craddock explained how the husband and wife could start down the path to sexual health and pleasure. In addition to advising the couple to approach coition slowly over a period of several days, she discussed in detail the issue of breaking the bride’s hymen. Noting that “the custom of brutal rupture” (“Wedding”) of the hymen on the
wedding night was unnecessary and that only a brutish man not worthy of marriage would insist on the privilege, Craddock advised the bride to have a doctor snip the hymen with surgical scissors before the wedding. The alternative was to break the hymen during first intercourse, the groom “[using] gentleness, patience, and tender love making” and “refrain[ing] from genital contact until the bride is thoroughly aroused” (“Wedding”), thereby insuring an entrance both quick and relatively painless. Craddock also emphasized that the choice of method was completely up to the woman, not the man, and should be discussed prior to the wedding.

Next, Craddock addressed what the couple should do if intercourse was uncomfortable. She noted that successive attempts at intercourse would stretch the wife’s vagina eventually, and that total comfort could take several months to achieve. In the case of a true “matrimonial mismatch” (“Wedding”), in which either partner’s sexual organs were of an unusually large or small size, Craddock offered several suggestions and encouraged couples with continuing problems to consult a physician. An individual whose sexual organ varied greatly from the norm, according to Craddock, should give the other party notification in advance, so the couple could discuss the matter, visit a physician if they wished, and avoid “making a wreck of their lives” (“Wedding”).

Craddock’s insistence on sexual discussion within marriage did not end with “The Wedding Night.” In “Right Marital Living,” she advised couples to pause once coitus had begun and “exchange . . . intellectual ideas in conversation”:

Think and talk . . . of good books, pictures, statuary, music, sermons, plans for benefiting other people, noble deeds, spiritual aspirations. . . . Do not tell indelicate stories. Do not choose this time to worry over your household economies or business troubles. . . . intellectual blending at this time is, by a
Schaechterle 143

psychological law, one of the most effective means of welding the natures of husband and wife into a beautiful and perfect oneness.” (“Right”) Craddock’s insistence on discussion about intercourse and during intercourse exemplified the difference between her public sexual discourse and that of Willard and Woodhull. While both Woodhull and Willard advocated equality between men and women in love relationships, Craddock offered practical advice on how such equality could be achieved and maintained.

Another example of Craddock practically applying the general advice of others was her insistence that intercourse could be practiced for pleasure or for procreation. While Willard did hold that a wife should be the one to choose when to become pregnant, she did not address how the wife was to exercise that choice. Likewise, while making it clear that a woman should enjoy intercourse and should only become pregnant under the most favorable conditions, Woodhull did not elaborate a method for achieving that goal. In “Right Marital Living,” however, Craddock specifically drew a distinction between intercourse for procreation (parental function) and intercourse for pleasure (love function), stating that

. . . the love function may and ought to be exercised periodically, in order that both the husband and wife may have a healthy, well balanced physique and mentality. The parental function may remain for years unexercised, without harm to either husband or wife. (“Right”)

To fulfill this ideal, Craddock offered her method for suppressing ejaculation as a contraceptive method. She did make clear, however, that contraception was secondary to the higher purpose of achieving union with the divine through spiritualized intercourse. Craddock warned that for a man do otherwise than to fix his thoughts on “the very highest and grandest power in all the universe . . . First Cause, Unconscious Energy, Primordial Substance, Jehovah, Brahma, Allah,
God, the Ultimate Force, [or] the Divine” (“Right”) at the time of orgasm and suppressed ejaculation would harm his nervous system and perhaps enlarge his prostate gland.

Despite their frank sexual content, Craddock probably would have winced to hear her pamphlets called sex manuals. She referred to her work as “a gospel of marriage which is being preached by no other teacher in America” and promised that her teachings would make “married lives healthier, happier, holier” (“To the Public”). I believe “Gospel” was a key word to Craddock’s purpose in writing and sharing her texts. Just as Jesus combined spiritual teaching with practical advice to his disciples,48 Craddock combined her spiritualized vision of sexual intercourse with practical advice for implementation. Thus, she saw no anomaly in discussing how a wife should move during coition –

  riding your husband’s organ gently, and, at times, passionately, with various movements, up and down, sideways, and with a semi-rotary movement,

  resembling the movement of the thread of a screw upon a screw. (“Wedding”) – and then explaining how the inclusion of God in that act would render it holy. Censors, on the other hand, took great exception to Craddock’s combination of explicit language and religious themes. Many people, in fact, misunderstood her vision. Even her lawyer, defending her at trial for mailing “The Wedding Night,” said that “no woman in her right mind would publish such a work” (“Mrs. Craddock”).

Audiences

Craddock wrote “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living” for an intended audience of white, largely middle-class men and women who came to her work already interested in, or at least curious about, divine sexuality. She also wrote for an unwanted audience

---

48 For example, Luke chapters 8 and 9 (King James Version), in which Jesus tells the disciples not only what to preach, but how to preach.
of censors, resulting in five arrests and at least three convictions for sending obscene materials through the mail. Because Craddock offered classes at the Church of Yoga and private lessons in her office, she had face-to-face interactions with many of the people who purchased her pamphlets. Such personal contact likely contributed to the pamphlets’ friendly, conversational tone. It may also have contributed to the definite lack of rhetorical sophistication, however, and to Craddock’s apparent unwillingness to make her texts less objectionable to censors.

A trained secretary, Craddock made extensive typewritten notes of 56 clients who came to her for private instruction in her sexual method. These case notes were dated 1899 through 1900 and appear to cover interactions that occurred in Chicago and in Denver. From the notes, we know that Craddock’s lessons consisted of discussions of “Right Marital Living,” use of anatomical charts, and discussions of clients’ specific sexual problems. Several clients were referred to Craddock by their physicians. Other clients came after having obtained “The Wedding Night” or “Right Marital living” by mail order or after attending one of Craddock’s classes at the Church of Yoga. Some returned for multiple visits, sent their partners for visits, or were referred by relatives who had visited Craddock previously. Craddock’s case files reveal that this segment of her audience was of all adult ages (as young as 24 and as old as 80) but centered in “young middle age,” presumably late twenties through early forties. Professions that she noted included lawyer, barber, consulting engineer, physician, journalist, artist, factory worker, business college student, and school teacher. Slightly more men than women visited Craddock. Most clients were married, although some came to discuss sex they were having outside of marriage. A few clients were husband and wife pairs, although Craddock met with them separately.
Of course, Craddock’s audience was much larger than the 56 descriptions in her case notes, and many people who ordered the pamphlets through the mail could not, due to location, or would not in any circumstances attend a class or face-to-face lesson. However, because Craddock began offering classes and one-on-one consultations prior to or concurrently with her self-publication of “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living,”49 we may assume she held a very definite image of her face-to-face audience in mind when composing her texts. Moreover, we may assume that the texts reflected the attitudes and responses of Craddock’s class attendees and office clients. In fact, both texts lack smooth transitions between paragraphs and bear a rigidly sequential structure reminiscent of lecture notes. It is probable that both texts were based closely on Craddock’s actual oral lessons.

Because she assumed that her readers were already interested in her subject, Craddock made few appeals to audience. In the “The Wedding Night,” she addressed the groom in all but one paragraph specifically directed to the bride, and made frequent use of second person pronouns. Appealing to her male audience’s sense of decency, Craddock only used the second person pronouns in a positive sense, giving advice based on the assumption that the groom wanted to behave in an acceptable manner. For example, after advising the him to forego sexual intercourse on the wedding night, Craddock promised, “if you are patient and loverlike and gentlemanly and considerate and do not seek to unduly precipitate matters, you will find that Nature will herself arrange the affair for you most delicately and beautifully” (“Wedding”). When discussing unpleasant male actions, on the other hand, Craddock eschewed second person pronouns and spoke more generally. Thus, some brutal man might wish to rip through his bride’s hymen or “befoul his wedding night or his honeymoon” (“Wedding”) by ejaculating during

49 Green states that Craddock rented office space in 1898 (23); the publication dates commonly given for the pamphlets in question are circa 1900.
intercourse, but such a man was not, Craddock made clear by using third person pronouns, among her readers.

In addition to appealing to male readers’ sense of decency, Craddock appealed to her audience’s presumed Christianity. She did this in a brief discussion of divine sexuality, which she termed “yoga,” evidently hoping that Biblical references would make the foreign-sounding idea more acceptable. Thus, to support the suppression of ejaculation, Craddock quoted John 1:3 – “Whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin; for his seed remain in him” (“Wedding”). To support the notion of communing with God at the moment of orgasm, she quoted Genesis 6:9, writing that Noah was “perfect in his generations: Noah walked with God;” Craddock then added her own note that ‘walking with God’ meant during coition (“Wedding”). She also supported the inclusion of God in orgasm by noting Jesus’ commandment to “love God with all our soul and mind and heart, and with all our strength.” The effectiveness of these appeals to her audience’s Christianity may have been compromised by the fact that the quotations were placed as separate paragraphs, with no transitions or discussion.

“Right Marital Living” contained no similar direct appeals to audience, but that may have been due to a larger strategy of formal appeal. That is, where the overall voice of “The Wedding Night” was that of a benevolent teacher or aunt, “Right Marital Living” read much more like a textbook. Because Craddock distributed her pamphlets through the offices of doctors who approved of her teachings, and because she felt that “Right Marital Living” was the more important of the two pamphlets, her intended audience included both the educated layperson and medical professionals. Thus, Craddock assumed a neutral voice, employing first person pronouns only five or six times and second person pronouns not at all. She also quoted or paraphrased experts to support her points: “Dr. W. Xavier Sudduth, a well-known nervous specialist of
Chicago;” “Dr. Brown-Sequard;” and “Albert Chavannes of Knoxville, Tennessee, a writer on psychological subjects” (“Right”). Although stating that union with some idea of deity or divine was necessary in order to successfully suppress ejaculation and yet retain good health, Craddock did not employ Bible verses or Christian references to support her claim. Rather, she wrote that

This is not religious cant; it is not goody-goody talk; least of all is it idle sentiment. So far as my observations go, it appears to be a psychological *fact*[^50] that only in aspiration to oneness with the impulsive power of the universe, whether phrased poetically as “Nature,” or theologically as “God,” or scientifically as “Ultimate Force,” may the sexual orgasm be suppressed and finally controlled without harm to the health in the long run. (“Right”) 

In this way, Craddock presented her sexual ideology as a scientific ideal which different auditors could consider in different ways, but which none of them should shrug off as superstition or a passing fad.

In addition to her intended audience, Craddock’s texts were read by an unwanted audience of postal censors. Given that her awareness of that audience dated to 1893[^51], well before she printed and distributed “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living,” and that those pamphlets caused her repeated arrest, one might wonder why Craddock did not craft her texts with the audience of censors in mind. There are several possible reasons. First, Craddock saw her work as a deliberate defiance of Anthony Comstock and Comstock laws. After she moved to New York City, Comstock’s home, she stated in a letter to *The Clinic* that she would “face this wicked and depraved man Comstock in open court and . . . strike the blow which shall start the overthrow of Comstockism” (qtd Burton 14). Second, the very thing that made

[^50]: Craddock’s italics
[^51]: In 1893, the journal *Chicago Clinic* was declared unmailable due to Craddock’s article “The Danse du Ventre” (Burton 2)
Craddock’s texts so objectionable to censors, her explicit discussions of the sex act, were also what made her teachings unique. There was nothing in Craddock’s sexual ideology that was not promoted by one or more social reform groups, but by combining those ideals into a specific whole and providing practical instructions, Craddock created her own vision of sexual reform – a gospel that she alone was divinely ordained to preach despite official sanctions. Third, had Craddock wished to create pamphlets that communicated her oral teachings in a different manner, she simply may not have had the rhetorical skills to do so. Far from uneducated and a prolific writer, Craddock nonetheless did not have a solid education in rhetoric, as Willard did, or mentors in rhetoric, as did Woodhull. Rather, she labored on her own to bring her unique vision to an audience that she knew, from her face-to-face interactions, would benefit from her teachings.

Craddock’s Ethos: Situated and Constructed.

As author and distributor of “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living,” Craddock’s situated ethos included her gender, her marital status, and, in 1902, her arrests for violation of state and federal Comstock laws. Apart from her subject matter, for Craddock to speak publicly via pamphlet followed a women’s intellectual tradition dating back centuries. Additionally, depending upon the newspapers and journals in which she advertised, Craddock’s authority to speak on religio-sexual issues was well supported by her gender. Both spiritualists and free lovers accorded women authority to speak on such issues, and we know that Craddock advertised in free thought newspapers such as *Lucifer The Light-Bearer*.

Because she referred to herself as Mrs. Craddock, many readers of Craddock’s pamphlets no doubt assumed she was part of a traditional marriage. In the late Nineteenth Century, it would have been more correct for a married woman to address sexual issues than for a single woman to
do so. Titles of contemporaneous guides to contraception, such as The Habits of a Well-Organized Married Life: By a Married Woman and Young Married Lady’s Private Medical Guide (Brodie 180-184) illustrate the synonymy between marriage and heterosexual intercourse. On the other hand, Craddock’s spirit marriage was mentioned in the New York Times story of her suicide (“Chose Death”); whether Comstock and his postal inspectors knew of it earlier is unclear, but, owing to Craddock’s openness about her spiritual husband and the extent of Comstock’s campaign against her, I suspect so. The knowledge certainly would have added to his disapproval of Craddock’s pamphlets.

Although Comstock arrested Craddock in an effort to silence her, in the short term he achieved the opposite effect and boosted Craddock’s situated ethos. Craddock’s papers contain many letters dated after her initial 1902 arrest and trial that offered sympathy and support; many also requested copies of one or both of her pamphlets.

In terms of the audience of censors that Comstock represented, Craddock’s gender was probably not an especial liability, nor her lack of authority in terms of professional status. Comstock pursued male free lovers, including Lucifer The Light-Bearer publisher Moses Harmon, with equal zeal. He also charged medical doctor Alice Stockham with obscenity for distributing her works on sexuality and obstetrics, even though her views on marital intercourse were quite conservative (Burton 7-8).

The ethos that Craddock constructed in “The Wedding Night” and in “Right Marital Living” were quite different. In “The Wedding Night,” her ethos was constructed exclusively through tone of voice. Craddock made no claims for authority and referred to herself, using first person pronouns, less than a dozen times. Instead, she created a strong authorial presence of concerned good humor, the sort of voice one might associate with a kind teacher or beloved aunt:
“If the wedding day has been one of prolonged excitement, the most sensible thing that the bride and bridegroom can do upon retiring, is to go straight to sleep like two tired children” ("Wedding"). This effect was strengthened by a dialogic construction:

In the ideal honeymoon, the bridegroom will not seek genital contact until the bride herself shows indications of desiring it. “But she might never want it?” My dear sir, you must be indeed lacking in manhood to be unable to arouse sex desire in a bride who loves you with even a halfway sort of affection.

“How can this be done?”

Well, I think that the very first thing . . . .("Wedding")

However, while Craddock employed such dialog with the reader in three instances, she did not maintain it as a theme throughout the text. She depended more upon the overall tone of her authorial voice to create her ethos.

