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Love, Sex, and Social Justice: The Anarcha-Feminist Free Love Debate

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ABSTRACT

Feminists today debate questions about just social arrangements for love and sex that were also being discussed by anarcha-feminists in the United States over a hundred years ago. Our contextual analysis of Lucy Parsons, Emma Goldman, and Voltairine De Cleyre's commentaries on the dispute between free love and marriage shows that the forced choice between these two social arrangements is misleading. By arguing that patriarchal/hierarchal power compromises both free love and marriage, these anarcha-feminists show that anarchism provides hope for social justice in the realms of love and sex since an anarchist society would displace and undermine the norms that buttress domination.

Keywords: *Anarcha-feminism, free love, marriage, social justice*

THE SOCIAL JUSTICE OF LOVE AND SEX

Perhaps it is unusual to think of love and sex as social justice issues. Yet, they are social justice issues for three main reasons: love and sex are essential ingredients for meaningful human lives, society can be arranged variously with respect to them, and some of those arrangements are notably unjust even if it is unclear which social arrangement is just. Our view is that social justice requires figuring out how society can best be arranged with respect to love and sex.

Two social arrangements immediately present themselves as competitors: marriage and free love. In almost every society, marriage is promoted and protected, such as through tax incentives. Within patriarchal, heteronormative societies, marriage is often stifling, limits women's personal liberty, and entrenches worrisome gender norms. Free love involves individuals transitioning freely between

romantic and/or sexual relationships. In theory, free love allows each person to define their own sexual autonomy. In practice, free love, especially within patriarchal societies, can burden women with increased responsibilities (such as for children), entrench different but still problematic gender norms and create its own room for serious abuse. In this paper, we will argue that patriarchal societies problematise systems of love and sex in ways that misguide any theoretical search for a just social arrangement.

To make this point, we will turn to nineteenth-century anarcha-feminists. This turn is beneficial for two reasons. First, anarchists yield interesting perspectives on just social arrangements. Anarchists deny that there should be a state in particular, and generally are against hierarchal social arrangements. Nonetheless, anarchists analyse which social arrangements are permissible and which are unacceptable to determine whether an ideal society should have unions/guilds, money/wages, private, personal, or no property, romantic partnerships or free love, etc. Anarchist thinking usually challenges traditional/conventional social arrangements.

Second, anarcha-feminists in particular have long been concerned with the social justice of love and sex, as they critique not only the state and capitalism but also patriarchy. In fact, the views of the earliest anarcha-feminists – Lucy Parsons, Voltairine de Cleyre, and Emma Goldman – continue to resonate. Indeed, sexism's purchase on contemporary social arrangements for love and sex has, unfortunately, changed very little. Conservative political and legal ideologies continue to grip contemporary society in ways that beg for further reflection on early anarcha-feminist ideas about love and sex. Importantly, even feminist debates on marriage in recent times reflect positions and viewpoints that the early anarcha-feminists previewed.[1]

By taking a look back, we will see that the debate about marriage and free love is not as significant as the coercive effects of hierarchal and patriarchal systems. Within a society where marriage is heavily regulated and free love is routinely criticised, the customary arrangements for love and sex are seldom empowering. Yet, if the anarcha-feminists were correct, there may be hope for a more just social arrangement in a freer, more anarchist society.

EARLY ANARCHIST CRITIQUES OF MARRIAGE

Anarcha-feminism is typically an anarcho-socialist position with a focus on patriarchy. It is not sufficient, for the anarcha-feminist, to be free from coercion from the state and capitalism: women must also be free from the coercion of fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons. They must be allowed to develop as full, autonomous beings, free from constraining gender norms.

Anarchism in general and anarcha-feminism in particular have both long histories in the United States. We can only briefly touch on those histories here. In the early nineteenth century, American thinkers such as Josiah Warren and Ralph Waldo Emerson critiqued the state as an obstacle to individual freedom and property; such thinkers supported a return to a simpler life, anchored in personal independence and the formation of voluntary agencies. Later, with the arrival of European immigrants, American anarchism gained new dimensions: the state was critiqued not only because it impeded the liberty of the individual and his property (as in the earlier American tradition), but also because it represented the privilege that went along with property, which marginalised wage labourers. These anarchists believed in community, solidarity, and advocated better working conditions. As Peter Marshall argues, these anarchists 'matched police violence with worker violence'[2] but they also matched worker's self-emancipation with women's liberation. In the decades after Haymarket tragedy, Lucy Parsons (1853-1942), Voltairine de Cleyre (1866-1912), and Emma Goldman (1869-1940) interwove the so-called 'sex question' (understood as issues revolving around gender equality, women's rights, sex and sexuality, etc.) into the fabric of anarchism.[3]

Since marriage was the predominant social arrangement for love and sex in modern society, it is unsurprising that early anarchists critiqued marriage. The initial critiques came mainly from men who were not yet 'anarcha-feminists'. Instead, they were part of the nineteenth-century free love movement, which viewed sexual freedom as essential to self-ownership and autonomy. Before turning to the anarcha-feminists, we will consider the writings of two free love anarchists, J.H. Morris and Oscar Rotter, who contributed to *The Firebrand* and *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer*.

