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Dear Emma: Narrating the Political Life of Anarchist Emma Goldman through

Women’s Correspondence

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by

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DEDICATION

To the one person who cared about this project the most.
She must find a boat and sail in it. No guarantee of shore. Only a conviction that what she wanted could exist, if she dared to find it.

—Jeanette Winterson

*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Dear Emma: Narrating the Political Life of Anarchist Emma Goldman through Women’s Correspondence
by
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Master of Arts in Women’s Studies
San Diego State University, 2013

Emma Goldman, prominent anarchist activist in the early twentieth century, is the subject of much scholarly attention. However, while the existing literature written based on the life of Goldman is vast and comprehensive in terms of capturing her political career, silences present themselves in a thorough examination of the documentation of her life. Biographers of Goldman often place her career as an anarchist organizer in conversation with her relationships with men, comparing her political ideals to the actualities of her intimate life. This thesis seeks to provide a new perspective on narrating the life of Goldman by centering her relationships with women, utilizing correspondence as primary documents. By centering women, I examine a different side to Goldman’s commitment to anarchist ideals.

To begin, I present my research questions, summarize and critique existing biographies of Goldman, provide a brief introduction to the genre of narrating women’s lives, and address my use of letters as a research method. Next, I provide an overview of Goldman’s life and political development, paying attention to the role anti-Semitism played on her childhood and adolescence, as well as the gendered aspects of her anarchism. Chapters three and four are case studies of Goldman’s communication with Margaret Sanger and Alameda Sperry, respectively, providing an analysis of Goldman’s correspondence with each woman in order to address my research questions. In my conclusion, I examine and name the relationships Goldman had with both Sanger and Sperry, offer a comparison of my results to those that prioritize Goldman’s relationships with men, address limits of my study, and make suggestions for future Goldman scholarship.
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These past two years have been a long and difficult journey, and anyone and everyone who has offered support and guidance deserves thanks. Sparky—this one’s for you.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Emma Goldman (1869-1940), prominent anarchist activist in the early twentieth century, exemplified a deep felt passion for raising revolutionary consciousness that led to her vilification and subsequent deportation from the United States. However, in her years spent in the U.S. (1885-1919), Goldman devoted her life to the cause of anarchism, believing in the philosophy of individual freedom from the coercion inherent within hierarchies of power. Goldman’s life has been chronicled in numerous biographies, as well as her own autobiography, originally published in 1934. While the existing literature written based on the life of Emma Goldman is vast and comprehensive in terms of capturing her political career, silences present themselves in a thorough examination of the documentation of her life. Biographers of Goldman often place her career as an anarchist organizer in conversation with her relationships with men, comparing her political ideals to the actualities of her intimate life. Through this lens, scholars draw conclusions regarding the effectiveness of her politics, and to what extent her actions coincided with the anarchism she taught and advocated. Special attention is paid to how Goldman negotiated power struggles in these relationships, while also maintaining a firm commitment to the idea that power is oppressive in all forms. This thesis seeks to provide a new perspective on narrating the life of Goldman by centering her relationships with women, utilizing correspondence as primary documents. I adopt the stance that the topic of Goldman’s relationships with men has been exhausted, but by shifting this framework, scholars can draw new, important conclusions to be added to Goldman’s historical record.

This thesis argues that in a study of what evidence we have of Goldman’s relationships with women, an unexplored perspective on her life becomes evident. We can ask questions about Goldman’s personal struggles from a perspective that privileges women. Does an examination of Goldman’s correspondence with women show a different relationship between personal relationships and politics? If Goldman compromised her political views in her relationships with men, did she do the same with women? Or do her
relationships with women prove the opposite, that when it comes to women, Goldman was able to hold true to her anarchist ideals? I seek to ask and answer questions about what stories can be recovered by studying these female friendships, and if different answers become apparent. By centering women and Goldman’s female friendships, we can examine Goldman from a different, generally understudied, perspective.

In this introduction, I will present my research questions, summarize and critique existing biographies of Goldman, provide a brief introduction to the genre of narrating women’s lives, and address my use of letters as a research method. Chapter two will provide an overview of Emma Goldman’s life and political development, paying attention to the role anti-Semitism played on her childhood and adolescence, as well as the gendered aspects of her anarchist politics. Chapters three and four are case studies of Goldman’s communication with Margaret Sanger and Alameda Sperry, respectively, providing an analysis of Goldman’s correspondence with each woman in order to address my research questions. In chapter 5, my conclusion, I will examine and name the relationships Goldman had with both Sanger and Sperry, offer a comparison of my results to those that prioritize Goldman’s relationships with men, address limits of my study, and make suggestions for future Goldman scholarship.

**Research Questions**

I became fascinated with Emma Goldman early in my undergraduate career. It was my first time being exposed to anarchism within an academic setting, and the philosophy’s views on capitalism and class polarization attracted me. As a very straightforward thinker, anarchism became a logical answer as to how the hegemony of global capitalism has created the ever-increasing unequal distribution of wealth and power. The coercion of the capitalist elite allows the concentration of power and wealth to remain in their own hands, at the expense of the working class. In an increasing age of globalization and corporate power, anarchism is the philosophy that explains the root problems of the problematic situation we are in today. For me, anarchism is more than a solution for how to reorganize society free of coercion, but a logical philosophy that furthered my understanding of the present state of politics. However, my relationship with anarchism is more than an academic solution to macro level inequality. On a personal level, anarchism has created the space for an understanding of the way my own identity has been shaped by my relationships with
hierarchies of power, and how institutional coercion has affected the way I navigate everyday life.

Goldman attracted me as the most prominent woman involved in a broader anarchist movement. She was the one addressing gendered issues within anarchism in a space dominated by men. However, as I began to further study her as a historical political leader, I became frustrated with representations of Goldman. Biographers tended to emphasize her romantic relationships with men at the expense of her political devotion. A standard was held to Goldman that was not held to her male anarchist comrades. When Goldman’s personal life did not match up with the politics she so strongly advocated, her dedication to anarchism was questioned. The representations of Goldman became focused on the struggles Goldman faced between desiring men and desiring the anarchist reorganization of society.

With a background in both Political Science and Women’s Studies, I became unsatisfied with Goldman’s representation in both disciplines. Political Science tends to focus on defining her in terms of the relationships she had with male leaders, using these relationships as a way to negotiate narrating her life. Women’s Studies directs a limited focus on some of Goldman’s gendered perspectives, sometimes without even addressing her anarchist identity. For example, an excerpt of Goldman’s feminist critiques of the institution of marriage may be included in an anthology, without further expansion on how a critique of marriage fits into anarchism more broadly. Both disciplines tend to tokenize Goldman as the one woman prominent in the movement, although there were many other women present. As I became frustrated with representations of her, I began to see how much sexism and heteronormativity defined Goldman historically. I developed my research questions in response to the application of my own feminist lens to the way Goldman has been depicted within academia.

My research questions seek to take Goldman seriously as both an anarchist and a feminist, and move beyond existing representations. The significance of my questions comes from the way I call upon silences I have discovered regarding Goldman’s relationships with women. I seek to shift the paradigm through which Goldman is most often defined, allowing for new conclusions to be drawn. As a feminist, I take the perspective of valuing the importance of women-centered spaces, and create an analysis of Goldman’s experiences with women, that I was unable to find in my extensive studies of the anarchist. With the intention
of shifting the male-centered paradigm in order to draw new conclusions surrounding an important historical figure, I developed my research questions, incorporating this desire for an analysis that centered women. My questions were divided into three themes: representation, political thought, and female relationships. They are as follows:

1. To what extent does Goldman represent the intersection of gender and anarchism to other women? (Representation)

2. Does Goldman use these letters as a place to develop her political thought and philosophy? Do her political opinions shift across the course of the letters, or are they place for Goldman to further the reach of her anarchist goals? (Political thought)

3. What role does female friendship play in the development of her anarchist politics? What role does Goldman take on in her relationships with women? Does Goldman demonstrate a sense of loyalty to women and does this loyalty have an effect on her loyalty to anarchism? (Female relationships)

THE NARRATED LIFE OF EMMA GOLDMAN

Many biographies of Emma Goldman exist, exemplifying various perspectives on how to narrate her life. These works tend to frame her career as an anarchist organizer in relation to her relationships with men, and in doing so they diminish Goldman as a political entity existing independently from men. Although Goldman devoted much of her time and attention to men in her life including Alexander Berkman and Ben Reitman, to name two, she also had significant relationships with women. She had female political anarchist colleagues including Voltairine de Cleyre and Lucia Sanchez Saornil, and close friendships with family members including her niece, Stella Ballantine. She also may have had an intimate relationship with anarchist Alameda Sperry. For the purposes of my analysis of the existing literature on Goldman, I will address the conclusions drawn by those biographers who discuss Goldman’s relationships with men, in order to place my research in comparison with these conclusions.

I will discuss four existing biographies\(^1\) of Goldman and the themes that emerge based on their treatment of Goldman. Two themes emerge in these four biographies, and both involve an analysis that minimizes Goldman’s accomplishments as an anarchist thinker and philosopher. First, Falk and Wexler use an analysis of Goldman’s relationships with men in

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order to question the consistency between her political ideals and her struggles in these relationships. Secondly, Drinnon and Solomon question Goldman as an authentic political theorist. In response, I provide an analysis of three more recent biographies that address these shortcomings. In these more recent biographies, the authors have moved past the common dismissal of Goldman as an anarchist theorist, providing a more feminist analysis, but still not centering Goldman’s relationships with women.

Although not all biographies of Goldman rely on Goldman’s correspondence with men in order to prioritize these relationships, I will first address two works that do so. Two of the most celebrated Goldman biographies, both published in 1984, are those that delve deeper into Goldman’s personal life and intimate struggles. Specifically, her struggles and intimate relationships with men and the effect they have on her anarchist political ideals. Candace Falk’s (1984) “Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman” and Alice Wexler’s (1984) “Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life” are important accounts in that they present information in the form of letters, and for the most part, this information had not previously been examined. Falk focuses on Goldman’s relationship with Ben Reitman (1879-1943), Goldman’s companion for over ten years of her life. The book delves into Goldman’s personal life, utilizing Goldman’s letters with Reitman to prove the struggles she faced between advocating anarchism and desiring Reitman. On the other hand, Wexler’s work is a more broad analysis of Goldman’s private life, while still examining the extent to which she was able to live up to her own standards, pointing out that this analysis is likely to be a “disheartening experience”\(^2\) for those who value Goldman as a heroic public figure. Wexler goes on to argue that despite these tensions, Goldman’s achievements should not be diminished, but rather her honesty should be celebrated. Ultimately, the authors conclude that locating Goldman within these relationships serves to uncover many of the struggles she faced, framing Goldman in the private sphere as unable to live up to the standards Goldman advocated in the public eye. Falk sees these struggles as “emotional limitations”\(^3\) that Goldman was able minimize in order to give “the world a vision of unlimited freedom.”\(^4\)

\(^2\) Wexler, xviii.

\(^3\) Falk, Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman, 522.

\(^4\) Ibid.
A second theme that emerges in an analysis of Goldman’s biographies is a dismissal of Goldman as an anarchist theorist. When biographers place Goldman’s relationships with men at the forefront, they argue that Goldman’s anarchism was a reflection of the men’s ideals, as opposed to her own original theorizing. However, in comparison to the previous theme, these biographers do not necessarily rely on correspondence to do so. Richard Drinnon’s (1961) *Rebel in Paradise* is the first biographical documentation of Goldman’s life. In it, he argues that Goldman “was by no means a seminal social or political thinker,”

4 dismissing her as taking the dreams of anarchist thinkers like Russian Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) as her own. Martha Solomon’s (1987) *Emma Goldman*, takes on a similar argument, as Solomon states, “Goldman’s works primarily synthesize and adapt the views of other, more original thinkers, as her frequent references to Proudhon, Bakunin, Stirner, and Kropotkin reveal.”

6 Both biographers challenge Goldman’s theorizing as unoriginal, again lessening the legitimacy of her interpretations of anarchist thought.

The themes that arise in these biographies lead to a dismissal of Goldman’s anarchist ideals in an analysis of her private life and struggles. While Goldman’s public persona was arguing for individual freedom from coercion, including in intimate relationships, these authors address a different side of Goldman, who was struggling with these concepts herself. This perspective is important in a complete study of Goldman, however, it is also vital for the historical record to take Goldman seriously as a political thinker.

The diminishing of Goldman’s theorizing requires a standard to be held to Goldman that is not held to her fellow male anarchist comrades. Men are less likely to be challenged when their ideas build on one another and are in conversation with each other. However, when Goldman builds on the ideas of anarchists who came before her, including Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin, it is dismissed as “unoriginal.” In addition, too often, women in the public sphere who defy norms of femininity are defined by their private lives in ways that men are not.

While these problematic themes emerge in older biographies of Goldman, more contemporary works specifically address the two themes I have outlined. This dismissal of Goldman’s originality is prioritized in Penny A. Weiss and Loretta Kensinger’s (2007) edited

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5 Drinnon, 314.

6 Solomon, 38.
collection of essays, *Feminist Interpretations of Emma Goldman*. In their introduction, the editors point out that although Goldman’s ideas were influenced by other theorists, this is irrelevant in terms of her originality and importance, “unless indeed there are no ‘original thinkers,’ since there are none for whom one could not make the same statement.” The same criteria applied to Goldman is not applied to male theorists, as their claims and legitimacy are not often challenged in the way women’s theorizing is. The editor’s goal was to include articles that not only take her seriously as a political theorist, but also paint her in a positive light. According to the authors, “most other literature on Goldman primarily emphasizes a litany of weaknesses, tensions, contradictions, omissions, biases, or unresolved problems in her work.” The essays in this collection are important works that value Goldman as a feminist, anarchist theorist, including topics such as free speech, childhood, and Goldman’s feminism.

Bonnie Haaland’s (1993) biography, *Emma Goldman: Sexuality and the Impurity of the State*, also addresses the previous themes in that she adopts an approach that does not deal with the life of Goldman, but rather “the ideas of Goldman as they relate to the centrality of sexuality and reproduction within her anarchist theory.” Haaland addresses those biographers who have focused on contradictions between Goldman’s anarchist rhetoric and her private life, and then distances herself from them. Her book focuses on an analysis of the role sexuality plays in Goldman’s vision of anarchism. For Haaland, Goldman does not believe sexual freedom can be achieved within state-dominated spheres, but rather by following one’s individual desires. Overall, this work is important because even in a discussion of sexuality and reproduction, Haaland does not rely on Goldman’s relationships with men, or the tensions produced between her anarchist ideals and lived experiences.

The most recent biography of Goldman written by Kathy Ferguson, *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets* (2011), also differs from those that stress her ideas and experiences concerning love and revolution. Ferguson deals with Goldman’s relationships by

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8 Ibid., 16.
contextualizing Goldman in a radical political space where her location and specific events lead her to think about ideas of oppression, ultimately influencing her political theory. Goldman’s relationships with male anarchist thinkers are placed in this political space, naming Goldman as an anarchist apprentice to those men that came before her. Ferguson takes Goldman seriously as an anarchist theorist, without centering her romantic relationships with men. In this way, Ferguson moves past both themes that limit previous biographer’s analysis of Goldman.

Overall, I have demonstrated the two themes that emerge in earlier (1960s-1980s) biographies of Goldman, including their prioritization of relationships with men in order to prove incongruencies between Goldman’s anarchist politics and intimate life, and the tendency to critique the originality and seriousness of Goldman’s political theory. In addition, I have pointed out the way more contemporary biographies have addressed these issues. However, a silence still exists about Goldman’s relationships with women. It is from this silence, and through my critiques of existing biographies, that I developed my research questions. I seek to complicate Goldman as a political figure based on the three themes I have devised. Through an analysis of Goldman’s representation of the intersection of gender and anarchism, her political thought, and her female relationships, it is my goal to draw conclusions with a feminist lens. This thesis seeks to address these themes in similar ways as contemporary works on Goldman, through a new perspective. By centering women, we can examine a different side to Goldman’s commitment to anarchist ideals.

**Narrating Women’s Lives as a Feminist Genre**

Feminists have undertaken the daunting task of narrating women’s lives as a method of retelling history in order to place women into texts where they have been written out as a result of patriarchy. In 1988, Carolyn G. Heilbrun published *Writing a Woman’s Life*, in which she argues feminist intervention is necessary in the genre of writing the lives of women. According to Heilbrun, biographers have been uncomfortable with women as subjects due to socially constructed gender roles, and because of this discomfort, there is little sense of what a woman’s biography should look like. Heilbrun’s concept was especially influential in 1988, and remains so today. Authors must choose interpretations of women’s lives, and as I have demonstrated, these interpretations are varied in terms of the way they
represent Goldman’s life. As a result of institutions like patriarchy and heteronormativity, women’s lives are often defined in relation to the lives of men, and Goldman is no exception. To limit Goldman’s political development to a comparison of her relationships with men is to limit the narration of Goldman’s life altogether. For Heilbrun, the task is to understand and narrate the lives of women without relying on structures defined by the role men play in women’s lives.

Addressing these limits to narration does not provide a definitive answer as to what a woman’s biography should look like. However, it is not productive to define one version of narration as more representative of “truth” than another. To acknowledge the concept of multiple “truths” is to realize that each account of Goldman’s life is an important representation of various parts of her life. The Personal Narratives Group, founded in 1983 at the University of Minnesota, organized as women’s personal narratives were gaining importance in academia. The group published a book titled *Interpreting Women’s Lives* (1989), which discusses the concept of “truth” when narrating a woman’s life. The group argues that feminist historiography is one that acknowledges multiple truths, as opposed to one truth based on objective sources. Truths, then, are “a decidedly plural concept meant to encompass the multiplicity of ways in which a woman’s life story reveals and reflects important features of her conscious experience and social landscape.”

Goldman is a well-known and important figure in history, and the multiple accounts of her life and various reflections of her experiences represent different truths. This thesis is significant in that it seeks to utilize her relationships and letters with women to tell an original version of truth in terms of narrating the life of Goldman.

Ultimately, narrating women’s lives is vital to feminist scholarship. Although Goldman has certainly been written about in feminist ways, as previously demonstrated, my version of a feminist truth is one that looks to relationships between women. In “Three Perspectives on Method: The Individual Life,” Patricia McClelland Miller (1979) points out syndromes which affect the life writing of women. One syndrome she identifies is the difficulty biographers have in terms of identifying relationships among and between women. According to the author, “this is an area fraught with difficulty for the biographer because

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our culture in general responds to relationships between women with silence, boredom, discomfort, fear, or contempt.”\textsuperscript{11} Many existing biographies of Goldman have fallen symptom to this syndrome, with emphasis on the responses of silence and boredom. Miller goes on to argue, “a thorough consideration of female bonding in all its aspects is crucial to women’s studies.”\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{THE EMMA GOLDMAN PAPERS: GOLDMAN & SANGER, GOLDMAN & SPERRY}

With my research questions, existing biographies, and the literature regarding narrating women’s lives in mind, I look to letters as a research methodology. The Emma Goldman Papers is an extensive archive located at the University of California, Berkley. The project began in 1980, and has organized tens of thousands of documents by and about Goldman since its conception. Although I was unable to visit the archives, the papers have been published to microfilm, which I was able to access via interlibrary loan. The chronology of the documents spans 1869-1940, and is divided into three categories, correspondence, government documents, and writings. I looked exclusively at correspondence in order to answer my research questions specifically tailored to examining relationships between women, and to keep the scope of my project manageable.