In “Right Marital Living,” Craddock did construct an ethos of authority. This authority, too, was supported by the authorial tone of voice, which was largely neutral and created distance between the writer and the reader. Craddock also created authority by introducing the research of professional men to support her claims. In one instance, that of Dr. Brown-Sequard, she criticized a portion of her source’s findings, thus entering the professional conversation as an equal:

. . . Dr. Brown-Sequard discovered that the voluntary suppression of the ejaculation of semen . . . strengthens a man and conduces to a long life (sic). He wrongly inferred, however, that the strengthening effect of this suppression was due entirely to the semen . . . (“Right”)
In addition to invoking the authority of others and entering into the professional conversation, Craddock briefly mentioned her own qualifications for promoting a religio-sexual ideology: “I speak from the standpoint of a teacher of over six years’ experience, when I insist to my pupils on the importance of aspiration to the highest during the marital embrace” (“Right”).

Looking at both pamphlets together, it is evident that Craddock did not fully understand, or did not attach importance to, constructed ethos. While each pamphlet was written in a distinct tone of voice, other strategies, such as dialog, citation of outside sources, and presentation of authorial expertise were applied unevenly. In addition to her lack of rhetorical training, however, a lack of concern with ethos may have other explanations. It is possible that Craddock relied on cues of interaction in her face-to-face consultations and adjusted her ethos for each individual accordingly; in other words, perhaps she had a greater understanding of ethos in person than in writing. Another possibility lies in Craddock’s sense of mission. As promoter of a divine gospel, she may have seen her duty as distribution of the word, rather than composition of the word itself.

Use of Enthymemes

Strictly speaking, Craddock did not make use of enthymemes in “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living.” This is not to say that she did not rely upon the sexual enthymemes of her time; Craddock subscribed to the common belief that masturbation was unhealthy and could be detected in person’s appearance and demeanor, for example (“Records”). Rather, Craddock did not employ or manipulate enthymemes as a rhetorical strategy to promote her ideas or sway her audience. In fact, in “Right Marital Living” Craddock used few rhetorical tropes or figures at all, employing example and simile once each, and seemed to rely on a straightforward, textbook-like construction to carry her arguments. In “The Wedding Night,” Craddock did
invoke the convention of romantic literature wherein stories concluded with the wedding. She began that pamphlet with exaggeratedly romantic prose that addressed the time after the wedding ceremony:

O, crowning time of lovers’ raptures veiled in mystic splendor, sanctified by priestly blessing and by the benediction of all who love the lovers! How shall we chant thy praise? Of thy joys even the poets dare not sing, save in words that suggest but do not reveal. At thy threshold, the most daring of the realistic novelists is fain to pause, and, with farewells to the lovers who are entering thy portals, let fall the curtain of silence betwixt them and the outside world forevermore. (“Wedding”)

These prose and their ideal presented a stark contrast to Craddock’s determination that the wedding night should be discussed in straightforward language, an effect she no doubt created on purpose, despite her habit of rough transition even when a jarring effect was not desirable. Craddock also used Biblical verses in “The Wedding Night,” thus approaching the idea of employing enthymemes of Christianity. That usage fell short, however, because the verses simply appeared between two paragraphs; Craddock did relate them to the surrounding text or manipulate them to support her argument in any way.

Style

Craddock’s style varied greatly between “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living.” The latter, intended for a combined audience of laypeople and medical professionals, was written in a neutral, straightforward manner, which Craddock felt suited her purpose. “The Wedding Night,” on the other hand, spoke directly to its audience of soon-to-be newlyweds and was meant to convey information in a gentle, comforting, and occasionally playful manner. In
that text, Craddock made freer use of tropes and figures, chiefly different types of repetition. In the seventh paragraph, for example, she employed anaphora in describing the newly married couple’s progression from church to bridal chamber:

Yet there is a more solemn moment to follow. It comes when the last kisses of mother and girl-friends have been given, and the last grain of rice has been thrown upon the newly wedded pair, and the last hack driver and hotel or railway porter have been gotten rid of . . . (“Wedding”)

In several instances, Craddock also used polysyndeton. For example, to describe how a new husband should ease his wife into lovemaking, she wrote: “Yet, if you are patient and loverlike and gentlemanly and considerate and do not seek unduly to precipitate matters . . . (“Wedding”). Yet another example of repetition was Craddock’s use of accumulation: “the feminine, womanly, maternal sensibilities of the bride” (“Wedding”). This use of figures of repetition, especially anaphora and polysyndeton, was evocative of fairy tales and other stories for children, and helped create the gentle tone of “The Wedding Night.”

“The Wedding Night” & “Right Marital Living”: Conclusion

Craddock’s self-published pamphlets, “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living,” promoted her unique religio-sexual ideology. Blending ideals of free love, social purity, and Far Eastern religions, Craddock wished to help married couples achieve happy and holy lives. This could be done if newly married couples eased into lovemaking and if all couples became comfortable talking about intercourse and during intercourse. Together, married men and women could work toward repressing orgasm and suppressing male ejaculation, thereby reaching the “sustained thrill” that happened beyond ordinary orgasm. If both partners put one another’s
pleasure first and contemplated the divine during coition, Craddock’s religio-sexual ideal would be achieved.

The audience for Craddock’s texts was white, largely middle-class men and women, including physicians who might pass her work on to their clients. Because Craddock conducted classes and one-on-lessons in addition to selling her pamphlets through the mail, she had a concrete idea of her intended audience. In her texts, Craddock made few appeals to that audience, presumably because her readers brought their own prior interest or curiosity to her work. In addition to her intended audience, Craddock also wrote for an unwanted audience of censors. Although she knew of their presence due to her multiple arrests for distributing obscene materials through the mail, Craddock did not modify her texts to make them more palatable to censors. It was possible that she intended to challenge censors or that she could not envision her gospel of divine sexuality in any other form; it was also possible that Craddock did not have the rhetorical skill to reimage her texts.

Craddock’s situated ethos included her gender, her marital status, and her arrests for violation of Comstock laws. Fortunately, each of these conditions enhanced her standing with her intended audience. While her audience of censors was most likely not concerned about her gender, they probably did know of her spirit marriage, increasing their negative view of Craddock’s ideals and of her sanity.

Craddock’s constructed ethos was different for either pamphlet. In “The Wedding Night,” she constructed an ethos of benevolent authority, similar to that of a teacher or aunt. In “Right Marital Living,” her ethos was one of professional authority. Both ethos were created largely through consistent tones of voice; other strategies were applied in a haphazard manner. It was
possible that Craddock did not fully understand constructed ethos, or that she did not feel it was important to her mission.

Overall, Craddock’s rhetorical style lacked sophistication, reflecting her lack of rhetorical education. She did not successfully employ enthymemes in either text, although she may have tried to do so in “The Wedding Night.” That pamphlet, as opposed to “Right Marital Living,” evinced her greatest use of stylistic techniques; Craddock employed several types of repetition to support the gentle, playful tone. Despite her general lack of rhetorical sophistication, however, Craddock’s pamphlets successfully communicated her determination to educate the public and her sympathy for her audience. Her readers responded, writing letters of thanks and encouragement. Craddock’s sexual ideology definitely filled a real need in the lives of her readers.

The Problem of Ida Craddock

The problems I discussed for Frances Willard and Victoria Woodhull were grounded in the ways they have been viewed by contemporary feminist scholars. Ida Craddock, however, has not been the subject of more than a few published works, and therefore no single problem presents itself. Craddock herself, however, was sufficiently anomalous in her public sexual discourse and her methods of dissemination, compared to the other sex reformers of her time, to warrant further investigation.

In the lengthy suicide note she addressed “To the Public,” Craddock compared herself to Socrates: “I consider myself justified in choosing for myself, as did Socrates, the manner of my death.” Indeed, the two shared several superficial similarities. Both were charged with preying on youth: Socrates was tried for corrupting the youth of Athens, while Craddock was arrested for mailing a pamphlet in response to a decoy letter supposedly sent by an underage girl (Craddock,
Letter to Pentecost). Craddock communed with spirits and experienced intercourse with Soph that brought her into the presence of the divine; Socrates heard a divine voice within himself (Philosophy), to which he referred in Plato’s “Phaedrus.” Both Socrates and Craddock were used by others to forward their own careers and promote their ideologies: Plato positioned Socrates as a character within his own works; Theodore Schroeder not only used Craddock’s suicide to promote anti-Comstockism, but published discussions of her texts and beliefs to support his own psychological theories. Engaging as these comparisons may be, however, I am not suggesting that Craddock was a latter-day Socrates. Rather, by applying some of the opinions of philosophy and rhetoric attributed to Socrates by Plato in his “Phaedrus” as a lens, I hope to come to a better understanding of Craddock’s gospel of sexuality and the end to which it led her.

Socrates told Phaedrus that “the real eternal absolute” exists, divine God which may be glimpsed by the soul of man (Plato 477, 483). Craddock believed that her sexual method would lead couples to union with the divine, the “very highest and grandest power in all the universe” (“Right”). Feeling that she had been appointed to share her divine revelation with others, Craddock composed “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living” as written guides; however, she preferred to share the guides and her teachings face-to-face through classes and one-on-one consultations for two reasons. First and most importantly, she could ensure that each client understood her teachings; in face-to-face conversation Craddock could explain, elaborate, or even rephrase something to make it more palatable. Thus, in consulting with an agnostic who “sniffed and pooh-poohed any reference to ‘God’ or the ‘Divine,’” Craddock instead talked with

---

52 “... the spirit and the sign that usually comes to me came—it always holds me back from something I am about to do—and I thought I heard a voice from it which forbade my going away before clearing my conscience ...” (Plato 459).

53 In the titles of his works, Schroeder variously referred to Craddock as Ida, Ida C., and Cadi. His texts included “Ida’s Theomania,” “Spiritualizing Sexual Insanity: Diary of Ida C.,” “Spiritual Joys by Cadi,” and “One Religio-Sexual Maniac” (Green 6-7).
him about “the Impulsive Power in Primordial Matter,” and “[got] him to listen without interpolating a joke” (“Records” case 2). By rephrasing the name of the Divine, Craddock fulfilled Socrates’ notion of Kairos, in which a virtuous rhetor makes “practical application of a certain kind of speech in a certain way to persuade his hearer to a certain action or belief” (Plato 553), something that cannot be done by a written text (Bizzell and Herzberg 81). Furthermore, rephrasing allowed Craddock to communicate her message without compromising its original meaning. She was able to preserve the spiritual, ethical, and moral components of her ideal, just as Socrates did throughout his dialog with Phaedrus. Thus, Craddock’s experience confirmed Socrates’ statement that the more important discourse is, the greater the need to share it orally with “a fitting soul” in “intelligent words” (Plato 569).

The second reason Craddock preferred to instruct face-to-face was because sending pamphlets through the mail put her in danger of prosecution under state and federal Comstock laws. In the case of such anti-obscenity legislation, text is misunderstood when separated from its author. I am not suggesting that, had Craddock verbally explained her teachings to him, Comstock would have revoked his designation of obscenity. Rather, in personal interactions Craddock could put her written text into the hands of its intended audience instead of mailing it; under Comstock laws, postal inspectors could intercept suspicious mail, even personal correspondence. Similarly, Craddock and many others who were prosecuted by Comstock, including Victoria Woodhull, could not be sure that a letter requesting to purchase a text truly came from a private individual and was not a decoy. Thus, due to both the complexity of her message and the threat of prosecution, Craddock most likely would have agreed with Socrates that
Socrates said in reply to Tisias, “a wise man ought not to undergo [the toil of learning the art of speech] for the sake of speaking and acting before men, but that he may be able to speak and to do everything, so far as possible, in a manner pleasing to the gods” (Plato 559). Craddock would have agreed that people must act in accord with the wishes of God, but her Christian background informed her that God was pleased by the spreading of God’s truth among mankind. Thus, when
Craddock wrote in her “Letter to the Public” that she was “teaching the duty and the joy of communion with God in the marriage relation so as to render it sacramental,”

she did not employ that religious terminology lightly. Craddock felt it was her duty to God and to her fellow men and women to share her “beautiful gospel” (“To the Public”). The postal system was simply the quickest way for Craddock to send her vital message to as many people as possible.

Craddock saw her mission not only as holy, but also as a God-ordained trial; she once said she felt akin to Moses “when the Lord told him to go and deliver the Israelites from Pharaoh” (Green 24). She referred to her teachings as a gospel; given the mission and the violent death of Jesus, the original gospels’ subject, and of some of the apostles and other early Christians, “gospel” can be a highly-loaded term. Perhaps Craddock felt that it was her duty to spread her word in defiance of the postal Pharisees despite the consequences; she wrote at one point that she had been “divinely led” to New York City to challenge Comstock and strike him down (Burton 13-14). Challenging Comstock meant sending her pamphlets through the mail.

Of course, Craddock was far from being the only sex reformer who took the risk of mailing information about sex and related issues. The information she conveyed and the language she used were, however, much more explicit than other marriage advice of the time. Dr. Alice Stockham’s Karezza, for example, supported a system of suppressed ejaculation very similar in its physical description to Craddock’s, yet Stockham used much more formal, euphemistic language to describe the act. Additionally, Craddock’s advice about sexual intercourse was unusually detailed. In “The Wedding Night,” she instructed brides to “perform pelvic movements during the embrace, riding your husband's organ gently, and, at times, passionately, with various movements, up and down, sideways, and with a semi-rotary

---

54 My italics
55 Date unclear, possibly 1895.
56 A common tern among Free Lovers for Comstock and his postal inspectors.
movement” (“Wedding”); this level of physical detail would not become common in marriage manuals until the 1920s (D’Emilio and Freedman 267). Craddock’s sense of humor in “The Wedding Night” was also unusual for her time. In a society just beginning to call for sexuality education in the home, speaking in public about sexual issues was serious business and public sexual discourse was expected to be quite somber. Craddock’s gentle, playful tone, however, was much more akin to that of The Joy of Sex, first published in 1979, or to the 1980s sexuality discourse of Dr. Ruth. Thus, not only did Comstock and his postal inspectors find Craddock’s pamphlets obscene, they no doubt also found them quite odd. In this light, one understands why Craddock’s own lawyer tried to gain clemency for her by saying in court that “no woman in her right mind would publish such a work” (“Mrs. Craddock”).

In addition to spreading her gospel as widely as possible and challenging Anthony Comstock, Craddock had a third reason for sending her “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living” through the mail. Despite her preference for face-to-face consultation, some of her male clients put her into very difficult positions. Two of them (and quite possibly more, since her case notes were not complete) seemed to think Craddock was some of sort of prostitute or procuress, and that enough money or hints would result in a sexual liaison. One enjoyed viewing the genital charts and requested a second viewing later the same day, which Craddock refused (“Records” case 18). This same man, “Cases 18, 20, 22,” and 25, returned to visit Craddock whenever he came to town, always requesting another look at the genital chart. He sometimes brought her gifts, such as a box lunch or a basket of fruit. In his presence, she wrote, she tried to maintain a “cool and scientific” demeanor (“Records” case 18). It is clear in each of these instances that, although Craddock handled the situation and avoided physical conflict or injury, she was intensely uncomfortable. The men themselves were obviously confounded by Craddock
in turn; in their experience, a woman met a man alone in a small room and accepted his money for one reason only.