Early anarchists provided three main arguments for free love and against marriage. First, marriage, as a state-run institution, is coercive just like other state-run institutions. Second, marriage promotes negative gender norms, especially by treating women like property, while free love would strike a blow against those gender norms. Third, marriage violates autonomy and personal liberty, which can only be achieved, especially by women, through free love.

Starting with the first argument, free love advocates believed that marriage is a coercive institution as it is the institution through which the state regulates love and sex. Being married requires state sanction, which is striking even though we take it for granted. To get married, you must seek the state's permission, as if marriage is not really a union between two consenting and loving adults, but a mere legal relation that the state regulates through marriage laws, and even rewards with incentives, such as tax breaks. J.H. Morris argued, in his 1896 essay 'Anarchy

in Marriage', that this legal relationship undermines the love that is meant to bind marriage, replacing it with a forced bond:

> before, these persons were lovers by choice and natural attraction; now they are man and wife by virtue of the law ... before each strove to be agreeable [sic] to the other because the companionship, the interchange of magnetism was pleasant, and they wished to continue it. Now this association being assured, it is no longer necessary to be always polite and pleasing, because the relation no longer rests on faultless conduct, but upon law.[4]

Morris explained that legal marriage encouraged couples to take each other for granted. Corrupting their love, the state made 'the marriage relation irksome'.[5] Morris recommended free love, where 'every individual shall consult only his or her own tastes and happiness in the matter'.[6]

As the state turned marriage into a legal relation, it also demanded couples seek its permission to dissolve a union. Morris noted the dangers:

> In every other relation in life we claim the right, without the intervention of law or courts, to discontinue when it ceases [sic] to be pleasant to us ... but if my marital partner abuses me, or if we cease to love each other, or our relation becomes irksome, and though we may each wish to terminate it, we can only do so by leave of one who is interested only in a business way, and a great cost to us.[7]

As well as establishing the state's improper control over people's personal and intimate life choices, divorce is also expensive: state fees, and lawyers' bills must be met. The economic/legal barriers to divorce often force people to stay in loveless, psychologically and/or physically abusive relationships. As Morris eloquently put the problem: 'We have fee'd the priest for permission to assume the marriage relation, and we must now fee the politician for permission to discontinue it!'[8]

The second argument against marriage points to the problematic gender norms associated with marriage. In general, Morris argued, marriage 'contemplates woman as inferior to man'.[9] Wives are made passive to their husbands, made responsible for housework, and treated as their husband's property – through their domestic labour, their sexuality, and their everyday activities. Specifically, Morris believed that marriage established a relation of 'master and slave'.[10] Women were dominated in marriage, depending on 'their position as wife for the necessaries of life'.[11] Moreover, these gender norms are transmitted to future generations: children learn

through heteronormative family norms that women are to be treated poorly. Morris noted that male children were socialised into learning women's inferiority: 'we boys love mother best, but we imbibe the idea of her inferiority, and that inclines us to scoff at her wise, loving, councils, though reason tells us they are right [sic]. We imagine [sic] it is manly to do so, and those who are sensible enough to respect mother's advice are laughed at as "girls" and "babies"'.[12]

The third argument against marriage is that it violates personal liberty and autonomy, especially for women. Free love anarchists argued that marriage was inimical to the free association of individuals. Once a couple entered a marriage, they were effectively stuck: their romantic and sexual relations were limited to that one other person, regardless of where their free liberty might have otherwise taken them. In this vein, Oscar Rotter argued that married partners lost the right 'to self possession and self rule'.[13] Rotter was a varietist, which means that he was a free love advocate who also endorsed having a wide variety of sexual relationships. In fact, Rotter felt that having a variety of lovers was a natural and innate desire for all human beings.[14]

Once the redemptive powers of love and sexual desire were liberated from the shackles of monogamy and the state, varietists felt that these powers would lead to a better society.[15] Varietists in particular and free lovers in general held that society would improve under free love because unrestrained sexual freedom would lead to egalitarian relationships, true cooperation, authentic self-ownership, and a betterment of social relations in general.

LUCY PARSONS' CRITIQUE OF FREE LOVE

While some anarchists provided early critiques of marriage, not all anarchists advocated free love. Lucy Parsons was both interested in abolishing wage slavery and in liberating women from their inferior position under capitalism and the patriarchy.[16] As such, she cautioned against free love within a patriarchal society. For as long as patriarchy remained intact, she believed that free love would harm women more than marriage. To support her argument, Parsons sought testimony from women who practiced free love, and their experiences confirmed her fears.