It is important to note the role correspondence played in Goldman’s life. In a time before technology made communication easily accessible, letter writing was an important way for Goldman to keep up with her revolutionary comrades. The correspondence category of the published archives includes over sixteen thousand letters written to and by Goldman. Goldman corresponded with people across the world, often desiring an update on revolutionary movements in any given location. Anarchists’ effort to stay in communication with each other was necessary for revolution, and Goldman sometimes wrote multiple letters to a single person in a single day. Before beginning the process of writing her autobiography, Goldman asked her friends and comrades with whom she had corresponded to send her written letters back, allowing her to recount and write, in detail, about her experiences and journeys. Goldman was aware of the power of letters, and the influence they had on her life


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
and the historical record. For Goldman, letters were more than a way to keep up with friends and relatives, they were a tool for the revolution.

Included in the Emma Goldman Papers website is an index of Goldman’s correspondence by name. After searching the index I chose to focus on Goldman’s correspondence with Margaret Sanger and Alameda Sperry. I specifically did not choose Goldman’s family members, although she had significant correspondence with female family members including her niece, Stella Ballantine. I did not focus on women who Goldman was related to because I wanted the correspondence between these women to be limited to a specific time period. The letters with Sanger and Sperry each span approximately two years, whereas Goldman’s letters with her niece, for example, span over two decades. I chose to examine Sanger because I knew her to a birth control pioneer, and I knew Goldman supported birth control within a broader anarchist framework. I suspected the letters would be a site where the women were in conversation about politics more generally, and birth control specifically. Although the correspondence between Sanger and Goldman was limited to thirteen letters, sufficient auto/biographical literature exists on Sanger, so I was confident in my ability to understand her politics, as well as her identity and location during her correspondence with Goldman.

I chose Alameda Sperry because I had previous knowledge about the speculation surrounding the possibility of a sexual relationship between the two women. I wondered the extent to which the letters would represent this relationship, as well as whether the women were in conversation about politics, specifically same-sex sexuality, which Goldman also supported within a broader anarchist framework. The relationship between Sperry and Goldman is sometimes mentioned in biographical accounts of Goldman, although in a very limited manner, and often dismissed of its significance. Although the biographical information on Sperry was limited, as she was a lesser-known historical figure, there was more correspondence, and I look to secondary sources to call upon existing silences.

It is significant to note that although the website of the archives lists correspondence by name, and dates of the letters, I did not know who, specifically, was corresponding going into this project. I entered my research with the assumption that the letters would be a back and forth conversation between Goldman and Sanger, and Goldman and Sperry. However, once I became immersed in the letters, I discovered that the Sanger correspondence included
only the letters from Goldman to Sanger. On the other hand, the Sperry correspondence included only letters from Sperry to Goldman. In many ways, this is limiting to my research, but as a feminist scholar who values silence as text, examining these silences became a part of my analysis.

**CORRESPONDENCE AS FEMINIST METHODOLOGY**

Feminists have pointed out ethical issues in terms of using a woman’s personal mail to uncover aspects of her life she may have wanted to keep hidden. Despite the fact that Goldman used correspondence to write her autobiography, she was still able to censor parts of herself she did not want to represent in her own version of her legacy. Simply put, she did not use all her letters in her autobiography, and although she was a public figure who wrote a variety of letters, both formal and intimate, she did not necessarily want all aspects of her life to become public. This has left open the possibility for scholars to uncover letters, and address these silences. Falk specifically addresses this issue in her previously mentioned 1984 biography, *Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman*, where she divulges many personal and intimate letters. Falk cites a letter Goldman wrote to Ben Reitman, in which she asks him not to publish their letters in his own writings, stating, “letters should only be published as letters and after the death of the writer—not that I am ashamed of anything I might have written.”

Using this letter as a reference, Falk continues on to publish Goldman’s personal mail in her book, adhering to Goldman’s two wishes. I, too, negotiate these ethical issues based on the fact that I am utilizing her letters as just that, the representation of one truth of Goldman’s life through correspondence, and am doing so after Goldman’s death.

Letters are seen as separate from that which is “objective,” in that they are biased by the individual composing the letter. However, feminists have taken up this methodology because of its ability to uncover relationships and desires not allowed to women within the confines of patriarchy. Through the use of letters, “subaltern new intertexts can be

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constructed to produce other/new narratives,”15 because these texts “reveal a myriad of illegitimate yearnings and subgenres.”16 If we return to the role correspondence played in the creation of Goldman’s autobiography, combined with the fact that the book only briefly mentions Sanger, and does not acknowledge Sperry at all, we can conclude that this specific correspondence exists as an undertold story. The fact that these relationships have yet to be explored leaves the possibility of the creation of a new narrative based on this correspondence as subaltern text. The silences that exist due to the dismissal of Goldman’s correspondence with women, both by Goldman herself and other scholars, need to be uncovered, and the representations of her politics need to be articulated by centering women.

I examine the letters in a way that examines female-to-female correspondence as a space for Goldman to exist separately from men. According to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (1975), female-to-female letters are important sites in that “women, who had little status or power in the larger world of male concerns, possessed status and power in the lives and worlds of other women.”17 While Goldman possessed status and power as a leader of the U.S. anarchist movement, she still existed in a world dominated by men. In these letters, Goldman could reflect on her politics without men present, despite being active in a male-dominated anarchist movement. Perhaps the fact that she did possess power in the larger anarchist movement is reflected in the extent to which she is able to possess power in her relationships with women. These letters act as texts in which Goldman was able to explore her politics outside the sexism of her male comrades.

Letters are also an autobiographical site in that the individual writing the letter is representing themselves to the recipients. In Sidonie Smith’s (1990) “Construing Truth in Lying Mouths: Truthtelling in Women’s Autobiography,” the author reminds us “the autobiographical text is, after all, a self-representational artifact, not the self itself.”18 Smith

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16 Ibid., 106.


goes on to argue that “autobiographical texts manifest a specific female consciousness,” but “the autobiographer does not always linger entirely in the spatiotemporal local of gender; she lingers also and elsewhere in multiple locales whose positioning shifts with the effect that the formerly peripheral becomes central.” Smith suggests that the autobiographer’s representations of herself shift based on her audience. In a male dominated location, gender was central for Goldman when she was the only woman, and the one woman representing gendered political issues. Perhaps, the temporal local of gender would be minimized between two women, allowing for the representation of alternate “truths.” In other words, these letters as woman-only spaces create an environment for Goldman’s gender to move to the peripheral, according to Smith. In valuing letters as representations of a self, I began my research looking to examine the extent to which other locales would present themselves when gender as a political identity was not necessarily prioritized.

Overall, although the life of Emma Goldman has been explored extensively, there needs to be a shift in perspective in order to write about Goldman in an original way. Goldman is a well-known figure in the academic disciplines of History, Political Science, and Women’s Studies, as well as in grassroots feminist, anarchist, and class based activism. While feminist perspectives of Goldman certainly exist, this thesis seeks to use a new feminist lens to center Goldman’s relationships with women by examining Goldman’s correspondence with two women. My thesis is not an overarching study of Goldman’s relationships and friendships with the many women she corresponded with across the course of her life. It is possible and probable that stronger relationships and connections existed between Goldman and other women in her life. However, this thesis does draw conclusions based on Goldman’s relationships with Margaret Sanger and Alameda Sperry.

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19 Ibid., 37.
20 Ibid., 44.
CHAPTER 2

EMMA GOLDMAN

Chapter two provides the reader with necessary biographical information on Emma Goldman. I specifically chart Goldman’s childhood, the journey that brought her to New York City, and her subsequent anarchist work. As anti-Semitism played an important role in Goldman’s development as an individual and in the development of her politics, I address the influence of this discrimination in her life. I then discuss anarchism as a philosophy through an interpretation of Goldman’s political views. In addition, I highlight the gendered aspects of Goldman’s anarchism, leading to my naming of Goldman as an anarchist feminist.

Emma Goldman was born in the rural Russian city of Kovno, in present day Lithuania, on June 27, 1869. Goldman was born into a Jewish family of two Jewish parents. Her mother, Taube Bienowitch, was previously married and the couple had two children, Lena and Helena, before Taube’s husband died from tuberculosis.21 Bienowitch remarried Abraham Goldman, the result of her family’s arrangement, and Emma later described the marriage as being “in the traditional Jewish Orthodox fashion, without love.”22 Soon after the couple was married, Abraham invested Taube’s inheritance from her first marriage in a small business, ultimately losing both the money and the family’s financial security.

The Goldman family lived in the Jewish Pale of Settlement, the name for part of the Russian Empire established by Catherine II, where 94 percent of all Jews in imperial Russia were forced to live.23 Here, the Goldman family, like other Jews, was subject to extra taxes and the inability to own land, making it difficult to earn a living. As a result of restricted lines of work, there was much competition for jobs as craftsmen and small traders within the Pale, and it was not atypical for Jews to invest money in these small businesses with the imminent threat of failure. The conditions of life in the Pale made it difficult to attain financial stability,

21 Drinnon, 4.


which was something the Goldman family struggled with for the majority of Emma’s childhood and adolescence. Emma was an unwelcome child not only because of the state of the family’s finances, but also because of her sex. Abraham wanted a son, and even after the couple later had two sons, Herman and Morris, his disappointment over having a daughter did not dwindle.\(^\text{24}\)

Shortly after Emma’s birth, the Goldman family moved from Kovno to the Lithuanian town of Papile. The town was predominately Jewish, and Abraham was able to find work as an innkeeper and as the manager of a stagecoach. His work at the inn was made especially difficult by anti-Semitism in that “as a Jew he was easily scapegoated in his role as middleman, and blamed for the drunkenness of the peasants of the inn by the officials and for any transgressions of the peasants toward the officials.”\(^\text{25}\) Abraham’s frustrations as a result of restricted lines of work, financial instability, and overall anti-Semitic attitudes commonly resulted in violence. Emma, as the unwanted daughter, often felt the physical brunt of threats to her father’s masculinity. Goldman recalls one particularly violent incident in her autobiography:

> Suddenly I felt a terrific pain in my head, as if I had been struck with an iron bar. It was Father’s fist that had smashed the round comb I wore to hold my unruly hair. He pounded me and pulled me about, raging: “You are my disgrace! You will always be so! You can’t be my child; you don’t look like me or like your mother; you don’t act like us!”\(^\text{26}\)

This is not the only account of abuse at the hands of her father in Goldman’s autobiography.

Emma lived in Papile with her family until she was eight and her mother sent her to live with her grandmother in Konigsberg, the capital of East Prussia, in order to attend a private Jewish elementary school. At the time, it was common for Jewish women to attend school, although not as a substitute for traditional expectations. Women were still expected to marry, but it was believed that their education would allow them to better support their educated husband and children.\(^\text{27}\) Goldman’s grandmother lived with many members of the extended family, including Emma’s aunts and uncles, allowing the family to have the

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 5.  
\(^{26}\) Goldman, *Living My Life*, 60.  
\(^{27}\) Morton, 7.
resources to send Emma to school. Although Emma was removed from the abuse of her father and able to escape to school, she was not free from violence at the hands of male family members. Goldman’s uncle would often force her to stay home from school to do household chores, and repeatedly abused her, including once kicking her down a flights of stairs.

Abraham Goldman moved from Papile to the capitol city of St. Petersburg in 1882 in order to open a dry-goods store with his cousin. However, shortly before the rest of the family was scheduled to join him, Emma’s father’s business again failed. The family still relocated, and eventually settled in the Jewish section of the city, where “the ghetto was filled to overflowing with Jews who had streamed in to avoid persecution—the refugees had arrived, someone remarked, with death literally nipping at their heels.”28 Again, the Goldman family was in a time of financial instability, and it became necessary for thirteen-year-old Emma to find work. Initially, Goldman was able to work from home knitting shawls, but she did not enjoy the working conditions. Working from home, a common job for women, meant there was no regulation of hours through a distinction between home and workplace. The work did not end until all the knitting was done, and began again as soon as resources allowed. When offered a position by her father’s cousin, Goldman took the opportunity to begin working at a glove factory. In the factory, “the rooms were stuffy, unventilated, and dark. Oil lamps gave the light; the sun never penetrated the work-room,”29 but Goldman preferred the factory to working from home.

**Immigration to the United States**

In 1885, Emma and her half sister Helena left St. Petersburg for the United States. Emma’s rocky relationship with her father had come to a breaking point, and the girls’ eldest sister, Lena, was already living in Rochester, New York. Emma and Helena went to live with their sister and her husband.30 Times remained difficult financially, and Emma went to work in a clothing factory upon her arrival, which was a common line of work for Jewish women who immigrated to the United States. However, she was not earning enough money to pay

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28 Ibid., 8.


30 Ibid., 11.
her board despite living with her sister, and in true rebel fashion, Emma went to the boss demanding a raise. After her demand was not met, Emma quit and found a job at a second clothing factory earning almost twice as much as she previously earned.\textsuperscript{31} It was here that Goldman met Jacob Kershner, who would eventually become her husband, providing Goldman with U.S. citizenship. In February 1887, at the age of 18, the couple was married in Rochester, but months into their loveless, passionless marriage, Goldman demanded a divorce from Kershner. After the divorce, Goldman moved to New Haven, Connecticut to escape the complications of Rochester and found work in a corset factory. This was atypical behavior for a newly divorced Jewish woman, but Goldman desired escape from the traditional Jewish community that frowned upon her divorce. New Haven offered a new environment with similar working opportunities.

It was here that Goldman, free from the ties of her family and failed relationships, was first introduced to socialists and anarchists in the U.S. Goldman met these radical Russian students through her factory work. The radicals organized their own meetings, and often invited guest speakers. Goldman, who was drawn to their revolutionary critiques of capitalism, attended the meetings as often as she could. Among these radicals was A. Solotaroff,\textsuperscript{32} who would come to be Goldman’s only radical contact when she moved to New York City, and who would later introduce her to anarchist Alexander Berkman. Although “life was interesting and colorful,”\textsuperscript{33} Goldman was eventually forced to return to Rochester because of strained working conditions.

At the dawn of the Progressive Era (1890-1920), poor working conditions within U.S. factories were commonplace. Between 1890-1910, “millions of new immigrants entered the country, most of them from Europe,”\textsuperscript{34} and these immigrants largely worked in factories and sweatshops. Women, especially single women, as Goldman was when she moved from Rochester to New Haven, worked outside the home in factories. By 1890, “40 percent of all single white women were in the labor force; 60 percent of single nonwhite women; and 70

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 17.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 23.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 24.
\end{itemize}
percent of single foreign-born women.”\textsuperscript{35} Women often worked fourteen-hour days in buildings with no windows, no ventilation, bad lighting, and little pay. For example, at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company in Manhattan, Jewish and Italian women sewed blouses and “their pay, usually no more than six dollars a week, was docked for lateness, for spending two or three minutes too long in the rest room, for talking on the shop floor, and for mistakes in sewing.”\textsuperscript{36} Supervisors also locked doors from the outside to prevent the women from leaving during working hours. In 1911, a fire broke out, and as workers were unable to escape through the locked doors, 3 men and 143 women and girls died in the fire. Labor conditions were not regulated by law, and as a result, conditions in the factories were often retched. During the time Goldman was living in New Haven, harsh factory conditions and the financial pressures of living alone in a new city were not enough to sustain her. Despite the draw of radical activity, Goldman moved back to Rochester

Upon her return to Rochester, Kershner continually approached Goldman with the offer to remarry. Goldman repeatedly refused, determined at this point to make it to radical New York City, the hub of the U.S. anarchist movement. Kershner eventually threatened to kill himself if Goldman would not remarry and with this threat, Goldman gave in to his wish. In her autobiography, Goldman recalls, “Kershner’s threat frightened me: I could not be responsible for his death. I remarried him.”\textsuperscript{37} Perhaps Goldman remarried Kershner because she believed he would kill himself, or perhaps she was drawn to a sense of security felt with him at a time when security in her life was scarce.

After returning to Kershner, Goldman took a course in dressmaking without her husband’s knowledge. It was her intention to become financially self-sufficient, and the course, in combination with a sewing machine, provided Goldman with her own means of production. Despite returning to Kershner, Goldman was not in love with her husband, and was plotting to leave him and the complacency of Rochester behind. After three months of attempting to convince Kershner to allow her travel to New York City to no avail, Goldman made the decision to leave Rochester definitely. Goldman’s sister Helena paid her fare to the

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 359.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 380.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 25.
city, and the rebel left with five dollars in her pocket and her sewing machine in tow. She had no plans to return.

**Haymarket Affair**

Goldman credits her passion for anarchism to the May 4, 1886 Haymarket Affair in Chicago, where a bomb was thrown during a labor protest and as a result five anarchists were hanged, two were imprisoned for life, and one received a 15 year sentence. According to Goldman, it was an unfair trial in that there was no evidence proving who threw the bomb, but rather, “anarchy was on trial.” After hearing news of the sentencing of the anarchists involved, Goldman was distraught with the verdict. Goldman was living in Rochester at the time, and she went to sleep the night of the verdict, awoke the next morning, and felt as though she had experienced a political awakening. Goldman recalls, “I had a distinct sensation that something new and wonderful had been born in my soul. A great ideal, a burning faith, a determination to dedicate myself to the memory of my martyred comrades, to make their cause my own, to make known to the world their beautiful lives and heroic deaths.” In this way, the treatment of those involved with the Haymarket Affair marks the “birth” of Goldman’s passion and political determination. However, while the affair was a catalyst to Goldman’s activism, it was not the only factor in her commitment to the cause of anarchism. Her political perspective and the choice to devote her life to radical politics were ultimately influenced by a myriad of factors including, but not limited to, her class background, anti-Semitism, and her experiences as a woman.

**Radicalism in New York City**

With her experiences in Rochester behind her and her anarchist spirit ignited by the Haymarket Affair, Goldman’s first day in New York City was August 15, 1889. She immediately became immersed in the anarchist scene. Upon arrival, Goldman’s previously mentioned host, A. Solotaroff, brought her to Sachs’s café, known as “the headquarters of the

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39 Ibid., 3.
40 Ibid., 8.
41 Ibid., 10.
42 Ibid., 3.
East Side radicals, socialists, and anarchists.”\textsuperscript{43} Here, Goldman was introduced to anarchist Alexander Berkman, who would go on to be Goldman’s life-long friend, mentor, and partner of 20 years. That very same night, Goldman accompanied Berkman to a Johann Most lecture, where Goldman also met Most for the first time. Most (1846-1906) was one of the most well-known anarchist leaders in the U.S. at the time. He was the editor of the radical publication, \textit{Freiheit}, and a follower of Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876), known to be responsible for the founding of anarchist thought. Upon her first day in New York City, Goldman was quickly accepted into this radical, anarchist milieu. It was not typical for a single woman to arrive, by herself, upon the political scene with an already established radical devotion. As a result, Goldman’s experience was unique in that she, herself was unique.

The anarchist congregation at Sach’s café was representative of a larger radical political climate present in the city comprised, in large part, by immigrants. By the 1880s, the United States, and specifically New York City, had a large population of leftist political groups who “dated back to the pre-Civil War period when German immigrants brought Marxist doctrine with them to the United States.”\textsuperscript{44} This Marxist doctrine originated with Karl Marx, the German philosopher who prioritized class distinctions above all else, arguing that the defeat of the bourgeoisie upper class by the working class proletariat would “emancipat[e] society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinctions, and class struggles.”\textsuperscript{45} Class distinction was prioritized in this specific radical space, largely at the expense of other oppressions. However, despite the overall focus on social class, a divisive split came in terms of revolutionary strategies of leftist political groups, specifically between socialists and anarchists. Marxist socialists favored political action through the use of political parties, with the ultimate goal of a proletariat takeover and subsequent redistribution of power through workers owning the means of production. Anarchist followers of Bakunin, like Most and eventually Goldman, favored direct action through union organizing, with the ultimate goal of establishing self-governing communities. These anarchists disagreed with the concept of political parties in that they gave legitimacy to existing hierarchal institutions,

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{44} Morton, 21.
including the state, which anarchists sought to abolish.\textsuperscript{46} Although there was a large anti-capitalist radical, immigrant, population in the U.S., there were still vast differences among the community.