The explicitness and humor of Craddock’s public sexual discourse, her determination to send it through the mail in defiance of Comstock and in obedience to God despite her own preference for face-to-face instruction, and the fact that some male clients misconstrued her purpose bring me back, once again, to Socrates. Socrates did not fit in among his fellow Athenians; his antidemocratic discourse was the underlying reason for his trial and death (Linder). In a similar manner, Ida Craddock seems to have been out of sync with her time. Her vision and the ways in which she fulfilled it set her apart, even among other late nineteenth-century reformers. As a spiritualist, or as a free lover, or as a social purist, Craddock could have fit in with one of the prevailing social movements of the late Nineteenth Century. As all three together and more – wife of a spirit husband, dedicated sex reformer, bearer of a gospel – she stood out, and largely stood alone.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: 19TH CENTURY PUBLIC SEXUAL DISCOURSE –
WILLARD, WOODHULL, CRADDOCK, AND WELLS IN CONVERSATION

Introduction

The purpose and scope of this study was to explore the public sexual discourse of three late nineteenth-century female reformers: Frances Willard, Victoria Woodhull, and Ida Craddock. “Public sexual discourse” signified reform-oriented text that explicitly or obliquely addressed vaginal intercourse between men and women and that was produced specifically for distribution to an audience via speech or publication. The four texts examined were Willard’s “A White Life for Two,” a pamphlet that included text from other of her pamphlets and from her speeches, Woodhull’s “Tried as by Fire,” a lecture delivered to paying audiences and reprinted in Woodhull & Claflin’s Weekly, and Craddock’s “The Wedding Night” and “Right Marital Living,” pamphlets for sale to face-to-face clients and through the mail. All texts presumed a white, male and female, heterosexual audience. My examination of each text was based in the general biographical information and the sexual experiences and opinions of each rhetor and was foregrounded against the social and reform climates of her time.

Before discussing the results of this study, I feel it is important to emphasize that public sexual reform discourse of the Nineteenth Century did not reflect actual sexual behaviors; rather, such discourse sought to impose desired ideologies (Deglar 88). Thus, the discourse of Willard, Woodhull, and Craddock did not necessarily represent what each woman, or their auditors, did sexually. Such discourse did, however, provide ideological systems against which an individual could measure his or her own sexual behavior (D’Emilio and Freedman 71-72). Thus, insofar as my results may be generalized as late nineteenth-century, female-authored, public sexual reform

57 Full terms and definitions for the study begin on page 60.
discourse, they do not represent actual sexual practices of the time or the full range of possible
sexual viewpoints embedded in their parent ideologies (free love, social purity, spiritualism,
Christianity, etc.).

The political conditions under which late nineteenth-century public sexual discourse
occurred should also be noted here. Beginning in 1872 and with increasing power throughout the
century, federal and state Comstock laws regulated much of the public discourse of sex. Because
all sexual language was by definition obscene, any reform discussion of sexuality could be
charged if it occurred in print and was mailed, and violators, regardless of their purpose in
mailing sexual discourse, could be sentenced to up to five years in prison at hard labor with fines
from $100 - $2000 (Document 58). Thus, although public discourse throughout the Nineteenth
Century presented women reformers with a number of socio-cultural challenges and
consequences, public sexual discourse in the final 27 years of that century carried legal penalties
as well. The subjects of this study made the decision to distribute their sexual discourses under
these conditions and were aware of the possible costs.

With these issues – the social meaning of public sexual discourse and the legal risks it
entailed – in mind, this chapter presents conclusions based on my examinations of the texts of
Willard, Woodhull, and Craddock. First, I discuss the continua proposed in chapter two.58 Next, I
construct a model of nineteenth-century women reformers’ public sexual discourse based on
points of agreement between the three rhetors. I then reinterpret that model using sexual
discourse that appeared in the contemporaneous anti-lynching rhetoric of Ida B. Wells and I
make a suggestion for further study. Finally, I position the study of nineteenth-century women’s
public sexual discourse within the larger endeavors of feminist historical rhetoric and women’s
historiography.

58 Pages 55-56.
Continua of Women Reformer’s Public Sexual Discourse

In chapter two, I claimed that placing the sexual discourses of Willard, Woodhull, and Craddock in dialog with one another via continua would allow me to construct complex descriptions of their speech. I proposed three continua: conservative speech to radical speech based on language use and cultural context; conservative speech to radical speech based on speech delivery; and degree of effectiveness in creating reform. I speculated the rhetors’ positions on these continua based on what I knew of them and of their reform speech before performing analyses of their specific sexual discourses. In this section, I examine the ways in which my analyses confirmed or reordered the rhetors’ positions.

On the first continuum, conservative speech to radical speech in terms of language use and cultural context, social purist Willard occupied the conservative pole, free lover Victoria Woodhull occupied the radical pole, and Craddock, representing a mixture of ideologies, stood between. Analyses of the rhetors’ public sexual discourse disrupted that arrangement, however. Willard, placing sex firmly within Christian marriage and employing sexual euphemisms, remained the most conservative of the three. Nonetheless, her revisions of Biblical enthymemes showed much greater radicalness than I had anticipated – in fact, all three rhetors supported their sexual reform arguments with religious interpretations that departed significantly from the mainstream protestant Christianity of their time.

Although Willard remained at the conservative end of this continuum of speech, Woodhull and Craddock exchanged places completely, with Craddock occupying the radical pole and Woodhull moving toward the center. Despite her claim to favor “plain, Saxon names,” Woodhull did not use anatomical terms to discuss sexual acts, whereas Craddock freely employed terms such as vagina, clitoris, ejaculation, and orgasm. Woodhull’s insistence on the
abolishment of marriage was a far more radical social position than Craddock’s spiritualized Christian marriage, but Craddock’s detailed advice of how to perform sexual acts was apparently much more alarming to censors. We have no report of Woodhull’s ideologically-based sexual discourse, mailed to readers of Woodhull and Claflin’s Weekly through 1877, being challenged or charged after her initial 1872 arrest for exposing the Beecher-Tilton affair. Craddock’s discourse was challenged at least five times. Thus, the frank, practical nature of Craddock’s public sexual discourse and the consequences it attracted placed her at the radical pole.

The second continuum arranged the rhetors in terms of radicalness of speech delivery. Willard occupied the most conservative position, embodying the “True Woman” expected by her more conservative audience. Woodhull, although her speech was much more dramatic than Willard’s in both delivery and ethos, occupied a position near Willard because both spoke to large audiences with the similar purpose of advocating general socio-cultural reform to large audiences. Craddock placed at the most radical position because her sexually-explicit text was delivered directly to the individuals it was meant to benefit. Additionally, delivering that particular text through the mail in the face of Comstock laws was a radical act. My analyses of the discourses left Willard’s and Craddock’s positions unchanged. Woodhull, however, moved closer to the radical end of the continuum. Speaking publicly to support herself and her extended family, Woodhull depended upon her notoriety to attract an audience and she enacted that notoriety in the content and presentation of her text. Also, Woodhull’s audience itself was more radical than Willard’s, composed largely of free lovers and spiritualists.

The third continuum described the effectiveness of the rhetors’ public sexual discourse in creating reform and had two constructions. In the first, effectiveness was equated with power to create and support social reform and, as president of the WCTU, Willard unquestionably
occupied the most powerful position. Woodhull was placed near Willard because her notoriety increased her ability to be heard and potentially to be effective in communicating her reform ideals. Craddock had the least power to create reform because she did not achieve fame (other than that associated with her final trial and suicide) and was not able to carry her sexual reform message to audiences beyond the individual. In light of my analyses, the construction of effectiveness based on power remained the same. The second construction of effectiveness in creating reform depended on inducing change in the lives of individuals. In this construction, Craddock was positioned as potentially the most effective because she worked one-on-one with clients and mailed her discourse to individuals who requested it. Based upon my analyses, however, Craddock would be joined in individual effectiveness, and perhaps even exceeded, by Woodhull. Woodhull obviously valued individual interactions and related several stories of her one-to-one reform interactions in “Tried as by Fire.” Even more significant, however, was the fact that Woodhull’s Midwestern and Western audiences found her discourse empowering. Individual auditors, especially women, began writing to Woodhull’s paper and to other free thought publications to discuss sexual and other life issues (Passet 104-107). Thus, while Craddock’s papers contain testimonials and thanks by readers of her pamphlets, Woodhull seems to have had a similar effect on individuals and to have reached many more people overall through public speaking and publication of Woodhull’s and Claflin’s Weekly.

These continua as originally constructed and as revised based upon my analyses of public sexual discourse are conjectural and descriptive only. That is, none of them can be supported by data in any scientific sense and a rhetorician other than myself might well interpret the rhetors’ public sexual discourses quite differently. This type of arrangement and rearrangement is important, however, precisely because of its uncertain and mutable nature; it fulfils Royster’s
call to “resist a drifting toward speedy claims, static conclusions, or overgeneralizations” (Traces 8). For example, arranging and rearranging Willard’s and Woodhull’s relative positions of radicalness of language and cultural context disrupts the free love/social purity dichotomy. While superficial classifications of free love and social purity facilitate general descriptions of nineteenth-century reform movements, maintaining the ideologies as polar opposites may hamper deeper understanding. Thus, although Frances Willard and Anthony Comstock have both been identified as leaders in the social purity movement, one could argue that Willard and Woodhull held more beliefs in common than did Willard and Comstock, including women’s right to choose when to have intercourse and when to become pregnant, an egalitarian ideal for love relationships, and belief in women’s power to create sexual reform. Royster also called for studying one person or group “in the company of similar descriptions of other[s]” in order to profit from a “concrete sense of human variety” (Traces 6). The continua provide a means to do just that – to examine each of these three rhetors “in company” with one another rather than as parallel cases.

**Nineteenth-Century Public Sexual Reform Discourse: A Model**

Frances Willard, Victoria Woodhull, and Ida Craddock identified themselves as social reformers and were involved in significant late nineteenth-century reform movements: social purity, suffrage, spiritualism, free love, and socialism. Although Willard and Woodhull represented somewhat conflicting ideologies and Craddock represented a unique mix of ideologies, they did agree on many issues. The points at which their beliefs intersected may be generalized into a model of nineteenth-century sexual reform discourse (see Table 1).

To create the model, I divided the issues of sexual reform into three categories: Women, Marriage, and the Sex Act; Women’s Sexual Rights; and Sexual Reform. Within each category
Table 1.

Model of 19th Century Women Reformers’ Public Sexual Discourse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women, Marriage, and the Sex Act</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Three Rhetors Agreed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Men hurt women through sexual violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Contemporaneous marriage could be harmful to women in a number of ways (physically, financially, reproductively, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Intimate female-male relationships benefited from a religious/spiritual aspect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Sexual education/discussion was necessary and appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two Rhetors Agreed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sexual intercourse belonged within marriage (Willard, Craddock)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sexual violence/rape occurred in marriage (Woodhull, Craddock)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discussions of sex should be carried out in plain terms (Woodhull, Craddock)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women’s Sexual Rights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Three Rhetors Agreed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Women should have the right to choose what happened to their bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Women should have the right to choose when to become pregnant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two Rhetors Agreed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Women could and should enjoy intercourse (Woodhull, Craddock)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sexual intercourse could be independent of pregnancy (Woodhull, Craddock)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Responsibility for pregnancy/prevention belonged to both partners (Willard, Craddock)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Reform</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual reform speech required some degree of radical religious belief</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual reform speech was delivered to large audiences and to individuals</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Three Rhetors Agreed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ The current state of female-male sexual relationships made sexual reform necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ Sexual reform would improve the entire culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two Rhetors Agreed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sexual reform was the first step toward a perfected citizenry and society (Willard, Woodhull)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Women’s sexual freedom would occur when they were no longer financially dependent on men (Willard, Woodhull)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Women were responsible for creating sexual reform and were better able to do so than were men (Willard, Woodhull)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

59 Although Craddock did not specifically state that plain or exact language use was necessary, her own use of explicit terms implied this opinion
are listed conditions or ideals about which all three rhetors agreed and conditions or ideals about which two rhetors agreed, based on their texts. Additionally, two points of intersection, marked by asterisks (*), are based on the revised continua discussed above. Individually held opinions were not included because they cannot be generalized toward a model of reform.

According the most generalizeable points of the model, nineteenth-century women reformers’ public sexual discourse was based on the perception that men sexually victimized women and that contemporaneous marriage could trap women into sexual, financial, and reproductive abuse. Sexual reform, in contrast, would protect women’s rights to control their own bodies within sexual relationships and to choose when to become pregnant. Reform would also encourage couples to form intimate relationships founded in supportive religious or spiritual belief systems, and those relationships would, in turn, improve the entire culture. Sexual reformers themselves held radical religious beliefs relative to the protestant Christian norm. One integral component of sexual reform was sexuality education and discussion. Sexual reformers practiced this component, delivering their public sexual speech to large audiences and to individuals.

The model’s secondary points explicate the major points and illustrate areas of disagreement between the rhetors. For example, all three agreed that marriage could be harmful to women. Willard and Craddock would have solved the problem by improving marital relationships, while Woodhull would have solved it by abolishing marriage all together. Similarly, while all three found reasons to criticize contemporaneous marriage, it fell to Craddock and Woodhull to recognize that husbands raped wives. One intriguing feature of the secondary points is illustrated by Craddock’s appearance in both explications discussed here. In the sections titled “Women, Marriage, and the Sex Act,” and “Women’s Sexual Rights,”
Craddock always appears as one of the two rhetors, paired with either Willard or Woodhull. That in itself does not surprise, since Craddock incorporated tenets from social purity and free love into her personal ideology. In contrast, however, in the secondary points section of “Sexual Reform,” the paired rhetors are Woodhull and Willard exclusively. Despite the fact that these women may be constructed as polar opposites – Willard’s virtue vs. Woodhull’s promiscuity, Willard’s social purity vs. Woodhull’s free love, Willard’s fame vs. Woodhull’s infamy – the women agreed on three idealistic concepts. Both socialists, Willard and Woodhull envisioned perfected societies resulting from sexual reform. Both also held an elevated essentialist view of women, believing that women must be responsible for creating sexual reform and were better able to pursue such reform than men were. Finally, both women agreed that women’s sexual freedom depended upon on their ability to earn a living, a fundamental tenet of American feminism. It must be noted that Craddock’s absence from this conversation did not necessarily indicate her disagreement with these ideals; Craddock’s public sexual discourse was centered in relationships between individuals, whereas Willard and Woodhull addressed larger social issues. Craddock’s beliefs aside, however, the fact that Willard and Woodhull, despite their many differences, agreed on the shape and results of sexual reform indicates that their matching ideals were a significant aspect of nineteenth-century women reformers’ public sexual discourse and could well merit elevation to primary points within the model.

Public Sexual Discourse and Uses for the Model

Public sexual discourse was an integral feature of the late nineteenth-century reform landscape. Just as women’s social and legal standing at that time was inexorably bound to their sexual and reproductive capacities, so too did many reform efforts center on issues of women’s sexuality. Thus, seemingly polar arguments, such as the sexual autonomy advocated by free
lovers and the sexual restraint promoted by social purists, were founded in similar concerns for the well-being of women and families and sought to solve, in their different approaches, the same social ills. More importantly, however, in addition to similar goals the women examined in this study shared a set of foundational views and spoke from positions of radical religious belief relative to the American protestant Christian norm of their time. Willard and Woodhull also agreed, despite their allegiance to different ideologies, on several aspects of the larger project of women’s sexual reform. Craddock’s lack of agreement on these issues should not be construed as rejection, but rather as a matter of scope; Woodhull and Willard addressed wider ideological issues while Craddock worked within the smaller, personal space.

Based on these findings, it is clear that public sexual discourse was a discrete component or genre of nineteenth-century women’s reform rhetoric. Often aligned with suffrage, temperance, social purity, free love, and other reform movements of the time, public sexual discourse nonetheless was based in a distinct set of premises that was shared across the spectrum of participating rhetors’ reform ideologies and yet was not, as a set, necessary or foundational to participation in those other reform ideologies or efforts. Thus public sexual discourse, like suffrage, temperance, and other reform speech, may be separated or winnowed away from the larger topic of nineteenth-century women’s reform for examination and theorizing.