Parsons felt that varietist arguments depended on unrealistically optimistic social predictions with no precise answers for how free love would actually translate into social, economic, and/or sexual equality for women – a deficiency that some free lovers of the period also acknowledged.[17] Parsons had particular doubts about the practicality of dealing with children under a free love arrangement. In her 'Objections to Variety' published in *The Firebrand* on 27 September 1896,

Parsons responded to Oscar Rotter's arguments by asking, 'Who is going to be responsible for the children? These un-consulted results of your "love relations"?'[18] Since contraception was not freely available at the time, Parsons argued that free love would result in unwanted pregnancies and women's enforced care of children. On the other hand, men could easily leave a sexual relationship they found to be inconvenient under a free love social arrangement. Free love may offer a promise of equality and sexual choice, but it was unlikely to produce equality of responsibility for unwanted pregnancies. Moreover, Parsons added that free love made it difficult for women to establish paternity, which would make claims for child support difficult at best.[19]

Parsons' point here represents the larger fact that free love alone could not really solve social problems that persisted under patriarchy. The putative promise of equality in sexual relations hides men's power within love and sex relations in general: insofar as men generally commodify and disrespect women, a free love arrangement would undoubtedly enhance women's objectification. Parsons believed that free love would increase the conception that women are things simply meant to provide pleasure for men.[20] Parsons worried about how Rotter analogised obtaining variety in sexual partners with obtaining economic freedom. For Parsons, Rotter treated sexual freedom like the freedom to control and own objects, which Parsons noted placed women in the role of the objects.[21] Parsons did not wish for her son to view women in this way, and stated that she would prefer that her 'tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, and my brains become as jelly before my son should hear such language fall from my lips'.[22]

Parsons also attacked the idea that free love promoted autonomy or personal liberty. Perhaps idealising marriage, Parsons denied the claim that marriage tied women down as if they were owned: 'no true man or woman considers they have an ownership in the "person" of the other, because they agree to live an exclusive life in sexual relations'.[23] This idea only applied to marriages where the men were 'brutes', and were not rational.[24] More convincingly, she argued that there was nothing about free love that would change this brutish attitude: if men were brutish in their treatment of their wives, they would be at least as brutish with their sexual partners, with whom they had no significant connections.[25] Parsons' point was that the problem was located in the society's general sexism, which included men routinely treating women cruelly without social consequence.

While Parsons preferred marriage, she recognised that her views could appear to be one-sided. Her arguments favoured an idealised form of marriage where husbands saw their wives as equals. Of course, real marriage was usually restrictive and limiting at that time. In her essay, 'Woman: Her Evolutionary Development',

Parsons wrote that in the beginning of social development, as men began to acquire property, women were viewed as subordinate: women were 'regarded as a sort of necessary evil, as something to be used and abused; to be bought and sold – as a thing fit only to cater to his pleasures and his passions – this was woman's lowly position'.[26] As a 'household drudge',[27] woman was a possession, kept to do household chores or relieve sexual urges. However, Parsons believed that, due in part to technological advancements, women were shifting from their lowly status and becoming 'enabled to leave the narrow confines of the kitchen'.[28] In this new progressive world, Parsons applauded women who went against the convention, had their own jobs, pursued their own educations, and fought for equal wages.[29] Equal wages were an important ingredient for Parsons: with fair wages assured, women would be economically independent, and then they might not see a restrictive, brutish marriage as an escape from wage slavery. She asked, 'How many women would submit to marriage slavery if it were not for wage slavery?'[30]

This new independent woman could take the time to seek out an equal and respectful marriage. In 'The Woman Question Again?', Parsons argued that an empowered woman could seek a proper marriage:

> The new woman has made her bow upon the stage of life's activities as an independent human being, and she feels her importance; she feels very different from her man-tagged sisters of passed generations, who imagined they couldn't move without man's assistance. The sooner men learn to make companions and equals of their wives and not subordinates, the sooner the marriage relation will be one of harmony.[31]

With an equal partnership, modern marriage could function as a locus for personal fulfilment and empowerment in various areas of life, whether sexual or revolutionary. As Carolyn Ashbaugh argues, Parsons' own marriage worked in this manner, and she perhaps generalised from her own experience.[32] Free love was not necessary for autonomy insofar as it was possible to find respect and reciprocity in these ideal marriages – no matter how rare these marriages were during Parsons' time.

Parsons perhaps realised that she was too critical of free love. At a Chicago anarchist meeting in 1897, she allowed that free love could be acceptable for individuals who desired it on their own terms.[33] At that meeting, too, Parsons was open to the possibility that variety might work out for some individuals in theory, though she was keen to investigate the real life experience. A few months earlier, she had invited readers of *The Firebrand* to report on their experiences with free

love: '*The Firebrand* has had a good deal from the men in favor of variety, and I would like to see something from the women readers in favor of variety showing wherein it is going to redound to the happiness of women'.[34]

The responses were largely uncomplimentary about free love. In the issue published on 28 March 1897, a woman who identified herself as B from Omaha, Nebraska, claimed that, 'I think Mrs Parsons is right, i.e. under the conditions with which we have to reckon at present. Should we be free in every respect the question of free love and variety will appear in a different light'.[35] While B was open to free love under more liberated conditions, she was more sceptical about it within patriarchy. When B's husband left her, he claimed to be exercising his right to practice free love. Yet, as B notes, 'He tells me I have the privilege to do the same, knowing that I was sick and have no desire for any man or else he would not have granted me the same freedom ... he thinks first about himself'.[36] B's sickness was specifically a result of complications from childbirth.[37] Free love then promised a false or merely formal equality: both men and women are equally able, in a *formal* sense, to seek out sexual partners as they see fit. Yet, this equality is merely formal if men can actually fulfil their sexual desires while women are more likely to be frustrated. B's sickness, her need to care for their kids (they had eight children), and her lack of desire to have sex again, given her hardships, combined to keep her from seeking out further sexual partners. Yet, her husband left her to seek free love, while sending very little money back to help the family.[38]