While the radical community was initially made up of immigrants who brought Marxist and Bakuninist doctrines to the U.S., the immigrant population also influenced the radical political space in that they were concentrated in working class jobs. Like Goldman, many immigrated to the United States in order to find work and create a better life for themselves. The work they were able to get when they arrived in New York was largely factory work, as these jobs were increasing with the rise of industrialization. In this way, an immigrant working class population grew because “employers needed the newcomers to work in the multiplying mills and factories that were rapidly making the United States a great industrial power.”\textsuperscript{47} This created a largely discontent, immigrant, exploited, working class population, who became the audience for anarchist lectures and union recruitment.

Following Goldman’s entrance into U.S. anarchism and with her immigrant background, she became immersed in this radical culture in New York City and immediately devoted her life to the cause of anarchism. It was Most who encouraged Goldman to begin a lecture tour, and chose, for her, the subject of the eight-hour workday. The eight-hour workday was an existing, growing movement in labor reform circles, especially among women. For example, Socialist party leaders argued that women activists “could best explain to workers’ wives how the eight-hour victory would benefit the whole family,”\textsuperscript{48} making them effective activists for this reform. Goldman agreed upon the topic, and her career as an anarchist speaker began in 1890. In her autobiography, Goldman recounts her first public speaking experience,

\begin{quote}
I began to speak. Words I had never heard myself utter before came pouring forth, faster and faster. They came with passionate intensity; they painted images of the heroic men on the gallows, their glowing vision of an ideal life, rich with comfort and beauty: men and women radiant in freedom, children transformed by joy and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 16.
affection. The audience had vanished, the hall itself had disappeared; I was conscious only of my own words, of my ecstatic song.  

So began the career that would eventually deem Goldman “the most dangerous woman in the world.”

Goldman, although one of the few women involved in the anarchist movement, was part of a larger movement of organized women working towards labor reform. For example, the Working Women’s Protective Union was established in 1868, where all working women were eligible to join. The union “ran an employment bureau, and tried to develop new kinds of jobs for women. The New York branch collected thousands of dollars in unpaid wages for women and placed fifteen hundred to two thousand women in jobs each year.” In addition to broader union organizations, Jewish women were also organizing themselves at this time. Jewish women’s clubs were coming together, including The National Council of Jewish Women, established in 1893. Members of the Council “educated themselves on public policy, testified before congressional committees, and tried to combat such social ills as poverty and juvenile delinquency within the Jewish community.” Although these groups were not specifically anarchist, Goldman and her comrades were not alone in advocating for labor reform. Rather, they were reflective of a larger labor reform oriented political climate, wherein women were active members.

After advocating for an eight-hour workday, Goldman organized a second tour in 1899. She would go on to spend the next twenty years advocating the cause of anarchism in the United States, until her deportation in 1919 for opposing conscription. Goldman was an effective public speaker, and as a result, she partially made her living as an anarchist. In addition, Goldman and her comrades often lived together, greatly lessening expenses. Goldman’s sewing machine was always in use, either by Goldman herself or whomever she was living with at the time. In her autobiography, Goldman recalls spending eighteen-hour days at her sewing machine with Alexander Berkman, when they were not busy touring.

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49 Goldman, Living My Life, 55.
51 Cott, 349.
52 Ibid., 344.
As she gained popularity, Goldman was able to lecture on a wider range of topics including anarchism, birth control, women’s suffrage, free love, marriage, drama, war, and many more. On a lecture tour in 1911, Goldman visited 40 locations in the United States in six months, delivering 150 lectures. In addition to speaking, she authored many articles and wrote five books across the course of her life, including *Anarchism and Other Essays* (1910), *The Social Significance of Modern Drama* (1914), *My Disillusionment in Russia* (1923), *My Further Disillusionment in Russia* (1924), and finally, her autobiography, *Living My Life* (1931). Goldman also founded and edited her own anarchist publication, *Mother Earth*, in 1906. Clearly, once Goldman arrived in New York City following the Haymarket Affair, her life became devoted to anarchism.

**GOLDMAN’S ANARCHISM**

Anarchism, in its most basic definition, comes from the Greek word anarkhia, “meaning contrary to authority or without a ruler, and was used in a derogatory sense until 1840, when it was adopted by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon to describe his political and social ideology.”\(^{53}\) Anarchism as a philosophy is often contributed to four male thinkers. William Godwin (1756-1836) published *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* in 1793, in which he “set out the anarchist case against government, the law, property, and institutions of the state.”\(^{54}\) Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) was the first to specifically call himself an anarchist, and he became famous for an essay in which he “declared that ‘Property is Theft’, but he also claimed that ‘Property is Freedom.’”\(^{55}\) The previously mentioned Michael Bakunin (1814-1876) became famous for his disagreements with Marx, and Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921) published many works and became “the most widely read on a global scale of all anarchist authors.”\(^{56}\) While these men were the founders of anarchist thought, the philosophy is not limited to their opinions. Goldman, for example, had her own interpretation of anarchism, influenced by experiences in her own life.

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\(^{54}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 4.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 8.
For Goldman, anarchism was a philosophy of consciousness allowing for complete individual and social freedom through a rejection of the state, religion, and property. In her book, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, Goldman devotes the first chapter to “Anarchism: What it Really Stands For.” To begin the chapter, Goldman focuses on condemning those who simply dismiss anarchist as too idealistic as opposed to realistic, and who equate anarchism with violence and destruction. Goldman counters with the idea that ignorance is what is truly violent, and reminds the reader that anarchism requires one to be critical about the capitalist world. She says, “Anarchism urges man to think, to investigate, to analyze every proposition; but that the brain capacity of the average reader be not taxed too much, I shall also begin with a definition.” Her definition is simple: “Anarchism: The philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law; the theory that all forms of government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary.” Goldman’s anarchism relies on the idea of individual freedoms, and that humans can only be free when they are free from religion, property, and government.

These basic anarchist ideas informed her opinions regarding women. For example, she was against the institution of marriage, which she saw as an economic agreement in that it enslaved women to men and limited their individual freedoms. In “Marriage and Love,” Goldman (1910) asserts that within the tradition of marriage, women are limited in that “the marriage insurance condemns her to life-long dependency, to parasitism, to complete uselessness, individual as well as social” and while men are also limited within this institution, “he feels his chains more in an economic sense.” However, Goldman was not the first woman in the U.S. to lecture against the institution of marriage. In 1871, Victoria Woodhull spoke against marriage in advocating free love, arguing that the institution of marriage stifled true love.

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58 Ibid., 49-50.

59 Ibid., 50.


61 Cott, 311.
Goldman’s rejection of government also meant she was against women’s suffrage. Goldman did not disagree with suffrage because she felt women were inferior to men, rather she saw suffrage as a distraction from revolutionary thinking, and remained critical of the movement itself from a class perspective. Suffrage was not a working class issue, but rather “a parlor affair, absolutely detached from the economic needs of the people.” Goldman opposed suffrage not only because she saw it as a form of government control, but because it stopped women from working towards what she considered real revolutionary goals, and was not a priority for the working class.

Goldman also had opinions when it came to the way ideas of property were applied to relationships. In order for an anarchist to dismiss the idea of private property, they must also address the manifestation of jealousy in personal relationships. Part of Goldman’s dismissal of marriage lay in advocating free love, where not only is one free to choose who to love, but also free from jealousy within relationships. In an undated lecture titled “Jealousy: Causes and a Possible Cure,” Goldman states “when love can go and come without fear of meeting a watch-dog, jealousy will rarely take root because it will soon learn that where there are no locks and keys there is no place for suspicion and distrust, two elements upon which jealousy thrives and prospers.” Goldman argued that through honesty, one could establish a relationship free from suspicion, where openness eliminates the need for jealousy. However, while Goldman had ideas about why jealousy occurs and how to free oneself from it, as Falk (1984) discovered in her previously mentioned biographical account of Goldman’s correspondence with Ben Reitman, Goldman often struggled with jealousy in her own relationships. While her political ideology kept her from condemning the lack of monogamy in their relationship, “her letters revealed a tortured effort to reconcile her bitter disappointment and anger with her ideology. She tried to deny her jealousy, but it gnawed at her.” Falk argues that while Goldman’s politics identified the root of jealousy, this identification did not immediately lead to the diminishing of jealousy in her own relationships.

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64 Falk, Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman, 83.
As I have demonstrated, Goldman addressed issues that specifically affected women’s experiences. Goldman identified with the specific plights of women in anarchist ideals, arguing that women needed a different kind of liberation as a result of different material experiences. In this way, I define Goldman as an anarchist-feminist. She saw patriarchy as a manifestation of hierarchy, and valued the abolition of patriarchy as essential to anarchist liberation. Many traditional anarchists did not prioritize the abolition of patriarchy, arguing that it would dissolve following the abolition of capitalism and the state.

A final, defining aspect of Goldman’s anarchism was her appreciation of the beauty in life. It was common within Goldman’s close anarchist circle, to criticize fellow comrades for whether or not they were living up to the revolutionary lifestyle, as opposed to enjoying bourgeois luxuries. In a conversation between Goldman and Alexander Berkman, the latter told Goldman, “it is inconsistent for an anarchist to enjoy luxuries while the people live in poverty.”\(^{65}\) However Goldman did not agree, and responded “but beautiful things are not luxuries,…they are necessaries. Life would be unbearable without them.”\(^{66}\) It is from this philosophy that Goldman’s ideas about dancing and revolution came to fruition. When she was told, at a dance, that it was undignified to frivolously enjoy herself so fully, she responded, “I was tired of having the Cause constantly thrown in my face. I did not believe that a Cause which stood for a beautiful ideal, for anarchism, for release and freedom from conventions and prejudice, should demand the denial of life and joy.”\(^{67}\)

**The Deportation of Emma Goldman**

Goldman spent the majority of her political career in the United States being tracked and followed by the U.S. government for her anarchist ideals. She was arrested seven times over the course of twenty-four years in the U.S., and subsequently served three prison sentences. Goldman’s first arrest occurred in August 1893 after a lecture where she urged those in need to take bread if they were hungry. Following Goldman’s lecture and arrest, she was found guilty of inciting to riot, and sentenced to one year in prison. The next time Goldman was arrested was in connection to the assassination of President McKinley.

\(^{65}\) Goldman, *Living My Life*, 32.

\(^{66}\) Ibid.

\(^{67}\) Ibid., 56.
Anarchist Leon Czolgosz shot President William McKinley on September 6, 1901, and he died eight days later. The press immediately targeted Goldman, and subsequently arrested her, although Goldman did not play a role in the assassination. Czolgosz had heard Goldman speak, but admitted Goldman had not been involved in his plan. Since there was no evidence to follow the arrest, Goldman was released without charge. Although Goldman was sympathetic to the use of political violence, especially within a critique of the power structures that create the inequality that ultimately leads to the use of violence as a tactic, she distanced herself from Czolgosz. Goldman acknowledged political violence as often a necessary means to revolution, but as she did not have a part in Czolgosz’s assassination, she did not necessarily identify with the attempt.

The assassination of the McKinley, marked a new level of anti-anarchist sentiment in the U.S., and the country reacted accordingly. The Immigration Act of 1903 specifically targeted anarchists in that the law “prohibited entry into the United States of any person who did not believe in organized government.” The Bureau of Investigation (BOI) was established in 1908, and would later become the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in 1935, to track the actions of radicals, including Goldman. John Edgar Hoover, who went on to become the first director of the FBI, began his career when he was assigned to follow Goldman with the intention of her eventual deportation from the country. Following this sequence of events, Goldman was arrested five more times, including once for the dissemination of information regarding birth control in 1916, and served two more prison sentences: fifteen days in 1916, and almost two years beginning in 1917.

It was the United States’ entrance into World War I in 1917 that intensified the already existing hostile environment toward radicals. In May 1917, “the Selective Service Act passed, requiring that men between the ages of 20 and 30 register for military service on June 4.” Goldman and her comrades lectured opposing the measure, in addition to opposing the war altogether. On June 15, 1917, Goldman and Alexander Berkman were arrested in New York at the Mother Earth offices for conspiracy to prevent draft registration, and sentenced to two years in prison. Goldman left the Missouri penitentiary on September 28,

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68 Morton, 34.
69 Falk, Love, Anarchy, and Emma Goldman, 47.
70 Morton, 85.
1919 after serving 20 months of her sentence, but knew deportation would soon be her fate. Finally, on December 21, 1919, Goldman was deported and ordered to return to Russia. When she arrived at Ellis Island, before boarding the ship, Goldman recalled one of her last interactions with U.S. press in her autobiography: “That is the end, Emma Goldman, isn’t it?” a reporter remarked. ‘It may only be the beginning,’ I flashed back.” Despite leaving the U.S., Goldman had no intention of giving up the cause of anarchism.

**GOLDMAN IN EXILE**

Upon her return to Russia, Goldman became immersed in the aftermath of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. She soon became unsatisfied with the state of Russia under the reign of the Bolshevik leaders, and began to write about her experiences. Goldman was specifically aghast at the anti-Semitism in the Revolution in the form of pogroms, or violent killings of Jews. Upon a visit to Ukraine in 1920, “Goldman discovered that the community was still in shock from frightful pogroms initiated by the White generals. One pogrom had killed 4,000 people outright, and thousands more died trying to escape. There had been wholesale rape of the Jewish women.” She eventually left Russia for London in 1921, and her accounts of the harsh political and economic conditions she uncovered at the hands of the Bolsheviks were published in *My Disillusionment in Russia* (1923) and *My Further Disillusionment in Russia* (1924). Goldman continued to lecture extensively, and lived and traveled across Europe and Canada. She traveled to Canada in 1926, to Germany in 1932, and back to London in 1933.

Goldman always wished to return to the United States, and finally, in 1934, the U.S. government provided her a three-month visa, allowing her to once again briefly tour the United States. With the support of important political and literary figures including John Dewey, Sinclair Lewis, and Amos Pinchot, Goldman was allowed to return under the condition that she only speak on the topics of literature and drama. After her short visit, Goldman returned to Toronto, Canada. In many ways, Goldman considered the U.S. her home. However, the next time she would return home would be following her death.

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72 Ibid., 710.
73 Morton, 113.
74 Ibid., 137.
Goldman died in Toronto on May 14, 1940 of complications following a stroke, at the age of 70. Goldman was buried May 17 in Waldheim Cemetery in Chicago, chosen because she wanted to be close to the graves of those who died in the Haymarket Affair.

It is with this biographical background of Goldman as an anarchist activist, who existed in a male dominated movement but prioritized women’s issues, and appreciated the beauty in life, that I proceed to my analytical chapters. I have provided a brief overview of Goldman’s life and political development, allowing for the contextualization of the correspondence in the following chapters. Chapter three is an analysis of Goldman’s correspondence with Margaret Sanger, and chapter four addresses Goldman’s correspondence with Alameda Sperry.
CHAPTER 3

MARGARET SANGER

The correspondence between Margaret Sanger and Emma Goldman allows for an examination of Goldman as an activist mentor to Sanger, as well as an analysis of Goldman’s prioritization of birth control politics within a broader anarchist framework. To briefly introduce the timeframe of the letters, they begin in 1914, after Sanger already had some political experience as a member of the Socialist party, and end in 1915 due to a disagreement between Sanger and Goldman. At this time, Goldman was immersed in traveling, continuing to lecture across the country on a variety of topics. As an activist with a larger audience and more resources, Goldman served as a mentor to Sanger, who was newer to the radical political scene. In this chapter I argue that although Goldman offered Sanger advice in terms of birth control activism, she was only interested in Sanger as a political ally as long as their political viewpoints matched up. Goldman saw Sanger as furthering an anarchist cause, and when that was no longer the case, Goldman was not interested in mentoring Sanger. After providing a brief biographical background on Margaret Sanger, as well as a discussion of the development of her political thought, I move on to an analysis of the letters.

Margaret Sanger was born on September 14, 1876 in Corning, New York. She was one of eleven children. It is necessary to address Margaret’s parents, Michael and Anne Higgins, as their experiences influenced the development of her political goals. Michael, a first generation Irish-American who owned a marble and stonecutting business, was interested in radical political organization long before his daughter. Michael became involved in politics “as a member of the Knights of Labor, a fraternal association that predated the movement for trade unionism […] and espoused a utopian brand of Socialism.”75 Michael’s political beliefs influenced his daughter’s later actions in two main ways. First, Margaret

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“identified his radicalism as ‘the spring’ from which she drank,” but at the same time was critical of what she thought of as the ineffectiveness of his radicalism. According to Sanger biographer Ellen Chesler, “A compulsion to make something concrete of Michael’s well-meaning but largely empty political gestures surely underlay her own enthusiasm for reform.” This second influence of her political father will be later discussed in Sanger’s disidentification with her radical political roots in favor of a more effective strategy of advocating birth control reform as a single issue.

Sanger’s mother, Anne Higgins, was the mother of eleven children, and her experiences are significant to Sanger’s later decision to advocate for accessible birth control. Anne was plagued by chronic tuberculosis, and as her body was further weakened by constant pregnancies, Anne’s family often feared for her life. Margaret later blamed her mother’s poor health on her parents’ ignorance to birth control. However, it is important to note that Anne was a devout Catholic, who likely would have rejected any forms of birth control had she known about them. Nonetheless, watching her family struggle with her mother’s illness, complicated by many pregnancies, was significant to Sanger’s personal political development. With the experiences of her mother and father as political influences, Sanger eventually became immersed in the radical political scene of New York City herself.

In 1911, Margaret Sanger moved to New York City from her suburban dream home and entered the pre-war bohemian culture of the city. However, this was not her first time living in the city. She was enrolled in nursing school in New York City, where she met William Sanger and eventually married him on a two hour lunch break in 1902, after promising she would not give up nursing. Soon after, Sanger dropped out of school and the couple then moved to “Columbia Colony,” one of the first suburban communities in the United States, where they lived with their three children. William Sanger worked as a draftsman in order to support their family, and Sanger had seemingly given up on nursing in favor of marriage and a life that accompanied it. While still living in the suburbs, Sanger

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76 Ibid., 26.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 34.
80 Ibid., 36.
remained critical of “an inclination among both husbands and wives, to sink back into a
complacent suburban attitude, to enjoy petty middle class comforts.”\textsuperscript{81} In 1910, a fire burnt
down her suburban home, destroying her ties to a complacent suburban life. Sanger longed to
return to New York City. Attracted to the political culture of the city, Sanger and her husband
and three children moved to an apartment in Manhattan, a mere ten miles away from their old
life. Here, they became involved with many political radicals of the time and soon became
members of the Socialist Party. According to Sanger, “our living room became a gathering
place where liberals, anarchists, socialists, and I.W.W.’s\textsuperscript{82} could meet. These vehement
individualists had to have an audience, preferably a small, intimate one.”\textsuperscript{83} It was in this
space that Margaret Sanger met Emma Goldman.

Sanger is most well known for her birth control activism in the U.S. She established
the first birth control clinic in the United States (1916), and founded the American Birth
Control League (1921), which would later become Planned Parenthood (1942). Ultimately,
Sanger became most effective as a birth control activist after she valued it as a single issue as
opposed to incorporating it within a broader framework. However, before becoming devoted
to the cause of birth control, Sanger spent time in socialist and anarchist circles, where she
learned organizing and propaganda techniques that became a necessity later in her career.