I believe that the model presented in Table 1 will help us to further explore women reformers’ public sexual discourse, not only in the late nineteenth-century American East and Midwest, but in other times, among other regions and socio-economic classes, and among non-white women as well. A first step, however, might be to examine the reform speech of rhetors who, though similar to the three women discussed in this study, did not discuss sexual relationships in any overt or recognizable manner. That is, just as Willard’s “A White Life for
Two” would seem, at first glance, to have little to do with sexual intercourse, other women reformers’ speech on other topics may fit the model and reveal previously uncovered elements of sexual reform discourse.

In addition to using the model to further explore women reformers’ discourse, I hope that my colleagues in women’s rhetoric will revise, reimagine, reinterpret, and redefine the model and the assumptions that underlie it. It is only through encountering one another’s work in a spirit of curiosity, respect, and, yes, academic rigor, that we as feminist scholars can fulfill the promise of a (rather than the) women’s rhetorical canon. In that spirit, then, I offer my own interrogation of the model, a comparison between the public sexual discourse of Ida B. Wells and that of Willard, Woodhull, and Craddock.

Interrogating the Model: Ida B. Wells’ Public Sexual Discourse

Ida B. Wells is one of the most widely recognized Black women reformers of the late Nineteenth Century. Co-owner and publisher of the weekly Memphis, Tennessee newspaper Free Speech, she began her international anti-lynching campaign in the spring of 1892 (Royster, Southern 1). In an editorial printed on May 21, Wells reported the lynching of eight Black men in the week since the last issue was printed. After describing the victims and the circumstances, she commented on “the old threadbare lie” that such lynchings were punishment for raping white women:

If Southern white men are not careful, they will over-reach themselves and public sentiment will have a reaction; a conclusion will then be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women. (qtd Royster, Southern 1)

This early implication that white women willingly engaged in sexual intercourse with Black men was amplified in Wells’ later anti-lynching discourse. Because rape of white women was a
justification for lynching that otherwise liberal whites might accept, Wells tried to dispell the myth of Black-white rape. One way she addressed the problem was to research and report who was lynched and why. In “A Red Record,” published in 1892, Wells listed the allegations used to justify lynching, including burglary, arson, and insolence, to show that rape was very often not the charge (Royster, Southern 29). In the cases where rape was the allegation, she reported evidence showing that many of the sexual encounters were consensual and that some had been long-term (29). In doing so, Wells produced a pointed critique of white female sexuality.

The purpose of this section is to examine samples of Wells’ public sexual discourse concerning white women and Black men and to apply the results to the model of women reformer’s public sexual discourse already constructed. The samples are taken from two of Wells’ pamphlets, “Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All its Phases” and “A Red Record,” both published in 1892:

[This statement of facts] will serve at the same time as a defense for the Afro-American Sampsons who suffer themselves to be betrayed by white Delilahs. (Wells, “Southern Horrors” 53)

White men lynch the offending Afro-American, not because he is a despoiler of virtue, but because he succumbs to the smiles of white women. (Wells, “Southern Horrors” 54)

In numerous instances where colored men have been lynched on the charge of rape, it was positively known at the time of lynching, and indisputably proven
after the victim’s death, that the relationship sustained between the man and woman was voluntary and clandestine . . . (Wells, “Red” 79)

In addition to these comments, Wells also related specific incidences of Black men being punished for consensual relationships with white women. In these stories, the white woman typically either did not dare object to the lynching of her partner, or accused her partner of rape to protect herself from scandal. For example, the wife of an Ohio minister accused a Black man of rape and the man was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Later, the woman confessed to her husband that she had initiated the alliance and that intercourse had taken place on several different occasions. After the first time, she “could not have resisted and had no desire to resist” (Wells, “Red” 121). She had later accused the man of rape for three reasons: she was afraid the neighbors might have seen him visit the house in her husband’s absence; she thought she might have contracted a sexually transmitted disease, and she was afraid she might have become pregnant (120-121). In other words, when the sexual liaison could no longer remain clandestine, the white woman claimed it was the result of force in order to protect herself. As Wells pointed out repeatedly in her pamphlets, a white women’s word would always be accepted over that of a Black man.

Through her comments and stories, Wells created a definite image of white women’s sexuality. In this portrait, white women enjoyed sexual intercourse and actively sought it, even to the point of seduction. Occupying the position of power within a sexual relationship, white women would sacrifice their partners’ well-being in order to preserve their own. In some ways, this depiction confirmed aspects of the Willard’s, Woodhull’s, and Craddock’s sexual ideologies. Wells’ white woman obviously enjoyed sexual intercourse, a benefit claimed for women by Woodhull and Craddock. Given the social ramifications of bearing a mixed-race baby, Wells’
white woman must have mentally separated sexual intercourse from procreation, again confirming Woodhull’s and Craddock’s ideologies. Finally, a white woman having consensual intercourse with a Black man was exercising choice in the disposition of her body, a right claimed for women by all three rhetors. In a single, highly significant aspect, however, Wells’ white woman differed sharply from that agreed upon by Willard, Woodhull, and Craddock. Their white woman was never the sexual aggressor, but rather suffered at the hands of men; men hurt women through sexual violence and also by wielding certain social and legal powers over women. This construction of women as sexual victims was absolutely foundational to the public sexual discourse of all three rhetors. Women’s victim status and men’s sexual aggression created the need for sexual reform and provided a counterpoint for Craddock’s image of perfected sexual relationships and Woodhull’s and Willard’s perfected societies. In a very real way, then, Wells’ sexually aggressive, sexually selfish white woman not only threatened the three rhetors’ sexual views, but their world views as well. And more than that, Wells’ white woman challenged the underpinnings of entire social reform movements: social purity, free love, spiritualism, and suffrage arguments based on expediency were all heavily invested in the purity and selflessness of white women.

It is doubtful that Woodhull, Craddock, or Willard would have welcomed any description of white women’s sexual relations with Black men as support for their own ideologies, and Willard emphatically rejected Wells’ claims for white women’s sexual aggression and sexual enjoyment relative to Black men. Their public sexual discourse was built on assumptions, laws, and personal experiences rooted in white, middle-class, heterosexual, Northeastern and Upper-Midwestern culture; comparison to Wells’ depiction of Southern white women’s sexuality
confirms the regional and racial centeredness of the three rhetor’s discourse and of the model based upon it.

I am aware that in briefly using Well’s anti-lynch law texts to critique the model of nineteenth-century sexual reform discourse, I have simplified her arguments and elided the greater part of her work. A more detailed study of Wells’ public sexual discourse and its depictions of white and Black women’s sexuality is needed. Also necessary is a larger study of nineteenth-century Black women reformers’ public sexual discourse, which might exist as discreet texts or may be embedded in discourses of women’s rights, civil rights, mob violence, self-help, or racial uplift. Such studies would provide a new point of comparison between white and Black women reformers’ perceptions, agendas, and rhetorical strategies, and would contribute to the atmosphere of conversation and critique that is central to feminist rhetorical inquiry.

**Why Public Sexual Discourse: Revisiting the Goals of the Study**

The goals for this study were threefold. First, in addition to creating a model that might be useful in future investigations of women’s public sexual discourse, I hoped that analyzing the sexual discourse of Willard, Woodhull, and Craddock would fill in a neglected area of nineteenth-century women’s reform speech and allow me to draw connections between seemingly disparate social movements and between feminist projects across time. This goal has been met. Together, chapters three, four, five, and the model of nineteenth-century women reformers’ public sexual discourse illustrate the central position that women’s sexual rights held within the larger reform discourses of the time. Although they disagreed about the ways to achieve women’s sexual parity, all three rhetors clearly felt that improving women’s status in their most intimate relationships was a primary step toward improving their status overall. This
accord between Willard’s depiction of passionless marriage, Woodhull’s call for fluid sexual partnership in the pursuit of better regeneration, and Craddock’s step-by-step guides to sustained thrill beyond orgasm demonstrates the strong, underlying similarities between social purity, free love, and spiritualism. It also highlights core resemblances between three very different women, the strongest of which were their sheer determination to effect reform and their belief in a perfected future.

The explication of nineteenth-century women reformers’ public sexual discourse also allows comparisons across time. The second wave of feminism was based in issues of sexual and reproductive freedom: contraception, co-habitation, marriage, abortion, sex education, sex work, child care, reproductive health care, lesbianism, divorce, rape. This study reveals that women’s sexual and reproductive freedom was just as central to feminist discussion nearly a century earlier. It also provides an intriguing view of nineteenth-century female reformers as sexual beings. The media-saturated second wave of feminism was often transparent in this manner, but earlier feminist figures, especially single women, have typically been portrayed as asexual. This view has been belied not only by the sexual opinions and experiences section of chapters three, four, and five, but also by each rhetor’s insistence that improving female-male intimate relationships was foundational to creating wider reform.

The second goal of this study was to position nineteenth-century women reformers’ public sexual discourse as a lens for examining women’s other public reform speech of the time. I reasoned that, because public sexual speech presented additional challenges to women’s speech acts in a time that overtly valued women’s public modesty, examining women’s sexual speech might reveal specific rhetorical strategies or pitfalls that could later be used to study women’s public speech in general. Overall, I feel that my analyses failed to reveal a distillation of reform
speech. Willard, Woodhull, and Craddock employed, or failed to employ, rhetorical strategies commonly used by contemporaneous women speaking on any subject. Additionally, Craddock’s persecution by Comstock was not at all unique among sexual reformers, female or male. There is one area, however, in which women’s public reform speech might shed light on nineteenth-century women’s rhetorical practices in general: considerations of audience. For all three rhetors, successful reform speech depended on matching the type and manner of their discourse to their audience. Thus, Willard employed a conservative demeanor and style, Woodhull a dramatic demeanor and style, and Craddock a practical demeanor and style. Each rhetor’s tone, ethos, and message was calibrated to audience expectations. And more than that, Willard’s and Woodhull’s audiences had formed strong expectations of the rhetors prior to the speech act, based on the rhetors’ fame/notoriety. In this respect, Willard was as much of a showperson or entertainer as Woodhull, in each speech act trading on past reputation as much as on current rhetorical skill and message. In terms of nineteenth-century women reformers’ public discourse in general, then, it might be enlightening to study conscious acts of performance as they related to rhetor reputation, audience expectations, and rhetorical success.

The third goal of this study was to contribute to feminist historiography by using each rhetor’s public sexual discourse to explore a larger issue about her life or work. I feel I was most successful in my exploration of Willard’s reputed racism and her position as a Schlafly-esque definer of other women’s proper sphere. My examination of Willard’s text and of her sexual opinions and experiences allowed me to address those issues from a fresh perspective and to at least partially resolve them. In contrast, my ultimate analyses of Woodhull and Craddock were more rhetorical than historiographic in nature. Overall, however, I feel this study has contributed much to both feminist historical rhetoric and feminist historiography by exploring a neglected
facet of nineteenth-century women’s reform speech. First, by focusing specifically on each rhetor’s sexual opinions and experiences and her sexual reform text(s), I revealed aspects of their characters and belief systems that had not been previously conjectured. Additionally, the model of public sexual discourse I created revealed intriguing areas of agreement between Willard and Woodhull, women who have become iconic for their adherence to very specific, opposing reform discourses.

I believe another significant achievement of this project was my examination of Ida Craddock’s discourse. Because very little work has been done on Craddock, any study of her life or work represents a noteworthy contribution. More germane to this study, however, was the way in which Craddock combined practical, face-to-face reform with the dissemination of her sexual ideology. It could be argued that Craddock’s emphasis on reaching the individual limited her voice and diminished her effectiveness in promoting social reform, especially in comparison to Willard and Woodhull. Another way to view Craddock’s methods, however, is as part of “the forms, strategies, and goals used by many women as ‘rhetorical’” (Lunsford 6). From this perspective, we could position Craddock’s public sexual reform discourse as an area ripe for feminist study precisely because, unlike the discourse of Willard and Woodhull, it eschewed the masculine-identified public arena and utilized the feminine realm of personal interaction to promote radical reform for women.

I feel also that Craddock’s ideology, drawn together from a wealth of social and religious movements, as well as her determination to pursue reform independently of a guiding organization, can tell us much about the everywoman of late nineteenth-century reform. First, Willard, Woodhull, and other much-discussed female leaders aligned themselves with discreet reform ideologies at least in part to more easily communicate their reform messages. From the
auditor’s perspective, knowing in advance that a particular rhetor was affiliated with the social purity movement, or the free love movement, or the suffrage movement contributed to his or her understanding and acceptance (or rejection) of the discourse. It is likely that the footsoldiers of reform, however, built and enacted their personal ideologies as Craddock did, piecemeal from complementary and even conflicting movements. These women then went out to perform practical reform work independently, as Craddock did, or under the banner of a larger social effort. In this respect, Craddock represented a much larger aspect of nineteenth-century women’s reform than her own actions and ideology would indicate.

**Final Comments**

Throughout this project, I have been continually surprised, amused, and awed by the words, actions, and accomplishments of Frances Willard, Victoria Woodhull, and Ida Craddock. Like these women, I, too have self-identified as a social reformer. In my time with Planned Parenthood of Northern Nevada, I wrote and disseminated public sexual discourse, worked face-to-face with clients, and represented Planned Parenthood’s ideology through public speech before live audiences and on television and the radio – yet I know that I performed less work, at less personal risk and for much more pay, than each of these women performed in an equivalent period of time. And I did my work, in part, simply because Planned Parenthood paid me to do it. Willard, Woodhull, and Craddock, however, dedicated themselves to promoting significant reforms on behalf of American women, reforms from which twenty-first century women continue to benefit. By speaking publicly about sexual reform issues they assumed an additional burden, one that created social ostracism for Woodhull and, for Craddock, resulted in premature death. All three pursued their work in a culture that was, at the very least, ambivalent about
women’s public discourse and actively hostile toward wage-earning women, yet they persevered. It has been an honor to walk this path in their company.
Works Cited


----- Letter. Lucifer the Light Bearer. 10 Aug 1901, 5.27: 239.


Southworth, Dr. F.W. Prescription. Ida Craddock Papers. Special Collections Research Center, Morris Library. SIU-Carbondale.


APPENDIX A

“The Wedding Night” *

“Right Marital Living”*

*Taken from <ww.idacraddock.org>, a website created and maintained by Ordo Templi Orientis U.S. Grand Lodge.
THE WEDDING NIGHT

By Ida Craddock

Oh, crowning time of lovers' raptures veiled in mystic splendor, sanctified by priestly blessing and by the benediction of all who love the lovers! How shall we chant thy praise?

Of thy joys even the poets dare not sing, save in words that suggest but do not reveal. At thy threshold, the most daring of the realistic novelists is fain to pause, and, with farewells to the lovers who are entering thy portals, let fall the curtain of silence betwixt them and the outside world forevermore.

What art thou, oh, night of mystery and passion? Why shouldst thou be thus enshrouded in an impenetrable veil of secrecy? Are thy joys so pure, so dazzling, so ecstatic, that no outside mortal can look upon thy face and live?

Or art thou a Veiled Prophet of Khorassan, and, under thy covering of silver light, a fiend, a loathsome monster, a distorted and perverted semblance of what thou dost profess thyself to the world?