Patriarchy allowed B's husband to profit not only through a variety of sexual partners, but also through the passing of their joint burdens completely onto B. This example also gives us pause in thinking there is a simple mixed solution that allows free love for some and marriage for others. B's husband was able to use the anarchist community's openness towards free love to transition from a marriage that worked for him while his wife was healthy and supportive, to a free love arrangement that benefited only him when his wife became sick and he felt they had too many children to support.[39]

The 25 April 1897 issue of *Firebrand* compiled more responses revealing that women viewed free love as problematic and unrealistic, as Parsons had hypothesised. One respondent, who went by A.E.K., argued that free love would lead to increasing objectification of women: 'Sexual freedom, in the present stage of its development, means greater slavery for the woman who embraces it ... the average free lover of the masculine gender is not yet sufficiently advanced in the practical applications of the opinions of which he holds to realize this fact, or to rise above the condition of master which he has so long held'.[40] Once again, A.E.K.'s view supports the idea that the problem is not just about marriage, but more about the

way in which the 'masculine gender' tends to think of women as property, which would be problematic in any sexual or romantic arrangement.

A.E.K. went on to show how free love could lead to confusion and even grave wrongs, such as sexual assault under the cover of free love. A.E.K. characterised this arrangement as 'slavery-in-freedom'. She explained her point in a story:

> The As visited the Bs. Being in favor of freedom, it was agreed upon to change partners for the night. Mr. C. came, unexpectedly, to spend the night ... it was arranged that Mrs. A. should spend the first part of the night with Mr. B. and visit Mr. C. in his room toward morning ... Mrs. A was not a self-poised, emancipated woman ... [Mr. C.] selfishly took every advantage of his partner's 'womanly weakness' and 'relieved' himself to his fullest capacity. Then, and not till then, he consented to allow Mrs. A. to leave his room. In the meantime, Mr. A. had requested his wife to come to his room before dressing. She did so. He insisted upon, and received from her, the full indulgence of his 'marital rights'. All this from A. and C. after she pleadingly informed them that she was expecting her menses at any time, and feared the consequences, and preferred to abstain on that account, as well as not having any desire herself. Result: a very sick woman next day, and for several days, but two satisfied and 'relieved' men ...[41]

In the name of free love, Mrs A was assaulted by Mr C and then again by her own husband. Through Mrs A's story, A.E.K. pointed out how free love did not necessarily lead to respect for women's voices and rights. Instead, women could be pressured and assaulted as men took women's participation in free love as an open permission to do as they pleased, irrespective of consent.

Male privilege would malign a free love arrangement just as it maligned the marriage. These viewpoints suggest that it is first necessary that men rise above and relinquish their privilege. A.E.K. concluded that women must 'teach men that sexual freedom does not mean sexual indulgences in the propagative act, regardless of the women's choices'.[42] The women who had experienced free love were in agreement with Parsons' strong critiques.

EMMA GOLDMAN AND VOLTAIRINE DE CLEYRE CRITIQUE MARRIAGE

While Lucy Parsons provided an early anarcha-feminist critique of free love, her contemporaries, Emma Goldman and Voltairine de Cleyre, were much more critical of marriage. Though Goldman's and de Cleyre's positions had similarities with the

earlier free love anarchists, they added significant contributions and more persuasive arguments.

Emma Goldman was a proponent of variety, and, for most of her life, a free love practitioner. She did not wait for the patriarchal world to change, but lived in accordance with her beliefs. Practicing her ideals of liberty in all things, she enjoyed relationships with Johann Most and her long-term partner Alexander 'Sasha' Berkman; she lived in a free love commune in upstate New York and she was later involved in a free love relationship with her manager Ben Reitman.[43] In spite of her position, Goldman often felt jealous about Reitman's other partners. Addressing the betrayal of her own feelings, Goldman wrote that 'I stand condemned before the bar of my own reason', and she expressed that she felt like a hypocrite for advocating free love while suffering from jealousy.[44]

Goldman argued that true free love unions would result in a free, non-judgmental exchange of partners that enhanced personal freedom.[45] The key, for Goldman, was that a free love required the partners to relinquish the idea of property and recognise 'that they are neither the owners nor controllers nor dictators over the sex functions of the wife or the husband'.[46]

Just as Goldman linked free love to personal liberty, she saw marriage as a form of economic prostitution.[47] Writing in *The Firebrand* she explained the similarities she saw between marriage and sex work, along with the alleged sole difference:

> the sole difference between her and the married woman is, that the one has sold herself into chattel slavery during life, for a home or a title, and the other one sells herself for the length of time she desires; she has the right to choose the man she bestowes [sic] her affections upon, whereas the married woman has no right whatsoever; she must submit to the embrace of her lord, no matter how lothsome [sic] this embrace may be to her, she must obey his commands; she has to bear him children, even at the cost of her own strength and health; in a word, she prostitutes herself every hour, every day of her life.[48]