Mapping Sanger’s movement through these radical political circles is difficult due to
incongruencies in various sources, including Sanger’s autobiographical sources. Sanger’s
entry into radical politics began through socialism. Sanger became involved with the party
because of her husband’s membership and her father’s earlier influences, and she too became
an active member. After moving to the city, Sanger met Anita Block, the editor of “Woman’s
Sphere,” the women’s section of the socialist newspaper, \textit{The Call}. Sanger was offered a
column to be called “What Every Girl Should Know.” Sanger was offered this column to
discuss sex and reproduction from a woman’s point of view, and her column was
controversial, even among socialists. Sanger explored female masturbation, abortion, female


\textsuperscript{82} The Industrial Workers of the World, established in 1905, was a union that sought to unite all workers as
a social class.

reproductive physiology, syphilis, and gonorrhea, and the fact that a woman was writing about sex “aroused a furor among many reticent Call readers.” Many of those who opposed the column argued that discussions around sex detracted from the party’s overall priority, the class struggle.

Although Sanger did not specifically offer birth control advice, and the term “birth control” did not yet exist, her column was controversial due to the lack of a cohesive stance on family limitation with the Socialist Party. Party loyalists “were apathetic at best” while younger members felt that a successful campaign would entice individuals “to challenge the precepts of bourgeois morality.” Ultimately, following the publication of Sanger’s column, the party did not officially adopt a campaign for family limitation. Critics did not see the value in prioritizing women’s issues in this way. Block, the editor of the column, declared that the men of the party “were incapable on responding sympathetically: they were ‘stirred by the Socialist call for the workers to revolt from wage-slavery but […] unmoved by the Socialist call to women to revolt from sex-slavery.’” As the party distanced itself from Sanger’s column, Sanger began to distance herself from the party.

It was as a contributor to The Call that Sanger first came into conflict with the Comstock Laws. Both Sanger and Goldman were censored in regards to birth control under the Comstock Act, which was enacted on March 3, 1873. The Comstock Act was a US federal law that acted as an amendment to the Post Office Act, making it illegal to send “obscene, lewd, or lascivious” materials through the mail. Many states passed further prohibitive laws regarding materials sent between states, and together these restrictions are referred to as the Comstock Laws. The laws are named after Anthony Comstock, who influenced the US Congress to pass the act. Comstock began his obsession with obscenity with the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) where he worked to provide “wholesome recreational alternatives” to the temptations of drinking, gambling, and

85 Chesler, 65.
86 Buhle, 273.
87 The term “birth control” began to be used in 1914.
88 Buhle, 268.
89 Ibid., 274
prostitution. Comstock and the YMCA had so much power that his commitment to “root out sin wherever he could find it” resulted in his ability to amend the Post Office Act to allow him to continue to hunt the obscene at the federal level. When Sanger’s column extended its discussion to include syphilis and gonorrhea, it was seen as in violation of the Comstock Laws. In the next issue of The Call, instead of publishing her article, the column read, “What every girl should know. By order of the post office—NOTHING.”

Sanger subsequently moved on from her column and her role as an organizer for the Socialist Party. Although she shifted political associations, Sanger remained involved in working-class organizations when she subsequently joined the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in 1912. The IWW was an international worker’s union formed under the principal that all workers should unite as a social class. However, once it became clear that the IWW was not interested in fighting for birth control, Sanger left their ranks. At this time, her sister Ethel moved to New York and obtained a nursing degree from Mt. Sinai Hospital. Sanger was able to get work as midwife and nurse as a result of her sister’s connections.

Sanger began to work for the Visiting Nurses Association, a group that worked in poverty stricken neighborhoods. Their goal was to aid women who did not have medical care, but also had no other method to control births other than self-administered abortions. Through her work for the Visiting Nurses Association, Sanger allegedly met Sadie Sachs in 1912, and ultimately witnessed her death. Sanger claimed that Sachs was a woman who she had previously cared for after complications due to a self-administered abortion, and when Sachs asked the doctor what she could do to prevent another unwanted pregnancy the doctor replied: “You want your cake while you eat it too, do you?” Sachs became pregnant a second time, and again preformed an at-home abortion. When Sanger was not able to control the bleeding, Sachs died. In her autobiography, Sanger claims to have felt responsible for her death, and that this event caused her to undergo an internal revolution of sorts, where she

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90 Chesler, 66.
91 Ibid., 67.
92 Baker, 70.
93 Gray, 43.
94 Chesler, 62.
95 Baker, 50.
became committed to the cause of birth control.\textsuperscript{96} There is no proof that Sachs actually existed, and was likely a fictional character Sanger made up to symbolize the many women for whom this situation was a reality.

In Sanger’s autobiographical accounts of her life, it was the death of Sachs that resulted in her decision to devote her life to the cause of birth control. However, according to Madeline Gray, a biographer of Sanger,

\begin{quote}
The trouble with Margaret’s story, which ends with a description of her stripping off her nurse’s uniform, throwing her nurse’s bag across the room, and deciding to devote herself immediately to the cause of birth control, is that it didn’t quite happen that way. Almost four years were to pass before she dedicated herself entirely to birth control—four very busy years in which she was to write more articles for the \textit{Call}, march in picket lines, start a newspaper of her own, escape to Europe as a fugitive from justice, and see her beloved daughter Peggy die.\textsuperscript{97}
\end{quote}

My analysis of the correspondence between Goldman and Sanger falls within this time span, (1912-1916) and as a result seeks to address this time in Sanger’s life through an analysis of her relationship with Goldman.

\textbf{SOCIALISM AND ANARCHISM}

Although Sanger existed in both socialist and anarchist circles, the result of the radical political climate of New York of the time, these two philosophies must not be conflated. Both socialism and anarchism are anti-capitalist, but anarchism seeks to abolish all hierarchies of power, including the state. On the other hand, socialism seeks to organize the working class and gain power through a reorganization of the state. Chronologically mapping Sanger’s political development is difficult in that Sanger’s own accounts of her identification with various political organizations are varying and do not seem to match up with other historical sources. For example, in Sanger’s (1931) autobiographical account of her life as a birth control activist, \textit{My Fight For Birth Control}, Sanger disassociates with socialism as a movement. She does this despite the fact that she was at one point a member, and began her career as a writer within the Socialist Party. Sanger recalls, “I had previously cast my lot with the women of the Socialist movement. I listened intently to all debates, arguments, and theories of this great school of liberal thought. Their ardent and passionate faith in

\textsuperscript{96} Sanger, \textit{My Fight for Birth Control}, 55.

\textsuperscript{97} Gray, 55.
legislation, however, I could never share. […] Thus I lost faith in the social schemes and organizations of that day.”

Here Sanger clearly cited the Socialist Party’s commitment to legislative reform as a reason she did not support the movement despite her previous association with the “great school of liberal thought.” However, at times Sanger specifically advocated political reform within the context of socialism and the labor movement. For example, at a 1912 meeting regarding striking laundry workers, Sanger spoke “asking them to support a ‘political measure’ to try to improve their wages and working conditions through legislation rather than through repeated strikes.” Although Sanger recalls being unable to identify with legislative reform, she did, in fact, see it as a strategy, at least in this case. It is possible that Sanger was reflecting back on her father’s empty political gestures, and saw a “political measure” as the most effective action for the laundry workers to improve their working conditions.

Although we cannot be sure of the motivation behind Sanger’s actions at the laundry workers strike, or whether her decision to advocate legislative reform was a reflection of the Party’s interests or her own, this example demonstrates two points. First, Sanger’s political identities remained unclear certainly from the time she moved to New York City in 1911, until she established her own birth control clinic and subsequent organization in 1916, and possibly continually throughout her life. Sanger is defined by her political effectiveness through her decision to take up birth control as a single issue, as opposed to within a broader radical framework. This is in part because she did not clearly support a single broader framework. This differs from Goldman’s commitment to anarchism. Although across the course of her life Goldman favored different revolutionary methods and types of anarchism, she remained a devoted follower of anarchism throughout her work in the U.S.

Secondly, this example demonstrates a difference between socialism and anarchism by exemplifying Socialism’s methodology of legislative reform, at least in this particular instance. There are a myriad of forms of Socialism, however one main distinction is that within Socialism, all power hierarchies are not dissolved, rather centralized government becomes a means to power for the working class, where the public collectively owns resources. In this case, Sanger, as an organizer for the Socialist party, was advocating


99 Gray, 45.
legislation that would improve working conditions for the laundry workers, in an attempt to address the material realities of the workers. On the other hand, Goldman would have certainly been in favor of repeated strikes as an activist tactic, as she saw that as the best solution to address the material realities of the workers.

**MARGARET SANGER AND HAVELOCK ELLIS**

At the time of Goldman and Sanger’s correspondence, Sanger became involved with sexologist and eugenicist Havelock Ellis. Although this relationship is not addressed in the letters, it was an important aspect of Sanger’s life at the time. Sanger and Ellis met in December 1914 in Europe, where Sanger fled after her first birth control arrest, which will be addressed later in the chapter. According to Sanger biographer Ellen Chesler, “It is virtually impossible to overestimate the impact Ellis would have on Margaret.”

Sanger was attracted to Ellis’ views on female sexuality, in that “[h]is writings celebrated the emancipation of an independent, self-defined woman whom she liked to think she resembled.” However, his support of the limitation of births went beyond advocating individual sexual freedom. Ellis believed sex was the driving force behind all of civilization, and as a result his views on sex between males and females were problematic. Ellis “maintained that woman’s passivity and lack of initiative in sexual matters required an aggressive and insistent stance on the part of the male.” For Ellis, a woman who did not initiate sex still had an ever-present desire to have sex, and simply required an aggressive male.

In addition, Ellis supported the practice of eugenics, or the idea that human reproduction should be regulated in order to improve the biological characteristics of society overall. As a devoted follower of Ellis, Sanger supported this practice as well. Sanger was especially interested in the way Ellis targeted the role of women in eugenics, including advocating birth control. According to Ellis, “[w]omen are critical agents of civilization’s progress […] because as individuals they alone have the power to produce and nurture fewer, fitter babies, while, collectively, they can exercise the will to reduce substantially the

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100 Chesler, 112.
101 Ibid., 115.
102 Haaland, 126.
pressure of population on the environment and the competition of labor in the marketplace." Ellis believed that putting birth control in the hands of women, especially in those he defined as unfit, would result in the fostering of “fitter babies.”

Through the practice of eugenics, those in power, and those with the most influence and access to privilege, had the ability to define “desired” biological characteristics. Eugenics became a method for the suppression of racial minorities in the United States, where those who were not white were deemed as less “fit” than those individuals who were defining the desired biological characteristics. By the 1920s, “qualitative theories of racial improvement […] gained widespread public acceptance.” In addition to racial minorities, eugenics in the US in the 1920s adopted “compulsory sterilization statutes to govern the behavior of individuals carrying deficiencies believed to be inherited, such as mental retardation, insanity, or uncontrollable epilepsy.” Sanger supported these initiatives. Before an audience of eugenicists, Sanger “bemoaned the burden of the ‘unfit’ on the productive members of the community and pledged to organize the ‘thinking population of this country’ around the issue of birth control as a deterrent to poverty and human waste.”

Goldman used similar terminology regarding the “unfit” although she did so in a critique of the expectation that all women were mandated to have children. In addition, Goldman’s use of eugenic arguments was class based, as opposed to racially based. Goldman argued: “The woman, physically and mentally unfit to be a mother, yet condemned to breed; the woman economically taxed to the very last spark of energy, yet forced to breed; the woman, tied to the man she loathes, whose very sight fills her with horror, yet made to breed; the woman, worn and used-up from the process of procreation, yet coerced to breed more, even more. What a hideous thing this much-lauded motherhood!” While still upholding a problematic view of being both mentally and physically “unfit” to be a mother, Goldman’s views were arguing on behalf of impoverished women who did not have access to safe, planned, spaced out childbirth.

103 Chesler, 123.
104 Ibid., 215
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid., 216.
**THE WOMAN REBEL**

Emma Goldman’s radical publication, *Mother Earth*, established in 1906, allowed Goldman to successfully propagate anarchist literature. Similarly, Sanger sought to start her own radical publication. On March 1914, just before the correspondence between Sanger and Goldman begins, the first issue of *The Woman Rebel* was published with the slogan “no gods, no masters.” According to biographer Madeline Gray, “[Sanger’s] primary goal was to make women, especially working women, more rebellious—rebellious about having to work such long hours in factories, rebellious about having to bear so many children, rebellious about having to be subservient to men.” In the first issue, an article written by Sanger titled “The Aim,” stated: “the aim of this paper will be to stimulate working women to think for themselves and to build up a conscious fighting character.” With a goal of motivating women to think for themselves and become more rebellious, Sanger had the support of Goldman upon the conception of *The Woman Rebel*. In this first issue, Goldman was a contributor, publishing a short paragraph condemning the institution of marriage. *The Woman Rebel* was short lived, with just seven publications throughout 1914, but nevertheless, it drew significant attention. On three different occasions it was censored under the Comstock Laws. It is at this point, with a radical, albeit ambiguous political background, and her own radical publication, that Sanger’s correspondence with Goldman begins.

**THE LETTERS**

The letters I collected between Goldman and Sanger from the Emma Goldman Papers archive begin on April 9, 1914 and end May 10, 1916. The letters that make up the basis of my research are exclusively from Emma Goldman to Margaret Sanger and others, with the exception of one letter Sanger wrote to *Mother Earth*, the pamphlet edited by Emma Goldman. In this way, my research is limited in that I have only one-sided correspondence. This lends itself to silencing Sanger altogether, although I take her seriously as an activist and important political figure in history, and supplement my analysis with biographical information. The chronology of letters begins after the publication of Sanger’s pamphlet, *The

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108 Gray, 67.
109 Ibid., 66.
110 Ibid., 67.
Woman Rebel, and follows the women’s relationship through Sanger’s first arrest for a violation of the Comstock Law. The included correspondence ends after the charges against Sanger were dropped and Goldman herself was arrested under the Comstock Laws for disseminating information regarding birth control. Notably, the letters end before Sanger established the first birth control clinic in the US on October 16, 1916, resulting in her second, and more well known, arrest. At the time of her second arrest, Sanger was no longer associated with the Socialist Party, or any other anti-capitalist political movements, and had made a career for herself as a single-issue birth control advocate.

The first letter from Goldman to Sanger is dated April 9, 1914. At this time, Goldman was active in her career as a public speaker and lecturer, traveling across the United States giving talks on topics including anarchism, atheism, and birth control. However, Goldman’s political view was not one that prioritized birth control. She was first and foremost an anarchist, however, in order to exercise complete individual freedom, women needed freedom from motherhood. For Goldman, birth control was a necessary element within a larger revolutionary struggle against capitalism and social coercion. Goldman also prioritized the organization of workers, which included working class women. Access to voluntary motherhood and the knowledge to control the number and spacing of children born allowed women the time, energy, and consciousness necessary to organize. Access to information regarding birth control was an economic issue, a necessity for women’s material reality, and a necessity for the conscious organization against coercive institutions. A true and dedicated anarchist did not believe in fighting for equality within existing oppressive institutions, but prioritized the abolition of all hierarchies of power, including the state.

Goldman’s belief in the necessity of birth control was not only a theoretical concern, where women needed the ability to control child birth in order to have complete individual freedom. Her experiences as a nurse and midwife in poor immigrant communities allowed her to see the conditions in which women were giving birth, and the necessity of accessible birth control. Goldman was initially trained as a nurse in prison in 1893. She then continued her training in Vienna, earning diplomas in nursing and midwifery in 1985.\textsuperscript{111} Upon returning to the United States, Goldman dedicated her services to mostly poor women who could not afford hospital stays, but rather gave birth in their own homes. Sanger also brought

\textsuperscript{111} Goldman, Living My Life, 174.
her nursing experience to impoverished neighborhoods. As previously addressed, she worked part-time with organizations including Lillian Wald’s Visiting Nurses Association, serving immigrant neighborhoods in New York’s Lower East Side. In this way, both Goldman and Sanger were exposed to the realities of those who did not have access any information regarding any type of birth control as a result of their class status.

In addition to her work as a midwife, Goldman attended the Neo-Malthusian conference in Paris in 1900. The small conference on birth limitation was held in secret due to the French government’s opposition to dialogues of this nature. It was here that Goldman was introduced to preventative methods of limiting births, and “marveled at their ability to discuss such a delicate matter so frankly and in such an inoffensive manner.” Goldman left Paris with literature and contraceptives, returned to New York, and began to mention birth control at some of her lectures. To dedicate whole lectures to birth control at this point in her career would almost certainly be met with arrest, so Goldman tended to include this information briefly in lectures on other subjects. She spoke of the importance of birth control and disseminated information regarding how to limit births, while still remaining politically active as an advocate of anarchism. It was following this conference that “Goldman introduced Margaret to a new-Malthusian ideology then fashionable among European Socialists, who disputed Marxist orthodoxies that condemned contraception as hopelessly bourgeois and encouraged a high proletarian birthrate.” Goldman’s attendance at the conference so early in the U.S. birth control movement was significant, especially in an analysis of her relationship with and influence over Sanger.

**MY DEAR MARGARET**

It is with this contextual background that I move to an analysis of the correspondence. I divide the letters from Goldman to Sanger into three groups based on shifts that occur in the correspondence. The first group of letters, with dates from April 9, 1914 to March 12, 1915, portray Sanger and Goldman as political allies. With their own personal experiences in the medical field, and similar views regarding the necessity of access to birth control, Goldman

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112 Chesler, 62.


114 Chesler, 86.
and Sanger became colleagues. It is unclear when exactly they met, although both refer to each other within descriptions of evenings spent at the Sanger’s apartment. Both women existed in a male-dominated atmosphere, and there was a sense of camaraderie between the two women, who valued each other’s support. The first letters from Goldman include salutations including “My Dear Margaret,”115 and “Dearest Margie”116 and often conclude with “Affectionately”117 or “With much love.”118 Goldman was not only a political mentor to Sanger, she was also emotionally supportive, and these letters represent a specific friendship between the two women. At this point in the letters, Goldman and Sanger did not only appear to be colleagues but also friends and supporters.

At this time, Sanger and Goldman were in conversation about women’s issues. Although it is unclear what specifically Goldman is referring to, in the first letter dated April 9, 1914, she writes:

I know you will be amused to learn that most of the women are up in arms against your paper; mostly women, of course, whose emancipation has been on paper and not in reality. I am kept busy answering questions as to your ‘brazen’ method. They would not believe me when I told them that you were a little, delicate woman, refined and shrinking, but that you did believe in the daring and courage of woman in her struggle for freedom.119

However vague, this letter shows the two women in conversation about gendered issues early in their relationship and correspondence. The paper Goldman refers to is Sanger’s publication, The Woman Rebel, in which Sanger advocated not only birth control, but also appealed to a wider radical political audience. The letter refers to women who are “up in arms” against The Woman Rebel, and although it is unclear what specifically the women disagree with in terms of issues and politics covered in the publication, the tone of the letter implies camaraderie between the two women. Goldman and Sanger are standing together in opposition to those against the “‘brazen’ method” utilized by Sanger.

115 Goldman to Sanger, 9 April 1914, Reel 8, The Emma Goldman Papers, University of California Berkeley. All letters cited in this thesis are located in The Emma Goldman Papers at the University of California Berkeley. Subsequent citations of letters omit collection title and location to limit repetition of annotations as they are all taken from the same source.