Whatsoever thou art, it were well, methinks, that the veil, for a moment, were lifted from thee, that the young and ignorant may see thee as thou art, and, seeing, be not misled by thy glamour to their own undoing, but keep the higher law when they shall have entered thy radiant doors.

When the last stanzas of the wedding march have died away, and the bride, in shimmering white, places her hand in that of the bridegroom and pledges herself to be his wife "until death do part," a shiver of awe stirs the audience, as a field of wheat is stirred by a strong wind. An uncomfortable feeling pervades us all during these few moments, for it is felt to be a solemn occasion; and when the final words of the marriage service have been pronounced, every one feels relieved.

Yet there is a more solemn moment to follow. It comes when the last kisses of mother and girl-friends have been given, and the last grain of rice has been thrown upon the newly wedded pair, and the last hack driver and hotel or railway porter have been gotten rid of, and the key is turned in the bedroom door and the blinds drawn, and the young girl, who has never been alone in a locked room with a man in all her life, suddenly finds herself, as though in a dream, delivered over by her own innocent and pure affection into the power of a man, to be used at his will and pleasure. She, who has never bared more than her throat and shoulders and arms to the world, now finds that her whole body, especially those parts which she has all her life been taught it was immodest to fail to keep covered, are no longer to be her own private property; she must share their privacy with this man.

Fortunate indeed is the bride whose lover at such a moment is a gentleman in every fibre of his being.

For there is a wrong way and there is a right way to pass the wedding night.

In the majority of cases, no genital union at all should be attempted, or even suggested, upon that night. To the average young girl, virtuously brought up, the experience of sharing her bedroom with a man is sufficient of a shock to her previous maidenly habits, without adding to her nervousness by insisting upon the close intimacies of genital contact. And, incredible as it may sound to the average man, she is usually altogether without the sexual experience which every boy acquires in his dream-life. The average, typical girl does not have erotic dreams. In many cases, too, through the prudishness of parents--a prudishness which is positively criminal--she is not even told beforehand that genital union will be required of her. I once talked with a young married woman, the daughter of a physician, well educated, and moving in cultured society, who had been allowed to marry at the age of 20, in entire ignorance of this. She remarked to me: "I think the relation of husband and wife is something horrid. I knew, of course, before I married, that married people had children; but I supposed that God sent them babies, and that that was all there was about it. I was never told about the physical relation." Her husband was so lacking in self-control as to make her pregnant on her wedding night.
And her experience is but one out of thousands.

In the ideal honeymoon, the bridegroom will not seek genital contact until the bride herself shows indications of desiring it. "But she might never want it?" My dear sir, you must be indeed lacking in manhood to be unable to arouse sex desire in a bride who loves you with even a halfway sort of affection.

"How can this be done?"

Well, I think that the very first thing for you to bear in mind is that, inasmuch as Nature has so arranged sex that the man is always ready (as a rule) for intercourse, whereas the woman is not, it is most unwise for the man to precipitate matters by exhibiting desire for genital contact when the woman is not yet aroused. You should remember that that organ of which you are, justly, so proud, is not possessed by a woman, and that she is utterly ignorant of its functions, practically, until she has experienced sexual contact; and that it is, to her who is not desirous of such contact, something of a monstrosity. Even when a woman has already had pleasurable experience of genital contact, she requires each time to be aroused amorously, before that organ, in its state of activity, can become attractive. For a man to exhibit, to even an experienced wife, his organ ready for action when she herself is not amorously aroused, is, as a rule, not sexually attractive to her; on the contrary, it is often sexually repulsive, and at times out and out disgusting to her. Every woman of experience knows that, when she is ready, she can cause the man to become sexually active fast enough.

If this be so with the wife who has had pleasurable experience in genital contact, how much more must the sight or touch of that apparent monstrosity in a man shock and terrify the inexperienced young bride!

Yet, if you are patient and loverlike and gentlemanly and considerate and do not seek to unduly precipitate matters, you will find that Nature will herself arrange the affair for you most delicately and beautifully. If you will first thoroughly satisfy the primal passion of the woman, which is affectional and maternal (for the typical woman mothers the man she loves), and if you will kiss and caress her in a gentle, delicate and reverent way, especially at the throat and bosom, you will find that, little by little (perhaps not the first night nor the second night, but eventually, as she grows accustomed to the strangeness of the intimacy), you will, by reflex action from the bosom to the genitals, successfully arouse within her a vague desire for the entwining of the lower limbs, with ever closer and closer contact, until you melt into one another's embrace at the genitals in a perfectly natural and wholesome fashion; and you will then find her genitals so well lubricated with an emission from her glands of Bartholin, and, possibly, also from her vagina, that your gradual entrance can be effected not only without pain to her, but with a rapture so exquisite to her, that she will be more ready to invite your entrance upon a future occasion.

If the wedding day has been one of prolonged excitement, the most sensible thing that the bride and bridegroom can do upon retiring, is to go straight to sleep like two tired children. On waking in the morning, the first marital endearments may suitably take place, and will be found conducive to the exchange of sexual magnetism which will strengthen and refresh. Indeed, you should never, never allow genital contact to be attempted when either of you is physically weary or mentally fagged out.

If you are accustomed to the use of tobacco and alcoholic drinks, it is to be hoped that you will have sufficient self-control and consideration for your bride to abstain from them at least upon your wedding night. Not only are their odors, especially when stale, disgusting to any woman of delicate sensibilities, but the use of either or both will go far toward coarsening your emotional relations toward her on that occasion.

The effect of alcohol will be to lessen the co-ordination among your nervous ganglia, accentuate your prominent weaknesses (this, too, at the very moment when you wish to appear especially manly in her eyes!) and inhibit your powers of self-control.

The effect of tobacco always is to deteriorate the moral and emotional sensibilities through its capacity for blunting sensation.
Do you wish to be truly a man upon the wedding night? Then forego both tobacco and alcohol upon that occasion and for a long time previously.

Do not, upon any account, use the hand for the purpose of sexual excitation at the bride's genitals. There is but one lawful finger of love with which to approach her genitals, and this is the male organ. Even where there is a hymen whose orifice requires to be gradually enlarged in order to effect a painless entrance, the male organ, and not the finger, should be employed, lest a masturbative response be set up in the bride at the outset, which would be most unfortunate.

Bear in mind that the more gentle, slow and lingering your entrance, the more passionate will be the response of the bride. Also, the more readily will you yourself attain to the sexual self-control inculcated in my RIGHT MARITAL LIVING.

As to the clitoris, this should be simply saluted, at most, in passing, and afterwards ignored as far as possible; for the reason that it is a rudimentary male organ, and an orgasm aroused there evokes a rudimentary male magnetism in the woman, which appears to pervert the act of intercourse, with the result of sensualizing and coarsening the woman. Within the duller tract of the vagina, after a half-hour, or, still better, an hour of tender, gentle, self-restrained coition, the feminine, womanly, maternal sensibilities of the bride will be aroused, and the magnetism exchanged then will be healthful and satisfying to both parties. A woman's orgasm is as important for her health as a man's is for his. And the bridegroom who hastens through the act without giving the bride the necessary half-hour or hour to come to her own climax, is not only acting selfishly; he is also sowing the seeds of future ill-health and permanent invalidism in his wife.

A woman's clitoris is sometimes hooded, which, of course, is an unnatural condition, and is apt to result in sexual coldness on her part, or, at best, in a stunted sex desire. Here a physician should be appealed to, as the clitoris can be freed from its hood by circumcision; and the earlier that this is done in a girl's life the better for her health. Many a girl infant, it is now maintained by some physicians, is nervously deranged by the existence of such a hood, and would be restored to health by its circumcision.

Some woman have an abnormally long clitoris, which it is impossible not to engage during coition, and such women are usually sensual, and lacking in the ability to prolong the act. In extreme cases the excision of such a clitoris may be beneficial; but it would seem preferable to first employ the milder method of suggestive therapeutics, and for the wife to endeavor to turn her thoughts from the sensation induced at the clitoris to that induced within the vagina, which is the natural and wholesome sensation to be aroused in a woman.

Do not expend your seminal fluid at any time, unless you and the bride desire a child, and have reverently and deliberately prepared for its creation on that especial occasion. Your semen is not an excretion to be periodically gotten rid of; it is a precious secretion, to be returned to the system for its upbuilding in all that goes to emphasize your manhood. It is given to you by Nature for the purpose of begetting a child; it is not given to you for sensual gratification; and unless deliberate creation be provided for by both of you, it should never, never be expended. This however does not mean less pleasure, but more pleasure than by the ordinary method of sex union. As to the details of how such sexual self-control may be exercised during coition, and without harm to the nervous system, you can learn these from my pamphlet on RIGHT MARITAL LIVING.

I would add that the habit of using a wife as a convenience for a man's easing himself of a fluid which is looked on as an excretion, is chiefly responsible for the widespread idea that the sex relation is unclean, and for the growth of Comstockism, with its baneful efforts at suppression of all enlightening literature upon the details of coition as being "obscene, lewd, lascivious." The sex relation is indeed unclean, when made use of by a man for the purpose of easing himself of a supposed excretion; and the details of such a union are truly "obscene, lewd, and lascivious." No bridegroom of any delicacy of sentiment will want to thus befoul his wedding night or his honeymoon. But when the higher law is known and kept --- that of genital union in self-control and aspiration to the divine --- the sex relation at once becomes refined and spiritualized, and the morbid ideas about its being impure cease.
When you are performing your movements, do not indulge in the thought of how much you are enjoying them; rather dwell, in thought, upon how much pleasure you are giving to your bride, and study carefully every movement with reference to its pleasure-producing effect upon her.

Also, to the bride, I would say: Bear in mind that it is part of your wifely duty to perform pelvic movements during the embrace, riding your husband's organ gently, and, at times, passionately, with various movements, up and down, sideways, and with a semi-rotary movement, resembling the movement of the thread of a screw upon a screw. These movements will add greatly to your own passion and your own pleasure, but they should not be dwelt in thought for this purpose. They should be performed for the express purpose of conferring pleasure upon your husband, and you should carefully study the results of various movements, gently and tenderly performed, upon him.

We human beings are so constituted that when we seek happiness for ourselves, it eludes our grasp. But when we seek to make other people happy, happiness comes and abides with us. If each will seek to give pleasure to his or her wedded partner, the bliss of each will be greatly intensified. Especially will this be so if God be included in this pleasure-giving partnership, along the lines which I have laid down in RIGHT MARITAL LIVING.

The custom of brutal rupture of a woman's hymen on the wedding night, and, too often, the consequent tearing of the walls of the vagina, with attendant pain and loss of blood, is wholly unnecessary. The bride elect should go to a physician some little while previous to the wedding and if their be a hymen of any toughness, have it snipped by a pair of surgical scissors. This will not be painful, and the hymen, which is a membrane attached to the walls of the orifice, will soon shrivel away, being now but a piece of dead skin. It would be advisable, however, for the woman to let her future husband know that she intends to do this, for the reason that there exists a popular superstition to the effect that the presence of the hymen is a proof of virginity. On the contrary, it is not a true test of virginity, for many women never had any hymen, and others have lost theirs when children, by romping. Also, prostitutes are on record as having had a hymen which deceived physicians into thinking them virgins. Nevertheless, because men still ignorantly hold to the popular superstition about the hymen, it is prudent for the bride elect to state her intention ahead of time. Some men with brutal instincts feel themselves defrauded of their rights if the bride's hymen be not there, unbroken, for them to rupture. Of course, no intelligent, self-respecting woman would feel herself bound to accord a husband such a right, if she knew beforehand all the pain and suffering which the exercise of his supposed prerogative would involve. (I know of one case where a bride was confined to bed for six weeks with abscesses in her vagina, because of her husband's brutal manner of effecting entrance on the wedding night.) And if the bridegroom-elect be the sort of a man who claims this as his conjugal right, perhaps it would be as well for the bride to find it out before she marries him.

But, of course, the natural instrument for effecting entrance is the bridegroom's organ of penetration, and, if at all possible, it should be employed in preference to any other. Even where there is a fairly tough hymen, if the bridegroom will use gentleness, patience, and tender love making, and refrain from genital contact until the bride is thoroughly aroused, it will usually be found that she will, upon genital contact, instinctively bear down so quickly and effectively that the dreaded entrance will be all over within a moment. Allay the bleeding by the use of water as hot as can be borne, dipping therein a wad of clean absorbent cotton, squeezing it out, and placing the wad up between the lips of the bleeding orifice.

It should be the privilege of the woman, and not of the man, to choose between these two methods.

Another thing which often causes unnecessary suffering to the bride at first is the smallness of her orifice, as compared with the bridegroom's organ, especially if the latter be unusually large. Like a glove which is a trifle small in the fingers, however, this disparity in size can be overcome by successive attempts at entrance, provided, also, that the parts be anointed with some simple ointment, such as petrolatum, cosmolene, or vaseline. Do not use an ointment containing unknown ingredients, as there may be a harmful drug among them. Nature will, indeed, furnish a natural lubricant in the woman's own emission after awhile, but at first it is well to have the ointment at hand. Do not be in a hurry; be patient. In some cases, it may take months for the parts to become fitted to one another, but the result is worth the trouble.
Many and many a divorce dates its beginning to the ignorance or the lack of consideration shown by one party for the other in the nuptial chamber. And those who think to render marriage pure and holy by keeping our young people ignorant of the functions and proper management of their bodily organs, are the ones directly responsible for such divorces.

The following out of the above directions is of especial importance where the organs of the bride and bridegroom are so ill-matched as to make what is termed "a matrimonial misfit." Sometimes the man's organ, which in a state of activity should be about six inches in length, is much longer and proportionately large; and if the woman's orifice and vagina chance to be unusually small, great suffering will result unless one party or the other has been cautioned and knows what to do. In a case where the organ had attained a phenomenal length, the man married a young woman of average proportions, and almost killed her upon the wedding night. Fortunately, the family physician, to whom the suffering bride referred her case, insisted that the husband should wear a pad, made as a ring, which prevented the entrance of the organ beyond a certain distance; and the couple are now living happily and have had several children. In other cases the man's organ is small, like a little boy's, so that entrance is an impossibility. Such a husband simply arouses and excites his wife, without being able to afford her the normal sexual satisfaction. Or, again, the organ, while of average length, may be slender, and the woman's orifice and vagina unusually large, so that his organ does not completely fill it, and this also often fails to result in full satisfaction to the woman. In the latter case the male organ can sometimes be enlarged by electrical treatment. But I think that where the organs of either party depart very greatly from the average size, the party who is abnormal in size one way or the other is committing a great wrong upon the other party not to give due notification of his or her abnormality in advance. Such notification, if given to the family physician, could be acted upon by him and advice which in many cases would greatly lessen the annoyance of the matrimonial misfit, and preserve both parties from making a wreck of their lives.

It is possible that much could be done by suggestive therapeutics to gradually adapt the organs of such ill-matched couples to one another. Intelligent control of the subconsciousness, and, through it, of the sympathetic nervous system, at a time when the sexual organs of both parties are excited and engorged with blood, ought to be able to effect very marked changes in the tissues of these organs.

I here use the term "suggestive therapeutics," because this is a term which does not jar upon the orthodox medical ear. But the method may also be called applied psychology, or mental science, or divine science, or yoga. The phraseology adopted by these several schools of thought varies: so, also, does some of the philosophy taught; but the scientific process is essentially the same in all.