For Goldman, marriage was an oppressive institution where the wife lost her sexual autonomy and gained a master, all in exchange for economic security. In her 1910 essay 'Marriage and Love', she described marriage as an economic arrangement that 'condemns [a woman] to lifelong dependency, to parasitism, to complete uselessness, individual as well as social' for which she pays with 'her name, her privacy, her self respect'; Goldman characterised marriage as a 'failure'.[49] Though Goldman was well aware of Parsons' arguments in favour of ideal marriages, she dismissed them as the exception to the rule.[50] Goldman saw marriage as an inherently oppressive

institution and ignored the testimony offered by happy unions.[51] To Goldman, these unions were aberrations: 'I cannot deal with the few exceptional cases of marriage which are based on love, esteem, and respect; these exceptions only verify the rule'.[52] Goldman saw marriage as intrinsically flawed, and wanted to eliminate the practice so as to create independent, autonomous women.[53]

While Goldman challenged the ideal version of marriage, she retained hope for respectful, romantic love. In 'The Tragedy of Women's Emancipation', she imagined a truly emancipated woman who stands on her own ground and insists upon her freedom. This liberated woman listens 'to the voice of her nature, whether it call for life's greatest treasure, love for a man, or her most glorious privilege, the right to give birth to a child'.[54] Similarly, while Goldman noted that the right to vote and equal civil rights are 'good demands,' she urged that 'the most vital right is the right to love and be loved'.[55]

Romantic love was important for Goldman. She noted that this was the kind of love that was found in 'love songs' and enacted in 'an elopement by ladder and rope on a moonlight night, followed by the father's curse, mother's moans, and the moral comments of neighbors'.[56] Such passionate love comes with respect and equality: 'If love does not know how to give and take without restrictions, it is not love'.[57] Thus, love involves selflessness and giving to the other without demands or expectations. Further, love enriches each individual: 'to give of one's self boundlessly, in order to find one's self richer, deeper, better'.[58] Even though Goldman disagreed with Parsons, she did not want to disavow the kind of love that Parsons' ideal marriage represented. Goldman specifically critiqued marriages under patriarchy, not ideal ones.

Goldman argued that in patriarchy the wife had less freedom than a sex worker insofar as the wife's every action was under the control of her husband. The wife could not easily change her husband or refuse him, as the sex worker could her clients. Whether or not she was right about sex work, the point remains that Goldman saw the husband as an exploiter who used the wife's economic vulnerability to gain power over her. Thus, Goldman agreed with and extended the argument that marriage turns the wife into property. She likewise provided the same solution: 'Marriage, the curse of so many centuries, the cause of jealousy, suicide and crime, must be abolished if we wish the young generation to grow healthy, strong and free men and women'.[59] Goldman held that free love would lead to genuine interdependence.[60]

Like Goldman, Voltairine de Cleyre, an advocate of anarchism without adjectives, also enacted her principles: she had various lovers and became pregnant by one of them; she refused to raise the child and turned him over to the father's family.[61] She critiqued marriage, like Goldman. In her 1896 essay, 'Sex Slavery', de Cleyre

compared marriage to prison and slavery: 'The earth is a prison, the marriage-bed is a cell, women are the prisoners, and you [men] are the keepers!'[62] Even though the possibility of marital rape was not recognised until a century later, de Cleyre correctly pointed out that husbands were habitually raping their wives, that wives submitted to sex due from a false sense of marital duty, and that they raised children that they did not want as a result. Thus, marriage put the man in a controlling position. Like the jailer, the husband prevented the wife from obtaining release.[63]

de Cleyre explained that these same social mores denigrated single women who chose free love in societies where both marriage and free love are available as outcasts. Her children would be categorised as bastards because their '*mother* wasn't virtuous!' even if their father's virtue is never questioned.[64] The woman who chooses free love would be considered to be 'guilty' according to 'the constructed crime of obscenity'.[65] Society uses its own 'peculiar standards of morals' to condemn women who seek their own path, encouraging them instead to seek virtue within marriage.[66] Thus, just as B highlighted the problems with a mixed society (with both free love and marriage), de Cleyre similarly rejected the mixed arrangement. Instead, she pointed to a problematic tension: insofar as marriage remained the social preference, social mores would prop up marriage by labelling free loving women as 'obscene'.

de Cleyre encouraged all women to ask: 'Why am I the slave of Man? ... Why must my body be controlled by my husband? Why may he take my labor in the household, giving me in exchange what he deems fit?'[67] In this fashion, she also compared marriage to slavery. The wife is not only her husband's prisoner, but also his slave – having to meet his demands for whatever minor reward he is willing to bestow. Metaphorically she was dead: married women were 'walking corpses'.[68] The wife, in de Cleyre's view, had lost so much power and freedom in the marriage, that she had been turned into a zombie.