116 Goldman to Sanger, 26 April 1914, Reel 8.

117 Ibid.

118 Goldman to Sanger, 22 June 1914, Reel 8.

119 Goldman to Sanger, 9 April 1914, Reel 8.
In numerous letters, Goldman describes significant time spent finding individuals willing to distribute *The Woman Rebel*, and requesting more copies from Sanger herself.\(^{120}\) In this way, Goldman was supporting Sanger’s views, at least through promoting the publication. Goldman reached out to her friends and comrades, many of who already supported *Mother Earth*, and advocated the distribution of *The Woman Rebel*. At this point, Goldman had a larger political audience than Sanger, so an important use of resources was utilizing her followers. By 1914 Goldman had been lecturing for approximately two decades, reaching an audience across the United States. In addition to supporting Sanger’s publication, many letters also offer support in the form of advice on how to make a living as a political activist.\(^{121}\) Goldman advised Sanger on fair pricing for *The Woman Rebel*, how to successfully distribute the pamphlet without relying on postal service, and how to begin working towards a successful speaking tour. On May 26, 1914, Goldman writes:

> If you could arrange, my suggestion would be that you make a tour, talk about prevention, organize leagues and take the paper with you. I am inclined to think you’d have a tremendous success. Perhaps you might start the preliminary work during the summer and start out in the fall, or begin with N.Y. you have no idea what the personal element means in reaching people, in that way, you could kill two flies with one stroke, circulate the paper, sell pamphlets and also organize the leagues.\(^{122}\)

By offering specific advice on future plans, Goldman acted as a mentor to Sanger. However, by this point, Sanger had existing political experience as a Socialist, and as a result, it is possible that this was unsolicited advice. Nevertheless, the mentorship present in the letters is one of techniques of activism, not of theories or politics. Based on her use of the phrase “talk about prevention,” it can be implied that Goldman is referring to birth control. However, the conversation is not regarding broader political ideas surrounding the need for birth control or who should or should not have access to information. This first group of letters demonstrates the nature of the relationship between the two women in terms of

\(^{120}\) Goldman to Sanger, 9 April 1914, Reel 8; Goldman to Sanger, 14 April 1914, Reel 8; Goldman to Sanger 21 April 1914, Reel 8; Goldman to Sanger, 26 April 1914, Reel 8; Goldman to Sanger, 1 May 1914, Reel 8; Goldman to Sanger, 26 May 1914, Reel 8; Goldman to Sanger, 22 June 1914, Reel 8.

\(^{121}\) Goldman to Sanger, 14 April 1914, Reel 8; Goldman to Sanger, 21 April 1914, Reel 8; Goldman to Sanger, 26 April 1914, Reel 8; Goldman to Sanger, 26 May 1914, Reel 8.

\(^{122}\) Goldman to Sanger, 26 May 1914, Reel 8.
Goldman acting as an activist mentor, rather than providing a place where differing political views and theories were in conversation with each other.

**YOU CAN HAVE WHATEVER MEANS WILL BE NEEDED TO FIGHT**

The second set of letters, beginning December 7, 1915 and ending February 3, 1916, mark a shift in the relationship between Sanger and Goldman. This shift occurs as a result of Sanger’s arrest for dissemination of *The Woman Rebel* under the Comstock Law. There is no correspondence from April 1915 until December 1915. On August 25, 1914, just over four months after the letters began, Sanger was arrested for the first time and indicted for two violations of obscenity laws and a third count of inciting murder and assassination.\(^{123}\) The articles that violated obscenity laws, including “The Prevention of Conception,” were targeted by Comstock and the Postmaster General despite the fact that they did not give explicit advice on contraceptives themselves. An article written by Herbert A. Thorpe called “In Defense of Assassination” earned the third count, which threatened a lengthened jail sentence for Sanger.\(^{124}\) After being denied an extension to her trial date, Sanger fled to Europe to better prepare her case.\(^{125}\)

Following Sanger’s first arrest and decision to flee to Europe, Goldman was very involved in supporting Sanger both emotionally and financially. Not only did Goldman work to keep copies of *The Woman Rebel* in circulation in Sanger’s absence, she also asked her friends to raise money and send letters of support to Sanger, in an effort to raise awareness surrounding her impending trial.\(^{126}\) By asking her comrades to support Sanger’s case, Goldman was aiding in keeping the issue of birth control relevant among her circle in the United States. Goldman included birth control in her lectures at this time, although she continued to address it within a broader anarchist framework, rather than prioritize it as a single issue. In addition to raising support among comrades on behalf of Sanger, Goldman

\(^{123}\) Gray, 76.

\(^{124}\) Ibid.

\(^{125}\) Ibid., 81.

\(^{126}\) Goldman to Sanger, 7 December 1915, Reel 9; Goldman to Sanger, 19 December 1915, Reel 9; Goldman to Jacob Margolis, 10 January 1916, Reel 9; Goldman to Ellen A. Kennan, 11 January 1916, Reel 9; Goldman to Leon Malmed, 11 January 1916, Reel 9; Goldman to Ellen A. Kennan, 3 February 1916, Reel 9.
also made an effort to encourage Sanger to remain committed to the cause of birth control.

On December 7, 1915, Goldman writes to Sanger:

The Birth Control question has taken hold of the public as never before. That ought to be a tremendous satisfaction to you. It is this growing interest which will have no little bearing on your case, and which in a measure may explain the indifference on the part of the authorities to open up your case.\footnote{Goldman to Sanger, 7 December 1915, Reel 9.}

Goldman continued to act as Sanger’s colleague and was excited at the prospect of drawing public attention to the cause of birth control through a critique of the legal system. By raising awareness of what both Sanger and Goldman saw as the faults of the government as an institution, Sanger’s case represented an opportunity to further the movement for Goldman. Goldman saw the case as an opportunity to organize women who wanted access to information regarding birth control, as well as individuals concerned with the suppression of free speech. After hearing that some of Sanger’s friends in Europe were urging her to plead guilty, the possibility arose that Goldman’s radical political ally might concede to the very system Goldman despised most. Goldman wrote to Sanger on December 8, 1915, encouraging her to continue with her case,

Dear, dear girl, I appreciate your state of mind. I feel deeply all you have gone through since you began your work. But at the same time I feel that it would be a great unpardonable error were you now throw allow yourself to be beaten in compromise when there is no need of it. You have friends all over the country. You can have whatever means will be needed to fight. You have aroused the interest as no one ever has. Think of losing it all by declaring yourself guilty. Don’t do it.\footnote{Goldman to Sanger, 8 December 1915, Reel 9.}

Goldman’s position was clear, and rather than being concerned with the possibility that Sanger would face a prison sentence, Goldman was concerned that Sanger would plead guilty. Despite spending time in prison herself, there is no mention of this experience in the letters. One might expect Goldman, as a friend and mentor, to prepare Sanger for the possibility of a prison sentence, especially as Sanger had fled the country and the two were not in physical contact with each other. However, the letters show that Goldman was strictly concerned with Sanger’s decision to plead guilty or remain committed to a political stance that did not believe in conceding to the state. Rather than concerning herself with the welfare of Sanger and the results of her trial, Goldman was concerned with the trial itself being
carried out. In this exchange, Goldman prioritized her political goals over her relationship 
with Sanger. Goldman was not concerned with Sanger’s prison sentence because she worried 
for her friend’s well being, but because she worried about what this would mean for the 
radical cause. At this point in the letters, we begin to see a shift in Goldman’s emphasis of 
political goals over emotional support and closeness with Sanger.

Goldman firmly believed that one should be prepared to go to prison for their beliefs, 
because to plead guilty was to concede to the capitalist system. To plead guilty would have 
been to admit that birth control was a violation of the Comstock Laws, and to concede that 
such obscene content should not be delivered through the mail, or even discussed in general. 
Goldman was a part of the lecture circuit at the time, while Sanger had fled the United States, 
and Goldman knew that birth control was gaining momentum. This was an opportunity to 
gain more public attention, and if Sanger had been convicted, the cause could have gained 
even more attention, as citizens may have been outraged that Sanger would be sent to jail on 
such an injustice.

**She Is an American Woman and She Has the Support of Prominent Ladies**

The third set of letters begins February 12, 1916 and ends May 10, 1916. This shift is 
marked by the fact that Goldman was arrested for disseminating information regarding birth 
control on February 11, 1916. She had given a lecture after a high demand for knowledge 
regarding birth control on February 8th in New York that was not interfered with by police, 
and then was arrested on the 11th when arriving to give a lecture on atheism. After her own 
arrest, Sanger’s birth control arrest was no longer the only one on Goldman’s mind. At this 
point, a dramatic shift occurred in the relationship between the two women, not only because 
of Goldman’s arrest, but because of the shift in Sanger’s activist tactics. In these letters, 
Goldman shifted from supporting Sanger as a colleague to completely disavowing her former 
friend. It is significant to note that letters from Goldman to Sanger after her own arrest are 
not included in the archives, and as a result are not a part of my analysis. The letters that 
follow are written from Goldman to other comrades, regarding Margaret Sanger.

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On February 3, Goldman’s attitude towards Sanger is still one of support, although she has not heard from Sanger in a significant amount of time, as Sanger was busy with the lead up to her trial. In a letter to friend Ellen Kennan, Goldman writes,

Truth is I have not seen Margaret Sanger since her trial began. She is pestered to death by a lot of people who jumped in for sensation and notoriety so I am zealously keeping in the background. Besides, I am so rushed with lecture in Philadelphia, Washington, Pittsburgh and New York, that I haven’t the time to see anyone. So long as Margaret has friends and is being sustained in a material way there is no necessity of adding to her burdens. I think, however, she is getting along very well now and that she is going to make a brave fight. Her case has again been postponed until the 14th, which proves that the authorities are not really not very anxious to prosecute her. In fact, they have made all sorts of overtures. I think Margaret will absolutely insist on a final hearing so that they case may be settled next week. I hope so for her sake.  

Goldman may have been concerned that Sanger had friends and sustenance, but soon Goldman would not approve of Sanger’s friends. At this point in her career, Sanger had begun to value the effectiveness of birth control as a single issue over a broader anti-capitalist platform. After Sanger returned to New York, awaiting her trial, she had already begun to shift her previous attitude towards birth control to one that was more palatable to middle to upper-class women who were part of the U.S. suffrage movement. As I have demonstrated, women were vital to the working class labor reform movements, and much of the feminism of the time had roots in socialism, as well as Progressive Era reforms. Sanger was no longer aligning with these women, or anarchists or socialists, but the U.S. suffragist feminists. Women were fighting for the right to vote in a reform based movement that contradicted the anti-capitalist movement Goldman and Sanger both belonged to. Suffragists wanted rights within the existing system, and Goldman wanted to abolish the system itself. Goldman specifically opposed women’s suffrage, arguing the issue was a distraction created to fool women into believing they were represented, and an attempt to distract women from their coercion under capitalism. 131 Goldman did not identify with this type of feminism, and considered it a distraction from organizing women as workers. In return, pro-suffrage feminists did not support Goldman, as they were largely accepting of capitalism, and were seeking reform in the democratic system.

130 Goldman to Ellen A. Kennan, 3 February 1916, Reel 9.
131 Goldman, “Woman Suffrage.”
At this point in the letters, Goldman was aware of Sanger’s beginning to appeal to those outside the radical community, although she was not yet openly hostile towards her. In a letter to her friend, Agnes Inglis, written February 15, 1916, Goldman writes,

Already it is apparent that the press will not give me the same courtesy and space it has extended to Margaret Sanger. You see, she is not known as an Anarchist, not even as a Socialist. Besides, she is an American woman and she has the support of ‘prominent’ ladies. I am glad for her sake but I do not wish to avail myself of such mediums and so I must rely on the radical element exclusively.¹³²

Here Goldman refers to Sanger’s lack of a radical political association, in addition to her own treatment in the media. Even before her birth control arrest, Goldman was targeted by the media. Not only was Goldman vilified in the media because she was a radical anarchist traveling across the country in an attempt to appeal to the working class and incite an anarchist revolution, but she was also an immigrant. The US government was working to suppress anarchists like Goldman, who was eventually deported not long after these letters, in 1917. Under Theodore Roosevelt, the US passed the Immigration Act of 1903, keeping in place existing immigration law and adding four classes of “aliens,” “anarchists, people with epilepsy, beggars, and importers of prostitutes.” It allowed the government to question immigrants as to their political beliefs, and deport anyone “who disbelieves in or who is opposed to all organized government, or who is a member of or affiliated with any organization entertaining such disbelief in or opposition to all organized government.” Deportation was a threat to Goldman, whereas Sanger did not have the same threat, not only because she was not an anarchist, but because she was not an immigrant.

In this letter, Goldman also refers to “prominent ladies” of whom Sanger has support. She was most likely referring to the suffragist feminists, including the ones who organized the dinner on behalf of Sanger. These women began to support Sanger, also taking up birth control as an important issue outside of radical politics. Goldman states she is glad that Sanger has the support of these women, demonstrating a remaining sense of support towards Sanger, despite her new allies. However, at this point, Sanger’s trial had yet to be dismissed, so in the letter her sense of support may come from the fact that they were both arrested in regards to birth control, rather than sympathetic towards Sanger’s case being dropped altogether.

¹³² Goldman to Agnes Inglis, 15 February 1916, Reel 9.
Sanger was clearly not hostile to pro-suffrage feminists to the same extent as Goldman. A dinner was organized by a suffrage worker on January 23rd, where Sanger was “given a chance to say [her] say, speak [her] piece before a gathering of influential people.” The dinner was arranged the day before her trial was set and after being postponed another week, the charges against Sanger were dismissed on February 18, 1916. After having the charges against her dropped, Sanger’s allegiance shifted completely, likely in an effort to become more effective in disseminating knowledge regarding birth control.

Ultimately, Sanger’s decision to abandon her radical political roots in favor of a focus on birth control as a political issue did lead to her becoming a more effective birth control activist. The Socialist Party was not open to adopting a birth control campaign. While Goldman was able to become a famous, household name as an anarchist leader, an open mind towards women’s issues did not necessarily follow. U.S. Socialists were at times openly anti-feminist, arguing that women belonged at home, critiquing capitalism as the force bringing women away from domestic duties. In addition, Sanger had already been dismissed by the anarchists, precisely because she was pushing birth control as a single issue rather than within a larger framework. As a result, Sanger’s appeal to a higher class of women allowed her to be successful as a birth control organizer, when she no longer had a place with the socialists or the anarchists. Once she appealed to “a higher class of women,” including suffragist feminists, Goldman was no longer interested in having a relationship with Sanger.

**THOSE WHO POSE AS LIBERALS AND RADICALS**

Immediately following the dismissal of Sanger’s trial, a letter dated February 21st, 1916, marks one event leading to a significant shift in the relationship between Sanger and Goldman. Goldman writes to a recipient referred to as “comrade,” who is most likely anarchist W.S. Van Valkenburgh and describes a meeting in which both an anarchist and a

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134 Ibid.


136 The archivists at the Emma Goldman Papers have indicated that this letter and others are most likely written to W. C. Van Valkenburgh by including his name as the recipient of the letter despite the fact that the letter itself is addressed to “Comrade.” They do so by indicating his name followed by a question mark.
feminist of the time were present. The purpose of the meeting is unclear, but Goldman describes a scenario where it was proposed that the meeting discuss Goldman’s case, but no one present supported the proposition. The significance of this meeting lies in the fact that Sanger was present. According to the letter:

The tragic part of it is that Margaret Sanger was on the platform and hadn’t the courage enough to speak up, that after all the work the anarchists have done for her and Sanger. Please dear comrade do not think that I expect her or anyone else to be grateful. I am only citing the case because it proves again that the anarchists are merely used to fetch the chestnuts out of the fire and that when they are in trouble they need not hope for any support from those who pose as liberals and radicals.¹³⁷

In this clear turning point, Sanger distanced herself from Goldman. She was no longer attempting to associate herself with Goldman, and as a result can be seen as refusing the importance of her friendship with Goldman. Not only was Goldman upset that Sanger’s case was dismissed while she was dealing with her own upcoming trial, she was also negotiating losing Sanger as an ally. Later in the letter, Goldman reacts to Sanger’s actions and concludes that those at the meeting who did not support her case, namely the “hard and impossible feminists”¹³⁸ and together with Sanger, they “are not really interested in birth control or if they are it is only when it can be kept within respectable channels.”¹³⁹

The shift in the relationship between Sanger and Goldman also represented the continuing change in Sanger’s political reasoning for advocating birth control. She now appealed to a different class of women through her alliance with feminists. Goldman saw the support of these women as contributing to the fact that Sanger’s case was dropped. In the face of this situation and her own arrest, Goldman stood firmly in her own views on birth control and anarchism. In her letters to fellow comrades, Goldman disassociates with Sanger altogether. In a letter to a friend on February 27th, Goldman writes,

You see dear, the publicity and interest which Margaret Sanger aroused are not going to be given to me of which by the way I am very glad. I’d much rather have the assistance of my comrades and friends than the capitalistic class or the ‘Prominent Ladies.’¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Ibid.
¹³⁹ Ibid.
¹⁴⁰ Goldman to Anna Strunsky, 27 February 1916, Reel 9.
Where they had previously agreed, a clear shift had occurred. In this way, the shift in the letters is representative of the fact that these letters were not a place where Goldman developed her politics. While Goldman is representing an intersection of gender and anarchism, her opinions do not shift across the course of the letters. As someone who did not believe in the government, abandoning a broader platform in favor of the government’s acknowledgement that birth control was important and necessary was not conceivable.

I THINK SHE IS SIMPLY UNSTABLE

Following the letter that was most likely sent to Van Valkenburgh, it appears as though Goldman had written an article in which she discussed the event where Sanger refused to speak up on behalf of Goldman. The article was not published, but Goldman refers to it in a second letter to Van Valkenburgh,

I am so glad that you were able to stop the article about Margaret Sanger. I never would have forgiven myself for writing to you about the miserable experience I had with her if that matter had been made public now. […] I think she [Sanger] is simply unstable. I understand through Leonard Abbott that she is quite crushed from her failure of taking a decent stand at her glorification meeting which may or may not be true. In any event, I want nothing done that will in the least jeopardise Margaret Sanger’s chances of a tour.141

The miserable experience Goldman refers to in the letter she sent Van Valkenburgh regarding the meeting where Sanger did not speak up on behalf of Goldman. Although Goldman appears to have written an article about the event to be published, she revokes the article, and dismisses Sanger as unstable. This dismissal is a reflection of Goldman’s inability to move past the shift in Sanger’s alliances, and perhaps a tactic utilized by Goldman to further her own political gains at the expense of her former friend. While Sanger is diminished to being unstable, Goldman heralds herself for passing on an opportunity to publicly bash the birth control activist. Goldman does not take the opportunity to further publicize the event, and credits herself with supporting Sanger’s chances at a speaking tour. Although possibly superficially, Goldman does show support for Sanger despite their political differences. However, this decision does not mean Goldman was willing to place her politics in conversation with Sanger’s, and Goldman was not open to any further political development as a result of her relationship with Sanger.

Finally, in a letter again to friend Agnes Inglis, Goldman exemplifies an attitude that displays a sense of sadness while at the same time dismissing and disassociating herself from Sanger. The letter was written May 10th, 1916, after Goldman had approximately two months to reflect on her decision to pull the article regarding the meeting at the end of February.

About Margaret Sanger: It is tragic but yet true that she is not big enough to give credit to those who have paved the way for her. Then too, she is evidently trying to interest people of means, so of course it will not do to mention the name of Emma Goldman. It is pityful to be so small, but who cares? Each one must stand on his own merits after all, only she is really hurting herself much more than she can possibly injure us.142

Here, Goldman takes credit for aiding Sanger in beginning her activist career, while also demonstrating an understanding for her disassociating with Goldman. Goldman also refers to the strength of herself and her movement, and Sanger’s inability to injure their cause. Goldman’s reference to those who “paved the way for her” is a reference to herself, and the role she played in the development of Sanger’s political career. It is likely, Goldman is referring to sharing with Sanger the information she gathered at the neo-Malthusian conference in Paris in 1900, although probably not limited to that event. Biographers of Sanger largely agree with the claim that she did not credit those who paved the way for her, and more specifically the role Goldman played on her role in the birth control movement. According to Sanger biographer Chesler, as Sanger continued on as a birth control activist, she “continued to popularize Goldman’s claim for the revolutionary potential of women’s control over their own bodies but never admitted any debt to her.”143

**CONCLUSION**

The letters between Margaret Sanger and Emma Goldman are a partial representation of the complicated nature of their relationship. The letters are less of a place where the two women developed their opinions and views on birth control as an issue, and more of a historical representation of Goldman’s mentoring of Sanger. Goldman did not compromise her own political views, and her support of Sanger’s activist career was limited to the decision not to act in a manner that may have jeopardized Sanger’s future in politics. The letters are a place where Goldman recorded a specific relationship, but her view on birth

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142 Goldman to Agnes Inglis, 10 May 1916, Reel 9.
143 Chesler, 87.
control was not in conversation with Sanger’s opinions. As Sanger abandoned her radical upbringing into the political scene, disavowed her role in the Socialist Party, denounced her mentorship, and appealed to a new audience, Goldman remained on a clear anarchist platform.