To the average uninstructed man or woman, there is no apparent relation between the honeymoon and that philosophy which I prefer to call "yoga." And yet, if yoga were properly understood and practiced in the marital embrace by every newly married couple, their sex life would be, from the start, so holy, so healthy, so happy, that they would never care to descend to the methods commonly practiced among married people today---methods which involve loss of sexual self-control, tigerish brutality, persistent rape of the wife's person, and uncleanness.

The word "yoga" is a Sanskrit word which means "union." It comes from the same root as our English word "yoke," i. e., that which unites. It has been used for centuries by Hindu occultists and metaphysicians, to signify the philosophy which teaches mankind to enter into that state of oneness with the Divine which will secure them both spiritual bliss and power over their bodies and over material things. To what a wonderful extent this yogic power can be carried is only beginning to be dimly apprehended by us in America, here and there, among students of the "higher thought." But the Orientals have known of it for centuries.

"Whosoever is born of God," writes the Apostle John, in the third chapter of his first Epistle, "doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

Paul (I. Thess. Iv.) admonishes: "This is the will of God, * * * that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor; not in the lust of concupiscence [unlawful desire of carnal pleasure], even as the Gentiles which know not God: * * * For God hath not called us unto
uncleanness, but unto holiness." In Gen. Vi. We find that Noah is especially praised because he was "perfect in his
generations: Noah walked with God" (evidently, during coition).

In my RIGHT MARITAL LIVING I emphasize the importance of thought union with the Divine, Central Force of
the universe as the third partner during the sexual embrace. This is physiologically of importance because, without
such union, it is impossible to fully control one's mentality, the orgasm, which always begins on the mental plane,
and which is partly worked out on that plane; and if the orgasm be not fully controlled, it is dangerous to the man
to attempt to suppress the ejaculation of semen at this moment, as such suppression is apt to result in an enlarged
prostate gland, or in damage to the nervous system in various ways.

But there is another reason for union with the Divine during the act; it is that one thereby enters into fuller harmony
with the universe, giving and receiving sexual pleasure, in a way undreamt of without such union.

Moreover, it is a duty--a courtesy, if one may use such a term in this connection---which we owe to that wonderful,
all-pervading Force in whom we live and move and have our being.

Take, for instance, the case of a child to whom you give a box of bonbons. If the child has been properly brought up,
the first thing it will do, after thanking you for the gift, will be to open the box and share the goodies with its little
brothers and sisters, and its father and mother: then it will come to you, the giver, and offer to share them with you,
and insist, sweetly, that it will enjoy them ever so much more if you will eat just one or two also. This is the right
thing, the courteous thing, the loving and altogether fitting thing for a child to do on such an occasion.

Now the Lord has given each one of us a box of delicious sexual bonbons, and, for my part, I think it is little enough
that we can do, to offer to share one or two of these bonbons with the Giver. It would seem, at least, common
courtesy on our part to do so.

"But," you object, "the Ultimate Force which we call God is impersonal, and does not experience sexual desires or
passions."

Indeed ! Then, may I inquire, my friend, whence you received your own sex desires? Do you suppose, for one
moment, that there is any attribute of your being which is not an inherency of the First Cause?

Is there, indeed, anything in all the universe, even your own capacity for individual, personal liking for a given man
or woman, which can be conceived of as not inherent in the First Cause?

Therefore the First Cause, the Ultimate Force, impersonal though it be, must be inherently capable of sexual feeling
and of individual personal attraction to any given creature.

The Ultimate Force of the universe must, of necessity, be both masculine and feminine in its inherencies. As
masculine essence, it should be thought of as entering through the man's organ during the sexual embrace, giving
pleasure and receiving pleasure from the wife. As feminine essence, it should be thought of as residing within the
wife's body (the temple of the Holy Spirit) at the vagina and uterus, riding the man's organ, giving pleasure and
receiving pleasure therefrom. Thus, the experience is shared with God in every possible way, and is sanctified and
glorified.

Remember that Jesus said that the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all our soul and mind and
heart, and with all our strength.

No bridal couple who have once shared the joy of a controlled orgasm and sustained thrill with God will ever care to
leave God out of the partnership in future.

The Oriental occultists claim that a prayer breathed at such a supreme moment of self controlled and rapturous union
with Deity is sure to be granted. This is because such a process is a divinely ordained way of so displacing the
psycho-physical threshold of sensibility as to enter into the most perfect communion with the Spirit of God which is known to us earthly beings. When the inward self realizes its oneness with the Ultimate Force of the universe, it will ask only for what it is right it should receive; and, as the Divine Scientists insist, all power is ours, when we rise in thought to oneness inwardly with the Divine Central Force.

Only that wedding night, only that honeymoon in which spiritual communion with the Ultimate Force of the universe forms part and parcel of the sexual act, is truly blest.

-THE END-
RIGHT MARITAL LIVING

By Ida Craddock

In the marital relation, there are two physiological functions—the love function and the parental function. These two functions are not always exercised conjointly. There are also two sets of organs for these two functions, respectively.

For the parental function, in the woman, the organs are the ovaries and the uterus (the womb); in the man, they are the testicles and the vesiculae seminales. The organs of the love function are those which contact—the erectile organ in man; the vulva (the external genitals) and the vagina in woman. The uterus, however, also seems to be with many women a love organ; for, during the final ecstasy, where the man's organ in not sufficiently long to touch it, the uterus frequently descends into the vagina, as though seeking contact. It is probably that the uterus is intended by nature to always take part in the culmination of the act; but this, it will be observed, is merely as an organ of contact. When the uterus becomes a receptacle, it is then a parental organ.

The love function may and ought to be exercised periodically, in order that both husband and wife may have a healthy, well balanced physique and mentality.

The parental function may remain for years unexercised, without harm to either husband or wife.

It is popularly supposed that the love function should never be brought into play without at least an abortive attempt at exercising the parental function. That is, when the love organs of husband and wife have been brought into contact, it is supposed that the man's creative semen ought to be ejaculated, even though a child begotten at that time would be brought into the world under the worst possible circumstances—circumstances which would result in its being born a pauper or an idiot, or predisposed to drunkenness or insanity or criminality. To this mistaken belief (namely, that an attempt at parenthood should always terminate sexual intercourse)—a belief rooted in the popular mind by centuries of wrong living—the well-being of the future generation is daily sacrificed.

Of course, preventives to conception are always wrong. And there never yet was a preventive invented which is certain. Moreover, they are all forbidden by law; and to sell a preventive, or to lend it, or to give it away, or to state where or how it can be procured, is to commit an offense which, if known to the authorities, renders the party liable to a heavy fine or imprisonment, or both. Most preventives are distinctly injurious to one or both parties at the time; many are said to injure the tissues of the woman later on. If used, they put no check upon passion; and they are, all of them, abominable and degrading. The condoms, womb veils and pessaries, by interposing a foreign tissue between the genital organs of husband and wife during the act, render the relations masturbative for both parties. So do the various suppositories, which, by dissolving, cover the walls of the vagina with a coating of foreign substance. The syringe, by driving the spermatozoa nearer the mouth of the uterus, often helps along the very thing it is intended to prevent; and some physicians claim that, as it must be used while the tissues are still engorged, the shock is injurious to the woman. It likewise detracts from the delicacy of the conjugal act, for people of refinement.

Withdrawal is an act of onanism; it is unhealthy and morally degrading. And men who habitually practice it are apt to carry the sign of their unclean habit marked on their faces and in their manner, for all knowing people to read. The popular fourteen day period (two weeks after the menses) is decidedly not a sure preventive, as a woman can become pregnant at any time in the month; and it is unnatural to have intercourse at the time in the month when the wife least desires it. Such coition tends to make her loathe the performance of her conjugal duty.

All these methods are degrading; they all coarsen what should be a pure and exquisite attraction; and at any moment they may fail to prevent conception, and will then, through the wife, stamp the child with unwholesome tendencies, mental perversions, or physical deformities.

Yet, to refrain from exercising the parental function (the ejaculation of creative semen) during coition, and to exercise only the love function (that is, the function of prolonged genital contact which mutually refreshes, stimulates and upbuilds the entire nervous system) is popularly supposed to be either unhealthy or impossible.
This is because, for many, many centuries, men have been perverting the natural functions of their sexual organism, until that which is really the best way has come to seem impossible to the many, and unwise to the few who have learned that it is not impossible. I refer to the suppression of the ejaculation of the semen upon all occasions, except at the time when the creation of a child has been prepared for by both husband and wife.

Let us remember that the seminal fluid is bestowed by Nature upon man for one purpose only—the creation of a child. It is quite true that Nature, in order to secure the propagation of the race, surrounds the act of creation with all sorts of allurements. If it were not so, people would seldom take the trouble to beget children. But the semen itself is given, not for mere sensual gratification, but for a creative purpose. To turn it aside from its natural purpose is to live wrongly as a husband. Also, to create children at random and by the wholesale, or in an environment unsuitable for either the mother or the child, is a degradation of the holy power of fatherhood.

If, then, the semen has been bestowed by Nature on man for the one purpose of creation, it is wrong to sow any seed in a woman after the child has begun to develop, for it is unnecessary, and is a waste of precious material. Now it is usually necessary to wait for over four months after the seed has been sown, in order to determine with certainty whether or not it has germinated. It is true that physicians do sometimes make fortunate guesses much earlier; but it is safer to wait until four or four and a half months shall have elapsed, by which time not only will the child have quickened, but also it will have become possible for a physician, by means of a stethoscope, to hear the child's heart beat. The latter is held to be the one sure sign by which to determine the existence of pregnancy; and if the educated ear of the physician distinguishes the quick beating of the child's heart then, separate from the slower beat of the mother's heart, of course there will be no further need for seed-sowing at that time. To persist in sowing seed during the remaining months of pregnancy is a violation of natural law.

It is true that a woman is sometimes more amorous during pregnancy than at other times, owing to the swollen condition of the uterus, which induces excitement at the genitals, so that she craves sexual satisfaction. Just as when a woman, during pregnancy, craves a peach or other wholesome food, she should be allowed to have it, so if she craves sexual intercourse during pregnancy, she ought to be allowed to have it; but only in moderation, and with care not to press upon the uterus, either from without or from within, in such a way as to injure the growing child. Of course this should not be made an occasion for seed-sowing. Genital contact should take place only for the purpose of interchanging sexual magnetism.

During the nursing period, it is unwise to unduly excite the mother sexually, as it is apt to render the milk feverish, and this will injuriously affect the infant. And to render the mother pregnant while nursing, as is sometimes done, is cruel to her and to both children.

And, surely, a little child is entitled to the care of its mother during the first two years of its life, is it not? Now, everyone knows that the care of a mother for a young child is likely to be interfered with, if she is undergoing the nervous fluctuations of pregnancy.

This brings the time for a man's abstaining from ejaculation of semen up to two years and nine months—say, in round numbers, three years. But he may have sexual intercourse with his wife during that time, if he will refrain from ejaculating the semen.

It is popularly, but mistakenly, supposed that the semen is an excretion which a man needs to get rid of periodically. But the reverse is the truth. "The male semen," says Dr. W. Xavier Sudduth, a well-known nervous specialist of Chicago, "is an acknowledged tonic, ready prepared for absorption into the system." Every expenditure of semen means a loss of nerve energy. Instead of its being thrown forth upon the slightest emotional provocation, it should be reabsorbed through the lymphatic vessels which are so abundant in the walls of the vesiculae seminales and the vas deferens, in order that it may circulate in the blood throughout the entire body, nourishing the vocal organs which make a man's voice deep and masculine, nourishing the roots of the beard, building up brain and nerves, and intensifying his virility and manly bearing....

Some years ago, Dr. Brown-Sequard discovered that the voluntary suppression of the ejaculation of semen, just at the last moment, strengthens a man and conduces to long life. He wrongly inferred, however, that the strengthening
effect of this suppression was due entirely to the semen, thus returned to the body; whereas it seems to be largely due to the mental act of self-control in accomplishing the suppression, which thus acts as a tonic for the nervous system.

An impression prevails among both physicians and the laity, that to exercise the organs of the love function without also at least an abortive attempt on the man's part at exercising the parental function, will be prejudicial to his nervous system, and, consequently to his health. That is, that it is dangerous to suppress the ejaculation of semen during coition. This may be true, if the act of suppression be performed merely as a means for bodily, sensual enjoyment. It is not true, however, if the mentality (which, in its turn, as we all know, governs the nervous system) be kept in a state of serenity and exaltation, so that the inner spiritual forces may be brought into play.

It is a medical dictum that the nervous system regulates the bodily functions, and that those functions are perceptibly affected, for better or for worse, according as the nervous system itself is in good or in bad working order. Now, the nervous system is controlled by the inward self of the person—if he so desires.

Take the matter of blushing. A blush is caused by a mental state of embarrassment, of mortification, of exhilaration, or of passionate feeling. This mental state acts upon the nervous system; the nerves act upon the capillaries; the capillaries call the blood to the face and the face gets red. Children reddens easily with very slight provocation; but, as they grow older and, with advancing years, more self-controlled, they tend less and less to crimson uncomfortably under trying circumstances. People sometimes explain this by saying that a grown person has become "less sensitive." What has really happened is, that the grown person, little by little, has learned to resist any suggestion on the part of his mentality that there is something to get red in the face about. That is, he has found out how to control his mentality in this particular, and, through the mentality, his nervous system, and through the nervous system, the capillaries, so that he need no longer blush, when to do so would render him annoyingly conspicuous.

The self-control which people usually learn to exercise in the matter of blushing, may be extended to other bodily functions, in many surprising ways. But, in order to do this intelligently, one needs to understand how important it is to have one's mentality well under control. It is important, because it is impossible for us to issue our commands directly to our bodies. All commands must be issued to the Mentality, and, through Mentality, be transmitted to the nervous system, which, in its turn, regulates the bodily functions. Thus, if we wish our hand to move, we may say, "Hand, move!" and we may keep on saying this to all eternity, but our hand will never move until we think, "I wish my hand to move!" That is, we practically say to our Mentality, "Mentality, I wish my hand to move!" Thereupon, Mentality transmits, with more or less accuracy (according as we have trained it well or ill), our command to the nervous system; the nerves act upon the muscles; the muscles contract and the hand moves.

If we wish the hand to perform a difficult piece of music on the piano, we must earnestly and resolutely give instructions to Mentality over and over again, until Mentality gets so well trained, that our slightest suggestion is sufficient to cause Mentality to attend to the muscular exercise of our hands with thoroughness and nicety, like a well drilled servant, leaving our inward and higher self meanwhile free to occupy itself with other thoughts, if we so desire.

What can be done (through Mentality) in enabling the hand to master a difficult piece of piano music, can be done similarly with other muscles of the body, especially with those which participate in the sexual embrace; but it must be by controlling Mentality.

The orgasm, according to Dr. Sudduth, "represents the height of nervous tension; it is a mental and physical act combined, which it is impossible to accomplish on a purely physical plane."

Control Mentality, therefore, from the plane of the higher, inward self, and you can control the orgasm (the ecstasy, or final thrill) which is set going by Mentality.

How can this be done?
There are three steps in the process:

(1) Total suppression of the orgasm itself when it is still afar off.

(2) Going gradually nearer and nearer to the verge, and stopping at the last moment, without the orgasm, and consequently, without ejaculation of semen.

(3) Going right through the orgasm, with the controlled and sustained thrill, but without any ejaculation of the semen; unless it be desired to create a child at that especial time, when the semen may be ejaculated at will.