When she considered the ideal marriage in her 1907 lecture, 'They Who Marry Do Ill', she also rejected it. de Cleyre begins the essay by defining marriage as 'the real thing, the permanent relation of a man and a woman, sexual and economical, whereby the present home and family life is maintained'.[69] Her definition is incredibly broad and includes, 'polygamous, polyandric, or monogamous marriage' as well as marriage that is 'blessed by a priest, permitted by a magistrate, contracted publicly or privately, or not contracted at all'.[70] Thus, keeping a very open mind, de Cleyre sees a marriage not just as a religious union of a man and a woman and/or a contractual union under state law, but as any permanent sexual or economic relation that makes up a home and family. de Cleyre's criticism extends beyond the circumstances of her own context.

de Cleyre did not wish to level her objections only against poor marriages, but also against successful ones. She laid out what she would regard as a successful marriage: much of the time spent together is agreeable, the partners earn a decent living through honest work (the father's wage-earning labour and the mother's labour at home), they give the children a good start in life, and they end up growing old together – assured that each has a friend until death.[71] Though she doubts that this type of marriage is often realised, de Cleyre admitted that it sometimes is, and her rejection of marriage was directed even at these ideal scenarios.[72]

de Cleyre contended that nothing is really gained by this ideal marriage, and the flexibility necessary to flourish in life is entirely lost by it. Our embrace of the ideal depends on outdated and false notions of human nature.[73] For example, we tend to think that it is natural to marry for the purpose of raising children. Yet, de Cleyre argued this view is based on living in a world where most children died at or near birth and multiple children were necessary to divide the crushingly difficult and quite various labour tasks around the house.[74] If a family must farm, hunt, clean, build necessities, and still somehow earn coin to pay the tax collector, then the family needs to have a lot of children, especially when some will die young. But that prior necessity does not imply that human nature requires marriage for the sake of children. Since children are no longer necessary for survival, marriage is not required for the children.

Similarly, de Cleyre argued that the division of labour between husband and wife is neither natural nor desirable.[75] In fact, dividing labour between spouses entrenches gender norms, incompetence, and dependency. The husband, following masculine gender norms, does not know how to tend to himself at home – unable to do his own laundry, cook, or clean – becoming a helpless 'tramp' or 'drunkard'.[76] Relatedly, the wife struggles so much to take care of the tasks assigned to her based only on her gender that she lacks the time or energy to do much else. de Cleyre pointed out that, 'The conditions and pay of domestic service are such that every independent spirit would prefer to slave in a factory, where at least the slavery ends with the working hours'.[77] Far from being natural, this division of labour robbed both women and men from achieving their all-around potential.[78]

Finally, de Cleyre argued that sexual appetites become stunted within marriage. She claimed that young people who marry are likely to develop new and different sexual appetites as they grow older and that they will be unlikely to satisfy each other.[79] de Cleyre conjectured that even when a couple seems sexually satisfied after many years together, it is probably because at least one of them has suppressed sexual appetites for the sake of the family.[80]

One need not agree with de Cleyre's contentious psychological claims about

sexual appetite to see her general point. de Cleyre's strategy was to note that humans constantly change over time, but marriage is permanent. de Cleyre believed that any pair of humans will eventually grow apart in some significant respect over a lifetime. As she said, 'People will not, and cannot, think and feel the same at the same moments, throughout any considerable period of life; and therefore, their moments of union should be rare and of no binding nature'.[81] Since people change, the odds are high that couples will find tension and fundamental disagreement at some point. At that point, the permanence of marriage will no longer make sense to them. Since problems can always come up that undermine the whole point of a permanent union, marriage is constantly plagued by uncertainty. So, de Cleyre concluded, 'I see no reason why the rest of life should be sacrificed to an uncertainty'.[82] For de Cleyre, who holds the strongest position against marriage, the permanence of marriage is inherently problematic.

ANARCHA-FEMINIST SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR LOVE AND SEX

While the three early anarcha-feminists have very distinct views on free love and marriage, we learn something significant from their commonality. In particular, we ascertain that it is the patriarchal structure of society, and not any given social arrangement of love and sex, that taints and corrodes our loving and sexual relations.

Underlying Parsons' critique was the idea that free love within a society beset by patriarchy would only worsen the situation for women. Since social mores pressured women to take responsibility for children, women in free love would face even greater difficulties dealing with unwanted children while men could escape offspring responsibility with ease. Further, as long as women are thought of poorly for their sexual proclivities, women who endorse free love risk unfair but unavoidable social disapprobation. As anonymous women B and A.E.K. pointed out, men can easily abuse free love to exploit women's weakened positions under patriarchy. Free love within the confines of patriarchy would not empower women, but alter their enslavement.

Goldman likewise saw women as enslaved, but under marriage, not free love. Goldman argued that marriage was an economic arrangement, therefore analogous to prostitution. de Cleyre likened marriage to imprisonment and slavery, and she agreed with Goldman that husbands controlled their wives, leaving little room for married women to find liberty and autonomy.

The similarity of the arguments deployed by Parsons, Goldman, and de Cleyre suggests that they all saw the patriarchal relations between women and men as deeply problematic. It did not matter that they were describing opposing social

arrangements; the relations between men and women consistently exhibited men's privilege alongside women's limited liberty. While they advocated different social arrangements, their overlapping analyses showed comparable concerns for the tenuous relations that existed between men and women under patriarchy in general.

This problem appears too entrenched to be resolvable merely through a mixed social arrangement. While some theorists critique marriage and others critique free love, the solution is not as simple as a mixed arrangement where some marry while others engage in free love. As we saw in B's situation, a mixed society that still exists under patriarchy could allow men to be married when that suits them, but then switch to a free love arrangement when that becomes more beneficial. Further, as de Cleyre argued, a mixed social arrangement that exists alongside coercive and sexist social mores will apply more social pressure towards the socially preferred option, thus making life even worse for women who choose the 'wrong' social arrangement.