Thus to return to my research questions, these letters are a place where Goldman represents ideas concerning gender and anarchism to Sanger through their similar experiences and arrests as political activists. However, Goldman does not use these letters as a place to develop her political thought in the way she did with men. Goldman’s opinions regarding politics do not shift across the course of the letters, but rather, they are a place where Goldman’s commitment to anarchism becomes evident at the expense of her relationship with Sanger. Goldman’s relationship with Sanger does not lead to a struggle between her politics and her experiences.

In addition, to begin, the role Goldman takes on in her relationship with Sanger is that of mentor. However, by the end of the correspondence, their relationship is one that is representative of a political truce. The women began as allies, where Goldman mentored Sanger, extending her resources to a fellow female radical. Goldman distributed *The Woman Rebel*, advised Sanger on how to become a full time activist, and offered her financial and emotional support after her first arrest. However, as soon as Sanger abandoned her radical background and became involved with a higher class of women, Goldman separated herself from Sanger. While Goldman’s decision not to publish the article based on the letter to Van Valkenburgh is significant, the extent of its significance should not be exaggerated. It is likely that Goldman’s reference to taking no action to jeopardize Sanger’s chances at a tour was more of a reflection of her own ego than any allegiance to Sanger.

Overall, Goldman’s priority did not lie with this relationship. After Sanger’s arrest and disassociation with the radical left, Goldman’s support dwindled, and eventually resulted in a full dismissal of Sanger. Ultimately, Goldman did not demonstrate any form of loyalty towards Sanger. An analysis of this set of correspondence demonstrates that Goldman displayed loyalty to the cause of anarchism over her relationship with this particular woman.
CHAPTER 4

ALAMEDA SPERRY

Chapter four provides an analysis of Emma Goldman’s correspondence with anarchist Alameda Sperry. While the biographical documentation of Margaret Sanger is plentiful, the same cannot be said for Alameda Sperry. In the earliest biographies of Emma Goldman, Sperry is not mentioned once and she is not mentioned in Goldman’s autobiography.\(^{144}\) There are no existing biographies written on Sperry, so the biographical information available is limited. What is known is that Alameda Sperry was an anarchist living in New Kensington, Pennsylvania during the time she corresponded with Goldman (1912-1913). Sperry was a union organizer and wrote for local radical and anarchist newsletters. Her experiences with poverty led her to prostitution, which influenced her politics and entrance into anarchism. Biographers of Goldman have briefly mentioned Sperry in similar ways, including describing Sperry as “a young, literate, working-class radical from an industrial suburb of Pittsburgh,”\(^{145}\) “something of a radical in the town of New Kensington, Pennsylvania, where she lived while she knew Emma, Alameda had worked to bring lectures on sex to students in a nearby school district, had been involved in union organizing, and occasionally wrote for radical papers,”\(^{146}\) and most simply an “anarchist colleague.”\(^{147}\) At the time of her correspondence with Goldman, Sperry was married to Fred Sperry.

Based on the letters from Sperry to Goldman, scholars have speculated about the possibility of a sexual relationship between the two women. When Goldman biographers do mention Sperry and provide an analysis of their relationship, it is often in a limited context. Wexler’s (1984) biography, *Emma Goldman: An Intimate Life*, mentions Sperry across two pages. Wexler argues, “But after they had corresponded for a time and Goldman had invited

\(^{144}\) Drinnon, 1961; Solomon, 1987.

\(^{145}\) Wexler, 182.


Sperry to visit her at the ‘farm’ in Ossining, the younger woman fell in love with her and began sending her letters filled with erotic fantasies that sometimes were quite bizarre. That Sperry’s sexual feelings toward Goldman were ever reciprocated seems unlikely.\(^{148}\) In this account of the correspondence, Wexler acknowledges that the two women knew each other not only over correspondence, but physically spent time together. However, although she argues Sperry visited Goldman, she does not seem convinced that they had a sexual relationship, and dismisses Sperry’s letters as being, at times, “quite bizarre.”

In Falk’s (1984) biography, *Love, Anarchy, & Emma Goldman*, the complicated nature of Goldman’s relationship with Sperry is acknowledged and Falk argues, “although it might have been Alameda’s fantasy, it seems more likely that the all-encompassing Emma did in fact consummate her attraction for Alameda.”\(^{149}\) Falk goes on to state “Emma’s relationship with Alameda Sperry had enhanced her belief in free love and strengthened her convictions about freedom from restraint, although she often characterized intimacy between women as a retreat from intimacy from men.”\(^{150}\) Here, Falk is inserting an argument that Goldman and Sperry did have a physical relationship, and that the relationship itself influenced Goldman politically, while still pointing out that Goldman was not woman-identified. Falk acknowledges the fantastical nature of Sperry’s letters to Goldman, but elaborates further to demonstrate that she is at least more convinced than Wexler that the two had a sexual relationship.

In order to understand the letters between Sperry and Goldman, and build upon the analysis of Goldman biographers, it is necessary to acknowledge feminist historians who have worked to rewrite women’s intimate relationships into the historical record. In Blanche Wiesen Cook’s (1979) influential piece, “The Historical Denial of Lesbianism,” the author argues heterosexist definitions of relations between women “accompan[y] the persistent refusal to acknowledge the variety and intensity of women’s emotional and erotic experiences.”\(^{151}\) Scholars have elaborated upon this concept in order to understand the historical context that led Goldman to deemphasize her relationships with women while

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148 Wexler, 182.
150 Ibid., 176.
valuing her experiences with men. Bonnie Haaland applies Cook’s idea to Goldman and states,

I argue that Goldman was part of what Blanche Wiesen Cook refers to as the ‘historical denial of lesbianism.’ In fact, Goldman’s denial of the possibility that women’s love of women could be erotic and sexually pleasurable, independent of the quality of previous male contact, reflected the sex-gender ideology of her day. Goldman not only denied what Cook refers to as the ‘reality,’ ‘diversity,’ and ‘vast range of perfectly pleasurable relations between women,’ but was less than open about her own relationship between companion Alameda Sperry.152

Haaland builds upon Cook, and implies that Goldman herself was denying the significance of relationships with and between women, in addition to the way biographers of Goldman have minimized the relationship. However, Haaland does not hypothesize as to why Goldman may have denied the significance of relationships between women more generally, or specifically, her own relationship with Sperry. She argues this denial was common in terms of normative behavior of the time, but does not complicate this idea with the fact that Goldman existed in a radical location, and lived to defy norms.

Within this chapter, we must also look to scholars who have complicated existing notions of relationships between women. For example, in her well-known article, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (1975) works to historically deconstruct the binary between normal and abnormal, or heterosexual or homosexual relationships between women. By examining relationships in a specific historical context, rather than confining them to current concepts of what is normal or abnormal, Smith-Rosenberg argues one can better understand their subversive nature. To immediately deny the “abnormal” nature of a sexual relationship between women in an effort to normalize it continues the long tradition of denying lesbian relationships in history. Deemphasizing the binary of heterosexual or homosexual as we conceptualize of it today allows for new and important ways of understanding women’s relationships.

In this chapter, I will do more than hypothesize as to whether or not Sperry and Goldman had a sexual relationship. I will address the way these letters are a place where Sperry represents her understanding, and interpretation of Goldman’s anarchist politics. I look to these letters for content beyond a sexual relationship. Scholars tend to cite the same

152 Haaland, 156.
few letters written from Sperry to Goldman, in an effort to offer their thoughts on the possibility of a sexual relationship, leaving many of the letters behind. In addition, I propose to offer one hypothesis as to why Goldman may have refused to acknowledge the significance of her relationship with Sperry, despite her anarchist philosophy of free love.

THE LETTERS

The letters that make up the basis of this chapter span the years 1912 and 1913. Many of the letters lack specific dates, leaving an unclear representation of the chronology of the relationship. However the archivists at the Emma Goldman Papers have categorized the letters in chronological order based on those letters that do have dates, and content of the letters that do not. In some cases, the letters include a date without a year, or a month without a day, and the archivists have made an educated guess that they were written in 1912, indicated by “1912(?).” For the purposes of my thesis, I utilize the organization published to the microfilm as chronological order where ambiguous dates appear. For those letters that have no date, I provide an analysis that is not chronologically based. Significantly, most of the letters than describe the possibility of a sexual relationship do not have dates. The letters that make up the basis of my research are exclusively from Alameda Sperry to Emma Goldman, the opposite of the letters between Goldman and Margaret Sanger. This is especially significant given the nature of the letters, and requires further analysis.

In Estelle Freedman’s (1998) article, “‘The Burning of Letters Continues’: Elusive Identities and the Historical Construction of Sexuality,” she builds upon the concept of self-censoring parts of ones identity. Freedman suggests, “that so many women in public life destroyed their correspondence with close female friends or partners indicates their awareness of the process of stigmatization that took place in the early twentieth century.”\(^\text{153}\)

While we do not have proof that letters written in response, from Emma Goldman to Alameda Sperry, ever existed, we can look to nuances in Sperry’s letters to suggest that Goldman was writing back. If the letters did exist and have been destroyed, by applying Freedman’s concept of self-censoring as the result of the awareness of the sigma of a same-sex relationship, we can conclude that if Goldman was censoring herself, perhaps it was

because she feared the negative stereotypes associated with these relationships. While we do not know if or where the letters exist, this silence is significant as it relates to feminist history that draws on silences as texts. If we return to the fact that Goldman used correspondence to write her autobiography and was aware of the importance of correspondence in her life, it is possible that the letters were destroyed in this process, as a way for Goldman to censor herself in her autobiography and in general. It is possible that the letters may never have existed, that they are in the possession of someone who does not want to share them, or they may have been destroyed or censored by someone other than Goldman or Sperry, but the absence of any discussion of the letters on behalf of Goldman leaves us with a sense that something is missing. It is also important to recognize the fact that these letters from Sperry to Goldman still exist. Assuming the letters were at one time in the possession of Goldman herself, we can speculate that Goldman chose not to destroy this set of correspondence.

The correspondence begins in March 1912, most likely after Sperry had seen Goldman lecture while on her annual US tour. Due to the ambiguity in terms of dates, there is no distinct first letter. In a letter dated March 5, 1912, Sperry spends the majority of the letter informing Goldman about the state of radical politics in New Kensington. She writes:

The socialists here have started a paper and want me to be the editor. Well, I’ll not do it. The editor now is that man who says I ought to be incarcerated in an institution […] he will learn, I think, that he might just as well stop running me down to everybody that he meets.

New Kensington is not so much a mental prison that you think it is. I have been here two and a half years and have done some good. I have been the means of having the street paved from here to Arnold, the next station about and a nice side-walk laid. I have gotten the principal of the Arnold school to have lectures on sex delivered to his pupils; […]

I haven’t been able to do much with the New Kensington school. There is such a damn lot of christians in this town. The other day one of the teachers in the New K. school went to see a friend of mine and deliberately knelt down and started to pray. I say, ‘No quarter’ for such people and I gave my friend a raking over the coals for not putting that stinking, virtuous, old maid out—so my friend is going to sent her to me- you know that I need salvation— and I have a bucket of water drawn to pour over her, nice cold water, when she is in the middle of her prayer. […]

Two of our women ran for the position of school director in this town at the last election and almost won.154

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154 Sperry to Goldman, 5 March 1912 (?), Reel 6.
This letter appears to be an overview of politics in New Kensington, Sperry’s experiences as an activist, and her frustrations with the socialists in the town. Sperry’s references to the socialist editor and the teacher are most likely in regards to Sperry being known in the town as a prostitute. In this way, Sperry’s experiences with prostitution influence not only her entrance into radical politics, but shape her activist goals. She works to get a form of sex education into the schools, but is limited by the Christian morals of the town, as well as the opinions of those around her. Sperry is also clearly on the side of Goldman in terms of radical politics. She closes the letter with “I am going up just now to put in a protest in our paper about your treatment in Dayton.”

In a letter dated April 2, 1912, there is a reference to not being able to write for the previous six weeks. Goldman began her annual speaking tour early that year, and spent much of the year traveling across the country. The letter is short:

My dear: I have wanted to write you but have been too busy blazing a trail of infamy for the last six weeks. Something seems to have broken in me. I do not care for anything any more. One thing, tho! I love you.

Sperry is indicating that she had been politically active, although what exactly she was doing is unclear, based on her previous letter we can make conclusions about her activist goals. Her use of “infamy” implies that she has spent six weeks working towards a revolutionary, anti-capitalist, and perhaps anarchist goal. In this way, the beginning of the letters are political in nature in that the two women’s common thread is, at this point, politics in general, although later, specifically anarchist politics. Although this is towards the beginning of the collection, it does not reference specific physical contact with Goldman. At this point, Sperry may have been writing to Goldman as an anarchist role model after hearing Goldman speak, as opposed to an intimate friend. However, she does display feelings of devotion towards Goldman this early in the correspondence. The next letter is more specific in terms of Sperry’s political activity, and the fact that it appears the two women had not yet met. On April 7th she says,

Dearest: I hope you’ll forgive the letter I sent you the other day. I have been a perfect friend since my disappointment at not meeting you but I believe I have recovered by poise. […]

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155 The question mark indicates the fact that the letter itself is dated April 2, but has no year. The Emma Goldman Papers have included the year 1912, so I too am utilizing this date in my chronological analysis.

156 Sperry to Goldman, 2 April 1912 (?), Reel 6.
There has been an epidemic of strikes in this valley. Fred is out of a job but won’t apply at any of the shops where the men are striking. The I.W.W. has been stirring the men up and they have a few Cossacks here. One has to keep moving on the streets. I have never seen a strike conducted in such a dumb manner before—only the laborers are striking, the with result that skilled mechanics who are really in sympathy with them, walk into work past the pickets.\footnote{Sperry to Goldman, 7 April 1912 (?), Reel 6.}

Sperry is referring to her husband’s inability to get a job because he refuses to cross the striking worker’s picket lines. She references the International Worker’s of the World, the union that sought to organize the working class in general in an effort to revolt against the upper classes. However, Sperry gives a further class analysis in this part of the letter. The laborers are the only ones striking, while the more skilled workers, who are paid more, are not included in the strike. A founding principle of the IWW was “its attempt to break down the boundaries between craft unions and unskilled workers,”\footnote{Candace Falk, ed., \textit{Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years}, vol. 2: Making Speech Free (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 55.} and here Sperry demonstrates a specific instance where the two were not united. Sperry acknowledges this is not an efficient way to organize a strike, as the skilled mechanics are “really in sympathy with” the lower class of laborers, but were not involved. She sees this as being a weak point in the tactics of the IWW.

In the same letter Sperry goes on to demonstrate her commitment to the cause of anarchism at the cost of her relationship with her family. She writes,

\begin{quote}
I did offer my services to speak at the glass house strike and wrote an article for the strikers but the P.F. Press would not use it—it was probably too incendiary. My sister said today that I ought to have more respect for my dead mother than to be interested in strikers. I am deserted by my whole family.\footnote{Sperry to Goldman, 7 April 1912 (?), Reel 6.}
\end{quote}

Again, she is demonstrating her anarchist activism to Goldman. She refers to a speaking event at a strike, as well as writing an article that she implies is too radical for publication, a problem Goldman could sympathize with, as she was often demonized for being too radical. Sperry’s commitment to radical politics was such that she valued her beliefs over her relationship with her family. At this specific time in Goldman’s life, she was making a career doing both things Sperry cites in this letter, speaking and writing, and Sperry is associating
herself with these tactics as well, although on a smaller scale and, apparently unsuccessfully, at least in this specific instance.

Already at this point in the correspondence, there is evidence that Goldman was in fact writing in response to Sperry. In the closing of the April 7 letter, Sperry writes, “It is so sweet of you to say you had a longing to see me. I, too, have a longing to see you and it seems more terrible every day.”

**HOW I ENVY YOUR SAMENESS OF EXPRESSION**

The following letter is dated April 20, and in this letter Sperry demonstrates her understanding and agreement with Goldman’s politics regarding religion. Sperry writes,

> Dearest: I have just finished reading your article upon Christianity and it is masterly; how I envy your sameness of expression. I could never give my thoughts upon that subject in such a dignified manner. All I can do when I think of that subject is to curse and rave and use the rottenest language possible. I reckon the reason of it is that I have had the strictest kind of Christian raising.

Sperry demonstrates that she agrees with Goldman’s politics regarding Christianity. Here there is some uncertainty in terms of dates as the Emma Goldman archives has attributed this date as April 20, 1912, and Goldman’s “The Failure of Christianity” was published in *Mother Earth* in April 1913. Although Sperry specifically refers to reading Goldman’s article on Christianity, it is possible that it was published elsewhere, as Goldman often lectured on the topic prior to the publication of “The Failure of Christianity.” It is also possible that Goldman sent Sperry a copy before publication. Regardless, Sperry is impressed by Goldman’s abilities as a writer, is envious of her composure, and doesn’t hold back in her flattery of Goldman. Sperry clearly does not agree with Christianity, despite the fact that she had a Christian upbringing. In her article, Goldman argues “Whoever sincerely aims at a radical change in society, whoever strives to free humanity from the scourge of dependence and misery, must turn his back on Christianity, on the old as well as the present form of the same.”

Sperry echoes this statement by assuring Goldman she has denounced Christianity, and feels so strongly about her denunciation that she cannot speak in a dignified manner on

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160 Ibid.

161 Sperry to Goldman, 20 April 1912 (?), Reel 6.

the topic. Here, Sperry proves that she is not only impressed with Goldman’s skill as a writer, but again, she reinforces Goldman’s arguments and perspectives by mirroring them back to her.

Later in the same letter Sperry describes meeting an Italian anarchist woman named Florence, and they further discuss the topic of religion:

Florence isn’t a Christian either; she used to get a beating every Sunday when she lived at home—they beat her to make her go to church. She wants someone to place a bomb under every church in Kensington so she can light them.163

In addition to furthering a discussion of Christianity, Sperry touches on the topic of political violence, which Goldman sympathized with at times in her life. Goldman understood the way those who had been subject to extreme poverty as a result of inequality within the capitalist system might see political violence as their only option. When lecturing and writing on the topic of political violence, even when her own viewpoint changed at times, she always highlighted her opinion that the state was always guilty of violence against its citizens, as an institution. In “The Psychology of Political Violence,” she states, “Compared with the wholesale violence of capital and government, political acts of violence are but a drop in the ocean. That so few resist is the strongest proof how terrible must be the conflict between their souls and unbearable social iniquities.”164

Overall, a common theme that emerges thus far in these letters is an echoing of Goldman’s politics. Whether Sperry is specifically referring to an article Goldman published, or simply expressing envy towards Goldman’s abilities, Sperry seems to be a follower, and emulator of Goldman’s anarchist politics. Sperry identified as an anarchist herself, and was attracted to Goldman as a result of her career as an activist. If Goldman had not been successful politically, and Sperry had not begun to write to her, it is likely that they might never had met. Although the letters do not refer to a clear beginning in their relationship, anarchist politics are what brought the two women together. It is because Goldman was a famous anarchist that Sperry was attracted to her, regardless of the nature of the attraction.

