

RESHAPING PUBLIC OPINION IN NEW YORK

Dr. Charlotte Lozier's sudden death at the age of twenty-five in New York City prompted a flood of obituaries, appreciations, and reflections. Lozier was the mother of three children, a practicing doctor, and a member of many women's social and reform organizations, including Susan B. Anthony's Workingwomen's Association and Woman Suffrage Association. But when *The Revolution* eulogized her, they didn't focus on these activities. Rather, Paulina Wright Davis wrote, "Her real strength did not reveal itself in the brief interview we had with her; it was not till she came out firmly to stay the prevalent sin of infanticide that we knew the woman in all her greatness." Lozier, when asked by a man to perform an abortion on an unmarried girl he had impregnated, had counseled the girl against that course of action and then reported the man to the police. While this action had been criticized by some as a breach of professional confidentiality, she had argued that any expectation of privacy ceased when she was asked to commit murder for hire. Davis applauded her actions, writing, "The murder of the innocents goes on. Shame and crime after crime darken the history of our whole land. Hence it was fitting that a true woman should pro-

test with all the energy of her soul against this woeful crime."¹

Lozier wasn't the only woman doctor in New York praised by *The Revolution* for speaking against abortion and infanticide. Dr. Anna Densmore French, some fifteen years older than Lozier, also gained the newspaper's attention, and its pages covered both her lectures and her leadership of the early women's club Sorosis. While in many ways their lives were very different, both doctors saw women who chose abortion or infanticide (the terms were sometimes, as above, used interchangeably) as victims of women's unequal place in society, and particularly of the ill-formed public opinion. Women who chose abortion or infanticide suffered from the sexual double standard and often had been left ignorant of physiology, making them more vulnerable to sexual predators and unaware of the process of fetal development. Densmore's and Lozier's proposed solutions, embraced by women's rights activists in their city, included offering women better education about their own health and fetal development and working to erode the sexual double standard. They strove to ensure that women carrying the "burden of unlegalized maternity" could survive the crisis of having a child outside of wedlock and go on to have economic and social opportunities to support themselves and their children and to live dignified lives.² This approach, however, did not preclude support for legal remedies.

Doctors and Mothers

Anna Densmore began her medical career after eleven years of marriage and the birth of two children, and developed it as a widow with a young daughter to support. Born in 1828 in England as Mary Ann Walmsley, Anna and her parents immigrated to the United States and settled in Boston when she was young.³

She married Albert Mansfield Densmore, a clerk, in an 1851 ceremony conducted by noted Unitarian divine and abolitionist Theodore Parker.⁴ The couple had two children—a son born in 1853, who died at the age of seven months, and a daughter born in 1859.⁵ By 1860, they were living in Worcester with Albert's parents, and Albert had become a merchant.⁶ Two years later, following the outbreak of the Civil War, Anna began studying medicine at the New England Female Medical College, where Anita Tyng, Lucy Sewall, and Helen Morton were among her fellow students.⁷ The next year, she continued her studies at the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania (WMCP), where Tyng would join her after spending a year working at the New England Hospital for Women and Children.⁸

Densmore's entrée into the world of New York women's rights began when she decided to conclude her medical education in pioneering woman doctor and suffrage advocate Clemence Lozier's New York Women's Medical College and Hospital (NYWMC).⁹ She graduated in its first class in 1865, when it was neither homeopathic nor regular.¹⁰ One of the first women's medical colleges, it had been chartered by New York State in response to lobbying by Lozier and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who would remain its staunch supporter.¹¹ Less than two months after her graduation, Albert died, leaving Densmore a widow with a six-year-old daughter to support.¹² She chose to remain in New York City, and maintained a private practice while also teaching and working with women's organizations.¹³ It is hard to imagine that her personal tragedies did not shape her concerns as a doctor.

The brief medical career of Charlotte Denman Lozier, who was approximately fifteen years Densmore's junior, was a whirlwind of activity, including a successful practice, public speak-

ing, and domestic life. Born in 1844 in New Jersey, Charlotte Denman grew up in Winona, Minnesota.¹⁴ After her mother's early death, Charlotte joined the Minnesota State Normal School's first class, and she began teaching at age sixteen.¹⁵ In 1864, at the age of twenty, she moved to New York City to study at the NYWMC.