The problem then lies in the structure of society as a whole. While living under patriarchy, all social arrangements for love and sex will be problematic. Marriage, free love, and even a mixed system are all problematised by the patriarchal world that we all inhabit. That is why all of these anarcha-feminists make pointed critiques about the system in which they have the strongest doubts, while also seeing hope for a system that would exist under more ideal, non-patriarchal contexts.

Significantly, these same critiques continue to have purchase today. While sexism has lessened in the last hundred years, it has, unfortunately, not lessened sufficiently to make the nineteenth-century anarcha-feminists' worries irrelevant. The social norms that view mothers as primarily carers for children and women as somehow blameworthy for being sexual beings have changed only a small amount. Further, while there is now a bit more equality in typical marriages, it is still largely true that husbands have greater power to limit their wives' liberty, such as through spousal abuse or marital rape, both of which are illegal today, but still remain prevalent.[83] Further, husbands still do less housework than their wives.[84] That sexism still exists within our current, patriarchal society certainly should not surprise anyone.

As we began, love and sex are social justice issues. In a significant sense, they lie at the core of social justice: justice with respect to love and sex concerns individuals attempting to achieve justice within their most intimate relations, within their homes, and among their families. Sexual identity is a core part of all of us, and so injustice with respect to sex and sexuality can make life quite unbearable. Of course, from the time of the early anarcha-feminists to now, love and sex social justice has been quite lacking.

The solution, then, is not simple. It is not a matter of simply choosing one social arrangement over another. Instead, the solution calls for an overhaul of society in whole, which is exactly what the anarcha-feminists were ultimately calling for. Though they each idealised their own view of love and sex, their idealisations would make most sense outside of patriarchy. In other words, the most illuminating way to read these anarcha-feminists is to understand, first, how much their critiques establish the wrong of each social arrangement under patriarchy. Second, one must understand how their stated preference is being hypothesised for an anarcha-feminist society. For Parsons, ideal marriages were the solution, but they really only exist when women are empowered, such as within her view of anarchist society. For Goldman and de Cleyre, ideal free love is the solution, but again, it could only work outside of patriarchy, and perhaps within anarchism. Yet, each anarcha-feminist's view puts pressure on the others', given the existence of the patriarchy. In tension with Parsons' view, patriarchy corrupts the ideal of marriage. In tension with Goldman and de Cleyre, patriarchy poisons free love relations. Nevertheless, what emerges from this conflict is that the true culprit is the patriarchy itself. Yet, we learn much by reading each side's critiques as applied to patriarchy, and their idealisations as applied to anarchist societies that are free of patriarchy. Thus, social justice for love and sex could be achieved, but it would require a system that leaves patriarchy behind.

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NOTES

1. For a few examples of recent feminist critiques of marriage, see: Claudia Card, 'Against Marriage and Motherhood', *Hypatia* 11, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 1-17; Debra Bergoffen, 'Marriage, Autonomy, and the Feminine Protest', *Hypatia* 14, no. 4 (Autumn 1999): 18-35; Andrea Veltman, 'The Sisyphean Torture of Housework:

Simone de Beauvoir and Inequitable Divisions of Domestic Work in Marriage', *Hypatia* 19, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 121-143; Jyl Josephson, 'Citizenship, Same-Sex Marriage, and Feminist Critiques of Marriage', *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 2 (Jun 2005): 269-284.

2. Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (PM Press, 2010), p499.
3. For more on the integration of gender and the 'sex question' into American anarchism, see Brigitte Koenig, 'American Anarchism: The Politics of Gender, Culture, and Community from Haymarket to the First World War' (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2000).
4. J.H. Morris, 'Anarchy in Marriage', *The Firebrand*, 5 January 1896.
5. Ibid.
6. J.H. Morris, 'Free Sex Relations', *The Firebrand*, 3 May 1896.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Morris, 'Free Sex'.
12. Morris, 'Anarchy'.
13. Oscar Rotter, 'The Sexes and Love in Freedom', *The Firebrand*, 16 August 1896.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid. Also see Jesse Battan, 'Living the Life of 'Love in Liberty': Free Unions and Free Love in Late Nineteenth-Century America', (paper presented at International Socialism and Sexuality Conference, Paris, 5 October 2006), p1.
16. Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: An American Revolutionary* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1976), p8, p11. Also see Gale Ahrens, 'Introduction', in Gale Ahrens and Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, (eds.), *Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality, and Solidarity, Writings and Speeches, 1878-1937* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2004), p13.
17. Discussions over how this end would be achieved were held in anarchist papers such as *The Firebrand* (1895-1897), *The Word* (1872-1893), *Discontent* (1898-1902), *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* (1883-1907), and *Mother Earth* (1906-1917). For more on this issue, see Battan, 'Living the Life', pp1-2.
18. Lucy Parsons, 'Objections to Variety', *The Firebrand*, 27 September 1896.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Lucy Parsons. 'Woman: Her Evolutionary Development', *The Liberator*, 10 September 1905. Also reprinted in Gale Ahrens and Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz (eds), *Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality, and Solidarity, Writings and Speeches, 1878-1937*, 93.
27. Parsons, 'Evolutionary Development'p93.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Lucy Parsons, 'The Cause of Sex Slavery', *The Firebrand,* 1895. Quoted in Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: An American Revolutionary*, p202. Also see Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, 'Afterword', in Gale Ahrens and Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz (eds), *Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality, and Solidarity, Writings and Speeches, 1878-1937* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2004), pp172-173.
31. Lucy Parsons, 'The Woman Question Again?', *The Liberator*, 3 October 1905. Also reprinted in Gale Ahrens and Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz (eds), *Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality, and Solidarity, Writings and Speeches, 1878-1937*, p103.
32. Carolyn Ashbaugh argues that Parsons was married to Albert Parsons, which influenced her in having this positive view of marriage. See Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: An American Revolutionary*, p203. It is also important to note that Parsons, as a working class woman, also possibly viewed a good marriage as a refuge from the harsh conditions associated with wage labour or racism. See Ashbaugh, p203. It is also possible that she held this idealised position on marriage as a factor of her reminiscing on her past, as a way of looking back at the time before Albert was martyred due to Haymarket. However, in absence of tangible proof of such an idealisation, this must remain a supposition. Jacqueline Jones also reveals that Parsons was African American but promoted the fiction that she was Spanish Indian perhaps as way to be able to enter into marriage with Albert Parsons. See Jacqueline Jones, *Goddess of Anarchy: The Life and Times of Lucy Parsons, American Radical* (NY: Basic Books, 2017).
33. Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons*, p205.
34. Lucy Parsons, 'Comrade Lucy Parsons Writes', *The Firebrand*, 14 February 1897.
35. B, 'Open Letter to E.F. Ruedebusch', *The Firebrand*, 28 March 1897.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. A.E.K., 'It Depends on the Woman', *The Firebrand*, 24 April 1897. It is worth noting that this article (and others) resulted in *The Firebrand* being prosecuted under the