163 Sperry to Goldman, 20 April 1912 (?), Reel 6.
In this way, I argue the relationship between Goldman and Sperry exemplifies Leila Rupp’s (1981) concept of “the charismatic leader who attracts intense devotion”\textsuperscript{165} as a method of characterizing relationships between women. When referring to the complexity of women’s relationships in the US women’s movement in the 1940s and 1950s, Rupp uses this concept. Rather than implying that because the leader attracts this attention, it must be sexual, or assuming that the devotion must be devoid of sexual attraction, this idea is useful in its simplicity. Goldman was undoubtedly a charismatic leader within the anarchist movement at this time, and the nature of Sperry’s letters lend themselves to being described as an intense devotion. While this label does not speak to the sexual nature of the letters, it is a way to interpret the relationship in a different way. In Sperry’s discussion of Goldman’s article on Christianity, she not only agrees with her ideas, but also describes her jealousy of Goldman’s ability to be concise and dignified in her writing. Goldman’s power within the anarchist movement was not within the same sphere as Sperry’s, making her an anarchist leader to Sperry, whose letters demonstrate an intense devotion to Goldman.

\textbf{WE CERTAINLY DO HAVE A REPUTATION AND WE CERTAINLY DO ENJOY OURSELVES}

A common political theme in Sperry’s letters is her experiences with prostitution. Specifically, she uses this space to describe the reactions she receives from people who know she is a prostitute, including her husband.

In a letter between June-July 1912 Sperry writes, “Fred didn’t even have any money to hunt a job with. I have done the best I could for him and I pity him so because he has lost the best part of me and I think he knows it.”\textsuperscript{166} Here we see Sperry describing prostitution as a way for her to provide for herself and her husband when he was unable to find a job. In addition, she laments over the loss of genuine intimacy with her husband, acknowledging the psychological effects of prostitution on her marriage.

Sperry discusses prostitution again with Goldman, this time she portrays a different attitude towards the subject. “Florence and I have a regular salon over at her office—men, men, men—even the chief of police. She said today, with a giggle, ‘Alameda, the people in


\textsuperscript{166} Sperry to Goldman, btw. June-July 1912 (1), Reel 6.
this town could draw and quarter you and me.’ Well, we certainly do have a reputation and we certainly do enjoy ourselves.”\textsuperscript{167}

In an August 8 letter, Sperry writes in more detail about prostitution, and points out similarities between prostitution and marriage. She writes,

I have absolutely no reciprocation as far as passion is concerned for a man who pays me for sex. So bent is such a man for self gratification that he seldom bothers to find out whether the woman responds or not and if he does want response he can easily be ‘bluffed.’ Nearly all men try to buy love—if they don’t do it by marrying they do it otherwise and that is why I have such a contempt for men.\textsuperscript{168}

Sperry’s point that marriage is an economic agreement similar to prostitution is one Goldman often made prior to Sperry’s letters. In “The Traffic in Women,” Goldman writes (1910),

To the moralist, prostitution does not consist so much in the fact that woman sells her body, but rather that she sells it out of wedlock. That this is no mere statement is proved by the fact that marriage for monetary considerations of perfectly legitimate, sanctified by law and public opinion, while any other union is condemned and repudiated. Yet a prostitute, if properly defined, means nothing else than ‘any person for whom sexual relationships are subordinated to gain.’\textsuperscript{169}

Goldman furthers the connection between prostitution and marriage specifically in “Marriage and Love.” Here, Goldman argues that marriage as an institution encourages girls to be interested in the amount of money a man can provide in heterosexual marriage, as opposed to whether or not the couple is in love. Goldman asks, “Can the man make a living? Can he support a wife? That is the only thing that justifies marriage. Gradually this saturates every thought of the girl; her dreams are not of moonlight and kisses, of laughter and tears; she dreams of shopping tours and bargain counters.”\textsuperscript{170} In this letter, we see that Sperry’s declaration of her experiences with prostitution are a reflection of Goldman’s clear argument that marriage and prostitution are structures where men buy love from women, so sexual relationships are traded for economic gain.

\textsuperscript{167} Sperry to Goldman, btw. June-July 1912 (2), Reel 6.
\textsuperscript{168} Sperry to Goldman, 8 August 1912 (?), Reel 6.
\textsuperscript{170} Goldman, “Marriage and Love,” 162.
YOUR EYES ARE LIKE VIOLETS

A significant shift occurs in the letters following the summer of 1912. The previous letters demonstrated Sperry’s political activism as if she wanted to prove to Goldman that she was serious about anarchism. Goldman spent the summer of 1912 at a farm in Ossining, New York with Alexander Berkman while he wrote his book, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist*, an account of the fourteen years he spent in prison. Goldman invited Sperry to the farm, and the two of them spent an undetermined amount of time together over the summer. For a period, the letters are no longer accounts of her political workings in New Kensington, but a representation of Sperry’s infatuation for Goldman, and the possibility of a sexual relationship between the two women. After spending time with Goldman on a personal level, as opposed to being in the audience of one of Goldman’s speeches, Sperry becomes infatuated with her mentor. There is a shift from seemingly platonic devotion to Goldman as a charismatic anarchist leader, to reference to a sexual relationship. Based on a series of letters regarding dates for Sperry’s visit, it appears that the women spent time together in late August, early September of 1912. On August 24, Sperry writes:

> I reckon you will get this Monday morning. Don’t get a rig. I can walk all day without tiring. [...] Of course there is something in telepathy. And between two such electric natures as ours. I tell you, Emma, if you are good to me I will never be weak again. It is just because I don’t want things very badly that I let things slide but, when I do want anything and want it badly I am ruthless. But I think that I have said enuf wild things to you— I’d better save some until I see you.  

On September 23, 1912, Sperry writes in reference to the time they spent together on the farm:

> How I wish I were with you on the farm! You are so sweet in the mornings—your eyes are like violets and you seem to forget, for a time, the sorrows of the world. And your bosom—ah, your sweet bosom unconfined.  

Sperry references the time spent with Goldman on the farm, as well as a deeper level of intimacy. Sperry discusses mornings spent together, leading us to believe they may have spent the night together as well. Beyond an analysis of whether or not they two women spent the night together is the understanding of a deeper connection. Sperry’s reference to Goldman’s eyes, and the way they seemed to forget the sorrows of the world, exemplifies a

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171 Sperry to Goldman, 24 August 1912, Reel 6.

172 Sperry to Goldman, 23 September 1912 (?), Reel 6.
political understanding as well as an intimate one. As anarchists, the two women were aware of the inequalities present in the world as a result of capitalism, and worked tirelessly towards a vision of individual independence and equality. Goldman’s vision especially, was felt so strongly that witnessing the inequality across the country was exhausting, and she was constantly hyper aware of the sorrow felt by the working class as a result of their exploitation at the hands of wealthy capitalists. Both women envisioned a different ideal, an anarchist ideal, which would free the sorrows of the world. The letters are valuable not only to determine whether or not the morning they spent together was preceded by a night spent together, but to see a representation of the vulnerability and emotional exhaustion they shared as a result of perpetuating the cause of anarchism.

A letter written September 23rd is a more specific description of physicality between the two women. Sperry writes:

Dearest, if only I had the courage enuf to kill myself when you reached the climax then—then I would have known happiness, for at that moment I had complete possession of you. Now you see the yearning I am possessed with—the yearning to possess you at all time and it is impossible. What greater suffering can there be—what greater heaven—what greater hell? And how the will to live sticks in me when I wish to live after possessing you. Satisfied? Ah god, no! At this moment I am listening to the rhythm of the pulse coming thru your throat. I am surging along with your life blood, coursing through the secret places of your body. I wish to escape from you but I am harried from place to place in my thots. I cannot escape from the rhythmic spurt of your love juice.173

Beyond the description of a sexual interaction between the two women, within this letter is a manifestation of jealousy as a result of Sperry’s desire to maintain possession of Goldman. Sperry describes feeling fulfilled in the moment she “had complete possession of” Goldman. It is possible that Sperry was satisfied by feeling as though she had Goldman’s complete attention, which would have been difficult considering Goldman’s other relationships, including the prioritization of her relationship with anarchism. However, Sperry’s satisfaction over having possession of Goldman marks a shift in that she is no longer mimicking Goldman’s anarchist ideals. Possession implies ownership, in this case, of a person. The concept of ownership and property is not conducive to anarchism, which is by definition, freedom from property and restraint in all forms. Goldman (1912) speaks to the idea of ownership of people in “Jealousy: Causes and a Possible Cure.” Goldman argues that

173 Sperry to Goldman, 11 October 1912 (?), Reel 6.
even those who have rejected the way the state and moral codes have coerced individuals to love a certain way are subject to its traditions. In other words, individuals have been socialized and engrained with the ideas of monogamy and moral codes that dictate acceptable behavior so that even political radical experience jealousy. Goldman argues that radicals, “become as blinded by the ‘green-eyed monster’ as their conservative neighbors the moment their possessions are at stake.”

Sperry, a radical who has rejected state control over love, is still demonstrating the emotion of jealousy. Sperry was most satisfied when she believed she had complete control over Goldman, and is tortured by the fact that she cannot have possession of Goldman at all times. In this way we can use Goldman’s ideas to understand Sperry’s behavior. By utilizing Goldman’s definition of jealousy even among radicals, we see the way Sperry was influenced by the habits of human ownership, and how Goldman herself may have interpreted Sperry’s behavior.

It appears as though Goldman may have written a response to Sperry regarding her voicing the desire to have possession of Goldman. In a letter written between September 5 and 30, Sperry references Goldman’s issues with Sperry’s jealousy. Writing in the third person Sperry says she is a “new Alameda” and it was in a “moment of madness in which she used the word possession in connection with yourself.”

Sperry goes on to say:

I feel like a spent runner from my terrible emotions of the last few days. I feel that you are right in all you say and that I have done you irreparable injury. It may be true that some day I may lose those tendencies but I do not know that I have any desire to lose them for they are natural and not acquired. For the life of me I do not understand why people look askance at those tendencies which, by the way, have been directed towards but two women.

It appears as though Sperry is referencing her feelings of jealousy, arguing they are not coercively learned tendencies, but natural ones. She goes on to point out the way feelings of jealousy have often been directed at women, possibly critiquing the way women tend to be pitted against one another in a patriarchal society.

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175 Sperry to Goldman, btw. 5-30 September 1912, Reel 6.
176 Ibid.
NEVER MIND ABOUT NOT FEELING AS I DO

While Sperry refers to the fact that Goldman did not return the same feelings, this does not allow for dismissal of the significance of the relationship altogether. Not only did Goldman not write or speak about her relationship with Sperry, she also did not appear to be affectionate in the same way that Sperry was. Sperry refers to this multiple times in the letters. In a letter with no date she says, “Never mind about not feeling as I do. I find restraint to be purifying. Realization is hell for it is satisfying and degenerating.”

In a letter that appears to be a description of a dream Sperry had about Goldman, she again refers to a violent reaction to Goldman’s apparent indifference:

O horrible, horrible fear that you have become indifferent to me. O horrible midnight version of you—so unsatisfying—gazing past me into the beyond. [...] Your gaze is arrested, horrible vision. How you are looking at me. I have compelled you to look at me. I am The Present. And I am a part of The Future. But I am hell-fire when you gaze past me indifferently. I am hell-fire and I drag you to me for there are many things in me you have not fathomed. Horrible vision, peering into the future, you must pay attention to me or I will become mad and plunge the knife in deeper for if you no longer love me the future does not want you nor will I permit you to love anyone else if you do not love me for I will blind your eyes and leave you to rot.

Sperry is making evident the intense jealousy she feels as a result of the recognition that she will never have the full attention of Goldman, let alone an acknowledgement of their relationship. There is also a shift in tone in comparison to the letters before the two women spent a period of the summer together. In the letters where Sperry is discussing a sexual relationship with Goldman, the letters are more poetic in tone, referencing dramatic imagery and cryptic descriptions, whereas the previous letters were plainly descriptive and to the point. This can be interpreted as furthering the development of Rupp’s concept of a “charismatic female leader who attracts intense devotion,” where Sperry’s intense devotion takes different forms as their relationship progresses.

Sometime after this letter comes another written on December 23, 1912, in which Sperry references a card Goldman sent, again suggesting that the

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177 Sperry to Goldman, btw. March 1912-September 1913 (1), Reel 6.
178 Sperry to Goldman, btw. March 1912-September 1913 (2), Reel 6.
179 Rupp, 63.
communication was not one sided. After previous references to inattention, Sperry is relieved to hear from her again. Sperry writes:

Dearest: I have just received your card and am filled with a great peace. I am a little remorseful for wanting to hear from you so badly … I will never again have anger for you nor ever feel impatient again for I have lived a thousand years in the last two weeks.  

Sperry again names her jealousy in another letter with an unknown date. This letter demonstrates another representation of the fact that Goldman was not reciprocating the intense devotion Sperry was experiencing towards Goldman. The letter begins:

Do you know, dear, that sometimes I feel quite cruel towards you? When I do not hear from you I wish I were a giant with thirty league boots, I would stride to where you are, grab you up with my big paws and dump you down into the middle of this community and whenever you would try to escape I would push you back into it again just to let despair creep into your heart. I would like to strike you in the mouth. I think, ‘She is at the tail end of a blind alley anyhow. To hell with other people—damn the swine! They do not understand any part of her and she is giving, giving, giving herself to them. She will die in extreme poverty, if she does not die in harness…” And then I think, ‘Can it be possible that I feel vulgar jealousy? Well, this is the first time.’ And then—I kiss your feet and ask for forgiveness.

Sperry also exemplifies a sense of confidence in her relationship with Goldman in that she claims to understand Goldman to a further extent than others Goldman devotes her time to. This is significant because the difference between Sperry and others who may have had Goldman’s attention, is that Sperry is a woman. Goldman not only existed in a male dominated movement, but was, for a large part, without intimate female companionship. Sperry speaks to this gap in Goldman’s intimate relationships. It is not likely that Sperry was referring to having a better understanding of Goldman because she was an anarchist, as most of the people Goldman surrounded herself with were anarchists. Thus, Sperry was most likely referring to the fact that she was a woman, while others in Goldman’s life were not.

**CENSORSHIP CAME FROM SOME OF MY OWN COMRADES**

It is important to recognize that Goldman was not silent on the issue of same sex relationships altogether. In fact, her anarchism was one that stressed individual freedoms, including

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180 Sperry to Goldman, 23 December 1912 (?), Reel 6.

181 Sperry to Goldman, btw. March 1912-September 1913 (3), Reel 6.
free love, or the freedom to love whomever you choose. This included same sex love, and Goldman has been referred to as “the only woman in America who defended homosexuality in general and the conviction of Oscar Wilde in particular” (Cook 435). Goldman was a successful speaker and lecturer with an existing audience of anarchist followers, so when she publicly defended homosexuality, people listened. She spoke in defense of Oscar Wilde during his trials and accusations of sodomy and gross indecency in the late 1890s. However, Goldman faced criticism from within the anarchist community when she included homosexuality in her lectures. Specifically, some anarchists felt that taking up a defense of homosexuality would only further stigmatize anarchism, and lead to the dismissal of anarchist philosophy. In her autobiography, Goldman reflects on her speaking tour of 1915:

Censorship came from some of my own comrades because I was treating such “unnatural” themes as homosexuality. Anarchism was already enough misunderstood, and anarchists considered depraved; it was inadvisable to add to the misconceptions by taking up perverted sex-forms, they argued. Believing in freedom of opinion, even if it went against me, I minded the censors in my own ranks as little as I did those in the enemy’s camp. In fact, censorship from my own comrades had the same effect on me as police persecution; it made me surer of myself, more determined to plead for every victim, be it one of social wrong or of moral prejudice.\footnote{Goldman, \textit{Living My Life}, 555.}

Goldman is referencing the way her comrades were pandering to homophobia in an effort to further the cause of anarchism. For Goldman, this went against the philosophy of anarchism altogether, and she continued to defend homosexuality in general, and the trial of Oscar Wilde specifically. However, while she speaks to the fact that anarchists disapproved of her lecturing in defense of homosexuality, she also did not go so far as to recognize her own relationship with Sperry. Goldman’s lectures on the defense of homosexuality were, for a large part, concentrated between 1915 and 1916. However, this was not the first time she mentioned homosexuality in her career. Terence Kissack, author of \textit{Free Comrades: Anarchism and Homosexuality in the United States, 1895-1917}, argues that a talk given by Goldman in 1901 was informed by readings in sexology, and as a result, was a scientific viewpoint. However, by 1915, “her sociological and psychological perspectives on homosexuality were reflected in the content of her talks.”\footnote{Terence Kissack, \textit{Free Comrades: Anarchism and Homosexuality in the United States, 1895-1917} (Oakland: AK Press, 2008), 139.}
Her argument in 1901 was “that consensual relations and behaviors that cause no harm to others should in no way be regulated.” She spoke of homosexuals as a distinct category, and utilized terminology associated with sexology, including “inverts” and “intermediate types.” Her main influences were sexologists Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis, and Magnus Hirschfeld. She sold Carpenter’s book, which included his views on same-sex sex and relationships, to audiences at her lectures. In this way, those who attended her lectures and heard her talk about homosexuality also had access to the sexologists she referred to in her speeches.

If, by 1915, there was a shift away from a scientific viewpoint, it is possible that this shift in perspective came as a result of experiences with people as opposed to sexological readings. Goldman and Sperry’s correspondence occurred before this shift in perspective, so perhaps this relationship influenced Goldman’s inclusion of sociological and psychological perspectives in terms of her defense of homosexuality.

If Goldman and Sperry did have a sexual relationship, one must also contemplate why she then chose not to write about it or even acknowledge it at all. While she may have championed her defense of homosexuality despite critics within her anarchist comrades, Goldman may also have minimized the significance of her relationship with Sperry because of this criticism. If her comrades criticized her for simply speaking about male homosexuality, a sexual relationship with a woman would have prompted further stigmatization. In order for Goldman to be the most successful anarchist leader and agitator, she needed to maintain a balance of revolutionary spirit and the ability to recruit. Based on the identities Goldman did claim, she may have minimized any other marginal identities as a result of her devotion to anarchism. Goldman remained committed to the cause of anarchism during time spent in the United States and would not have negotiated jeopardizing her influence on the movement. In this way she was negotiating her identity as a woman in a male dominated movement, and as Crenshaw argues through her concept of intersectionality, “identity categories are most often treated in mainstream liberal discourse as vestiges of bias or domination—that is, as intrinsically negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different.”

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184 Ibid.
185 Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against
mainstream discourse, although it was marginalized in a capitalist society, so any other differences that would place her outside of the majority of anarchists in the United States would render her a less effective recruiter. Her loyalty to anarchism was greater than loyalty to this individual relationship. Goldman’s priority was organizing the working class towards an anarchist revolution, thus she needed to be an effective, captivating, relatable recruiter.

In addition, broader cultural disapproval of lesbianism may have also influenced Goldman’s decision not to acknowledge her relationship with Sperry. While her anarchist comrades were critical of her decision to defend the “unnatural” these of homosexuality, this was reflective of a broader cultural climate that associated lesbianism with sexual inversion. The connection between lesbianism and masculinity present in the early 20th century in the U.S. is explored in Esther Newton’s (1984) analysis of Radclyffe Hall’s (1928) novel, *The Well of Loneliness*, in her article “The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman.” Here, Newton criticizes Hall’s association of lesbianism with somehow feeling male, thus equating lesbianism to sexual difference. The novel is reflective of the larger climate that did not yet acknowledge a female sexual discourse, but rather defined women’s sexuality through male discourses. As a result, in order for the novel’s main character, Stephen, to claim her sexuality, “she sacrifices her legitimacy as a woman and as an aristocrat. The interpersonal cost is high, too: Stephen loses her mother and her lover, Mary.” To apply this concept to Goldman, to acknowledge a sexual relationship with Sperry may have meant losing her legitimacy as a woman who was a successful political figure in a movement dominated by men. While she did exist in a radical sphere that was critical of social structures that created minority populations, she also faced criticism for even discussing homosexuality. If cultural disapproval of lesbianism meant Goldman would lose her legitimacy as an anarchist were she to acknowledge a sexual relationship with a woman, it is clear that Goldman would choose not embrace her experiences with Sperry.