The first step (total suppression of the orgasm) is accomplished thus: Just before the last thrill which precedes ejaculation, all motion on the part of both husband and wife should be promptly desisted from, and, on the man's part, the thoughts should be completely turned away from the bodily sensations, and fixed on something beyond and above the body.

If he believe in God, let him pray to God at that moment, not only consecrating his body to God and praying for strength, but also asking God to be the third partner.

If he be an Atheist and a Materialist, let him seek, in thought, to be in harmony at that moment with Nature, with the Ideal, the Beautiful, the True; with the Ultimate Force, the Unconscious Energy of the universe....

I speak from the standpoint of a teacher of over six years' experience, when I insist to my pupils on the importance of aspiration to the highest during the marital embrace. Many a libertine stumbles upon this possibility of suppression of the orgasm, and, with it, the suppression of the ejaculation of semen, and practises it for awhile, only to find at last that he has wrought great harm to his nervous system, and has, possibly, also enlarged his prostate gland. But the libertine seeks mainly sensual gratification, and when he prolongs the act by suppression of the orgasm, it is with the thought of increased sensual, bodily pleasure distinctly in his mind. He would be the last person to think of praying to God at that moment, or seeking to enter into harmony with Nature, or trying to turn his thoughts, during sex union, resolutely toward the Ultimate Force or the Unconscious Energy of the universe. And so, being ignorant of the psychological law which works upon his body during sex union, he fails to establish healthy thought currents along his nerves. It is because the sexual orgasm is a mental, as well as a physical act, that it becomes so important at that time to have the mentality well under control of the inward, spiritual self--that inward self which all deeply religious people feel to be a part of God. I therefore most earnestly urge the masculine reader, when he takes his thoughts away from the bodily sensation just before the last thrill comes which precedes ejaculation, to fix them, not upon something on the bodily plane, but to lift his thoughts to that which he considers the very highest and grandest power in all the universe, call it by what name he will--First Cause, Unconscious Energy, Primordial Substance, Jehovah, Brahma, Allah, God, the Ultimate Force, the Divine.

This is not religious cant; it is not goody-goody talk; least of all is it idle sentiment. So far as my observations go, it appears to be a psychological fact, that only in aspiration to oneness with the impulsive power of the universe, whether phrased poetically as "Nature," or theologically as "God," or scientifically as "Ultimate Force," may the sexual orgasm be suppressed and finally controlled without harm to the health in the long run.

The first step--total suppression of the orgasm while it is still afar off--is quite easy, although it may seem difficult to the man who has never tried it. But he will speedily find, if he does take his thoughts away from the bodily sensation and aspire to the highest just before the last thrill comes which precedes ejaculation, that the tendency to ejaculate will subside. The erection will not subside immediately; and presently the movements may recommence.

The second step--going gradually nearer and nearer to the verge, and encouraging the orgasm, while he still suppresses the ejaculation of semen, and yet stopping at the last moment without an orgasm--is much more difficult. But the experience of mastery of the first step will help greatly in this. And let it be always borne in mind that the second step is merely a half-way house on the rod to the controlled orgasm and the sustained thrill. It should never be considered as an ultimate act, but merely as a step in the training for self-mastery. Just in proportion as he masters
this second step, will he be enabled to experience the controlled orgasm and the sustained thrill in a satisfactory manner. The second step is to be conquered in the same way as was the first step.

In the third step he should pass through the orgasm without ejaculating the semen, but with the full enjoyment of the final thrill, and in union with God, or Nature, or the Ultimate Force. It is to be mastered in the same way as were the first and second steps.

"The intense pleasure of the orgasm," says Albert Chavannes of Knoxville, Tennessee, a writer on psychological subjects, "is not, as it is usually supposed, due to the ejection of the semen. While they are coincident, it is quite possible for men to prevent, by the use of will-force, the emission of semen at the time of the orgasm.... The enjoyment of sexual intercourse is due to the generating of a current of sexual magnetism, created by a certain degree of affinity between the parties, and increased by friction. When this current has become sufficiently strong, and a certain amount of magnetism has accumulated around the sexual organs, an overflow—orgasm—takes place, which, in obedience to inherited tendencies, sends a magnetic current to the testicles and causes a discharge of the seminal fluid. It is Nature's method to procure conception.

"Magnetation is the application of the power which man possesses of controlling this overflow, preventing it from taking its usual course and causing the usual discharge, and compelling it to take another direction. That direction is the dissemination of the magnetism through the system of both the man and the woman, the woman assimilating the magnetism of the man and the man that of the woman. Magnetation requires for its successful practice self-control, affinity and union of purpose, but under right conditions it permits the full enjoyment of the overflow without the weakening influence of the emission.... Magnetation is the art of regulating the course taken by the overflow of sexual magnetism. Uncontrolled, it goes to the testicles and causes an emission. Controlled, it diffuses itself through the organism."

The cleaner the thought and the more aspiring the impulse which prompts a man to seek the sex union which culminates in what I call the third step, the more satisfying to him physically, mentally and spiritually will this third step be. Those who seek only sensual pleasure therein are likely to be disappointed every time. But those who resolutely lift their thoughts to the spiritual plane at this time will experience thrills of physical rapture which they can experience in no other way....

I have spoken of the duty of the husband to practise self-control and aspiration to the highest throughout the act. It is also the duty of the wife. She, also, has her own three steps to master:

(1) Total suppression of her orgasm, when it is still afar off. This is to be mastered in the same way as the man was directed to master his first step.

(2) To go gradually nearer and nearer the verge of her orgasm, and, just as her vagina is about to take it spasmodic hold upon the male organ, to stop resolutely, and refuse to allow that hold to be taken. This will doubtless seem cruel at the time; but it must be remembered that it is merely a step in the training for self-mastery. It is to be accomplished in the same way as was the first step.

(3) To go right through the orgasm, allowing the vagina to close upon the male organ. Keep self-controlled, serene, tranquil, and aspire to the highest. Pray to God, if you believe in God and in prayer; if not, think steadily and quietly what a beautiful thing it is to be at that moment in harmony with Nature in her inmost workings, and rejoice that you and your husband are part of Nature, pulsating with her, and according to her law. Rejoice that Nature at that moment feels through you also, and through your husband. Feel love, love, love, not only for your husband, but for the whole universe at that moment.

Remember that sex union between husband and wife is, according to the Bible, a divinely appointed ordinance ("the twain shall be one flesh"). And people who consider it impure are likely to reap little satisfaction in this third step.

"The pure in heart shall see God."
While the man's ejaculation of semen should be totally suppressed, yet there should be, throughout the act, an oozing of fluid from the male organ, which is probably intended as a lubricant, to assist it in effecting entrance easily, and also to render it more sensitive.

There should also be an emission from the woman, which acts as a lubricant, and which, mingling with the male fluid referred to, appears to form with it a sort of electro-chemical fluid which enables sexual magnetism to be interchanged with more intensity to both parties. Without this emission from the woman, she is likely to experience comparatively little pleasure.

For a wife to submit to genital union with her husband when she does not desire it, is to degrade herself so that she has no call to draw her garments aside from the harlot in the street. Indeed, the wife who allows her body to be used as a convenience for her husband has degraded herself below even the harlot. For the harlot leases her body for ten minutes of for two hours of for a night, and she is free to refuse embraces which displease her, but the wife leases her body for a lifetime, and she mistakenly imagines that she dare not refuse any embrace of her husband's, however repulsive to her finer sensibilities. And so, year by year, she coarsens and degrades the holy estate of matrimony, and paves the way for begetting children who shall be at least the children of a slave mother, if not also tainted with bestial propensities on the one hand, or, on the other hand, impressed during the nine months of pregnancy with an unnatural loathing for what was intended by Nature to be a pure and wholesome relation.

A great mistake is made by wives in consenting to genital union without previous lovemaking on the husband's part. A man is always ready for sex union; a woman is not, although she may frequently be aroused by lovemaking. This is Nature's indication that it is the woman, and not the man, who should indicate when union is desirable; and also that lovemaking should precede all attempts at coition....

It usually requires from twenty minutes to a half hour of affectionate caresses upon any given night, to arouse a woman to the point of desiring genital contact. If, at the end of a half hour of tender and reverent lovemaking, she shows no signs of desiring genital union, her feelings should be respected.

Comparatively few men realize that, while a man is a sexual animal, a woman is not, but is a maternal animal. The normal woman desires to mother the man she loves--to hold him in her arms, close to her bosom, and to caress him thus, without genital contact. She likes, also, to be held by him, and to exchange sexual magnetism with him on the affectional plane, without genital contact. For there appears to be a secondary sexual centre somewhere in the breast, near the heart, so that husband and wife may, in one another's arms, without genital contact, interchange sexual magnetism which will refresh, soothe and uplift. Men usually imagine, when a woman evinces desire for affectionate caresses in her husband's arms, that she is ready for contact at the genitals. Never was there a greater mistake. The woman cares, at that moment, only for the interchange of innocent affection. And for a husband to display unequivocal evidence of a desire for genital contact then does not attract her; it simply repels, and often disgusts her. It is, however, quite possible that, if her husband behaved with consideration and self-control, and it were the right time in the month, she might eventually manifest a passion that same night which would amply satisfy him. What she needs is to be gradually aroused by the right sort of treatment. Husbands, like spoiled children, too often miss the pleasure which might otherwise be theirs, by clamoring for it at the wrong time.

The man who thinks this prolonged courtship previous to the act of sex union wearisome, has never given it a trial. It is the approaches to the marital embrace, as well as the embrace itself, which constitute the charm of the relation between the sexes.

One of these approaches--an approach too little practised between husbands and wives--is the chastity of relation possible in a close embrace, in one another's arms, night after night, with accompanying kisses and caresses, but with no genital contact....

In right marital living, the nude embrace comes to be respected more and more, and finally reverenced, as a pure and beautiful approach to the sacred moment when husband and wife shall melt into one another's genital embrace, so that the twain shall be one flesh, and then, as of old, God will walk with the twain in the garden of bliss "in the cool of the day," when the heat of ill-regulated passion is no more.
One thing which men do not always realize is, that the average woman comes to the marriage bed far more ignorant of what is expected of her sexually than does the average man. For, even if a man has never had sexual experience with women previous to his wedding night, yet he usually knows, from the dreams of his boyhood, pretty well what the sensations of sex contact are. Very few women, however, have amorous dreams previous to having sexual experience. And so, with the first sensation of genital contact, whether it shock them so that their parts become rigid and difficult to enter, or whether it come naturally and healthfully after prolonged lovemaking, so that thrills of sexual magnetism will be interchanged immediately on contact, it is in any event a startling experience to a woman. Now, women in civilized, Christian lands are universally inoculated with the idea that it is immodest to show any liking for a man, and, very often, they carry this mistaken teaching into the intimacies of marriage. Too often, indeed, women think they have done their conjugal duty, if they submit passively to the conjugal embrace; and in some cases, they clinch their hands as they force themselves to lie still, resolutely trying to resist any answering throb of passion during sex union. Poor, mistaken creatures! And then they wonder why the husband, after awhile, goes out to a harlot, who, at least, will pretend to the rapture which the wife thinks it immodest to show that she really feels!

A wife who behaves as Nature intended her to behave, will instinctively perform pelvic movements during sex union. If she does not fall into the way naturally, she should consider it a solemn duty which she owes to herself and to her husband, to try to perform them. If she will bear in mind that her love organs (the organs which contact) are given to her for the purpose, not merely of receiving pleasure, but also of conferring pleasure upon her husband's love organ, she will be better able to study out the sort of pelvic movements which she should perform. And she will soon learn that these movements can be depended on to hasten her passion and to increase her lubricating emission, referred to above.

Let her also bear in mind that it is wrong for her to go through with these pelvic movements for sensual enjoyment alone. Every throb of passion must be brought under the control of the higher, inward self, and laid as an offering at the feet of Deity, or blended, in thought, with the Ultimate Force, if she would have the purest and sweetest satisfaction.

Nature has so made a woman that it takes her from half an hour to an hour after the entrance of the male organ, to come to her orgasm. This is Nature's indication that the man ought to wait for the woman, and not to hasten through the act, as is too frequently the case. A man who gets through in from three to ten minutes after entrance, not only misses the most intense form of pleasure, but also fails to satisfy his wife properly. Her genitals being thus irritated, without being soothed by the discharge of her own sexual magnetism in exchange for his, a congested condition of the internal parts is frequently set up, which results at length in her having to be placed under a physician's care. Many a case of lifelong and hopeless invalidism in a wife is traceable to the husband's habit of hasty termination of the sexual act.

If a husband wishes to treat his wife considerately, let him not hasten, either the act itself or the approaches to the act. He should approach her gently, perhaps linger for awhile in contact with the outside only, enter slowly and with self-control, rest tranquilly after entrance, and let his first movements be gentle and slow. In all things, let him seek, not to get the most pleasure possible out of the relation for himself, but to give his wife the most pleasure. Let him study his own movements, in their possibilities of conferring pleasure, and remember that these should be in the nature of caresses of her love organs by his own love organ.

To approach the woman's genitals with the finger for the purpose of excitation, is distinctly masturbative, and therefore wrong. The only lawful finger of love at her genitals is his sexual love organ.

Also, an orgasm which is induced mainly at the woman's clitoris is unwise. The clitoris is a rudimentary male organ, with a similar power of erectility, though in a much lesser degree. To excite the woman at this organ chiefly, therefore, (as is sometimes mistakenly done by quite estimable men) renders it impossible for her to exchange with the man her natural feminine magnetism, and the act becomes more or less perverted, and destructive of her finer sensibilities. The clitoris should play a very secondary part indeed, and the orgasm should be induced within the vagina.
Every marital embrace should be the occasion for the exchange of intellectual ideas in conversation. Think and talk during the nude embrace, and also at intervals during the sexual embrace, of good books, pictures, statuary, music, sermons, plans for benefiting other people, noble deeds, spiritual aspirations. Do not speak of people against whom you cherish resentment, unless it be to throw out feelings of love toward them. Do not tell indecent stories. Do not choose this time to worry over your household economies or business troubles. Shut out the world, with all its baseness, all its impurity, all its struggles for a livelihood, and let this be a time for the interchange of delicate, poetic sentiment, pure affection, playful, merry thought, and lofty religious sentiment. So strangely are human creatures constructed, that intellectual blending at this time is, by a psychological law, one of the most effective means of welding the natures of husband and wife into a beautiful and perfect oneness....

While the natural position is for the woman to lie upon her back, and allow the man to be on top, yet, where the man is very heavy, or for other reasons, it is sometimes better for the woman to mount the man. Again, there are various side positions, which different couples can find out for themselves, by experimentation.

As to how frequently genital union should take place, no hard and fast rule can be laid down. The one safe guide is the after result to the husband and wife, mentally and physically. If the union take place according to the method here set forth, and be not practised intertemperately, there should be no sense of depression at the close, nor should there be any feeling of nervous irritation; but on the contrary, both husband and wife should feel soothed and tranquillized. And the next day, they should feel serene and more than usually clear-headed; they should feel as though they walked on air, and as though the world were full of brightness and joy.

When either husband or wife is physically weary, or mentally fagged out, all genital contact should be sedulously avoided. But the quiet embrace in one another's arms at such a time, without genital union, will be usually found to strengthen and refresh, sometimes to such an extent, indeed, as to pave the way for genital contact a little later....

It is sometimes objected that it is unwise to spread among married people the knowledge which is set forth in the foregoing pages, as they would straightway cease to beget children, and so the human race would die out. This objection shows how little the differences in the mental attitude of men and of women toward the marriage relation are understood. The average woman longs, with all the intensity of her nature, to have a child or children by the man whom she loves, at some time in her life; but it is for her to choose the fitting time. A woman who is made pregnant against her will, naturally resents the outrage.