Comstock Act. For more on this issue, see Jessica Moran, 'The Firebrand and the Forging of a New Anarchism: Anarchist Communism and Free Love' (Fall 2004). Available at https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/jessica-moran-the-firebrand-and-the-forging-of-a-new-anarchism-anarchist-communism-and-free-lov (accessed 20 December 2017). This prosecution in itself serves to underscore the criticism that free lovers were making about the authoritarian state.

41. A.E.K., 'It Depends on the Woman'.
42. Ibid.
43. 'Free Love Advocate Confronts Issues of Jealousy and Doubt', Available at http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/goldman/MeetEmmaGoldman/emmagoldmanandfreespeech.html (accessed 7 April, 2015). Also see a transcript of Goldman's love letter to Reitman, available at http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Goldman/Exhibition/hobo.html (accessed 7 April, 2015).
44. 'Free Love Advocate Confronts Issues of Jealousy and Doubt'. Available at http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/goldman/Exhibition/freespeech.html (accessed 7 April, 2015). Also see Emma Goldman, 'Jealousy: Causes and A Possible Cure', reprinted in Alix Kates Shulman, (ed.), *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader* (New York: Humanity Books, 1996), pp220-221.
45. Goldman, 'Jealousy: Causes and A Possible Cure', p221.
46. Ibid., p220.
47. Candace Falk (ed.), 'Introduction', in *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years: Made for America, 1890-1901* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p43.
48. Emma Goldman, 'Marriage', *The Firebrand*, 18 July 1897.
49. Emma Goldman, 'Marriage and Love', reprinted in Alix Kates Shulman, *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader* (New York: Humanity Books, 1996), p205.
50. Candace Falk (ed.), 'Introduction', p43.
51, Ibid. Also see Goldman, 'Marriage'.
52. Goldman, 'Marriage'.
53. Ibid.
54. Emma Goldman, 'The Tragedy of Women's Emancipation', reprinted in Alix Kates Shulman, *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader* (New York: Humanity Books, 1996), p165.
55. Ibid., p167.
56. Ibid., p166.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., p167.
59. Goldman, 'Marriage'.

60. Ibid. Also see Candace Falk (ed.), 'Introduction'.
61. Crispin Sartwell, 'Priestess of Pity and Vengeance', in Sharon Presley and Crispin Sartwell (eds), *Exquisite Rebel: The Essays of Voltairine de Cleyre: Anarchist, Feminist, Genius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), p6.
62. Voltairine de Cleyre, 'Sex Slavery,' reprinted in A.J. Brigati (ed.), *The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader* (Oakland: AK Press, 2004), p94.
63. Ibid., pp94-95.
64. Ibid., p96.
65. Ibid., p99.
66. Ibid., pp99-100.
67. Ibid., p97.
68. Ibid., p101.
69. Voltairine de Cleyre, 'They Who Marry Do Ill', reprinted in A.J. Brigati (ed.), *The Voltairine de Cleyre Reader* (Oakland: AK Press, 2004), p13.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid. p15.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid. pp15-16.
74. Ibid. p16.
75. Ibid. p17.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid. p18.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid. p20.
82. Ibid.
83. For example, see National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 'National Statistics' available at http://ncadv.org/learn-more/statistics (accessed 15 July 2017). For statistics on marital rape, see Health Research Funding (9 October 2014) available at http://healthresearchfunding.org/21-spousal-rape-statistics/ (accessed 15 July 2017).
84. See United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 'Household Activities' (20 December 2016) available at https://www.bls.gov/tus/charts/household.htm (accessed 15, July 2017).