After a year in New York City, Charlotte returned to Minnesota, where she gave lectures on physiology in the schools where she had previously taught.¹⁶ In January 1866, she married Clemence Lozier's only son, Abraham Witton Lozier, Jr.¹⁷ Six years her senior, Abraham had graduated from the College of Physicians and Surgeons and had been stationed with the Army of the Potomac as Surgeon to the Sanitary Corps during the Civil War.¹⁸ He had then become a professor of chemistry and toxicology at his mother's medical school.¹⁹

Marriage and motherhood did little to slow down Charlotte Lozier. After their marriage, she and Abraham returned to the East Coast, and she resumed her medical studies.²⁰ Because the NYWMC was tending toward homeopathy by the end of its second year, its regular physicians—including Abraham and his mother—left to found a new institution, the Women's College of Physicians and Surgeons.²¹ Abraham taught surgery, pathology, and microscopic anatomy at the new institution, and Clemence became its dean of faculty, the chair of both theory and practice, and the chair of diseases of women and children.²² That summer, Charlotte, now pregnant, returned to Winona with her husband. She practiced medicine there before giving birth to her first child in November.²³ Less than a year later, she resumed her medical studies in Pennsylvania, at the WMCP, with her husband as her preceptor.²⁴ The Lozier family returned to New York City sometime in 1867, moving in with Clemence,

who had returned to the NYWMC.²⁵ Charlotte gave birth to her second child in May 1868, and ten months later she graduated from the NYWMC with distinction.²⁶ She then lectured for the Medical College and developed a private practice specializing in treating cancer and other tumors.²⁷

Doctors and Activists

The Revolution's second issue, published in January 1868, announced a lecture series on "Physiology" given by Anna Densmore.²⁸ *The New York Times* reported that during her first lecture, open to the press and public, she argued "that the duties of women physicians were not limited to the practice of medicine," but rather they should be both healers and educators.²⁹ Moreover, the duty of physiological education did not belong solely to women physicians. Densmore argued that women teachers, as well as the wives and daughters of clergy, had a duty to provide physiological education due to their influential roles, positions of authority, and "unusual opportunities for direct personal communication with young women and girls."³⁰ In short, all women who could contribute to this essential piece of women's uplift ought to do so.

Densmore's lectures focused on pregnancy, explaining fetal development in detail and pointing out that physicians could hear a fetus's heartbeat before "quickening," when a mother first felt her child's movement. She believed this topic to be "the one least understood, and the one of all others necessary to be well comprehended in order that the duties and responsibilities of maternity and child culture should be realized."³¹ Densmore's audience was shocked to learn that a fetus's life began before quickening; one attendee reported that several women had

fainted at the realization that they had been "participators in the crime of premeditated child destruction before birth."³² *The Revolution* printed a letter from a reader who heard the lecture series, saying that it had been better attended than any medical lecture previously given in the city.³³ Shaken by Densmore's description of fetal development, she wrote: "We have not such an amount of inherent depravity, nor such a degree of reckless daring in our composition, nor such a deficiency in the motherly instinct... as to lead us into the commission of this most *deadly* crime *realizing it to be so*."³⁴ She pled: "Give us *knowledge* before accusing us of crime, and do not forget to gauge the caliber of our sins by the light furnished to guide us."³⁵ Improving women's understanding of their own physiology and the mechanisms of reproduction would reduce the incidence of abortion.³⁶

Lozier also publicly lectured on physiology. She gave a talk titled "The Social Evil" at the NYWMC in May 1869.³⁷ Ostensibly about prostitution, it dealt broadly with duties correspondent with a woman's physiology and sexuality, and dangers posed to their fulfillment, including infanticide—which, like other women's rights advocates at the time, she conflated with abortion, arguing that infanticide could not be justified except to "save the life of the mother."³⁸ She was alarmed by the apparent increase in both practices, noting that "one child in eight during 1868, was known to have been born dead, while the births of a vast number were known to have been criminally concealed."³⁹ Like Densmore, Lozier argued that ignorance was "directly the cause" of the "social abuses" of prostitution and abortion. That is, women had "ever been denied an equal education with man," and men, through "neglect or refusal," failed "to allow her personal and spiritual being a full expansion."⁴⁰ Young women learned "everything in physics and

ethics, except a knowledge of themselves," and "ate, slept and dressed in a manner that was simply suicidal."⁴¹ She therefore encouraged physiological and moral education, less restrictive clothing, healthier diet and exercise, and increased opportunities for women to earn their own livings. But she did not think these common prescriptions were sufficient. She also called for the medical education of women—and, notably, the more stringent enforcement of the laws against abortion.⁴² Only with all of these reforms would women be healthy, understand their bodies and reproduction, and have the chance to develop their full human personalities and potentials.

The intensity of Lozier's focus on legal remedies for social ills distinguished her from many women's rights activists. In arguing for the regulation of prostitution, especially, she better reflected mainstream medical opinion. Where the radical women's rights advocates argued that to regulate prostitution would be to endorse it, Lozier insisted, with William W. Sanger, that "a medical supervision of those connected with it should exist."⁴³ And like Horatio Storer, she expressed greater confidence than most women rights advocates in the possibility that legal intervention could prevent filicide, arguing that the legislature "should impose the same penalties for infanticide as for the murder of an adult."⁴⁴ Yet her advocacy of stronger legal penalties for abortion and infanticide reflected her belief that both practices represented the murder of children *and* were an outrage against women.⁴⁵

The New York press responded to Lozier's lectures with a mixture of praise and skepticism. *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reported that the "most startling fact" that Lozier had presented was the incidence of infant mortality, and her suggestion of the probable incidence of abortion and infanticide.⁴⁶ The