I claim for this method of Right Marital Living, that the quality of children born from people who have lived in this way will (other things being equal) be superior to that of children who are the result of accident or lust....

Another objection which is sometimes raised to the spread of this knowledge is, that if young unmarried people get to know of the possibility of controlling the fecundating power, seductions, promiscuity and illicit unions of all sorts will increase. In reply, I would say that I find that the average libertine is unwilling to try this method, as he considers it "too high for his purpose." In fact, a man who practises this method and who teaches it to the woman (as he is apt to do, in order to increase his own pleasure) will not be a libertine; for the habit of aspiring to union with God (or with whatever else he recognizes as the Ultimate Force of the universe) during the sexual act, and of encouraging the woman to do so likewise, has the curious psychological effect of tending to make him too loyal to that one woman to want to break with her. For this method, while it always satisfies, never satiates a man; and it renders the relation a perpetual honeymoon. On the other hand, should the man neglect to aspire to the highest throughout the act, but keep in thought upon the sensual plane, the result is likely to prove harmful to his nervous system, through the working of the psychological law upon which I have spoken at length, several pages back. Also, the union will be far less satisfactory. There are, therefore, two inducements to any man who learns this method to rise above the merely sensual plane, and to aspire to the highest throughout the act: First, the increased satisfaction if he does, and, second, the dread of serious harm to his nervous system if he does not. And if he and his partner live this method, they will tend, with each successive union, to become more and more closely welded into a partnership which nothing could induce either of them to break. Thus the institution of marriage will be strengthened, not weakened, by the widespread knowledge of this method of Right Marital Living.
APPENDIX B

“Letter to the Public”*

*Taken from <ww.idacraddock.org>, a website created and maintained by Ordo Templi Orientis U.S. Grand Lodge.
Ida Craddock's Letter to the Public on the Day of her Suicide

Room 5, No. 134 West 23D St., New York, Oct. 16, 1902.

To the Public:

I am taking my life, because a judge, at the instigation of Anthony Comstock, has decreed me guilty of a crime which I did not commit--the circulation of obscene literature--and has announced his intention of consigning me to prison for a long term.

The book has been favorably reviewed by medical magazines of standing, and has been approved by physicians of reputation. The Rev. Dr. Rainsford of this city, in two letters to me, partially approved this book so far as to say that if all young people were to read it, a great deal of misery, suffering, and disappointment could be avoided, and that to have arrested me on account of it, as Mr. Comstock has done, was ridiculous. This little book, "The Wedding Night," and its companion pamphlet, "Right Marital Living," have been circulated with approval among Social Purity women, members of the W.C.T.U., clergymen and reputable physicians; various physicians have ordered these books from me for their patients, or have sent their patients to me to procure them or to receive even fuller instruction orally; respectable married women have purchased them from me for their daughters, husbands for their wives, wives for husbands, young women for their betrothed lovers. On all sides, these little pamphlets have evoked from their readers commendation for their purity, their spiritual uplifting, their sound common sense in treating of healthful and happy relations between husbands and wives.

In contrast with this mass of testimony to their purity and usefulness, a paid informer, who is making his living out of entering complaints against immoral books and pictures, has lodged complaint against one of my books as "obscene, lewd, lascivious," and proposes to indict the other book later on, so as to inflict legal penalties on me a second time. This man, Anthony Comstock, who is unctuous with hypocrisy, pretends that I am placing these books in the hands of minors, even little girls and boys, with a view to the debauchment of their morals. He has not, however, produced any young person thus far who has been injured through their perusal; nor has any parent or guardian come forward who claims even the likelihood of any young persons being injured by either of these books; nor has he even vouchsafed the addresses of any of the people from whom he states he has received complaints. In addition, he has deliberately lied about the matter. He stated to Judge Thomas of the United States Circuit Court (secretly, not while in court), that I had even handed one of these books to the little daughter of the janitress of the building in which I have my office. It so happens that there is no janitress in this building, nor is there any little girl connected with same. I took a paper around among the tenants to this effect, which they signed, and which I sent to the judge by my lawyer; also a paper to the same effect, which my landlord stood prepared to attest before a notary, if need be. But even this made no impression upon Judge Thomas; he still is firmly convinced (so he says) that Anthony Comstock is a strictly truthful man.

On Friday last, October 10, I underwent what was supposed to be a fair and impartial trial by jury; but which was really a most unfair trial, before a thoroughly partisan judge, at the close of which he abolished my right of trial by jury on the main question at issue, namely the alleged
obscenity of "The Wedding Night" book. My counsel was not permitted to present in evidence circulars which showed that as far back as 1898 and 1899, I was accustomed to state in print that any applicants for oral instruction upon marriage who were under 21 would have to produce written consent from a parent or a guardian. My evidence was almost wholly choked off; neither my counsel nor myself was permitted to endeavor to justify the book by argument. The most the judge would do was to permit me to read from various paragraphs in the book, without comment, if these could explain the indicted paragraphs. Even with this tiny bit of a chance, I made such good use of my opportunity before the jury, that Judge Thomas, who was evidently prejudiced in advance against both myself and my book, saw that he dared not now risk the case to the jury, or he might not manage to convict me after all. And so he announced that he himself intended to pass upon the character of the book. He stated that there is in existence a decision of the United States Supreme Court which gives him this right.

He said he would not let the question go to the jury; he considered the book "obscene, lewd, lascivious, dirty." He added that he would submit to the jury only the question of fact. Did the defendant mail the book? (The charge was "mailing an obscene book.") He said, "Gentlemen of the Jury, the question for you to pass upon is, Did the defendant mail the book? You know that she admits having mailed the book. Please render your verdict. I do not suppose you will care to leave your seats." And the poor little cowed jury could do nothing but to meekly obey the behest of this unrighteous judge, and to pass in their ballots, "Guilty of mailing the book." Which, of course, was no crime at all.

I fully expected that the public press of New York city would duly chronicle this most remarkable invasion of the rights of the people by such an abolishing of the trial by jury; but so far as I could learn, the press remained totally silent.

It is evident that the political pull of the party which fathers Anthony Comstock is too powerful for any newspaper in New York to dare to raise a protest when, at the instigation of this ex officio informer, an innocent woman, engaged in a laudable work of sex reform, indorsed by reputable citizens, is arrested on false information and denied her right of trial by jury.

Since Friday last, people of influence and respectability have written to the judge on my behalf and have been to see him; but he announces his inflexible intention of sending me to prison, and, he is careful to malignantly add, "for a long, long term." I am a "very dangerous woman," he adds: Mr. Comstock has told him most shocking things about me--not in court, however, this paid informer being far too cute to dare to face his victim openly with any such lies.

At my age (I was forty-five this last August) confinement under the rigors of prison life would be equivalent to my death-warrant. The judge must surely know this; and since he is evidently determined to not only totally suppress my work, but to place me where only death can release me, I consider myself justified in choosing for myself, as did Socrates, the manner of my death. I prefer to die comfortably and peacefully, on my own little bed in my own room, instead of on a prison cot.
I am making this statement to the public because I wish to call attention to some of the salient features of Constockism, in the hope that the public may be led to put down this growing menace to the liberties of the people.

As I said not long since in the Boston Traveler, if the reading of impure books and the gazing upon impure pictures does debauch and corrupt and pervert the mind (and we know that it does), when we reflect that Anthony Comstock has himself read perhaps more obscene books, and has gazed upon perhaps more lewd pictures than has any other one man in the United States, what are we to think of the probable state of Mr. Comstock's imagination today upon sexual matters?

The man is a sex pervert; he is what physicians term a Sadist--namely a person in whom the impulses of cruelty arise concurrently with the stirring of sex emotion. The Sadist finds keen delight in inflicting either physical cruelty or mental humiliation upon the source of that emotion. Also he may find pleasure in gloating over the possibilities to others. I believe that Mr. Comstock takes pleasure in lugging in on all occasions a word picture (especially to a large audience) of the shocking possibilities of the corruption of the morals of innocent youth.

This man serves two masters; he is employed and paid by the Society of the Suppression of Vice, but he secures from the United States Government an appointment as postal inspector without pay; so that he is able, if he wishes, to use his official position for the furtherance of the private ends of his society and, presumably of himself. Ex officio informers, with their attendant spies and decoys, have been throughout history notoriously a means of exploiting the government for private and corrupt purposes.

For over nine years I have been fighting, singlehanded and alone, against Comstockism. Time and time again I have been pushed to the wall, my books have been seized and burned, and I myself have been publicly stigmatized in the press by Comstock and Comstockians as a purveyor of indecent literature. Yet this very literature has been all the while quietly circulating with approval among men and women of the utmost respectability and purity of life, and I have received numerous letters attesting its worth.

Not only this, Comstockism can be used, as was the medieval Inquisition at times, to gratify private malice, as the complainant does not need to appear in court. This was done to me in Philadelphia because, while holding a petty position as amanuensis in the Bureau of highways, I declined right along to pay political assessments to the Quay party. For months they tracked me night and day wherever I went, vainly hoping to learn something detrimental to my character, and at last they arranged to have me indicted for mailing immoral literature, as they could find no other means of successfully damaging my reputation.

John Wanamaker once stated in a political speech that the Quay party were relentless in hounding those who refused to pay political assessments. They would follow up such a person even when he went into the service of other employers, and leave no stone unturned to ruin him in after years. This may or not be so in my own case; I do not know. But I do know that when I went to Washington a secret complaint was lodged with the police My accuser never faced me openly in court. I pleaded my own case before the police judge, saved one book ("Right Marital
Living") and won many encomiums from those present in court because of the uplifting character of my plea; nevertheless I was driven from the city.

Each time that I have been arrested, I have escaped by a compromise; but I resolved, when I came to New York, that if again attacked by Comstockism, I would stand my ground and fight to the death. Perhaps it may be that in my death more than in my life, the American people may be shocked into investigating the dreadful state of affairs which permits that unctuous sexual hypocrite, Anthony Comstock, to wax fat and arrogant, and to trample upon the liberties of the people, invading, in my own case, both my right to freedom of religion and to freedom of the press. There is only one lawful excuse for the community's interfering with any one's religion or publication in America; and that is, the invasion by means of that religion or those publications, of other people's rights to life, liberty, or their pursuit of happiness. No proof of such injury wrought has been produced in my case; the testimony for the government against me rests entirely upon the mere say-so of this paid informer.

Every one of the paragraphs indicted in "The Wedding Night" is the outcome of talks which I have had with distinguished physicians and also with men and women among my pupils. I have looked into the hearts of hundreds of men and women during the nine years in which I have been engaged in sex reform work, and my soul burns within me when I see how husbands and wives are suffering, and how nearly all of the suffering could be done away with, if only Anthony Comstock were not hoodwinking the public into believing that sexual information in printed books must be kept away from them, so as to protect the morals of innocent youth. Surely, Mr. Comstock's idea of the nature of the marriage relation must be singularly impure, when he ventures to pretend that it should not be known of as to its details by young people who are sufficiently mature to be seeking for enlightenment!

In the courts, however, in obscene literature cases, a precedent has been established by which the defendant is forbidden to produce witnesses in behalf of the accused book, so that I was legally prohibited from summoning physicians to testify on behalf of the book.

Owing to this and to other legal precedents which hamper the defendant in obscene literature cases as is done in no other criminal cases anywhere; owing also the dense ignorance and prejudice which prevail in regard to the scientific open discussion of sexual matters; and, most of all, owing to Mr. Comstock's persistent lies and to his adroitness in depicting the shocking possibilities of corrupting the morals of innocent youth by permitting young people to peruse any enlightening literature upon the details of normal, healthy, pure marital relations--matters have now reached the point where it is only necessary to accuse a person of mailing so-called "obscene" literature in order to convict him. As no witnesses are allowed to testify as to the effect of the book upon themselves or their young daughters or young sons, or, if physicians, upon their patients, neither judge nor jury are in a position to learn the actual facts in the case. And now, in my own case the other day, the legal precedent has been established by the action of Judge Thomas, in the United States Circuit Court, of not only excluding witnesses in behalf of the indicted book, but even forbidding either the defendant or her counsel to attempt to explain the reasons for printing the indicted paragraphs or in any way seeking to justify, in an argument, the publication of the book and then finally, by a legal subterfuge, abolishing the defendant's
right of trial by jury; the latter being a proceeding which has always been recognized by true patriots as a serious menace to the liberties of the people.

In addition, in my own case, there is the matter of persecution for my religious views. Although this question did not directly arise before Judge Thomas, yet, from the paragraph which I read from my book, and which I was permitted to read only without explanation, it must have been evident that the book contained a religious propaganda, and that, indeed, the religious teaching was the foremost matter, the physical teachings being only subservient thereto.

But in my trial under the New York state law last March, before three judges the religious question did very decidedly arise. In that court, Judge McKean so far forgot his oath of office (to administer justice impartially) as to hotly denounce my book as "blasphemous" (presumably because I am teaching the duty and the joy of communion with God in the marriage relation so as to render it sacramental). Of course this was illegal on his part. No judge has any right to denounce a prisoner because he differs with that prisoner in his religious belief.

I earnestly hope that the American public will awaken to a sense of the danger which threatens it from Comstockism, and that it will demand that Mr. Comstock shall no longer be permitted to suppress works on sexology. The American people have a right to seek and to obtain knowledge upon right living in the marriage relation, either orally or in print, without molestation by this paid informer, Anthony Comstock, or by anybody else.

Dear fellow-citizens of America, for nine long years I have faced social ostracism, poverty, and the dangers of persecution by Anthony Comstock for your sakes. I had a beautiful gospel of right living in the marriage relation, which I wanted you to share with me. For your sakes, I have struggled along in the face of great odds; for your sakes I have come at last to the place where I must lay down my life for you, either in prison or out of prison. Will you not do something for me now?

Well, this is what I want the American public to do for me. Only one of my books, that on "The Wedding Night," is at present under legal ban. "Right Marital Living," which is by far the more important book of the two, and which contains the gist of my teachings, has not yet been indicted. Mr. Comstock, however, told me, when arresting me, that he expected to get both books indicted. If sufficient of a popular demand be made for this book, and especially if the demand voice itself in the public press, he will not dare to attack the book in the courts. Will you do this one thing for me, those of you who have public influence? Remember, it is for you and for your children that I have fought this nine-years' fight. And although I am going to a brighter and a happier land, nevertheless, I shall still look down upon you all here, and long and long and long that you may know something of the radiantly happy and holy life which is possible for every married couple who will practice these teachings. Even in Paradise I cannot be as happy as I might, unless you share with me this beautiful knowledge.

I beg of you, for your own sakes, and for the future happiness of the young people who are dear to you, to protect my little book, "Right Marital Living."
I have still other teachings to follow this, upon the marriage relation, later on. I have written a book of between 450 and 500 pages upon "Marriage" in which my teachings are set forth more fully. This book, in manuscript form, is at present stored in a safe place, in friendly hands. It will not be given to the public until such time as the public shows itself ready for it, and prepared to protect this fuller and franker book from prosecution. Meanwhile, however, "Right Marital Living" remains unindicted; it sets forth a gospel of marriage which is being preached by no other teacher in America. Its teachings will make your married lives healthier, happier, holier. Will you publicly voice your demand for this little book, "Right Marital Living," and protect it from Anthony Comstock?

Ida C. Craddock.