**CONCLUSION**

To return to my research questions, the letters from Sperry to Goldman demonstrate that the women were in conversation about anarchist politics and political strategies. At the

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very least, Sperry was writing to Goldman in a way that proved she was a practicing anarchist activist, and involved in the anarchist community in New Kensington, Pennsylvania. This correspondence demonstrates a different kind of political development than the letters with Sanger. Whereas the letters to Sanger provided empirical evidence to place Goldman back in a history of birth control in the United States, the letters from Sperry show that the women were explicitly in conversation about anarchist politics. At the same time, the relationship between Sperry and Goldman was complicated in a way that Goldman’s relationship with Sanger was not. Not only do the letters between Sperry and Goldman demonstrate the possibility of a physical relationship, but they also show the way Sperry was impressed with Goldman as a political figure.

In Cook’s “The Historical Denial of Lesbianism,” she argues it is because of this denial that scholars look to letters for what Cook calls “genital proofs” to convincingly define a relationship between two women as lesbian, or not lesbian. Not only are scholars obsessed with Goldman’s intimate relationships with men, they are also only interested in Sperry in order to speculate as to whether or not the letters prove they had a sexual relationship. Whether or not they did, simplifying the letters to this limiting discussion leaves out any discussion of Goldman as a political, anarchist mentor to Sperry. Looking to the letters with the goal of defining the relationship within strict binaries leaves out much of the significance of the letters in terms of Goldman acting as mentor while communicating with a woman about anarchist politics.

A feminist perspective is one that looks to Goldman and values her for reasons other than her sexual relationships, whether with men or women. In the case of Sperry, Goldman was not willing to disclose her relationship publicly, despite speaking in defense of homosexuality, and having the platform to speak publicly available for most of her life. It is possible that Goldman did not want to speak about her specific relationship in order to avoid further criticism from within her anarchist circle. It is also possible that she felt she would be less effective as an anarchist leader and recruiter if the public knew she had a sexual relationship with a woman and she spoke openly about it. While it is possible that the two never had a sexual relationship and Goldman did not write about her experiences with Sperry because she did not see it as a significant part of her life, I do not believe this to be true. It is my belief that Goldman and Sperry did have a sexual relationship. I believe Goldman
downplayed the significance of her experiences with Sperry because she was heterosexist, and she had nothing to gain politically from doing so. First and foremost an anarchist, publicly admitting to having a lesbian relationship would have lessened her political effectiveness due to cultural disapproval of lesbianism.

While the letters Goldman wrote to Sperry may or may not make evident a sexual relationship, they do show Goldman in conversation with Sperry about anarchist politics, including striking, religion, prostitution, marriage, and jealousy. While Goldman may have held back in terms of the possibilities of intimate relationships with women, she did not hold back on the subject of anarchism. When looking to the letters to find evidence of content beyond genital proofs, it becomes clear that Goldman was acting as Sperry’s anarchist mentor. Goldman was a mentor and role model to Sperry, as demonstrated by the echoing of Goldman’s political ideals by Sperry. Sperry chose to write to Goldman, and in that way it is possible that she was seeking out a female political role model. Goldman was a prominent woman in the anarchist movement, and it is significant that Sperry identified with her political views, including her gendered perspectives.

Overall, I believe that historians had and will continue to have the important job of finding and filling in gaps in the past, including those regarding relationships between and among women. Homophobia and heteronormativity have taken an obvious toll on the way history is told, in many ways through the self-censoring of notable women in history. Whether or not a scholar comes across remnants of the letters from Goldman to Sperry, assuming they still exist, their relationship retains significance. The powerful nature of binaries lead scholars to attempt to place Goldman in a heterosexual or homosexual category, leading to both the denial of the possibility and significance of a relationship with Sperry, and wrongly naming the potential relationship as lesbian. Further research into the relationship between Goldman and Sperry will benefit not only lesbian historical scholarship in terms of acknowledging a possible same-sex sexual relationship of an important and well known historical figure, but will also give agency to Goldman as a political leader.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Emma Goldman was a fiery, ambitious, stubborn, and overall complex historical figure. She devoted her life to the cause of anarchism, her own beautiful ideal, sometimes at the expense of her personal relationships. In this thesis, I have complicated the narration of her political life by centering Goldman’s relationships with Margaret Sanger and Alameda Sperry. This conclusion seeks to address Goldman’s relationships with Sanger and Sperry in comparison to her relationships with men. To begin, I will address a limit to my study that influences the conclusions I am able to make. Next, I will address my proposed research questions. Finally, I will further explore the limitations of my thesis, and make suggestions for future Goldman scholarship.

Before addressing my research questions, it is necessary to address an obvious limit to my study. Within my research, the most significant limit I have come across that I did not anticipate comes from the use of letters as research methodology. When I began this project, I did not know I would have only one side of the correspondence for both Margaret Sanger and Alameda Sperry. This does not lend itself to a full analysis of the relationship Goldman had with each woman. Although as feminist scholars we draw upon silences as texts, a more comprehensive analysis would include the complete conversation. Drawing more overarching and concise conclusions requires the ability to call on the back and forth within a conversation. However, I believe that having Goldman’s letters to Sanger in one chapter, and Sperry’s letters to Goldman in the next chapter does provide a more thorough representation of correspondence as a methodology, as opposed to having no letters from Goldman, or exclusively letters from Goldman. I acknowledge this limit, and acknowledge the role it plays in what I am able to conclude. However, with this constraint in mind, I move on to address my research questions.

The first question, addressing the theme of representation, asks the extent to which Goldman represents the intersection of gender and anarchism to other women. I have demonstrated that Goldman’s correspondence with both women reflects gendered aspects of
anarchism. It is significant that as women in the male-dominated movement, the topics of their correspondence were largely women’s issues. In the case of Margaret Sanger, their relationship began and ended within a framework of birth control. The two women are in discussion about efforts to further birth control activism, prioritizing this issue. The relationship between Sanger and Goldman was a representation of the intersection of gender and anarchism in that birth control activism was what sparked their relationship. Continuing to chapter three, it becomes evident that Sperry’s letters to Goldman are also indicative of the intersections of gender and anarchism. Sperry looked to Goldman to discuss topics including prostitution and marriage, both examples of gendered issues that Goldman prioritized within a framework of anarchism. The answer to question one is significant in that it demonstrates an example of community in the US anarchist movement surrounding women’s issues.

The second question, on the theme of political thought, asks whether or not Goldman uses these letters as a place to develop her political thought and philosophy. I asked if Goldman’s political opinions shift across the course of the letters, or if they were place for Goldman to further the reach of her anarchist goals. The answer to this question proved to be very straightforward as I became further immersed in the correspondence. In both sets of letters, it becomes evident that these were not sites where Goldman developed her political thought. While the letters do indicate that the women were in conversation about gendered issues, Goldman’s perspective on these issues does not develop over the course of the letters. For Goldman, the letters to Sanger were a place to further the reach of her anarchist goals, in that she was offering both advice on how to be an effective activist and financial support, but only as long as Sanger’s politics coincided with Goldman’s political goals. Sperry’s letters to Goldman also do not lead to the conclusion that Goldman’s politics were developing over the course of their relationship. The only exception to this conclusion is Terrence Kissack’s suggestion that Goldman’s tactics in terms of speaking on the subject of homosexuality shifted from her scientific approach in 1901 to her psychological approach in 1915. With this assertion, it is possible that Goldman’s relationship with Sperry led to the further development of her politics regarding homosexuality. However, the evidence that the relationship between Goldman and Sperry is definitively what caused this shift is not convincing. Goldman may have had a specific political development as a result of her relationship with Sperry, but this development did not specifically occur in the
correspondence. Based on this evidence, I conclude that Goldman’s correspondence with Sanger and Sperry was not, in fact, a place where she developed her political thought and philosophy.

Within the third theme of female relationships, I sought to ask questions regarding the extent to which female friendships played a role in the development of Goldman’s anarchist politics. What role does Goldman take in her relationships with women? Does Goldman demonstrate a sense of loyalty to women and does this loyalty have an effect on her commitment to anarchism? In her relationship with Sanger, she begins as an activist mentor, however the relationship is more complicated than that. Goldman does not acknowledge Sanger’s previous activist experience as a socialist, and ultimately abandons her role as mentor when Sanger disassociates from radical politics. In this way, Goldman was not loyal to Sanger. Goldman was only interested in a friendship with Sanger as long as she was furthering Goldman’s political cause. The correspondence specifically illustrates that Goldman did not prioritize her relationship with Sanger over her loyalty to anarchism. Goldman prioritized her commitment to and relationship with anarchism over her relationship with Sanger.

The role Goldman takes in the relationship with Sperry is more complicated than categorizing the relationship with Goldman and Sanger. I have demonstrated the possibility of a physical relationship between the two women, but do not limit the conclusions of this set of correspondence to an attempt to answer whether or not their relationship did have a sexual aspect. However, to return to the question, Goldman appears to have little, if any, loyalty towards her anarchist comrade. This conclusion is, again, limited due to the fact that we do not have the letters Goldman wrote in response to Sperry. The fact that Sperry does not exist in her autobiography leads to the conclusion that Goldman hid this aspect of her life altogether, or else the relationship was of almost no significance to Goldman. It is not my intention to dismiss Goldman for failing to acknowledge Sperry, as relationships between women were, and still are, stigmatized and often hidden and downplayed. It is likely that an acknowledgement of a relationship with Sperry would have jeopardized the rest of Goldman’s career. However, as someone who spoke out in defense of homosexuality, and advocated free love, displaying a sense of loyalty to Sperry would have looked differently than erasing her from Goldman’s life altogether. Overall, both sets of correspondence
demonstrate that Goldman was not loyal to either woman, and their respective relationships did not have an effect on, nor diminish, her loyalty to anarchism.

At the onset of my project, it was not my hypothesis that the answer would be an overwhelming “no” to the questions based on the themes of political thought and female friendships. I value Goldman as an anarchist feminist in my studies of anarchism, and have grown to respect her ability to navigate a male dominated space, and ultimately become a very effective, well-known political figure and leader. However, my expectation that Goldman would treat her relationships with women as valuable spaces, where she was free to develop her politics without the sexism of the radical left, was a reflection of my own feminism, and not Goldman’s. In this way, the role my bias played in creating the research questions I did becomes evident. However, while I still value Goldman as an anarchist feminist, and am still impressed with her ability to navigate a male dominated space, my research has demonstrated that the development of Goldman’s politics did not thrive in a woman-centered space.

Comparing my results to those that have centered Goldman’s relationships with men demonstrates the differences between Goldman’s loyalty to men and Goldman’s loyalty to women. Goldman was heterosexist in that she was loyal to men in ways she was not loyal to women. As existing biographies have previously addressed, Goldman’s relationships with men were a site where she struggled with anarchist politics in relation to her personal life. However, this struggle is not present in her relationships with Sanger and Sperry. This is, in part, because Goldman was willing to be mentored by men, but was not willing to be mentored by women. Timing must also be considered, as at the time of Goldman’s correspondence with both Sanger and Sperry, she was an already established anarchist political figure, as opposed the beginning of her career in the U.S. when her anarchist politics were developing under the mentorship of men. However, Goldman also displayed a greater sense of loyalty to men, sometimes at the expense of her politics. While she struggled with her loyalty to anarchism in these relationships with men, she did not represent the same struggle in her relationships with Sanger and Sperry. These relationships, in fact, demonstrate the opposite. Goldman was sound in her commitment to anarchism, especially in her relationship with Sanger. She easily sacrificed her relationship with Sanger in order to remain committed to her anarchist cause. While it can be argued that acknowledging a physical
relationship with Sperry may be representative of a commitment to anarchist concepts of free love, I believe Goldman’s dismissal of Sperry can be contributed to her loyalty to anarchism. As same-sex relationships between women were, and still are, stigmatized, Goldman would have done whatever she could to remain an effective anarchist agitator in her own eyes, and in the eyes of the public.

THE ANARCHIST APPRENTICE

In order to make an attempt at identifying the role Goldman played in her relationships with Sanger and Sperry, while also acknowledging the importance of the relationships, I return to the most recent biography of Goldman: Kathy Ferguson’s *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets* (2011). In this book, Ferguson coins the term “anarchist apprentice” to categorize both Goldman’s relationships with men in the anarchist movement, and Goldman’s entrance into anarchist politics. Ferguson centers Goldman in what she calls a “Goldman-centric” approach, as a model of coming into politics and political consciousness, as opposed to a theory centric approach. Ferguson argues:

> A theory-centric approach would start with the varieties of anarchist theory, establish their beginnings, trace their histories, and then show how they converged in her thinking. Instead, I want to start with her situation, chart her relationships with various people and places in which her apprenticeship was most profoundly shaped, and work ‘backwards’ to the theoretical influences each encounter facilitated. Rather than trace an anarchist lineage that comes down to Goldman, I want to put her in the center of the story and draw together the elements most salient to her emergence as an anarchist.\(^\text{187}\)

Ferguson’s perspective is refreshing, not only in its originality in terms of categorizing Goldman’s relationships, but also from a feminist perspective that seeks to place Goldman outside of her romantic relationships with men, centering Goldman herself. As I have argued, Goldman existed in an anarchist movement that was dominated by men. Men were able to be anarchist leaders and thinkers because of their advantage within patriarchy, allowing for privileges, including the ability to devote their lives to a revolutionary political cause. While it is significant to note that Goldman shared aspects of this privilege in that she too existed in this category of individuals able to devote their lives to a revolutionary political cause, she was still a woman in a man’s movement. She was an anarchist apprentice.

to men because patriarchy insisted that they be the teachers. However, I want to continue with an analysis of Goldman’s political life through an examination of the role Sanger and Sperry play in a “Goldman-centric” approach. I will do so by paying specific attention to how these relationships reflect Goldman’s already established anarchism, not necessarily her entrance into anarchist politics. In this way, I am centering women in order to narrate an original perspective on a “Goldman-centric” approach.

The application of Goldman’s relationship with Margaret Sanger to an analysis of her as a political figure is complicated. It suggests that Goldman was not a devoted friend to Sanger, and as a result, Sanger was not necessarily her anarchist apprentice. Through this relationship, we see the role Goldman’s ego played in her anarchist politics. We learn that Goldman was, in the end, not a good friend to Sanger. She recruited Sanger to support her own political beliefs, believing Sanger to be a radical. Initially, Goldman was not under the impression that Sanger was in some way unable, or less effective as an activist, simply because she was a woman. However, it becomes clear that Goldman did not value Sanger’s politics once they no longer aligned with her own. In this way, we ultimately learn that Goldman did not develop her politics regarding birth control in her relationship with Sanger, and more importantly, that Goldman did not value this relationship above her commitment to anarchism.

Using Goldman’s relationship with Sperry to complicate a “Goldman-centric” approach to narrating Goldman’s political life is also a complex task. Here, we can identify Sanger as Goldman’s “anarchist apprentice” in a way we cannot with Sanger. It is also significant that the obsession with the attempt to prove or disprove the sexual nature of their relationship has left other aspects of the relationship unexplored. We learn from this relationship that Goldman was unwilling to sacrifice her effectiveness as an anarchist leader in order to name her sexual relationship with Sperry. Again, it becomes clear that this relationship teaches us that Goldman valued her anarchism over her relationship with Sperry. In this case, Goldman had more to lose in terms of political effectiveness in that cultural disapproval of lesbianism would have certainly diminished her ability to be taken seriously as a leader within the political sphere. I believe Goldman’s lack of loyalty to Sanger is more complicated than her lack of loyalty to Sanger.
Overall, applying Goldman’s relationships with Sanger and Sperry to a “Goldman-centric” approach to narrating the political life of Goldman suggests that Goldman’s commitment in her relationships with men was stronger than her relationships with women. This is important because it highlights Goldman’s commitment to anarchism, but it also demonstrates her lack of loyalty in her relationships with Sanger and Sperry. We learn that Goldman was not necessarily nurturing in these relationships. If Goldman’s relationships with men demonstrate the incongruencies between Goldman’s political ideals and actual behavior, then her relationships with these two women prove the opposite.

**LIMITS AND SUGGESTIONS**

In addition to the most obvious limit based on the use of one-sided correspondence as methodology, my conclusions are limited in other ways. The scope of my project is limiting in that it is merely representative of two women in Goldman’s life, when she had many relationships and much correspondence with various women. This especially limits conclusions drawn regarding Goldman’s loyalty to women. I believe that it is probable that Goldman displayed a greater sense of loyalty to other women in her life, including family members. However, Goldman’s firm commitment to her relationships with men suggests that her politics are most likely not developing in other female relationships. It is also possible that Goldman did struggle with anarchist ideals in comparison to her relationships with other women. The fact that I was limited to a study of two women leaves room for other conclusions to be drawn based on different groupings of Goldman’s plentiful correspondence. This opens the door for future Goldman scholarship, as silences still exist in regards to the remainder of Goldman’s female-to-female correspondence. Further narration of the political life of Goldman based on other correspondence with women can stand in comparison to mine, demonstrating greater complexities in terms of the relationship between her commitment to anarchism and her other friendships.

It is my hope that scholars continue to prioritize Goldman’s relationships with women with academia. Goldman is an often-recognized historical figure, and while the discussion of her relationships with men has been exhausted, we still have much to learn from this anarchist leader. As feminist historians, we have a responsibility to write and rewrite history by centering the experiences of women, paying specific attention to the way history has been
defined by heteronormativity and patriarchy. This is a difficult and exhausting task, but it is my hope that continuing studies of Goldman prioritize this approach.

I HAD LONGED FOR A FRIEND OF MY OWN SEX

In conclusion, I call upon a reflection made by Goldman in her autobiography, where she discusses the lack of same-sex friendships in the anarchist movement. She says:

Ever since I had come into the anarchist movement I had longed for a friend of my own sex, a kindred spirit with whom I could share the inmost thoughts and feelings I could not express to men […] Instead of friendship from women I had met with much antagonism, petty envy and jealousy because men liked me. Of course, there were exceptions […] But my bond with these was the movement; there was no close, personal intimate point of contact.188

In true Goldman fashion, this statement reflects her stubbornness, her ego, and her often shortsightedness. She claims she was limited in what she could express to men, while at the same time she argues that her friendships with women were limited because of her relationships with men. She saw women as jealous of her, highlighting the ease she felt she had in terms of gaining the attention of men. On one hand, she expresses the desire for female friendship, while at the same time, dismissing the inability of women to look past their jealousy, assuming they too desired attention from men, and that they desired attention from the same men who Goldman was involved with.

The point of this thesis is not to prove or disprove Goldman’s statement that she lacked female friends in the anarchist movement. However, perhaps, for all women involved in this thesis, there was a more intimate point of contact than Goldman admits to. As Goldman’s relationship with anarchism was one of the strongest relationships across the course of her life, placing her ego aside, her effort to share this relationship demonstrates that Goldman did, in fact, have a significant bond with these friends of her own sex. If one Goldman’s most intimate relationships was with the philosophy of anarchism, and she shared this relationship with Sanger and Sperry, perhaps, according to Goldman, these women did share an intimate point of contact.

REFERENCES


